

## Original Paper

# Reconstructing the Family Unit: A Study of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

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### Abstract

*The family unit is the smallest but most important unit of the society. When the families are strong and united, the entire nation will definitely be strong and prosperous. If the families are weak or fragile, the entire society will obviously be fragilised. We set out in this study to probe into the American family unit as depicted in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and F. Scot Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. This paper is premised on the hypothetical contention that the American family unit as depicted in the novels under study, has significantly disintegrated, and is in dire need of reconstruction. Individual and Ego Psychological theories constitute the theoretical framework for this paper. Looking through the theoretical lens of Adler's Individual Psychology and Erikson's Ego Psychology, one can posit that, both novelists suggest in their novels under study a moral and spiritual rearmament as a condition sine qua non for the reconstruction of the American family unit.*

### Keywords

*Family, Reconstruction, American Family, Social Interest, Capitalism*

## 1. Introduction

The family unit is the smallest but the most important unit of the society. It is the substratum of every society. What this implies is that, stronger family ties in the society will obviously produce stronger communities while fragile family ties will unfortunately pave way for weak if not chaotic communities. Lawrence Wilson corroborates this stance in his article, "The Family Unit and its Importance." He opines that "the family is the most important unit of society; it is not only the basic societal unit, it is also the basic sexual unit, the basic child-raising unit, the basic communication unit, and the basic all-around fun and friendship unit" (1). Wilson reiterates the fact that the family unit – principally a man and a woman living together in harmony and peace – remains the basic social organisation or unit of any society. Such a healthy relationship guarantees stability sexually, emotionally, intellectually and socially.

Theodore Dreiser and F. Scott Fitzgerald are iconic 20<sup>th</sup> century American novelists who clearly portray in their artistic productions, the stark realities that obtain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century American family.

The capitalist system that is reflected in *Sister Carrie* and *The Great Gatsby* has rather created a situation whereby the factors that foster family ties like love, unity and solidarity have been significantly compromised. What obtains is a situation in which the crave for money and better living conditions have weakened the bond of love and unity that ought to exist in the home. Due to the fact that division in the home as a result of the unhealthy competition for wealth in the American capitalist society has greatly contributed to the disintegration of the family unit, there is urgent need for the home to be reconstructed so as to guarantee a healthier nation. An attempt will be made to prop into some of the families/ homes in the works of both authors, with the aim of analysing their challenges and how these challenges can be overcome.

This paper is premised on the hypothetical contention that the American family unit as depicted in the works of Dreiser and Fitzgerald under study, has significantly disintegrated, and is in dire need of reconstruction. The following research questions will guide us in the investigation of the causes and effects of the crucial issues that have fragilised the 20<sup>th</sup> century American family: Why has the 20<sup>th</sup> century American family disintegrated? How is the family unit depicted in the works of Dreiser and Fitzgerald? What solutions have been presented by both authors to strengthen the American family?

## 2. Definition of Key Terms

The key terms to be defined and situated in the context in which they will be used in this paper are “family” and “reconstruction.”

The *New Thesaurus Legal Dictionary* defines family as husband, wife and children. It further defines family as all blood relations; all who live in the same household including servants and relatives, with some person or persons directing this economic and social unit.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the family as the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children. Family in the *New Thesaurus Encyclopaedia* is defined as a basic unit of social structure. For the purpose of this study, we would consider the family as consisting of the nuclear and the extended family so as to have a better appraisal of how the American family is portrayed in the novels earmarked for this paper.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the term reconstruction is defined as the action of reconstructing; the act or process of rebuilding, repairing, or restoring something. In this study, focus will also be on how both authors suggest possible ways of rebuilding the disintegrated American family.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In this study, the theories of Individual Psychology by Alfred Adler and Ego Psychology by Erik Erikson will be applied. These psychologists were former students of Sigmund Freud but broke away

because of their disagreement relating to Freud's personality theory. Adler's and Erikson's theories on Individual and Ego Psychology are suitable for this study because it enables one to psycho-analyse the actions of characters operating in a capitalist society especially in relation to the complicated and fragile family bond we find in the novels under study.

To begin with, Alfred Adler (1870 – 1937) is known as the founder of Individual Psychology. After ten years in psychoanalytical circles under Freud, Adler had a bitter confrontation with Freud that led to enmity and eventual separation. Adler resigned from the Psychoanalytic Society in 1911 and founded his own organization, known first as the Society for Free Psychoanalysis and later as the Society for Individual Psychology (*An Introduction to Personality Theories* 91). According to Alfred Adler, the term Individual Psychology expresses his belief in the uniqueness and indivisibility of every human personality. As opposed to Freud, he insists that the conscious and unconscious always work together, and personality is never torn by conflicting wishes and goals that set one part against another part. It by no means precludes the social element. He argues that the individual becomes an individual only in a social context. He was also unique among the early personality theorists in devoting considerable attention to criminality, education, and child guidance.

