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### Consumerism and Advertising in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"

"The Great Gatsby" written by F. Scott Fitzgerald has always been known as an image of the American dream. Consumerism and advertising are one of the main ways to embody the American dream in this book. People are always amazed by extravagant parties, mansions, luxurious dresses those depicted in the book. People are amazed not only because of the fancy lifestyle they live but also because it is actually a glimpse into American society at the beginning of the early 20th century. Consumerism and advertising had greatly influenced people's lifestyle and thinking patterns in the early 20th century in America. F. Scott Fitzgerald portrays these two main topics by showing people's fancy lifestyle as well as people's typical ways of thinking and behaviors in that specific time.

In early 20th century America, people began to have more choices when they consume as there were increasing diverse products to choose from. Products of the same use are differentiated into a variety of products for different occasions. Commercial companies create demands instead of simply satisfying people's needs. Matthew Little notes that there were thousands of colors or shades of cars in the early 20th century in America, but the blue car was thought to be the most fashionable popular car, which explains Wilson's enthusiasm about Tom's blue coupe (5). Commercial companies created thousands of colors and shades simply to encourage people to buy more. Besides, women used to "wash their visages in the dew, a

cosmetic locally reckoned more potent than Kalydor's", but in the early 20th century in America, women began to have various kinds of beauty products: "powders, patches, perfumes, creams, beauty parlors and similar devices for painting the lily" which can be replaced by "common soap and tap water" ("How Much Do We Need? (Cover Story)" 317). Even water which used to be considered unbranded good, could be seen in different shapes of bottles with different labels (*The Overspent American*). Also, Gatsby has a lot of shirts in a variety of colors, materials, styles, and designed by different designers, "shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel" (108). Though he probably doesn't have the chance to wear every one of them, he still buys these expensive products just for pleasure or desires. People get more choices, then they tend to consume more for the same purpose.

In early 20th-century America, consumerism and advertising not only gave increasing various choices to people, but also made more people desire a fancy luxury lifestyle than ever before. Advertising is everywhere in 20th-century America, selling a luxurious fancy lifestyle. Daniel Navon states that "ads were increasingly moving away from statements of fact to ads geared largely towards the development of symbolic capital or goodwill for trademarked brands." in "Truth in Advertising: Rationalizing Ads and Knowing Consumers in the Early Twentieth-Century United States." (155). He also points out "techniques of salesmanship employed" and "the way the legitimation and rationalization of advertising enabled new and expanded forms of mass media" lead to a result that "enveloping the consumer in a world of targeted ads and brands." (170). Advertisements are no longer for products, but for desires. That means advertisements would be exposed to everyone from different classes. As a result, there would be a growth of a consumer society, leading to consumerism. "They are not content with

necessities. They demand conveniences, and some contact with luxury” (“How Much Do We Need? (Cover Story)” 317). If we take a careful examination of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby”, it’s not hard to find advertisements are everywhere. People are always willing to buy more. Myrtle’s apartment is a very small apartment with “a small living room, a small dining-room, a small bedroom and a bath”. (41) She buys a lot of things she doesn’t need to fill up this small apartment. She gets ideas from advertisements and gossip magazines. (41) And, she still asks to buy more. Besides, when Myrtle first met Tom, she was attracted by his dress first “He had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes, and I couldn’t keep my eyes off him, but every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head.” (48-49). Myrtle is a typical woman who is greatly influenced by advertisements. It seems like Myrtle lives only for consuming. Myrtle is attracted to Tom not because of his personality or anything inside of this man, but because of the way he dresses the luxurious lifestyle he lives which is the same as those in advertisements. She doesn’t have her own aesthetic or ideas, she does what commercials told her. Her way of obtaining satisfaction is living the life that commercials claim everyone should have. Advertisements guide people’s lives.

