

Artificial Lighting in American Twentieth-Century Literature

A Thematic Analysis of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

Marisca van der Mark
5534844
Supervisor: dr. Cathelein Aaftink
Second reader: dr. Alana Gillespie
Utrecht University
24-07-2017

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1 Theoretical Background.....	6
1.1 Introduction.....	6
1.2 Modernism.....	6
1.3 Historical Overview.....	7
1.4 Literary Historical Overview.....	9
Chapter 2 <i>Call It Sleep</i>	13
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Conventional Images of Darkness.....	14
2.3 Conventional Images of Light.....	15
2.4 The Influence of Artificial Lighting.....	17
Chapter 3 <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	23
3.1 Introduction.....	23
3.2 Conventional Images of Darkness.....	24
3.3 Conventional Images of Light.....	27
3.4 The Influence of Artificial Lighting.....	30
Chapter 4 Comparison.....	35
Conclusion.....	42
Bibliography.....	45

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century many inventions were introduced that altered mankind's day-to-day life. The rise of artificial lighting, especially gas lamps and electrical lighting, was one of these technological developments that changed the experience of living in the city. As artificial lighting began to illuminate the night, people experienced night-time differently. Prior to the increased popularity of artificial lighting, literature featured an established set of conventions regarding the symbolism of darkness and light. This raises the question what the thematic influence of artificial lighting is on literature in the early twentieth century. To answer this question, this thesis researches the presence of artificial lighting in two twentieth-century American novels. The thesis shows that in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* the presence of artificial lighting challenges the conventional oppositions between darkness and natural light, emphasises the co-dependent relationship between them, and establishes new conventions for interpreting the symbolism of darkness and light.

These specific novels are chosen for two reasons. Firstly, each novel contains a rich imagery of darkness and light. *Call It Sleep* mostly focuses on darkness signifying fear and danger, whereas light connotes safety. *The Great Gatsby* on the other hand, shows a connection between mystery and darkness, while light is associated with transparency. Secondly, a comparison of the novels puts the changes brought forth by artificial lighting in a broader perspective. *Call It Sleep* was first published in 1934 and *The Great Gatsby* in 1926. This situates the novels in a modernist era; a period in which writers reflected upon the changes in society and challenged the status quo. Artificial lighting changed people's view on life, which is displayed in modernist works such as *Call It Sleep* and *The Great Gatsby*.

The comparison of the two novels restricts this thesis geographically to the city of New York. However, there is some variation as *Call It Sleep* is set in the Jewish

neighbourhoods of the city and Fitzgerald has devised his own West Egg and East Egg for the setting of his story. However, both novels feature an outsider perspective as the characters are not originally from New York. The difference in time and class represented in the novels is also valuable. *Call It Sleep* represents the working class in the 1910s and *The Great Gatsby* features the upper class in the roaring twenties. A more varied impression can therefore be given of the society in New York as a whole because both the perspective of the wealthy and the poor are explored. Moreover, due to the different times in which the narratives are set, the development of artificial lighting over two decades can be examined.

The research that has already been done on artificial lighting in literature is limited. Most works that focus on artificial lighting do not explore the interaction between artificial light and the already-existing imageries of darkness and light. William Brevda, for example, discusses artificial lighting in John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*, but focuses on the meaning of an electric advertising sign. Tim Armstrong's analysis of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, on the other hand, features a discussion of the symbolic tension between darkness and artificial light (24), but hardly pays any attention to natural daylight. Comparative analyses concerning the theme of artificial lighting also appear to be lacking in the general discussion regarding artificial lighting in literature. Whereas conventional symbolism of darkness and light in literature has been researched extensively, the influence of artificial lighting on this symbolism has not yet been studied. This thesis will therefore add to the field of literary symbolism by providing a thorough comparative reading of the relationship between natural light, artificial light and darkness in twentieth-century literature.

In order to establish the role of artificial lighting and its effect in the novels, this thesis consists of a theoretical framework, a close reading of the individual novels, and a comparison of the two novels. Chapter one offers a theoretical framework that provides a brief discussion of modernist literature, the history of artificial lighting, and the symbolism of

darkness and light throughout time. This is followed by a discussion of the novels according to the chronology of their narrative worlds; chapter two focuses on *Call It Sleep*, which is set in the 1910s and the third chapter contains an analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, which is set in 1922. The analyses are completed through a thematic filter and the focus is therefore on the presence of darkness and light in the novels. Both these chapters first describe the conventional imagery of darkness that can be found in the novels and then describe the traditional images of light that are used. Once the symbolism of darkness and light in the novels is established, the chapters explore the influence of artificial light on this symbolism. Chapter four discusses the findings of the previous chapters and compares the role of artificial lighting in the two novels in order to draw more abstract conclusions and place the novels in a larger context.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Background

1.1 Introduction

In order to research and understand the influence of artificial lighting on literary symbolism in *Call It Sleep* and *The Great Gatsby*, a background regarding these elements is provided. Firstly, this chapter discusses those aspects of modernist literature that are specifically relevant to the role of artificial lighting in the two novels. Then the development of artificial lighting between 1825 and 1930 and the consequences this had on experiencing urban life are outlined. Lastly, a literary historical overview establishes the conventional imageries of darkness and light in literature.

1.2 Modernism

The modernist movement originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although this movement was present in many art forms, this thesis specifically focuses on modernism within literature. The modernist period was a revolutionary period in which “highly complex and often quite fully articulated forms of life or views of the world (for example, in investigating the nature of experience in the city)” were expressed (Butler xvi). Around this time, life was changing quickly due to, for example, technological innovations and modernist literature was prone to reflect upon changes in society, such as the growing presence of artificial lighting.

Modernists not only reflected upon the world, but also often challenged the status quo. By doing this they broke with the ideas of the Victorian era and attempted to “bring together that which the previous culture tried to keep separate” (Singal 13). Barriers between seemingly opposing concepts were brought down and new systems were structured in which there was more room for fluid concepts instead of strict distinctions. As artificial lighting

could not easily be placed in the dichotomy of darkness and light, the presence of this new technology correlated with the modernist concept of challenging conventional ideas and removing barriers between contrasting elements.

1.3 Historical Overview

Artificial lighting is a broad term as it includes all forms of light that do not originate from natural light sources. Artificial lighting came into existence with the invention of making fire, which later developed into the use of campfires, torches, and candles. However, this thesis focuses on the use of gaslight and electrical lighting because these new inventions transformed man-made light into a commercial product, which changed people's attitude towards artificial light. Gaslight was the dominant form of artificial lighting in the nineteenth century and made its first appearance in New York on Broadway in 1825, while electric arc lights were first used in 1882 (Sante 10).

In the mid-nineteenth century the night was “strongly associated in the public mind with vice and danger” (Baldwin 594) due to the poor illumination provided by oil lamps. Gas streetlights replaced these lamps and produced a brighter illumination. This changed the atmosphere of the city because it reduced the association with danger as “public lighting made the city safer [and] more recognisable” (Nye 29). Gas lamps also played an important role in the domestic sphere because it allowed people to depend less on hours of natural daylight for their activities. Yet, gas lamps were not ideal as they could ignite fires and caused soot on the walls (Kyvig 47). Electrical lighting was a “dramatic improvement over gas, being far brighter and more versatile” (Nye 382) and entered the private sphere around 1910. Electricity quickly gained popularity and the number of houses with electricity increased enormously in the period between 1910 and 1930 (261).

Although “electrification became inextricably bound up with ideas of social progress” (Nye 147), the changes that artificial lighting established differed per class and at times even increased the already existing class differences. Gas and electric lighting first spread in the areas of the higher classes before gradually moving to the lower classes of the city (Baldwin 594-95). Initially, the wealthier sections became safer than the poorer areas, which underlined the already existing gap between classes. This, in combination with the high prices of electricity and natural gas in the early twentieth century (Kyvig 46), turned the presence of artificial lighting into a status symbol. Artificial lighting also created the opportunity for more nightly entertainment, but at the same time allowed factories to lengthen the working days for the working class (Baldwin 595). As a result, the class differences became more distinct since the working class had to work harder, while the higher classes could enjoy nightly entertainment more freely.