One of the tenets of Adler's Individual Psychology that is of relevance to this paper is the aspect of 'social interest.' Alfred Adler avers that the human being has an innate potential to relate amicably with others. Whereas Freud's psychoanalysis views life as an inevitable struggle between our selfish drives and the demands of society, Adler maintains that what is important is community feeling that gives the individual a sense of kinship with humanity which enables our physically weak bodies to survive through cooperation. In defence of his stance in relation to social interest as opposed to Freud and Jung, he further reiterates in *An Introduction to Personality Theories* that,

It is social interest, rather than a superego or collective unconscious that establishes the guidelines for proper personality development. The well-adjusted person learns at an early age to develop this inherent potential, and to assist the common good of present and future generations. Maladjustment is defined not as the failure to sublimate or individuate, as Freud or Jung would argue, but as the denial of one's social interest. A major task of psychology, therefore, is to understand and alleviate deficiencies in cooperation. "Society has no place for deserters." (92)

One observes that Adler's argument is more convincing and most suitable for this study that seeks to x-ray and mend the American family because capitalism has created a society in which the aggressive, competitive and reckless struggle to amass wealth has rendered people operating in such a society to be ruthless, selfish and void of family or social ties. This is exactly what obtains in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in which their protagonists, do not have concern nor reach out to their family members in need. They are preoccupied with their reckless struggle for money and fame. An Adlerian reading of Dreiser's works will obviously give one a better understanding of the characters, their challenges in the capitalist space and the place of 'social interest' in the reconstruction of the family unit.

Education and religion are some of the tenets of Adler's theory that are of interest to us as far as this research study is concerned. Adler posits that education and religion significantly influence the rate of social interest in the society. He maintains that the principal aim of education is social adjustment. In connection to this, he stresses that individual ambition and competition should be down-played so as to further the development of social interest. As far as his focus on religion is concerned, one senses that unlike Freud, he encourages religion because it promotes the spirit of social interest.

Having presented the various tenets of Individual Psychology that will be applied in this paper, one will also take a quick look at Erik Erikson's Ego Psychology. In this paper, one sets out to psychoanalyse some of the characters in selected works of Theodore Dreiser and F. Scott Fitzgerald using Erikson's ego psychology theory to determine the motivations of their actions. We also examine why or whether they attain ego integrity or despair in the families or communities that they operate in. Erikson explicates that ego integrity is the feeling that one's life has been valuable and worthwhile. The sharp contrast of ego integrity is despair, that is, the fear that death will intervene before one can find the way to a more meaningful life. It also has to do with a deep sense of failure, regret, hopelessness and guilt for not having achieved what one would have desired to. Erikson concludes that "ideally, ego integrity prevails over despair; and this result in the ego quality of wisdom" (Ewen 180). One also makes an attempt in this paper to suggest a way-forward to ensure an attainment of ego integrity even in a hostile, competitive and indifferent socio-economic environment like that presented in the works under study.

Erikson's ego psychology also pays considerable attention to the subject of religion. Unlike Sigmund Freud who dismisses religion as a collective neurosis, Erikson like Jung and Adler considers religion to be very useful as far as social peace and stability are concerned. Erikson argues that religion does provide valuable support for such ego qualities like hope and trust. Erickson revisits that Golden Rule which states that 'we should do to others what we want them to do unto us.' He proposes that the ideal attitude is that which enhances both one's development and the others. He regards Mohamad Ghandi as a role model due to his philosophy of non-violence while stressing the need for solutions that benefit both parties in a dispute. One observes that his religious ideology is similar to that of Alfred Adler. Due to the many instances of rivalry, disagreement, greed and feud that we find in Dreiser's and Fitzgerald's families as portrayed in their novels, the religious dimension of Erikson's ego psychology will be applied to attempt solutions to such conflicts.

#### **4. The Fragility of the American family Unit**

The terms 'family unit' and 'home' are used in this context to mean the same thing. John Berger in his 1984 book titled *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* gives a profound commentary on the home thus:

Home was the center of the world because it was the place where a vertical line crossed with a horizontal one. The vertical line was a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards to the underworld. The horizontal line represented the traffic of the world, all the possible roads leading

across the earth to other places. Thus, at home, one was nearest to the gods in the sky and to the dead of the underworld. This nearness promised access to both. And at the same time, one was at the starting point and, hopefully, the returning point of all terrestrial journeys (Note 1).

