Partying Like It's 1925: A Comparison and Contrast of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Azuela's *The Underdogs*

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Partying Like It’s 1925: A Comparison and Contrast of 
Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Azuela’s *The Underdogs*

A Thesis by

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Partying Like It’s 1925: A Comparison and Contrast of Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby and Azuela’s The Underdogs

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ABSTRACT

Partying Like It’s 1925: A Comparison and Contrast of Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Azuela’s *The Underdogs*

by Sarah Nicole Valadez

This work is an assessment of themes, ideas, and structure between two iconic novels published during the nineteen-twenties: *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Underdogs* by Mariano Azuela (originally published in 1915, re-written and redistributed in the 1920s, and then given a final version in 1925 that was translated into many languages). Both novels were written during times of great change, cultural innovation, and revolution. Many characters from both works also comment, observe, or partake in the politics and the seemingly accepted or tolerated social interactions of their daily lives. For the sake of cross-cultural understanding and renewing interest in comparative literature, I believe it is essential to examine the literature from ‘other’ and outside sources and compare them to what is already well-known or even unknown.
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1 Introduction

My interest in the “Jazz Age” and some of the incredible novels it offered emerged at the blossoming age of twelve. Reading *Gatsby* made me appreciate the idea of storytelling and how to examine tragedy from this particular era. The novel, quite frankly, made me hungry for similar works. Later, when I approached a librarian to return the book, hoping to borrow something else, she asked me, “¿Eres latina?” I paused for a moment. I said, “Sí.” She told me to wait, and when she returned, she had a cloth-covered copy of *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs*).

She said, “If you like reading about partying and the great changes of time, you should try this, niña.” I thanked her and took the book—and twelve-year-old me was very shocked. The text was entirely in Spanish, but it really shouldn’t have been a surprise. The story was violent and crude, and the men were not clean, although they did have a lot of money. The men in Demetrio Macías’s troop and inner circle were known as heroes, thieves, and murderers. They were highly celebrated and feared because they made their living killing Federales (government soldiers) and looting the corpses immediately after. They partied just as hard as Gatsby’s many nameless guests, and I began to understand why the librarian had offered me this book. She was reminding me about what parallel, exciting lives we lead not just as people, but as neighbors of the earth. While the United States was reeling in the aftermath of WWI’s bloodshed and turmoil, and subsequently partying and re-examining class, gender, and sexuality—so was Mexico.

The Mexican Revolution’s armed phase ended in 1920. However, the revolution didn’t truly come to an end until Obregón was no longer president (1924), and most of the revolutionary leaders had been assassinated. Mariano Azuela’s novel, *Los de abajo*, was written during the war.
while he offered medical care in the field. He published a version of the story in 1915, but he was unsatisfied. He began making numerous edits and changes to the text in the 1920s, and finally, a version of the novel stuck in 1925. While much of Mexico was restructuring and reeling from old and new bloodshed in the 1920s, people were swept away by *Los de abajo*, so it became an instant hit. The popular novel received an English translation in 1929, where the translated title *The Underdogs* became a well-known and touted label for a book that breathed and relived the Mexican Revolution. I examine these books (*The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*) for my M.A. thesis and contextualize them side-by-side and in their respective backdrops.¹

### 1.1 Rationale

This thesis is a critical analysis of two representative works set in the “Jazz Age” (a.k.a. the Roaring Twenties) and the Mexican Revolution (1910). Within *Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*, there are similar human connections and interactions between characters, although they occur in wildly different settings. The final versions of both novels were issued in the same year (1925), and both works represent and define the era they were in, as well as the cultures they were written about. The comparative element in this thesis is primarily focused on reinvigorating comparative literature, especially during these times of extensive cultural and social exchanges.

¹ NOTE: For the purposes of this thesis, the Penguin Classics edition of *The Underdogs: A Novel of the Mexican Revolution*, translated by Sergio Waisman (2008), will be used in conjunction with the 1925 text of *The Great Gatsby*. Professor Waisman’s translation was chosen because of his dedication to authenticity. His desire to bring the work to life with renewed breath and vitality for both fresh eyes and well-seasoned readers is highly respected.
These works are crucial cultural texts that offer a window into their respective worlds and circumstances. They represent their authors’ unique backgrounds, and they exemplify the significant changes in public behaviors and cultural revolutions happening at the same time in neighboring lands. The United States was restructuring before and after WWI, whereas Mexico was restructuring before and after the Mexican Revolution. These wars provided a similar backdrop for F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mariano Azuela to draw from as they cultivated their craft.