Consequently, the streets became more crowded at night and although the atmosphere might have felt safer due to street lighting, “[m]odern urban night was not an extension of day; it was a liminal new world in which conflicting moral values mingled uneasily” (Baldwin 596). Artificial lighting reduces the fear of crime, but simultaneously increases “the opportunity and motivation for crime” by drawing more people and their money out at night (B.A.J. Clark 133-34). Artificial street lighting therefore on the one hand reduced crime by increasing visibility and on the other hand invited more people to commit vices (Bouman 13). Rather than removing all danger from the streets, artificial lighting invited the average citizen to come in “contact with the dubious elements that had long characterised the night” (Baldwin 596). The sharp contrast between the danger of the night and the safety of the day had thus faded and the arrival of modern artificial lighting created a new atmosphere in the city.

1.4 Literary Historical Overview

The new experience brought by artificial lighting was also reflected in literature. According to James Donald “the narratives and images of the nineteenth-century novel were no longer adequate to the new realities of the city” (40). New technology therefore not only called for the use of new descriptions and words, but also challenged already existing conventions. The development of artificial lighting complicated the dualistic view of day and night (Edensor 431). Whereas the conventional symbolism of darkness and light used to be sufficient, writers now had to reinvent their descriptions in order to accommodate the presence of artificial light in the world.

Prior to the arrival of artificial lighting, the descriptions for darkness, light and their literary connotations were relatively simple; light equalled good, darkness equalled evil. One of the first Western literary examples of this dualistic view can be found in ancient Greek mythology and literature (Burkert and Marinatos xv-xvi). Richard Buxton explains that “[t]he data from cult and ritual is *broadly* in line with the black-as-negative/white-as-positive polarity, but there are genuine exceptions which we must simply accept as part of the complexity of ritual symbolism” (4-5). It is therefore only possible to speak of general tendencies concerning the darkness/light symbolism within literature. However, these tendencies provide enough information to draw several conclusions.

Light, for example, symbolises purity, a source of help for men, and sometimes even safety. This is especially evident in Homer’s *Iliad*, in which the gods live in areas of purity and light and when men experience a crisis the gods appear to them in light (Constantinidou 93). Darkness on the other hand, is usually associated with death and danger. The Erinyes, also known as the furies or vengeance goddesses, embody this symbolism. This embodiment can be seen in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, which is about “the contrast between the darkness of the Erinyes and the light represented by Apollo, a contrast between the worlds of the dead

and the living” (Aguirre 133). In addition, light connotes clarity, whereas darkness is used to conceal actions and therefore represents mystery and secrets (Burkert and Marinatos xvi-xvii). Ken Dowden illustrates this by explaining how the capture of Troy is achieved via treachery and deception in the night (114) and he suggests that this might be a recurrent theme in history as Grendel’s attack on king Hrothgar’s men in *Beowulf* also takes place at night (118).

Old English texts are of importance to establish the use of darkness and light throughout history. The Old English period shows Christian and Pagan influences. Both feature the conventional opposition between darkness and light in a different manner. Christianity’s preference of light over darkness is clear: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that light was good” (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Gen. 1.3-4). This dualistic view of light being good and darkness signifying evil can also be found in the New Testament. Alan E. Bernstein, for example, argues that Paul contrasts the sons of light with the sons of darkness in Thessalonians 5:2, which reflects his ideas of good and evil (210). This symbolism is reflected in the Old English period, especially in the saints’ lives that “adopt but also extend the light imagery of hagiographical sources, drawing imaginatively upon the associations of light in their own religious experience” (Magennis 186). Examples of light symbolism in religious texts are: the reference to God as ‘light’ in *Guthlac A*, the use of light to denote heaven in *Andreas*, and the association of Christ with light in *Elene* (187-88).

Secular texts in the Old English period on the other hand, feature a more complicated relationship with darkness and light. Light does not always connote safety and goodness in these texts; it also conveys neutral concepts and sometimes even symbolises a more sinister meaning (Magennis 193). However, daylight still plays an important role, as can be seen in *Beowulf*. The heroes always approach in daylight, while the imagery of darkness is used to

narrate the monster's actions (G. Clark 657). It is specifically the sun that connotes positive elements, while moonlight can for example have a more dubious meaning. The sun is often associated with a deity, which is similar to Christian symbolism, while light and brightness are "an image of the life in the world" (Magennis 194) or "a place of existence" (198). The latter has the possibility of referring both to life on Earth and to a more Christian idea of paradise. It can therefore be concluded that although Christian and pagan symbolism differ in their specific meanings, light remained a positive element in general, whereas darkness was associated with villains and evil.

In the centuries following the Old English period, Europe was mainly dominated by a Christian perspective on life. Until the sixteenth century Christianity had connected the dark and the night with the Devil, death, and sin; a trend that continued in the early modern period (Koslofsky 23). This attitude was reflected in literature, as can be exemplified with the following lines by Simon Dach: "Fear I bear before the night / I keep myself awake with fright" (Qtd. in Koslofsky 24) and Thomas Nashe's "The devil is the special predominant planet of the night ... he spreads his nets of temptation in the dark, that men might not see to avoid them" (Qtd. in Koslofsky 25). These fears have spread to the United States and continue to influence modern-day symbolism. Nowadays, darkness still connotes negative elements in expressions such as "the Dark Ages," "Prince of Darkness," and the "Dark Continent" (Edensor 425).

Other examples that come to mind are expressions as "shedding light on something" and "to be left in the dark" to convey respectively clarity and uncertainty. Names such as "the Dark Lord" for the villain Voldemort in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and "Gandalf the White" for a wise and powerful helper in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* also reflect the conventional use of darkness and light. However, "[d]ualistic notions of night and day have been complicated by the expansion of urban lighting" (Edensor 431) and it is therefore

important to research the influence of artificial lighting on the dualistic symbolism of darkness and light.

Chapter 2

Call It Sleep

2.1 Introduction

Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* describes the lives of Jewish immigrants Albert, Genya, and their son David in New York between 1911 and 1913. The story is mainly told from David's perspective. Like many children, David is afraid of the dark, but darkness and light play a larger role in the novel than merely triggering a child's fear. The contrasts between dark and light underline the tension between danger and safety that David experiences in his life. The presence of artificial lighting breaches this tension and turns the traditional contrasts of darkness and light upside down, as is discussed in this chapter. The conventional associations with darkness and light within the novel are established, after which the influence of artificial lighting on this contrast is explored.

The prologue of the novel already shows the importance of the opposition of darkness and light and the interpretation of this contrast, as can be seen in the description of the statue of Liberty:

The spinning disk of the late afternoon sun slanted behind her, and to those on board who gazed, her features were charred with shadow, her depths exhausted, her masses ironed to one single plane. Against the luminous sky the rays of her halo were spikes of darkness roweling the air; shadow flattened the torch she bore to a black cross against flawless light – the blackened hilt of a broken sword. (H. Roth 14)

The association of the statue of Liberty, which symbolises America, with sunlight would normally create a positive setting for the immigrants' arrival. However, shadows obscure the statue's features, the halo of light has turned into one of darkness, and the torch that ought to

light the way to liberty has been transformed by darkness into a symbol of broken strength. According to Stanislav Kolář, the description of this darkness already hints at the difficulties that David will encounter in the United States (69). The hope of the immigrants for a better life, represented by the light of the statue, is obscured by darkness. This reading shows how the conventional symbolism of darkness and light is used to underline the events within the novel.

2.2 Conventional Images of Darkness

The conventional imagery of darkness is established early on in the novel. At first, David's association with darkness is one of discomfort due to the uncertainty about what is there and what is not: "If you ... couldn't see anything ... how could you be sure you were actually there and not dreaming?" (H. Roth 20). It is therefore not darkness itself that is scaring David, but rather the absence of light. When David's friend Yussie explains that "[r]ats on'y come out innu da'k, w'en yuh can't see 'em, and yuh know w'ea dey comin' f'om, dey comin' f'om de cellar" (48), David thinks he understands why he is afraid of the dark and the cellar, which reassures him.