John Berger in the excerpt above spells out what an ideal home is expected to look like. According to him, this ideal state of a home obtained in the past. The exigencies of modern life seem to have adversely affected the conviviality that animated the home. It is worth noting that the American family that is reflected in the works of Theodore Dreiser and F. Scott Fitzgerald has significantly disintegrated. The capitalist system which animates even the family space has created an environment in which “survival of the fittest” is the order of the day. Both Dreiser and Fitzgerald have a good memory of America’s enviable history and thus brood over the spiritual and moral dissipation that has taken toll on the modern generation of Americans. As a result of this deviation, the moral fabric of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American society in general and the home in particular has been fragilised. An in-depth analysis of the two texts under study will be made to show the insidious extent to which materialism has deformed the American family unit.

The first family we meet in *Sister Carrie* is that of the Hansons. Hanson is the husband of Carrie’s sister Minnie. This is the first family that Carrie lives with in Chicago. The Chicago presented at the beginning of the story is a city that is rapidly developing as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Increase in trade and industry in Chicago creates a very competitive business environment. The competition that is recurrent in capitalist communities is what equally prevails in Chicago. Workers in such a system like Hanson, Minnie and Carrie find life very difficult. This significantly affects the relationship that exists between family members. When Carrie arrives the home of her sister in Chicago for the first time, she is not heartily received by Hanson because he has the impression that her coming into their family entails a heavier financial burden on them. The kind attention and care that Carrie is supposed to receive in her elder sister’s home is transformed to indifference and hatred especially on the part of Hanson. She is expected to contribute financially to the upkeep of the house just a day after her arrival in the city.

One observes that such a shabby and indifferent attitude from the Hansons adversely affects the psychology of Carrie towards the family. She is obliged to start fending for herself under various precarious working conditions at a time when she is not psychologically prepared to grapple with such a demanding situation. The cold feelings or attitude of the Hansons towards Carrie pushes her to quit the home only to go and live with Drouet who promises to meet her needs. One also notes that Carrie never returns to visit the Hansons after she leaves that home.

Erik Erikson in his Ego Psychological theory lays emphasis on the eight Epigenetic Psychosexual Stages of personality development. These stages as propounded by Erikson are very important in the understanding of the attitude of Carrie in *Sister Carrie*. At the moment that we first meet Carrie in the novel she is more or less a young adult. This is the time that she comes to the city and lives with the Hansons. According to Erikson’s Ego Psychological theory, this stage in Carrie’s life is the sixth

epigenetic stage. Young adulthood is the sixth epigenetic psychosexual stage. At this stage which marks the beginning of adulthood, the young adult grapples with intimacy and isolation. He/ she faces the challenge of work and marriage. At this stage the young adult is expected to relate with people amicably. Erikson avers that if the young adult's sense of identity is very fragile, isolation and self-absorption will appear preferable to meaningful contact with others. On the other hand, a firm identity can be fused with that of another person without the fear of losing an important part of one's self. Such intimacy is seen as an important aspect of friendship and a successful marriage. It also enables the young adult to have concern for others. A predominance of intimacy over isolation enables the ego to overcome the separate needs of two individuals and enjoy mutual love which indicates that the crisis of this stage has been passed successfully (Ewen, 2003).

It is unfortunate that Carrie is rather isolated at this crucial period in her life. The feeling of intimacy and love that she ought to enjoy from the Hansons is completely absent. This attitude pushes her to leave the family at a very premature stage and is thus obliged to face the unfriendly and hostile American capitalistic society single – handedly. If she however ends up at the end of the novel as an immoral and materialistic character, it is because of the fragile family background that she hails from.

On the part of Carrie, one also notes that she herself is callous and selfish. All through the novel, she is presented as a lady who has no concern for her family. Lawrence Wilson's definition of the family unit as principally referring to a man and woman living together in harmony and peace does not even tie with the relationships that Carrie has with men. Her relationship with men is void of love. She only lives with them because she wants them to satisfy her material needs. At any time that she finds a better man who can spend more on her, she does not hesitate to date him. Carrie's lack of concern for others is further complicated by her childlessness. Dreiser does not make the reader know whether her childlessness is deliberate or not. The fact that she does not communicate let alone visit her parents in Columbia City is enough justification to prove that she has no concern for her family. The treatment she gives the two men whom she dates successively is also very telling as far as the family unit in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is concerned. While the men are attracted to her by her beauty, she exploits these men financially. The only factor that brings them together is sex which alone cannot guarantee stability in the home. At the end, when she is rich, she decides to live as a single lady. This lack of unity in the home already suggests failure in the sense that when families are weak, society begins to break down. The loneliness, childlessness, seclusion and disillusionment of Carrie at the end of the story are telling of the disintegration of the home in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century American capitalist society in which all efforts are concentrated towards money.