These novels are essentially a different means to a similar end. 1920’s ideology and reforms brought about gender, culture, and class changes to the United States, as did the Mexican Revolution to Mexico—although there was far more carnage and political upheaval in 1920’s Mexico. However, this does not mean the United States was morally superior, as there was plenty of bootlegging and back-alley violence going on behind the scenes of these seemingly grand and energetic parties. One of the most important things this paper hopes to establish is a union of people through similar ideas by showcasing their commonalities and that the human experience is more or less the same.

Although the United States and Mexico have far different living and cultural situations, they used similar thoughts and expressions to achieve lasting and imperative transformations that illustrate their current states. Fitzgerald and Azuela picked up on these adjustments and placed them into fictionalized worlds to paint a unique picture for the masses. This idea is particularly evidenced by “a universal sentiment of youth: the belief that one can become anything, given the luxury of time and focus” (“Introduction” to The Great Gatsby, by Jesmyn Ward, VIII), and the fact Azuela’s novel about the Mexican Revolution went “mostly unnoticed by readers and critics” (“Chronology of Mariano Azuela’s Life and Work,” Penguin Books, xxvi) until a majority of the conflict was
finally over. These novels were the authors’ way of helping their people deconstruct the horrors and misfortunes they had witnessed and to look back at these events with some clarity.

Alongside their interpretations of early twentieth-century society, both works reflect the changing role of women. Female agency can and should be brought up for scrutiny. The identified (named) females in both pieces make choices that affect the outcome of the narrative. For example, both Daisy Buchanan and War Paint commit a heinous crime by killing another woman. These choices take the possibility of a standard happy ending into a sudden left turn. Once the murder has been carried out, the reader is confident that only more calamity awaits.

The novels also share a parallel trajectory of characters at first being righteous in their purpose, only to become villainous and responsible for the tragedies later on. Next to the unpleasant, unremorseful Tom and the soon-to-be-murderous Daisy, Nick Carraway is seen as an honest, neutral character until he participates in dubious activities and meddles with Daisy and Gatsby’s affair. Similarly, Luis Cervantes is perceived to be an unfortunate, imprisoned medical student forced to give care to General Demetrio’s rough gang until Luis himself comes to participate and even enjoy the looting and overall debauchery they engage in.

Further alliances made between men and women in questionable situations can be cross-examined and studied within these works, such as Jordan and Nick working together to help Gatsby and Daisy commit adultery, just as Tom has with Myrtle, and War Paint consorting and looting with the other bandits and thieves in Demetrio’s troop, all of whom are male. These intricate female-male relationships are filled with enough resemblance and fascination to make the effort of dissecting and comparing worthwhile, especially pertaining to the near-identical lack of social concern or generally accepted moralities. Adultery, lying, jealousy, and nearly all of the capital
vices (a.k.a. the seven deadly sins) known to Christian ideologies are present within these works. The patriarchal, generational, and gender clashes and issues relate back to Christian values and the upheaval of these morals and standards through cultural and social change.

Lastly, the novels’ structure, imagery, and unity of characters and ideas are prime subjects for comparison. They will be examined thoroughly throughout the scope of this paper, often intersecting and sharing space with other concepts and thoughts. The most compelling argument for placing these works side-by-side is that in the end, every piece of history is part of the human experience, and these works of literature help deconstruct what major changes have occurred and what notions continue to foster the ideals, strengths, and politics of today.
2 Historically Old and New Cultures

The best parts of history are often defined by novel thinking, innovation in technology, clothing, the arts, and a loud dismissal of old identities and ideals. These characteristics are found in prominent United States eras and wars, such as the Plantation era, the American Revolution (1765-1783), the American Civil War (1861-1865), the Reconstruction era, and many others, including World War I (1914-1918) and the subsequent Roaring Twenties and Prohibition era.