This changes because of the traumatising experience with Annie, who wants to "play bad" in the dark closet in the bedroom (H. Roth 51-53), which is a catalyst for David's fear and adds the dimension of sex, secrecy and sin to his already existing fear of darkness. David does not exactly understand what has happened and the next morning, his fear has increased considerably and he begins to associate negative elements in his daily life with darkness. Although he does not do this on purpose, the dark now plays such an important role in his thoughts that dark elements in daily life appear to him more easily than those of light. When he sees a funeral procession, the black aspects of the scene jump out to David and he associates them with negative emotions such as desolation, fear, and terror (59-60). His

negative experiences with darkness have caused him to see the world through a filter of darkness in which the dark “is associated with fear, sex, excretion, and death” (F.A. Roth 218). David’s idea of darkness therefore confirms the conventional imagery of fear, sin, and death.

David’s involuntary obsession with darkness in combination with fear causes him to see his father, Albert, as a symbol of darkness (Lyons 191). Albert is only at home in the evenings and David therefore usually sees him in the dark, which strengthens the connection between his father and darkness. David associates his father’s violent behaviour with an image of darkness: “I saw my father lift a hammer; he was standing on a high roof of darkness” (H. Roth 28). This continues throughout the book as he begins to recognise Albert’s anger as “a dark corrosive haze that was all the more fearful” (125). David experiences his father and the darkness that is linked to Albert as an element of violent danger, which complies with the traditional imagery of darkness because the dark usually connotes “such meanings like ‘threatening’, ‘macabre’ or ‘devilish’” (*Terms* Wyler 58). It becomes evident that at first, David only sees darkness as something negative that is to be associated with danger, fear, and sin.

2.3 Conventional Images of Light

David’s association with light on the other hand, is one of safety and comfort. Whenever he races past the dark cellar, he only thinks he is safe once he reaches the daylight outside.

David also compares entering the skylight on his floor to “reaching a haven” (H. Roth 142), which shows that he associates light with safe places. Light even becomes David’s tool to keep himself safe: “[T]he cellar in one’s house could be conjured away if there was a bright yard between the hallway and the cellar-stairs. One needed only a bright yard. At times David almost believed he had found that brightness” (218).

In David's mind, his mother and daylight are connected because both represent safety. Albert is away during the day, which gives David a sense of security when he is alone with his mother, who attempts to protect him from all dangers. When Genya, David's mother, is away from home one evening, David realises that "[d]arkness was different without his mother near" (H. Roth 37), which ties in with David's discomfort about darkness as the absence of light. Genya's connection to safety becomes evident when David asks her to stand watch while he descends the dark staircase. Moreover, she protects him from his father, and brings him back home again safely when David gets lost in the dark.

In David's opinion, light also brings holiness and purity. Genya, for example, describes God to be unimaginably bright (H. Roth 238). David also hears the rabbi tell a story about how God's angels cleanse the impure Isaiah from sin using a fiery coal (220). David not only draws the conclusion that fire can remove sin, but also muses about the origin of this coal. In David's experience, coal comes from dark cellars and this coal would be ineffective as it would have burned Isaiah. He concludes that God must have special coal and since he associates light with God, this coal also comes from a light place: "Where is God's cellar I wonder? How light it must be there" (228). David's reasoning strengthens the connection between holiness and light in this manner. Moreover, a thunderstorm is raging during this scene and the lightning emphasises the association between God and light. This association leaves a lasting impression on David because he continues to see light as a weapon against sin. When he watches the sun's reflection on the water, this idea is again put forward: "Brighter than day ... [s]in melted into light" (244). For David, light is therefore not only a defence against danger, but also against sin and impurity.

Additionally, light is associated with revelation in the novel. Uncle Nathan explains how his mother's blindness was cured by a rabbi who told her that "[t]he Almighty gives you light" (H. Roth 181). This not only reinforces the association between God and light, but also

establishes a connection between light and seeing things clearly. The connection is made explicit when Aunt Bertha says that she will inform Genya about something that David has done “with the first light of day” (380). This links a revelation to daylight. The conventional idea of light being a positive element is therefore reflected in *Call It Sleep* as it symbolises safety, purity, and revelation while simultaneously representing the way in which David sees his mother.

2.4 The Influence of Artificial Lighting

The conventional contrasts between darkness and light are established in *Call It Sleep*. Darkness connotes danger, secrets, sin, and is personified by Albert. Light is associated with safety, revelation, purity, and is represented by Genya. However, the presence of artificial lighting challenges these contrasts. Darkness and light no longer adhere to traditional symbolism and ultimately the conventions are completely turned upside down.

There are several instances in which artificial lighting represents the same elements as natural daylight. For example, when David goes outside after hiding in the cellar, “the swift and brittle light on corners and upper storeys comfort[s] him” (H. Roth 91). In the beginning of the novel artificial light thus brings the same sense of comfort as natural light. However, this changes throughout the novel when the expectation that artificial lighting will provide security is no longer met. For example, when Genya is disconcerted she asks David to sit next to her while she lights the gas (139). His company would reassure her, but the artificial light is not sufficient to keep David close to her as he refuses and goes outside to play with his friends. The promise of safety and comfort that artificial lighting presumably contained is thus left unfulfilled. Similarly, when David notices that his mother is absentminded, he tries to bring her attention back by asking questions about artificial lighting (116). However, Genya remains distracted and David cannot be certain of her attention. The safety that he

usually feels around her has disappeared. Artificial light can therefore not provide the safety that natural daylight brings.

Artificial lighting not only compromises the connection between light and safety, but it also endangers David's notion of light equalling purity. On a Friday evening, the time of Jewish Sabbath, an old woman explains to David that she has already lit the candles and therefore asks him to light the gas for her. Although nothing appears to be wrong with this question, this goes against the Jewish rule that forbids them to "use matches, candles, or anything that involves starting or extinguishing a fire on *Shabbat*" (Palatnik 5-6). The lighting of the candles has started the Sabbath and David therefore goes against the rules of his religion. David understands that he has sinned (H. Roth 235) and feels bad about it. It appears to be the first time that he considers the importance of this rule as he wonders whether "lamp-lighters were ever disturbed by their own sacrilege" (236). Apparently, it had never occurred to him before that the workers would have to go against the rules to do their job.

Rather than associating artificial light with holiness, David thus connects it with sin. He hopes that God has not seen his actions and he begins to question God's abilities: "How can he look in every dark, if He's light – the rabbi said- and it's real dark" (H. Roth 236). Artificial light has therefore caused David to lose his unconditional faith in God. The story that Genya tells him about the altar in Veljish, reinforces the idea of artificial lighting not being holy. The altar was raised after people had seen a light without a source, to which David responds: "They saw a light and – and nothing burned? So that was holy?" (119) In David's mind, this is proof that light is holy, but Genya calls it "nonsense" (119) and explains that a traveller had probably left some candles behind. The candles were supposed to represent the holy rituals to honour God, but instead they brought a fake miracle into existence. David learns that religion is not as pure as he thought and artificial lighting is the

medium that creates this impurity. The candles are therefore no longer a symbol of holiness, but of deceit.

Artificial lighting not only questions the conventions of light, but also of darkness. The traditional connotation of night equalling secrets is for example challenged when Genya and Bertha discuss Genya's past for the first time on a Friday night in a room lit by "the combined lights of candle and gas" (H. Roth 161). David tries to listen in on the conversation and avoids detection by pretending to be engrossed in his book. He can only do this because of the artificial lighting in the room; without the lights, his book would have been unreadable. Artificial lighting gives David the opportunity to learn more about his mother. Although for Bertha the conversation is one of secrecy because Genya does not reveal her complete story, David rather sees it as a disclosure of new facts. He had never considered that there might be more to his mother than he knew. Although artificial lighting does not accompany a full disclosure of Genya's story, it gives David the chance to learn some revealing information. As a result, David begins to doubt his mother as he can no longer believe everything she says (Lesser 165). The openness that connects Genya to daylight is starting to disappear, which weakens the association between the two.

Artificial lighting thus allows a revelation to take place at night instead of during the day, which rattles conventional symbolisms. The traditional order appears to be restored when Genya discloses her full story to Bertha in the presence of daylight (H. Roth 188). However, they speak Polish, a language that David cannot understand. Even in broad daylight, there are therefore still things left unknown, which prevents the connection between daylight and revelation to be re-established. The story is only completely revealed to David one day at twilight when the gas lamps are not lit yet. Albert confronts Genya with his suspicions that David is not his son. His parents are therefore not who David thought they were. Artificial lighting has introduced the existence of secrets and has gradually turned the

usual contrast between darkness and light around; a full revelation now takes place in the dark instead of in the light.