Moreover, people’s identities and social status could be seen and judged directly as people kept desiring this kind of visible luxurious lifestyle in the early 20th century in America. People need to show their society status or classes by consuming. In fact, Gatsby himself, is just like an advertisement. He claims he comes from a rich family, he educated at Oxford, he was a hero in the war (78-80). Also, he talks and acts like a gentleman. He is the advertisement of the luxurious upper-class lifestyle that commercials try to sell people. Advertisements try to inspire people’s desires by keeping telling them they can live the life or get social status shown on

advertisements as long as they buy their products. However, rich as Gatsby, can't get a same social identity as Daisy and Tom in the end. When Gatsby shows Daisy his shirts, "He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them" (108). It seems like Gatsby is trying to show Daisy that his social status by using this visible way. He attempts to compete with Tom in order to prove that he has the same social status and economic power as Tom's or even better than him. And Daisy likes these luxury products "Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily" and she says: "They're such beautiful shirts ... It makes me sad because I've never seen such ---- such beautiful shirts before." (108). It's hard to tell she is amazed by his luxurious lifestyle or his economic strength and social class. Even when Daisy tells Gatsby that she loves him, she shows her admiration by saying: "You resemble the advertisement of the man" (135). Daisy is also a material woman influenced by advertisements. She is more like this luxurious fancy style rather than Gatsby. What she loves are the fancy lifestyle and social status that he stands for.

In contrast to visible social status, people's relationships were becoming more fragile due to consumerism in the early 20th century in America. Tyler May Elaine, the author of "The Pressure to Provide: Class, Consumerism, and Divorce in Urban America, 1880-1920." points out that "the rising living standard... it often wreaked havoc in the homes of those who could not afford the fruits of abundance. It is no accident that the emergence of the affluent society paralleled the skyrocketing of the American divorce rate" (180). Similarly, in the article "How Much Do We Need? (Cover Story)", the author notes that "Young people hold back from marriage on economic grounds, instead of pooling their poverty with love, and learning the sweetness of a dinner of herbs." (317). Clearly, consumerism influenced people's relationship greatly in the early 20th century in America. Not only for the lower class but also for the upper

class. In fact, consumerism can influence people's relationship in a different way. People's relationships become fragile, but material connection becomes solid. Although, Tom cheats on Daisy for a long time and she is not happy to be with him. It is still a tough decision for Daisy to leave Tom. Tom can provide her with a stable, safe, easy, upper-class life that Gatsby couldn't give her. So, she neither chooses to wait for Gatsby at the very beginning nor chooses to leave with Gatsby at the very end. Myrtle is the same kind of person as Daisy. She has sex with the other man and cheats her husband, too. When Myrtle talks about Wilson, she looks down upon her husband, "he wasn't fit to lick my shoe ... I knew right away I made a mistake. He borrowed somebody's best suit to get married in, and never told me about it" (48). She only cares about the lifestyle she can get in the marriage rather than the person she together with. She always wants to be treated the same as Daisy as she desires Daisy's upper-class luxurious lifestyle. So, she wants Tom to divorce and marry her so that she can be a real upper-class person. Then she can live this luxurious upper-class life forever. In addition, in Gatsby's party "Most of the remaining women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands" as their husbands are together with other women (65). Loyalty and trust in marriage become the least important thing comparing people's desires. Husbands and wives all cheat on their loved ones for their own desires. What's more, Gatsby tells Tom that Daisy never loved him: "She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved any one except me!" (147). Like what claims in "How Much Do We Need? (Cover Story)", economic grounds become an important factor in marriage. People's relationships can be easily broken down due to economic grounds as well as people's endless desires.

Like America in the early 20th century, ubiquitous advertising and consumerism are still influencing us in all the aspects of our lives in 21st century across the world. Nowadays, it's hard to find a place without any advertisements at all. On the internet, we are forced to watch advertisements while we are searching for information, reading magazines or watching videos. People even need to pay for an advertisement-free version website. We keep receiving commercial texts, phone calls, and emails from different companies for products we don't need. Different ads are sent to different groups of people divided by age, gender, occupation, income, religion, education and so on (Krumm 66-67). There are more diverse products for more diverse conditions. People are encouraged to obtain satisfaction and happiness by consuming what they don't need. It seems like consuming is the only way to get a sense of satisfaction and is the only purpose to live and work. Even we can't really tell from the desire to demand anymore.

As a result of "ubiquitous advertising" (Krumm 66), we not only spend more on unnecessary products but also put our privacy and safety at risk. It's easier to pay due to non-cash payment. The problem is you are consuming but you can't feel you are paying. The money spent is just a number reduced on the electric account. Paying is becoming easier and easier. Most importantly, our privacy can't be guaranteed. Our Google's browsing history is exposed to commercial companies so that they are able to analyze our preferences and tastes. Commercial companies can easily get our phones numbers or email addresses, which will cause cybercrime (Krumm 67-68). Consuming or safety? Desire or privacy? It's still a problem we need to figure out. Anyhow, we ourselves should make full use of advertising instead of being controlled by consumerism.

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