Mexico has a similar historical path concerning early colonialism and a fight for its independence (the Mexican War for Independence from 1810-[1824]—this date is debatable). The country also shares blood history with the United States from the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), and it ended with the U.S. taking numerous territories and places to populate. These events happened before civil unrest erupted from typically poor and hard-working people who were tired of the authoritarian Mexican government. Their seemingly unified cry began with Francisco Madero “declaring [President] Díaz’s regime illegal and calling for a revolution” (“Chronology of the Mexican Revolution,” xxi), and boom! The Mexican Revolution was born.

Even when detailing a culture or even referring to a work as a “cultural statement,” there is always the concern of adequately placing the morals and generally accepted rules of that society within a particular time. Neither the United States nor Mexico held much regard for women’s rights or caring for their indigenous populations—and neither were very keen on the rise of alcohol consumption that plagued many of their citizens. Nevertheless, how each country handled these and many other growing involvements offers comprehension of how their societies worked. It is
here that I aim to examine the historical backdrops of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs* in much closer and necessary detail.

### 2.1 Authors and Their Environments

Both F. Scott Fitzgerald (September 24th, 1896 to December 21st, 1940) and Mariano Azuela (January 1st, 1873 to March 1st, 1952) grew up rather comfortably. They had moderately wealthy and functional families, and this privileged upbringing allowed both of them to pursue an education and better their writing. These men were also greatly affected by the major wars that took center stage as they were coming into their own as writers. For Fitzgerald, it was the widespread and terrible effects of World War I, whereas Azuela himself was entangled in the bloody and equally horrific annals of the Mexican Revolution while administering medical care. These two countries, the United States and Mexico, have exchanged cultures and blows for as long as they have been created and nestled together side-by-side. In comparing these works, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*, it becomes apparent that the United States and Mexico have also been struggling for the same freedoms and ideals, although their perceived successes may vary.

Beginning with F. Scott Fitzgerald, the backdrop he lived in was energetic, arguably privileged, scandalous (for the then-current societal standards), and brimming with illegal activities, especially the consumption of alcohol in the wake of Prohibition. With the new election reforms to stop scamming and exploitation, and the direct election of senators, the United States was reminded of its original purpose, and what its founding fathers firmly believed in when the Plantation era came to an end and the American Revolution (1765-1783) was blaring its judicious horn—“that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (from the second paragraph of the
United States Declaration of Independence). These words have been part of the groundwork concerning a long and arduous struggle to achieve uniform fairness. Inequality between races, ages, and sexes ran rampant throughout the rise of new industries while a select few began to profit. Because of this, women began to raise their voices and demand equal voting rights, which would not be achieved until 1920 after WWI officially came to a close.

As Robert E. Hannigan explains in *The Great War and American Foreign Policy, 1914-1924*, “Large numbers of Americans were particularly opposed to any ‘entanglement’ by the United States in European affairs…it could draw the United States into costly conflicts among the seemingly always quarreling Old World powers”—especially since it seemed to serve little to no benefit for America (8). The United States’ commitment to neutrality at the beginning of World War I was tested through repeated mishaps and interference from both England and Germany through general trade and communications. Even the contrary militant approach President Wilson had taken with stalling a supply of arms to Mexico in April, prior to the official start of the war, would have drawn further criticism had a settlement not been reached (Dickson 52). The United States seemed adamant about their position until they could no longer ignore the call, officially taking up arms between 1917 to 1918, with young soldiers like Fitzgerald seeing little to no action.

*The Great Gatsby* was actually “set against the ending of the war. Both Nick and Gatsby have participated in the war, although like much of the historical background in the novel, these events are more implied than developed” since F. Scott Fitzgerald was determined to capture the wonderment and thrill of the “Jazz Age” (Lehan 3). Fitzgerald was also concerned with the widespread post-war disillusionment. Many Americans truly believed that their part in the conflict was over. They empowered each other to disperse under a grand illusion that everything would be
fine because they had essentially banned alcohol and were fixing up everything back home only to then ignore the newly installed Eighteenth Amendment and party. Fitzgerald examined this illusion of peace following the First World War critically. After briefly being in the military, he saw how the war directly and indirectly affected people’s lives, essentially using his own experiences as fodder and inspiration for what went on the page. The educated young author even used real-life people and interactions he had encountered whenever he was out and about, and it was because “[h]e identified with the collective experiences of his generation” (Lehan 1-2) that he was able to absorb a miasma of creative sparks and trauma and the will to write.