Afterwards, the conventional contrasts are truly turned upside down when Genya wants to protect David from Albert's wrath. Instead of sending him to a place of light, which used to be a safe place, she sends him to the darkness of the streets. Suddenly, darkness has become safety. However, David takes this even further and wants to conquer darkness and Albert with it: "In hatred this time, in challenge, his eyes stabbed the window. Dark. He defied it" (H. Roth 405). The only way that David can dominate darkness in the evening is by creating his own light. He attempts to create a spark by throwing a metal bar on the car tracks, but he is electrocuted in the process. This momentarily turns him into a form of artificial lighting: "A blast, siren of light within him, rending, quaking, fusing his brain and blood to a fountain of flame, vast rockets in a searing spray! Power!" (417). Although David thinks that the electricity gives him power, he only survives because bystanders save him. Artificial lighting therefore not only defies the standard contrasts of darkness and light by turning the dark streets into a place of refuge, but it also turns out to be a combination of safety and danger.

The argument between Albert and Genya not only results in a reversal of conventional contrasts, but it also has important consequences for David's identity. Throughout his life, David could be interpreted to symbolise a star. His mother could be seen to represent daylight, while his father embodied darkness. This makes him a combination of the two, namely a light in the dark, just like the stars at night. The rabbi calls David a "pretty star" (H. Roth 209) and suggests that "[p]erhaps, today, you can glitter a little" (212). The symbol of a star is reinforced by David's name, as the Jewish community is often associated with the star of David. However, David cannot maintain his identity of being a star now that his parentage has changed. He has to create his own identity and he goes to the car tracks to achieve this.

Whilst being unconscious after the electrocution David goes “downward in the funnel of night” and realises that he no longer has to fear darkness: “Horror and the night fell away” (H. Roth 429). James Ferguson argues that David “intuitively now understands that the tensions between light and darkness ... are ultimately meaningless. For there is light in the darkness” (219). Artificial lighting indeed shows David that darkness and light are less binary than he supposed them to be. However, an even stronger notion is at work in this passage. David understands that he cannot always rely on others to protect him and that he has to be his own light in the darkness. David’s experience with electricity has gained him new insights into his own capacities. He finally accept darkness and acknowledges that when he falls asleep he has the power to “feel, not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph” (H. Roth 440). David realises that he has the power within himself to overcome his fears and the dangers around him. He is no longer a star that cannot control his own power, but instead resembles artificial lighting, which shines as bright as the situation calls for. Artificial light is therefore not only a form of safety for David, but it also brings forth a revelation that changes his life.

Artificial lighting has thus allowed David to create a new identity for himself; he has distanced himself from his parents and has to find his own path in life. Similarly to artificial lighting being a combination of light and dark, David is a combination of all emotions, which makes him not pure good or pure evil. Although he tries to live a pure life, he cannot always avoid impurity as his friends, for example, involve him in sex-related actions. He also wants to be a good Jew, but his interest in other religions causes him to possess a rosary, which can be seen as heresy. David therefore possesses opposing qualities and it differs per situation which elements gain dominance. This ties in with artificial lighting sometimes conveying negative associations and sometimes positive ones. Moreover, his existence is what causes a rift between Genya and Albert and turns their world upside down. Artificial lighting has challenged the traditional order between darkness and light and David does the same to the

relationship between Genya and Albert. David therefore comes to personify artificial lighting and the connotations that go with it.

Call It Sleep shows how the original contrast between darkness and light are challenged by artificial lighting. The latter is the catalyst for the reversal of the values that are attributed to darkness and light. Moreover, artificial light itself is a combination of elements that used to belong to either darkness or light; it contains both holiness and sin, secrets and revelations, and safety and danger. The traditional symbolism of darkness and light is now rendered partially ineffective because it does not accommodate the presence of artificial lighting. The original system therefore has to be changed into a spectrum in which darkness, natural daylight and artificial lighting can be interpreted in various ways.

Chapter 3

The Great Gatsby

3.1 Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* features Nick Carraway, who narrates the story of the mysterious Jay Gatsby and the events that occur in the summer of 1922. Normally, the season of summer would grant the sun dominance over darkness. However, the novel displays multiple contrasts and tensions between darkness and light and the presence of artificial lighting creates new insights into these conventional imageries. Artificial light sometimes reverses the traditional contrasts, but mostly shows how darkness and light are intertwined instead of being strict opposites. This chapter explores the various conventional images of darkness in the novel, which is followed by an overview of the symbolism that is used in relation to light. Lastly, the role of artificial lighting is discussed.

The process of merging darkness and light is already put into motion early on in the novel:

Already it was deep summer on roadhouse roofs and in front of wayside garages, where new red petrol-pumps sat out in pools of light, and when I reached my estate at West Egg I ran the car under its shed and sat for a while on an abandoned grass roller in the yard. The wind had blown off, leaving a loud, bright night ... Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light ... (Fitzgerald 25)

The description of summer in combination with the light around the petrol-pumps suggests the presence of the sun, but instead the light is of an artificial nature. The night on the other hand, traditionally invokes associations of darkness, whereas in this passage it is bright. The

conventional associations are already starting to mingle under the influence of artificial light and this continues throughout the novel.

3.2 Conventional Images of Darkness

The Great Gatsby features several conventional imageries of darkness with mystery and secrecy being the most prominent ones. The events that introduce mystery and secrecy often take place at night, which allows for an association with darkness. The first connection between mystery and darkness is introduced when Nick visits Daisy. On this evening, the elements that cause the element of mystery in the novel are hinted at. As the story continues, the mysterious nature of the dark is emphasised when Nick is “examining various indefinite objects in the half darkness” (Fitzgerald 90) in Gatsby’s house. The objects belong to Gatsby’s past and are obscured to maintain the mystery around their owner. The presence of darkness in scenes of mystery shows how the two are closely connected. Similarly, secrets are also introduced at night. When Daisy and Nick have a conversation on the dark porch Daisy hints at subjects without elaborating on them. Nick becomes suspicious of her and he notices that she smiles “as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society” (22). The conversation therefore establishes a connection between secrecy and darkness. The connection between darkness and mystery and secrecy continues to occur throughout the novel.

Darkness also connotes negative feelings such as loneliness, misery, and hopelessness. Nick explains that “[a]t the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes” (Fitzgerald 57), which raises the notion of loneliness in the dark. This is reinforced when Wilson, one of the inhabitants of the valley of ashes, admits to having no friends or people to look out for him (149-51). Although the valley is not literally shrouded in

darkness, there is a constant absence of light because of the ashes that form an “impenetrable cloud, which screens [the men’s] obscure operations from your sight” (26). The lack of light creates a grey world that can be interpreted as a form of darkness. The colour grey is often associated with “bleakness” and “spiritual emptiness” (Zhang 43) and this is confirmed by the miserable atmosphere of the valley. The valley emanates a feeling of hopelessness, which is reinforced by the misery that Wilson and his wife experience (Sweeney 308). The Wilsons have hardly any money, their marriage is unhappy, and they have no children. They therefore embody the negative emotions that are present in the valley. This shows the connection between darkness and loneliness, misery, and hopelessness.

The accident that kills Myrtle also takes place in the valley, which turns the bleak valley into a place of not only misery, but also of death. As the valley is a dark place, death becomes linked to darkness as well. This connection is made explicit when Nick says that “we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight” (Fitzgerald 129), which is amplified when the newspapers report that “the death car” came out of “the gathering darkness” (131). Moreover, black is the colour of “the absolute, eternity and finality” (*Language* Wyler 158), which makes the dark of night a proper setting for the accident that not only kills Myrtle, but also incites Gatsby’s murder.