An Adlerian interpretation of Carrie's egoistic behaviour shows that her actions are influenced by neglect. Adler opines that "a neglected child may choose the goal of revenge, become hostile and dominating, and cast others in the role of probable enemies. On the other hand, a child given proper care and nurturing may adopt a style of life that ultimately includes a useful and rewarding occupation, a mutually satisfying marriage, and a sincere and sympathetic concern for other people" (Ewen 98-99).

One senses that Carrie's early separation from her parents, the poor treatment given her at the Hansons and the challenges of capitalism in the city of Chicago precipitate her maladjustment (Note 2). One again traces her lack of social interest to the disintegrated home she comes from.

More still, the case of George Hurstwood is more disturbing because of his gross negligence of duty as a family head. Before eloping to Montreal with Carrie, Hurstwood is married to Julia. They have five children but Hurstwood spends all his time in the restaurant where he is manager. He spends more time after work drinking with friends and also finds pleasure in going out with other women. The climax of the breakdown of the family unit in the novel is when he decides to abandon his family and elope with his lover Carrie. Hurstwood seems to have been carried away by Carrie's charm and beauty to the extent that he no longer has concern for his wife and children. His wife Julia seems not to be very worried about Hurstwood's infidelity because she has been adequately compensated financially by Hurstwood before he abandons them. In this case, one is again presented with a situation in which the love for money by Julia far outweighs her love for her husband. She is very comfortable with her wealth even in the absence of her husband.

The fact that Hurstwood finally abandons his family for good is again suggestive of the breakdown of the home in America as depicted in *Sister Carrie*. There seems to be no place for social interest in the life of Hurstwood. Healthy strivings for superiority are guided by social interest, whereas pathological strivings are characterised by selfishness and a lack of concern for others. Adler in his Individual Psychological theory underscores the fact that, it is social interest, rather than a superego or collective unconscious, that establishes the guidelines for proper personality development. The well-adjusted person learns at an early age to develop this inherent potential, and to assist the common good of present and future generations. Maladjustment is defined not as the failure to sublimate or individuate, as Freud or Jung would argue, but as the denial of one's social interest. A major task of psychology, therefore, is to understand and alleviate deficiencies in cooperation. "Society has no place for deserters" (Adler, 194). This researcher maintains that in order to alleviate such deficiencies in cooperation in the society, it must begin from the home or the family which is the smallest societal unit. Such a firm moral foundation from the home will obviously prepare an individual to grow up in a healthy family and be able to sustain healthy families and communities when he/ she heads a family.

In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the insidious extent to which the American family has disintegrated is alarming. We meet characters who care less about strengthening their family ties. All their energy is invested in the pursuit of material wealth and pleasure. Nick Carraway, the narrator of Gatsby's story describes this unfortunate trend as "the pursuit of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty." The case of the protagonist in the story is very preoccupying. Jay Gatsby hails from a poor family in North Dakota. Due to the fact that he is not comfortable with the precarious financial conditions of his family, he leaves home in search of jobs that can enable him to live the luxurious type of life that he aspires for. What is however disappointing on the path of Gatsby is the fact that when he becomes a millionaire, he does not return to his parents and siblings nor does he help in any way to materially empower his

family. He hardly talks about his parents or family. He is only interested in amassing and extravagantly spending money so as to be regarded as member of the high class in the capitalist and stratified American society depicted in the novel. His father only shows up at the end of the novel when Gatsby is murdered. Gatsby tragically dies without a wife nor child despite his solid financial standing. One deduces that neither does Gatsby relates amicably and regularly with his parents or siblings nor does he make a home of his own. The fragile nature of Gatsby's family can therefore be seen as a microcosm of the American family unit that is in dire need of reconstruction.