Mariano Azuela and the rebels he medically treated on the front lines also confronted altered prospects. The Mexican Revolution had still left many with nothing but crumbs of the good life they thought they might have, and most with more dead than they could bury. Still, like Fitzgerald, Azuela was born into some comfort and money, but his family resided in Mexico. The first big difference between these men was that Azuela went on to study medicine and become a doctor. As for the second significant difference between them—that would be the fact that Azuela participated in the turmoil taking over his country, whereas Fitzgerald enlisted but never made it to the battlefield. A separate point of interest is that Azuela’s writing career “was [greatly] developed while participating in the Revolution first-hand as a physician in the army of Francisco ‘Pancho’ Villa” (Kanellos 104), where he was aware of not only his surroundings, but his fellow men, and so he kept his head low while he scribbled down notes.

Unfortunately, the Mexican Revolution was cruel to almost everyone who lived within Mexico’s borders. Young people, old people, children, middle-aged—most, if not all, kinds of residents and passersby were subject to some sort of abuse. Kanellos notes that “Azuela wrote more than forty
novels, most of them based on Mexico’s political life from the point of view of a skeptic and critic bent on reforming social and political life in his native land” (104)—because there was something fundamentally, and morally, wrong with the way things had panned out. The strongest of the lower classes rose up against their enemies (the Federales) and soon became the enemy themselves. Initially good townsmen and countryfolk with self-imposed standards crumbled under the perpetual suffering and violence this rebellion had caused—and Mariano Azuela was steadfast in his need to document these real-life scenarios and preserve the madness so others could learn from it. Azuela was a captivated and passionate witness of his time, much like Fitzgerald. The internal disputes about what the revolution was really about brought great harm to the country, although declarations like the Constitution of 1917 did raise hope.

With a promised separation of church and state, laborer’s rights to organize and form strikes against unfair treatment, approved land holdings by communal groups, and much more, there was a light at the end of the bullet and blood-filled tunnel. However, like President Díaz, these new groups that rose up would eventually use their military strength and corrupt police forces to suppress the largely poor masses. Even more intriguing was how wealthy Mexico’s economy was under Díaz’s rule. He opened the country up to many foreign investors, “mostly from the United States…[who] had invested well over a billion dollars in Mexico’s railroads, mines, and a variety of other undertakings” sharing ownership and development of extensive land and resources with the Mexican elite (Wasserman 3). This foreign capital and technological understanding from the U.S. highlights how intertwined the two countries have been and will likely continue to be.

The problem with Díaz’s economy was that the commoners and native residents saw none of this money, and the situation worsened when widespread droughts began to hit these poor and
indigenous peoples working cash-crops. Eugenio Di Stefano observes that “[t]he Mexican Revolution emerged as response to these political and economic failures [and] Although marked by confusion and crisis, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, the Revolution took crucial steps to ameliorate the lives of Mexicans,” meaning a large-scale revolt was the only logical response (129). Just like the Twenties’ “Jazz Age” author, Azuela was determined to write for not only his generation but for his people. His highly acclaimed work, The Underdogs, is believed to be the primary literary text informed parties draw upon concerning the Mexican Revolution. He helped define an era through his truthful and creative re-imagining, and he stands at the top of historically and culturally celebrated novels. The Underdogs, like The Great Gatsby, has stood the test of time.

2.2 The Road to Publication (Bloodshed and Reconstruction)

Many outlines and versions of The Great Gatsby and The Underdogs were written and edited only to be re-written again. It is not unreasonable to think that dozens, possibly tens of dozens of drafts, were discarded before the final versions of both novels were complete. While there are older versions of these novels still circulating, taking the time to examine each iteration would be substantial. The most critical thing to remember is that these works would not exist without the complex, rapidly changing situations the authors lived in. The intricate framework history provided to inspire these men kickstarted their imaginations and lifelong dedication to writing.