It is only fitting that Gatsby’s death is determined in the dark, as he personifies darkness. Tony Tanner points out that Gatsby “is not really at home in the light” (xviii) and Gatsby indeed usually appears in the dark. Gatsby’s first appearance occurs on a summer night: “[A] figure had emerged from the shadow of my neighbour’s mansion” (Fitzgerald 25). Gatsby’s presence in the dark is reinforced throughout the novel as Nick mostly encounters Gatsby in dark places. Even at the end of the novel, Gatsby continues to reside in darkness as he hides in the “dark shrubbery” (136) to watch Daisy’s house. His element of choice is therefore darkness and he only appears in daylight out of necessity or when he is

invited by other people. Even when meeting Daisy during the day, he seeks the comfort of darkness whilst being uncertain of himself: “Gatsby got himself into a shadow and ... looked conscientiously from one to the other of us with tense, unhappy eyes” (84). By choosing darkness over light, Gatsby turns himself into a symbol of the dark.

Gatsby not only actively chooses the dark, but his persona also fits the symbolism of darkness. He is for example mysterious and secretive, which are elements that are traditionally associated with darkness. No one actually knows who Gatsby is and he actively upholds this mystery. By living in the shadows, he prevents anyone from knowing more about him than he wants them to know. The more interested in his life people become, the more he tries to hide: “It was when curiosity about Gatsby was at its highest that the lights in his house failed to go on one Saturday night” (Fitzgerald 108). Instead of satisfying this curiosity, Gatsby enhances the mystery; he envelopes himself in darkness, thereby turning the dark into a tool to maintain his own mysteriousness.

Gatsby also uses the dark to keep his criminal activities secret. Darkness is always present when the topic of criminality is breached, which emphasises the connection between secrecy and the dark. Gatsby only dares to show Nick the criminal side of his life under the cover of darkness. This is evident when he takes Nick to a dark restaurant one day to meet his business partner Wolfsheim, who is a criminal. The connection between crime and darkness is further amplified as Wolfsheim tells of a criminal liquidation at night (Fitzgerald 68-69). That same night Gatsby offers Nick to be part in a shady business deal, which again shows how Gatsby’s criminality is connected to the night and darkness.

Gatsby’s connection with the criminal underworld has to remain a secret because Gatsby wants to impress Daisy. He wishes to forget the bad things of both the past and the present in order to continue his life with Daisy where they left off five years ago. Gatsby ignores all boundaries of time and thinks that everything can be brought into the present. This

ties in with F. Birren's theory that the colour black is often chosen by people who "would only hold on to the present for ever and ever if they could" (Qtd. in *Language Wyler* 158). Gatsby's desire to repeat the past in the present is made explicit when Nick explains that things with Daisy cannot go the way they did in the past: "'Can't repeat the past?' [Gatsby] cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!'" (Fitzgerald 106). He is focused on achieving everything he wants in the present, but does so by holding on to the past and attempting to bring it back into the here and now. He almost drops Nick's clock (84), which can be seen as an attempt to destroy time itself. Following Birren's theory, Gatsby's obsession with time thus amplifies his affiliation with black and the dark.

Darkness plays a prominent role in *The Great Gatsby* both by underlining themes such as mystery, secrecy, loneliness, misery, and death and by enhancing some of these elements in Gatsby's persona. Gatsby not only symbolises darkness, but he also actively uses the dark to achieve his own goals. Instead of the dark simply being an element of nature in the novel, it becomes a tool that can be used to keep secrets and strengthen mysteries. However, despite the strong influence that darkness has in the novel, the element of light is not completely obscured by the dark and plays an important role as well.

3.3 Conventional Images of Light

Although darkness is often present in *The Great Gatsby*, the novel begins with a description of light: "And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees ... I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer" (Fitzgerald 9-10). Nick experiences the sun as a positive symbol of new beginnings and this gives him hope for his new life in New York. This positive interpretation of the sun reoccurs throughout the novel. The presence of sunlight, for example, accompanies Nick's romantic description of New York from the Queensboro Bridge (67) and even in the grim valley of ashes the arrival

of sunlight is seen as something positive. After Myrtle's death, the neighbour who watches Wilson during the night is glad to see dawn approaching (151). Although terrible things have happened at night, the promise of sunlight brings some hope and shows the association of sunlight with positivity.

Sunlight not only chases away the misery of darkness, but is also present during revelations of secrets. Jordan, for example, tells Nick the story of Gatsby and Daisy on an afternoon when sunlight is still present. This gives Nick more insights into Gatsby's past and Daisy's connection to Gatsby. Once darkness sets in, Jordan and Nick discuss the more mysterious motives for Gatsby's actions rather than clear facts (Fitzgerald 72-77). The revelation is therefore told in sunlight, while the mysteries still belong to the dark. Darkness and light play a role again when Gatsby and Daisy meet each other over tea. This is one of the key scenes in the novel, however, Nick is not present during most of their conversation because he goes outside into the rain (85). The unravelling of the vital scene remains a secret for everyone except Gatsby and Daisy, which is complemented by the dark rainclouds. Nick only returns when the sun is shining again, after which the exchanges between Daisy and Gatsby are no longer a secret (86). This once again fits the idea that revelations are usually accompanied by daylight.

Whereas Gatsby is associated with darkness, Daisy is a symbol of light and the sun. Firstly, she lives in East Egg and Gatsby lives in West Egg. This is fitting, as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Nick's first encounter with Daisy is also characterised by light (Elmore 429): he meets Daisy dressed in white in a "bright rosy-coloured space" (Fitzgerald 13). Daisy is often dressed in white and this implies that she possesses certain character traits such as innocence and transparency: "[I]t may easily make people feel that she is pure, flawless, innocent and noble when people meet her for the first time" (Zhang 42). Daisy's affiliation with the sun is evident from Nick's description: Daisy looks around "radiantly"

(Fitzgerald 17), her voice is “glowing” (19) and her garden even has sun-dials (12). Gatsby is also aware of Daisy’s connection to the sun. When Daisy is about to see Gatsby’s house for the first time, Gatsby proudly points out to Nick that the front of his house “catches the light” (87). The house looks good in daylight, but the actual purpose of Gatsby’s house is to impress Daisy and to win her over, or in other words: to catch her and the light that is associated with her.

However, as summer comes to an end, the amount of sun hours reduces and so does Gatsby’s connection to Daisy (Sutton 104-105). Gatsby loses his grasp on Daisy and he dies alone. Brian Sutton points out that Gatsby’s end has been compared to that of Icarus by Robert N. Wilson (103). Wilson indeed makes this comparison, but instead of including the sun in his observation, he focuses on the general theme of aiming too high (488). However, the comparison to Icarus is even more fitting when Daisy is considered to symbolise the sun. Icarus does not only fall because he wants to reach the sun, but also because the sun is too hot for his wings. Similarly, Daisy causes Gatsby’s downfall because he takes the fall for the accident in order to protect her. Daisy betrays Gatsby and as Nick concludes, in his last few hours Gatsby “must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found ... how raw the sunlight was” (Fitzgerald 153). Gatsby has realised that his dream of a happy ending with Daisy was not built to withstand the harsh reality in which Daisy does not follow him without a second thought.

The conventional images of light in the novel are mostly related to hope and revelation. Daisy symbolises the sun and daylight, which allows light to be connected to more aspects, such as innocence and transparency. However, as the story unravels, Daisy’s light diminishes as her true personality is revealed and this has important consequences for the power of artificial lighting.

3.4 The Influence of Artificial Lighting

The contrast between darkness and light in *The Great Gatsby* is quite distinguished. The dark accompanies mystery, secrecy, loneliness, misery, and death, and is personified by Gatsby. Daylight on the other hand, is associated with hope, positivity, and revelation. Furthermore, as Daisy symbolises the sun, she is also connected to daylight. However, the use of artificial lighting causes the opposition between darkness and light to fade as the two elements start to mingle and coexist.

Throughout the novel, artificial lighting sometimes appears to adhere to the conventional imagery of daylight, only to revoke this association upon further inspection. When Nick has dinner with the Buchanans, candles are lit on the table even though it is mid-summer. Daisy quenches the flames (Fitzgerald 17), which fits her symbolism with the sun as she can outshine candles in summer. Almost immediately afterwards, the conversation goes down-hill when arguments break out. With the disappearance of artificial lights, the safety and peacefulness that is associated with light has gone away as well. Yet, Daisy, as the sun, is still present and she distracts Nick by telling him an absurd story.