Meyer Wolfsheim is another character we come across in *The Great Gatsby* whose devotion to the cause of material wealth has obliterated his spirit of solidarity. All through the novel, Wolfsheim is presented as a man without a spouse or children. He is always involved in shady deals as a means of earning a living. He is responsible for the corruption of Gatsby because he himself reveals that he initiated Gatsby into gambling and bootlegging. Wolfsheim is so heartless to the extent that he is known in New York as a notorious bootlegger; in fact, anyone who is close to him like Gatsby is suspected to also be a bootlegger and murderer. Wolfsheim spends most of his time arranging 'gonnections' (Note 3) with the aim of amassing wealth. Mention is not made of any family member of his; neither is he fond of telling his agents about his family. He is so rootless in a way that the essence of humanism in his life is seriously questioned. He spends most of his time running away from the police because his name tops the list of those who are seen as security risk as a result of their track record of crime.

One also observes that apart from his detachment from his family and the fact that he is not married at all, he is indifferent to the plight of others even to those he collaborates with. When his 'son' (Gatsby) whom he initiates into and brings up in the practice of gambling dies, he does not attend his funeral. He makes it abundantly clear to Nick Carraway that people should learn to show appreciation to others when they are still alive, not when they are dead. One senses that such a statement is just a flimsy excuse he gives to stay away from Gatsby's burial. At no time in life has he ever shown genuine concern or love for anyone. His lack of community feeling or social interest is acute. Erik Erikson states that cooperation is the ultimate means of fostering friendly and family ties. For this to be effective, it must begin at the level of the home which according to him is the springboard of all life's endeavours.

Gatsby and Wolfsheim are products of an economic system in which survival of the fittest is the order of the day. The environment or society they evolve in make them to believe that money is the most precious thing. Even those who are married like the Wilsons and the Buchannans in the world of *The Great Gatsby* experience rocky marital relationships and this makes the likes of Wolfsheim and Gatsby reticent about having a family. The rootlessness of Jay Gatsby and Meyer Wolfsheim as depicted in the novel is suggestive of the false notion of American individualism that has been internalised in those operating in the American capitalist society. The false belief that money alone can make a happy home and the belief that money can do everything including 'bringing back the past' are what can be seen as

being responsible for the disintegration of the home in the capitalist space. The greedy, heartless and materialistic attitude of Wolfsheim is also owing to the fact that he has neither a wife nor children. Had it been he had a good home, his degree of callousness would not have been as acute as it is. He is therefore a representation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American entrepreneur who has been stripped of human feelings and family ties as a result of the unfair and fierce competition that capitalism influences. Alfred Adler avers that the human being has an innate potential to relate amicably with others. Whereas Freud's psychoanalysis views life as an inevitable struggle between our selfish drives and the demands of society, Adler maintains that what is important is community feeling that gives the individual a sense of kinship with humanity which enables our physically weak bodies to survive through cooperation. It is therefore the absence of social interest or community feeling in both *Gatsby* and *Wolfsheim* that renders them callous and essentially lacking in family ties.

### 5. Towards Reconstructing the American Family Unit

The reconstruction of the family unit is an urgent need in such a deeply materialistic society like the American society depicted in *Sister Carrie* and *The Great Gatsby*. From the background of both authors, one senses that the broken families portrayed in both works are indeed a reflection of the fragile families that both authors hail from. Due to poverty, illness and the early death of Dreiser's mother, he experiences a traumatic upbringing coupled with an erratic schooling pattern that leave him psychologically disturbed, academically weak and morally deficient. Such an unhealthy home equally has far reaching negative effects in the lives of Dreiser's siblings. Not only does he witness her sister's relapse into juvenile delinquency due to neglect and poverty, we also see him losing confidence in the church (which is the moral voice of the society) due to the disturbing treatment of her mother's corpse by a priest. His constant displacement from town to town in the United States of America in search of greener pastures is partly influenced by his disintegrated family background which has failed to instill in him the sense of community feeling that can guarantee his attainment of ego integrity.

On the side of F. Scott Fitzgerald, one also senses that he suffers from the effects of a traumatic marital life. Despite the fact that he enjoys a considerably better up-bringing than Theodore Dreiser, his moral disposition still remains preoccupying. Fitzgerald being amongst the prominent members of the Lost Generation during the crazy twenties in the United States of America, indulged in large scale drunkenness, extravagance and debauchery with his wife Zelda. Such a crazy lifestyle greatly affected his marriage because not only did it lead to poverty and misery, but the unity and love that ought to exist in a home were absent. The attention that ought to be paid to their daughter is diverted to clubbing and heavy drinking. Matters get complicated when his wife starts suffering from schizophrenia. This health condition devastates Fitzgerald and destabilizes his home. His wife's poor health inspires him to write his 1934 publication entitled *Tender is the Night*. Fitzgerald's crazy lifestyle is mirrored in the life of his protagonist in *The Great Gatsby*. Jay Gatsby's materialistic attitude and his neglect of family ties somehow precipitate his brutal murder. Taking a look at the rate of the disintegration of the homes in

Fitzgerald's novel, one argues that it is merely a reflection of what obtained in the roaring twenties in the United States of America when the novel was published. Being the moral voice of the twenties that Fitzgerald was, he could not remain indifferent to the deteriorating condition of the American family unit.