Both men wrote extensively during their time in the military (F. Scott Fitzgerald: 1917, commissioned a second lieutenant, discharged in 1919; Mariano Azuela: 1914, joined Julián Medina’s army as a medical officer, forced to flee across the Texas border at the end of 1915 when Obregón defeated Villa). While Fitzgerald was muddling with early drafts of his first novel at the tail-end of WWI, Azuela was likely penning out snippets of Los de abajo (The Underdogs) after
changing bloodied bandages. Neither spent more than two years in their respective military backgrounds, although they did experience new emotions and developed ideas for future works.

Fitzgerald and Azuela also seemed to hold out similar hopes. They figured if they couldn’t make it back home safely from all the conflict, perhaps someone might find their work. Maybe a close comrade or a superior would go through their belongings to uncover the words and sentences they had been stringing together that entire time. Even more favorable would be if an individual had found their work and was willing to publish or even share it with their family and friends—all so the ideals and criticisms present within these significant texts would not be lost.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born in 1896, so when WWI seized up a good part of the world for its beginning months of terror in 1914, he was already eighteen years old. Fitzgerald had more than enough life experience to have developed opinions and feelings on the societal habits and the enduring struggle in Europe. He further established these sentiments when the war came to a close. Some of these domestic issues included immigration, demobilization, the Nineteenth Amendment (women’s suffrage), labor issues, the infamous prohibition on alcohol, and much more. In Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s (1931), Allen offers a scene in which people are discussing the Eighteenth Amendment (the federal ban on alcohol) and how one man “thinks ‘his boys will be better off for living in a world where there is no alcohol’; and two or three others agree with him” illustrating the amount of support behind it, as the American people and their government were still high-spirited after the war (10-11). These oversimplified standards painted a desperately optimistic image for the upcoming “Jazz Age.”

In Fitzgerald’s debut novel, This Side of Paradise (1920), it “gave first widespread popular expression to that post-World War I ‘disillusion’ that is now recognized as one of the twenties’
most characteristic notes...[and] was the Younger Generation’s first best-seller” (Piper 69). Self-sacrifice, the idea of patriotism, and the notion of having ‘good values’ to make excellent soldiers out of young men was hardened into something much more pessimistic, distrustful, and dissatisfactory between large swathes of groups like Fitzgerald and his Princeton friends. These themes are revisited in *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) where Fitzgerald’s “disenchantment with politics...extended from his boyhood until the early 1930s” before he developed a taste for communism, reflecting a heavy change of interest (Monk 60). This political change is arguably reflected in Fitzgerald’s later writings and diminishing reputation towards the end of his life.

However, for Fitzgerald, getting *The Great Gatsby* (1925) published after his initially more popular titles was a bit disheartening. Charles Scribner’s Sons did not seem wholly excited about this novel either, as evidenced by the tiny ad that ran for it on the April 9th, 1925, issue of *The New York Times* (scan of original newspaper can be found via *The New York Times*’ online archive “TimesMachine”). Despite praise from close friends and kinder sources, the fairly minimal sales suggested that *Gatsby* would likely be his last acclaimed novel. However, while the sales may have been disappointing, Matthew J. Bruccoli notes, “*The Great Gatsby* marked a striking advance in Fitzgerald’s technique, utilizing a complex structure and a controlled narrative point of view...[but by the end of 1926] Fitzgerald made little progress on his fourth novel, a study of American expatriates in France” and so the famous author floundered under a depressive writer’s block. What Bruccoli hints at most is F. Scott Fitzgerald’s deterioration, which was mirrored and at least partially caused by his wife, Zelda, and her unusual changes in manner and mood.

Even so, Fitzgerald and many people of his day and age were aware of the potential pitfalls and repercussions of the First World War. This terrible struggle paved the way towards future misery
(a.k.a. The Great Depression and then World War II), and as the “Jazz Age” years rolled on, the iconic parties and booze-guzzling merriment came to a neck-break halt. The stock market crashed in 1929, and a line from Fitzgerald’s debut novel became all the more solemn and derisive. The notion that “all Gods [are] dead, all wars fought, [and] all faiths in man shaken” presents the prime outlook of a pessimist, and there are other instances of the young author expressing this attitude alongside some of his more ardent political views.