It is only after the real sun has disappeared that Daisy can no longer prevent trouble from happening because the sun has left her as well: “For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face ... then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret” (Fitzgerald 19). Immediately after the sun sets, Myrtle calls and the safety of Daisy’s home and family is threatened. The dark therefore brings danger with it and now that the sun is no longer capable protecting everyone, another means needs to be found to bring back some of the security that has disappeared. As the extinguishing of the candles was the catalyst for the negative conversations, it is only logical to assume that lighting the candles can restore some of the peace. However, artificial lighting cannot live up to this

expectation: “Among the broken fragments of the last five minutes at table I remember the candles being lit again, pointlessly” (20).

Artificial lighting has failed to fulfil the same role as natural daylight and as a result a new domain comes into existence in which artificial lighting combines elements of light and dark. The lighting of Gatsby’s parties, for example, shows how a cooperation between darkness and light is sometimes necessary. Gatsby’s parties are only such a success because they draw the attention of a vast amount of people with their illumination: “At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with ... enough coloured lights to make a Christmas tree out of Gatsby’s enormous garden” (Fitzgerald 41). The evenings would not have been so exceptional without the brilliant contrast of the darkness of the night and the illumination of the party. Although artificial lighting can be seen to take over the role of the sun by creating an atmosphere of cheerfulness, this cannot be established without the presence of darkness.

The combination of darkness and light in artificial lights is reinforced by the feelings that Gatsby attaches to the lights. The true purpose of Gatsby’s parties is to attract Daisy, which turns artificial lighting into a means to achieve his greatest desire: “Gatsby uses the magic of electricity ... to signal what he hopes and believes is a more than electrical glimmering” (Tanner xviii). Gatsby therefore ascribes supernatural powers to his artificial lights and this puts artificial lighting in the realm of mystery, which is associated with darkness. However, Gatsby holds on more strongly to the lights as his chances are fading: “The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun” (Fitzgerald 42). Gatsby increases his efforts to attract Daisy, while she continues to stay away from the parties. For Gatsby, the lights are a form of hope and this traditionally suits daylight. As artificial lighting is a combination of darkness and light, it is not strong enough to fulfil the hope that Gatsby feels; his efforts to lure Daisy do not succeed and he has to step out of the shadows and his artificial light and into the real daylight to see Daisy again.

Although Gatsby puts some hope into the lights of the parties, the green light on Daisy's dock is his true symbol of hope. The green light is physically close to Daisy and because Gatsby can see the light, he hopes that he can now also reach Daisy. The green light can only be seen in the dark, which allows Gatsby to experience this feeling of hope during the night. The conventional symbolism of darkness and light would expect light to chase away the despair of darkness. However, Gatsby chooses a form of artificial lighting that is shrouded in darkness as his beacon of hope. This causes a reversal of the conventional contrasts: hope is now experienced during the night rather than the day and darkness is necessary to see the origin of this hope.

However, despite Gatsby's strong faith, his hope turns out to be false because Daisy can never live up to the ideal that Gatsby has created in his mind (Fitzgerald 92-93). Artificial light has merely blinded Gatsby: "[H]is dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night" (171). The artificial light had momentarily chased away the dark moments of the past and allowed Gatsby to hope for a better outcome in the present. However, when Daisy comes within reach, the green light loses its meaning because the light is further away from Gatsby than Daisy is: "Possibly it had occurred to [Gatsby] that the colossal significance of [the green] light had now vanished forever" (90). The artificial light is therefore not strong enough to maintain its association with hope when Daisy as the personification of natural daylight is present. Sunlight appears to be stronger than the green light and Gatsby needs to put his faith in Daisy to experience the feeling of hope that the green light used to evoke.

Artificial lighting shows how the contrast between darkness and light creates a mutual reliance; light needs the presence of darkness to exist and vice versa. However, at the end of the novel this mutual reliance is shattered and artificial lighting acts as a catalyst for the final

conversion of the conventional contrasts between darkness and light. The relationship between Daisy and Gatsby can be seen as a relationship between light and dark and their falling out shakes the foundations of the traditional associations. At the Plaza Hotel Daisy cannot choose Gatsby over Tom. The connections between Daisy and the sun are starting to diminish as she loses her supposed traits of innocence and transparency in Gatsby's eyes: "[U]nder the pure and beautiful appearance, Daisy owns a superficial, hollow, cold and selfish heart inside" (Zhang 42). Similarly, Daisy loses her faith in Gatsby when she hears about his criminal activities. Gatsby and Daisy both realise that they cannot completely rely on each other and this causes a rift between the representatives of darkness and light.

After the fall-out at the Plaza, the unstable relationship between darkness and light becomes even more endangered. The accident that kills Myrtle takes place at dusk and this dark setting appears to confirm the traditional association of darkness and death. However, Daisy drives the car that kills Myrtle and it is therefore actually the sun that causes death. This is reinforced by the yellow colour of Gatsby's car; the instrument of death is one of light rather than darkness. Darkness on the other hand, becomes connected to safety as Gatsby is determined to protect Daisy: "[H]e assumes her guilt and is sacrificed, gives up all he has, so that she might live her careless life undisturbed" (Trower 20). Gatsby represents the dark and the connotation with danger now falls away as darkness is suddenly associated with protection.

Although this is a single event, the use of artificial lighting later that night causes the conventions to be turned around more definitely. Gatsby has made the agreement with Daisy that if Tom "tries any brutality she's going to turn the light out and on again" (Fitzgerald 137). Gatsby takes on the role of protector and thereby represents safety. Moreover, artificial light is used to signal danger rather than safety. Darkness has thus definitely assumed the connotations of peace and safety. Daylight traditionally connoted protection, but this is

starting to disappear; whereas Daisy was still capable of extinguishing the candles in the beginning of the book, she can now no longer use her light to convey anything and needs the dark to keep her safe. Natural light actually becomes associated with danger the next day when Gatsby is murdered in broad-day light. In the end, safety has moved away from the day and has become tied to darkness, while danger takes place during the day.

In *The Great Gatsby* artificial lighting initiates a process in which darkness and light begin to merge and their co-existence is emphasised. In this novel darkness and light no longer adhere to their former symbolism. In the end, there is even an instance in which artificial lighting is used as a catalyst to turn traditional meanings around. Darkness comes to equal safety, whereas daylight is dangerous and Gatsby's death finalises these new-found conventions.

Chapter 4

Comparison

In the previous two chapters, the role of artificial lighting in relation to the conventional contrasts between darkness and light in both Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has been explored. Artificial light has a considerable influence on traditional symbolism in these novels, but the manner and extent of this influence differs. This chapter therefore compares the findings of the two preceding chapters to describe these differences. The differences are accounted for by means of looking at the larger context both within the novels and within the reality of the early twentieth century.

Call It Sleep shows distinct imageries regarding darkness and light. Artificial lighting has a great impact on this symbolism as it turns the traditional contrasts around. Darkness, light, and artificial lighting are not simply part of the setting and background, but they function as plot devices (e.g. David's fear of the dark cellar, David getting lost in the dark, the old lady asking David's help to light the gas, and David's electrocution). The central position of darkness and light in the novel makes the impact of reversing conventional associations even more radical; not only the manner of description has changed, but the entire experience of life has been influenced as well.

The imagery of darkness and light in *The Great Gatsby* on the other hand, is used to help create the atmosphere of the narrative world rather than being important for the plot. Darkness is, for example, important to establish the mysteriousness within the novel, but this is done by the frequent presence of the dark in mysterious scenes. Similarly, the green light on the dock is an important symbol of hope in the novel, but it has no clear influence on the development of the plot. Darkness and light add more depth to the narrative by being an allegorical device in the background instead of having a prominent place in the story. The influence of artificial lighting is also subtler than in *Call It Sleep*. Instead of completely

turning the conventions around, artificial lighting mostly causes original symbolisms to merge.

Multiple explanations can be given for this difference between the two novels, one of them being the difference in *Zeitgeist* in the novels. *Call It Sleep* is set between 1911 and 1913, while *The Great Gatsby* is set a decade later in 1922. In the 1910s, artificial lighting was not only prone to draw attention due to its novelty, but it also raised the question of how the traditional ideas of night and day could be fitted into the new situation. This is reflected in *Call It Sleep*. *The Great Gatsby* on the other hand, features a subtler influence of artificial lighting because people had become used to its presence. The novel reflects the new balance that had been established between darkness, light, and artificial lighting in the 1920s. Despite their contrasts, darkness and light are in close relation to each other and they have become more entwined because of the introduction of artificial lighting.