Religion is an aspect that can bring families together if it is taken seriously. In the world of the two novels under study, Christianity is the main religion that is practised. The unfortunate thing is that the American society that is portrayed in both works has relegated religion to the background. It is worth noting that the young American generation of the 1920s staged a protest against Victorian ideals of gentility, godliness and respect. Due to the untold rate of bloodshed and human wickedness during the First World War, the young generation lost faith in God and in the older generation whom they blamed for causing the war. The 1920s actually witnessed the alarming rate of immorality and the boycott of church related activities and doctrines as a protest by the young generation against the old generation. This attitude not only negatively affected the family unit but also the entire American society. In Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, the aspect of religion is completely absent. Instead, immorality on the path of Carrie leads her to material success and fame but void of family ties. In *The Great Gatsby*, Christian ideals are sacrificed on the altar of materialism, extravagance and debauchery. Mention is made of the fact that while church bells are ringing in villages on Sunday mornings, Long Island inhabitants are instead streaming the Gatsby's mansion for parties and leisure. A society that is immoral or godless is bound to fail. The same thing applies to the family.

For the reconstruction of the American family unit to be effective and sustainable; unity, solidarity and love are indispensable qualities that can guarantee the Adlerian concept of social interest. One therefore contends that by creating such rootless and individualistic characters like Carrie, Meyer Wolfsheim, and Gatsby who end up as social failures, both authors are reiterating the urgent need for the reconstruction of the home which serves as the primary and most important place for character development and community feeling. Such a reconstruction will definitely go a long way positively impact the entire American society.

Another indispensable factor that can tremendously enhance the reconstruction of the family unit as portrayed in both novels is spiritual rearmament. Spiritual rearmament significantly boosts the attainment of ego integrity in individuals and in families. F. Scott Fitzgerald's Roman Catholic consciousness spurs him to identify the alarming rate of spiritual sterility symbolised by the valley of ashes and the decrease in church attendance in *The Great Gatsby*. Although he himself was lost in the frenzy of the young generation in the roaring twenties, he nevertheless realised that the American young generation of the period took a negative turn. Due to this frenzy, the spiritual fabric of families was shattered thus resulting to the rapid disintegration of the family unit. Erikson's Ego Psychology pays considerable attention to the subject of religion. Erikson like Jung and Adler considers religion to be very useful as far as social peace and stability are concerned. Erikson argues that religion does provide valuable support for such ego qualities like hope and trust. Alfred Adler considers religion as a

veritable tool for community feeling and social cohesion if religious values are not violated. In this light, one contends that 20<sup>th</sup> century America being a largely Christian country, Fitzgerald's preoccupation for a spiritual rearmament would definitely go a long way to reconstruct the fragile American unit as depicted in his novel under study.

To conclude, one can assert that Theodore Dreiser and F. Scott Fitzgerald underscore the importance of a strong family unit as far as the guarantee of hope, happiness and the development of the nation is concerned. Lawrence Wilson in his work, *The Family Unit and its Importance* states that the family remains the most important unit of society; when the families are strong, society is strong, as a rule. When families are weak, societies begin to break down. By castigating the division that plagues the American families depicted in their novels, Dreiser and Fitzgerald draw attention to the fact that family ties should be strengthened so as to sustain the unity of the family. Looking through the theoretical lens of Adler's and Erikson's psychological theories, one can posit that, both novelists suggest in their novels under study a moral and spiritual rearmament as a condition sine qua non for the reconstruction of the American family unit.

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## Notes

Note 1. <http://grammar.about.com/od/shortpassagesforanalysis/a/bergerhomepass.htm>

Note 2. A psychological problem that has to do with failure to meet the demands of society, such as coping with problems and social relationships: usually reflected in emotional instability.

Note 3. This is the corrupted form of the word 'gonnegtions' as pronounced by Meyer Wolfsheim in *The Great Gatsby* due to his poor mastery of the English Language.