The difference in time is not the only factor that causes the different approach to artificial lighting; class differences also need to be taken into account. David's family cannot afford much luxury in *Call It Sleep* and a few gas lamps are already of great importance to them. Candles are therefore a much-needed addition to their lighting system and both gas lamps and candles require some effort to light. Artificial lighting in David's life is not taken for granted and his mother even once says: "I still have the candles to light ... and my work is done" (H. Roth 68), which shows that creating light is not an easy task. This is emphasised by the old lady who pays David to light the gas and by David's musings about lamp lighters. *Call It Sleep* therefore shows that artificial lighting might make life easier, but it still requires people to work.

This contrasts with the life that is led in *The Great Gatsby*, in which money is in overflow and luxury is everywhere. Artificial lighting is no exception to this luxurious life style as houses can be set ablaze with the flick of a light-switch (and sometimes the owners of

these houses even depend on servants to operate the lighting system). Artificial lighting has become a commercial product for the rich and gains its importance from its status as a symbol of wealth. As a result, artificial lighting on its own is not valued as much as it is in *Call It Sleep* because it now fulfils a secondary need rather than a primary one. The characters therefore use it without giving it a second thought. Only when the light receives special meaning do the main characters appreciate it or attempt to use it for their own ends. Gatsby, for example, uses the light to display his wealth and emphasise the extravagance of his parties.

The different approaches to artificial lighting in both novels can thus be accounted for by the amount of money that the characters possess. David's family is poor and represents the lower class that has to work hard for every kind of luxury, whereas Gatsby and his companions do not have to worry about money and can spend it without a second thought. The way that artificial lighting is considered in the novels therefore reflects the class differences in twentieth-century society; the rich presume artificial lighting to be an asset for reaching their own goals, whereas the lower class has to work to create this light and therefore also appreciate the smaller forms of artificial lighting.

Despite the difference in income, David and Gatsby bear an important similarity that partially accounts for their desire to control the light: they are both outsiders in New York. David and his parents are immigrants from Europe, which, in combination with their Jewish background, causes them to be outsiders. Instead of truly integrating into their new homeland, the family finds their place among other Jews: they live in a Jewish neighbourhood, David has Jewish friends, and he goes to the cheder, a Hebrew school. Gatsby's outsider perspective on the other hand, is partially due to the fact that he is originally from the west of the United States and has now moved to the east. However, the same is true for Nick, Daisy, and Tom. Gatsby is the only one who is wealthy with new

money rather than old money and this sets him apart from the others. The question of where he has gotten his money from is therefore not only one of suspicion, but it also points out his otherness. His money does not grant him the right to be part of New York society; he remains a stranger and according to Tom even an intruder (Fitzgerald 123-24).

Both David and Gatsby thus stand in the shadow of society and more importantly, both use artificial lighting in an attempt to shed this outsider identity and become part of New York society. By letting go of his Jewish heritage and becoming part of a more modern generation of artificial lighting, David shakes his immigrant identity at the car tracks and attempts to find his own path in the United States. Similarly, Gatsby uses artificial light to become part of the upper-class society in New York in order to come closer to Daisy. Artificial lighting contributes to this attempt as “[f]or Gatsby, spectacular lighting is an assertion of self. It intensifies his sense of worth” (Nye 285). Gatsby deliberately uses artificial lighting at his parties to attract the social class that he wants to belong to and to give himself access to New York society. In his eyes, the electrical light is therefore a passage to social success. Although Gatsby does not succeed in his attempt and David’s future is unknown, it is evident that they both consider artificial lighting to be the key to integration.

Their actions are ones of re-identification and can even be interpreted as forms of re-creating the self. David’s attempt to drastically change his own life can be seen as a desire to gain more power, which ties in with David’s diminishing faith in God throughout the novel. By creating his own light at the car tracks, he no longer relies on God, but attempts to obtain power himself: “Power! Power like a paw, titanic power ripped through the earth and slammed against his body and shackled him where he stood” (H. Roth 417). However, the power that he feels is not his own and despite his desire to become free of sin, he realises that he is still unclean after his contact with the electrical power (425). David can therefore not

obtain God-like powers and has to continue his life as a mortal human, albeit with some new insights.

Whereas God is still present in *Call It Sleep*, religion has almost completely disappeared in *The Great Gatsby*. Although Gatsby saw himself as a “son of God” (Fitzgerald 95) when he was a boy, he does not desire to possess a God-like status. Rather, he wants to control his own destiny and gain power via artificial lighting. By controlling the artificial lights, Gatsby thinks he can control not only the way people see him, but also Daisy’s actions, both of which will shape his future. As a result, “electricity becomes a tool of self-creation” (Nye 285). However, although Daisy indeed comes to him and his dreams seem to come true, in the end, Gatsby has to face the limits of his own power and even admit his mortality.

Gatsby and David therefore both want to possess the power to control their own lives and this closely ties in with the developments of society in the early-twentieth century: “Electric light had entered a society with weakening religious convictions” (Nye 286). As religion started to disappear, artificial lighting made its entry in daily life and provided an alternative to chase away the demons of the dark. This is reflected by David’s diminishing faith and his desire to imitate God’s light at the car tracks; religion has not disappeared completely yet and artificial lighting therefore resembles God’s power. This changed over time and *The Great Gatsby* therefore shows a different approach to religion in combination with artificial light. The vacuum that religion left behind is filled by the presence of artificial lighting; life is no longer controlled by a deity and people can now control their own lives with the help of artificial lighting. This approach is evident in *The Great Gatsby* as Gatsby tries to use the lights to control his own fate and change his life.

However, despite its appeal, artificial lighting cannot always live up to the hopes that the characters attach to it. The magical quality of artificial lighting evokes the idea that

anything is possible, but the novels show that all that glitters is not gold. David is so obsessed with creating light that he disregards his own safety and gets electrocuted. Gatsby allows the light to blind him and to forget his shadowy past and the obstacles that stand between Daisy and himself. The novels show how artificial light cannot achieve miraculous feats despite being a ground-breaking invention; although mankind now interprets darkness and light differently, the laws of nature still need to be adhered to.

Although the novels show different approaches to the role of artificial lighting, the fact that they both comment on this new invention shows their modernist character. Modernism reflects upon society and the changes that occur within it. The novels adhere to this by incorporating the new invention of artificial lighting. They not only feature this new form of light, but also show how it influenced the experience of urban life via a change in the traditional interpretation of darkness and light. This new understanding of well-known elements fits the modernist genre of the two novels. The concept of challenging the conventional imageries of darkness and light suits the modernists' desire to question traditional oppositions. The rigid oppositions between darkness and light have faded with the introduction of artificial lighting and the interpretations can now vary on a larger scale than before. The modernist tendency to upset the traditional status quo is especially reflected in *Call It Sleep*. The novel shows how drastically the conventional imageries can be turned around, which causes them to be found on the other side of the spectrum. *The Great Gatsby* shows a more interwoven image in which darkness and light co-exist and merge. This ties in with the modernist idea of fluidity and intermingling elements. A thematic reading of artificial light and its influence on darkness and light in both novels therefore places them in the larger context of modernism in American literature.

The differences in the depiction of artificial lighting and its role on the relationship between darkness and light in *Call It Sleep* and *The Great Gatsby* can be accounted for by

multiple factors. The difference in *Zeitgeist* and social class causes *Call It Sleep* to show a more radical influence than *The Great Gatsby*. Both novels feature an outsider's perspective and the characters use artificial lighting as a means to become part of New York society and create their own identity. However, rather than artificial lighting providing people with miraculous powers, man-made light changes people's perception of darkness and light.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to research to what extent and in what ways themes of darkness and light feature in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and to determine the role that artificial lighting plays in their (inter)relationship. The theoretical background provided a brief description of modernist literature, followed by an overview of the history of artificial lighting and the manner in which darkness and light have been interpreted in literature throughout history. A close reading of the two novels showed a wide range of symbolism with regard to darkness, light, and artificial lighting. These imageries are not only visible in emotions, and descriptions of scenes, but they are also exemplified by the fact that important characters personify or symbolise either darkness or light.

In *Call It Sleep* the association with darkness is mostly one of danger and fear, whereas light equals safety. The importance of artificial lighting gradually grows throughout the novel and gains enough power to turn these imageries upside down and establish new conventions. This suits the narrative of the novel as it is written from the perspective of a child. For a child, things are often black and white and it is therefore fitting that changes throughout the novel have such a drastic impact on David's world. *The Great Gatsby* displays another side of the standard imageries by focusing on the mysteriousness of the dark and the presumed transparency of light. Although artificial lighting challenges the traditional values at the end of the novel, the main influence of artificial light is bringing together darkness and light and emphasising the co-dependent relationship between them. The subtler influence of artificial lighting in the novel is suitable for the characters as they have all reached adulthood and have a more refined world view than David in *Call It Sleep*. Moreover, the characters in *The Great Gatsby* have all engaged in various kinds of relationships with other people, which

makes them less independent. This reflects the connection between darkness and light that is established in the novel.

The role that artificial lighting plays in the novels reflects the rapidly increasing use of this invention in the early twentieth century and the effects it had on society. The class difference between the characters of the two novels and the different settings reflect how various parts of society had a different approach to artificial lighting. Other elements such as the outsider-perspective show how artificial lighting was thought to increase one's self worth. The modernist concept of allowing boundaries to blur and dichotomies to disappear into a more flexible spectrum is present in both stories. The novels show that artificial lighting was starting to integrate into daily life and although this could at times topple over the previous conventions concerning darkness and light, it also allowed the two elements to co-exist in a new manner.

Limitations of this thesis include the amount of close reading that has been discussed. Although more examples of symbolism can be found in the novels, the limited length of this thesis prevented a thorough discussion of all these scenes. A systematic cross-thematic analysis might offer an even more informed interpretation of the novels. Moreover, due to the scope of this thesis only a small section of literary modernism has been discussed. A more thorough analysis of artificial lighting in literature in relation to the modernist genre might provide new insights. As this thesis has mostly focussed on the setting of the novels and the larger context of the twentieth century, not much attention has been paid to the motives of the characters. A psycho-analytical discussion of the two novels in relation to artificial lighting might therefore add to the findings of this thesis.

Other suggestions for further research include an analysis of more modernist novels that are set in early twentieth-century New York to research whether artificial lighting challenging traditional contrasts in literature was a common trend throughout this period.

This would not only give a broader impression of the period, but it might also add to the symbolism of darkness and light that has been discussed here. Additionally, considering not only the genre of modernism, but also that of postmodernism when researching the role of artificial light in traditional symbolism of darkness and light in literature can be a useful addition, as postmodernism is sceptical towards binary oppositions. Moreover, a comparative analysis between modernist literature in America and Europe in relation to artificial lighting might generate discussions regarding possible different interpretations of darkness and light in varying geographical locations. Analysing the influence of artificial lighting on literary symbolism of darkness and light could also be continued throughout literature from the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first century to determine if and how the perspective on artificial lighting has changed over time. As not much research has been performed yet on the role that artificial lighting plays in symbolism of darkness and natural light, much work remains to be done and this thesis has hopefully contributed to this new topic in literary symbolism.

Bibliography

- Aguirre, Mercedes. "Erinyes as Creatures of Darkness." *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, edited by Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia Karakantza, and Olga Levaniouk, Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 133-41.
- Armstrong, Tim. *Modernism, Technology and the Body*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Baldwin, Peter C. "'Nocturnal Habits and Dark Wisdom': The American Response to Children in the Streets at Night, 1880-1930." *Journal of Social History*, vol. 35, no. 3, Spring 2002, pp. 593-611.
- Bernstein, Alan E. *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds*. Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Bouman, Mark J. "Luxury and Control. The Urbanity of Street Lighting in Nineteenth-Century Cities." *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 14, no. 1, November 1987, pp. 7-37.
- Brevda, William. "How Do I Get to Broadway? Reading Dos Passos's Manhattan Transfer Sign." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 38, no. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 79-114.
- Burkert, Walter, and Nanno Marinatos. "Introduction." *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, edited by Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia Karakantza, and Olga Levaniouk, Lexington Books, 2010, pp. xv-xx.
- Butler, Christopher. *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Buxton, Richard. "The Significance (or Insignificance) of Blackness in Mythological Names." *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, edited by Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia Karakantza, and Olga Levaniouk, Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 3-13.

- Clark, B.A.J. "Outdoor Lighting and Crime, Part 2: Coupled Growth." *Astronomical Society of Victoria Inc*, 2003.
- Clark, George. "The Traveler Recognizes His Goal: A Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 64, no. 4, October 1965, pp. 645-59.
- Constantinidou, Soteroula. "The Light Imagery of Divine Manifestation in Homer." *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, edited by Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia Karakantza, and Olga Levaniouk, Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 91-109.
- Donald, James. "The Immaterial City: Representation, Imagination, and Media Technologies." *A Companion to the City*, edited by Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, Blackwell, 2008, pp. 46-54.
- Dowden, Ken. "Trojan Night." *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, edited by Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia Karakantza, and Olga Levaniouk, Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 110-20.
- Edensor, Tim. "The Gloomy City: Rethinking the Relationship between Light and Dark." *Urban Studies*, vol. 52, no. 3, February 2015, pp. 422-38.
- Elmore, A.E. "Color and Cosmos in *The Great Gatsby*." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 78, no. 3, Summer 1970, pp. 427-43.
- Ferguson, James. "Symbolic Patterns in *Call It Sleep*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 14, no. 4, January 1969, pp. 211-20.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Penguin Books, 2000.
- Kolář, Stanislav. "Ethnicity and Some Other Aspects of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*." *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film*, vol. 1, no. 1, Fall 2009, pp. 67-80.
- Koslofsky, Craig. *Evening's Empire. A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

- Kyvig, David E. *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1939: Decades of Promise and Pain*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002.
- Lesser, Wayne. "A Narrative's Revolutionary Energy: The Example of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*." *Criticism*, vol. 23, no. 2, Spring 1981, pp. 155-76.
- Lyons, Bonnie. "The Symbolic Structure of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 13, no. 2, Spring 1972, pp. 186-203.
- Magennis, Hugh. "Imagery of Light in Old English Poetry: Traditions and Appropriations." *Anglia-Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, vol. 125, no. 2, 2007, pp. 181-204.
- The New Jerusalem Bible*. Edited by Henry Wansbrough, Doubleday, 1999.
- Nye, David E. *Electrifying America. Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940*. The MIT Press, 1990.
- Palatnik, Lori. *Friday Night and Beyond: The Shabbat Experience Step-by-Step*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994.
- Roth, Fred. A. "Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*." *The Explicator*, vol. 48, no. 3, 1990, pp. 218-20.
- Roth, Henry. *Call It Sleep*. Penguin Books, 2006.
- Sante, Luc. *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991.
- Singal, Daniel Joseph. "Towards a Definition of American Modernism." *American Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1, Spring 1987, pp. 7-26.
- Sutton, Brian. "Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*." *The Explicator*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2000. pp. 103-106.
- Sweeney, James G. "Searching for George Wilson's Garage." *The Explicator*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2012, pp. 308-13.
- Tanner, Tony. Introduction. *The Great Gatsby*. By F. Scott Fitzgerald. Penguin Books, 2000.
- Trower, Katherine B. "Visions of Paradise in *The Great Gatsby*." *Renascence*, vol. 25, no. 1, Fall 1972, pp. 14-23.

Wilson, Robert N. "Fitzgerald as Icarus." *The Antioch Review*, vol. 17, no. 4, Winter 1957, pp. 481-92.

Wyer, Siegfried. *Colour and Language. Colour Terms in English*. Gunter Narr Verlag, 1992.

---. *Colour Terms in the Crowd: Colour Terms in Use*. Gunter Narr Verlag, 2006.

Zhang, Haibing. "Symbolic Meanings of Colors in *The Great Gatsby*." *Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 10, no. 6, 2015, pp. 38-44.