As Ross Posnock notes, “A year before publishing The Great Gatsby Fitzgerald stated that he was a ‘pessimist [and] a communist (with Nietzschean overtones)’...[and] this disjunction is precisely what is most interesting about Fitzgerald’s gnomic remark” (201-202). Fitzgerald was not only a passionate and creative man, but he could understand the duality of being a unique individual while being privy to the collective consciousness of the Roaring Twenties. Within Gatsby, nearly every character is distinct, but not so distinct that they take away attention from the narrative and cannot be viewed as part of the same whole. The same goes for The Underdogs. Every character in Azuela’s novel has either a description or a descriptive nickname that helps separate them from the crowd in crucial moments. Fitzgerald and Azuela each represented on the page a slice of one large life led by many who were somehow affected by the far-reaching devastation of war.

Unlike F. Scott Fitzgerald, Mariano Azuela was not a young man when his country’s major turmoil fully surfaced. Azuela was thirty-seven years old when the Mexican Revolution started at the end of 1910, and he already had a few novels and short stories under his belt when he joined up with Medina’s army in 1914. He often thought about the common people and the disparity in living situations, so he strove for recognition and honest presentation with his written endeavors. The fact that Azuela decided to join the military at a much older age, even as a medical officer,
demonstrates that his resolve for justice was far more potent than any fears or concerns he may have had for his safety or health. His works before Los de abajo (The Underdogs) all had something to say about the society and government he was living in, even if some were not as politically outspoken. Scholar Bernard Dulsey comments on how enlightening Azuela’s works are, noting, “The most informative novel about the Diaz regime is Azuela’s Mala Yerba (1909), which gives a true account of the desperate life of the peons and their exploitation by the hacendados. Mala Yerba, written on the eve of the 1910 revolution, is in itself a sufficient indictment of the Diaz government to have warranted its overthrow” (383).

When examining the life of Mariano Azuela, it turns out the then-young doctor cultivated his love of writing long before the Mexican Revolution (1910). Throughout the 1890s, Azuela dutifully studied “medicine at the University of Guadalajara [and had] also published his first literary short texts” before he moved on to having five entire novels published between 1907 and 1912 (“Chronology of Mariano Azuela’s Life and Work,” xxv). Azuela managed to produce these novels before he became utterly captivated and involved with the Mexican Revolution. He became a fanatical and seemingly unstoppable force alongside his armed comrades until his troop disbanded under the heavy loss at the Battle of Celaya (April 6th, 1915 to April 13th, 1915).

Azuela was also a stylistic trailblazer. Kanellos describes, “Azuela’s keen ear for dialog and deft appropriation of characters from social reality contributed to a recognition of grassroots Mexican culture that had not really appeared in Mexican letters before…[and] true to a tradition of Hispanic literature in exile, Azuela’s greatest and most renowned novel, Los de abajo (The Underdogs), was written while he was a fugitive in El Paso, Texas,” where it was published as segments (Greenwood 104). Through this expulsion from Mexico, Azuela found some solace and
enough personal austerity to drive home the words that had been nurtured on the battlefield. *The Underdogs* was the grand opening to a theatrically long line of banished writers and their works which offered up their disgruntlement and sorrow concerning their native country.

With this knowledge, readers can appreciate what a creative and driven force Mariano Azuela was, with the origin of his successes in the numerous publications he produced before he published a version of *Los de abajo* as installments within *El Paso del Norte* newspaper in 1915. Unfortunately, *The Underdogs* didn’t make a huge splash when it was introduced as a complete novel by the end of the year—not unlike Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and its first days of circulation. Azuela’s work could have been invisible for all he knew, and so he made substantial edits and created wholly new drafts for a 1920 publication that similarly went ignored. It wasn’t until 1925 that Mariano Azuela’s little novel about the Mexican Revolution was solidified, exploding into unprecedented popularity. *The Underdogs* became highly celebrated about ten years after the initial publication, once again sharing a similar fate with *The Great Gatsby*, which did not gain much recognition and success until 1945, at the end of the Second World War.

### 2.3 Class Issues (Trajectory and Transformation of the Hero into the Villain)

The New York high society setting of Fitzgerald’s iconic book is just as attention-grabbing as the grimy bars, towns, and restaurants that Azuela’s novel underscores throughout. However, the novels present class issues very differently, although they reach similar conclusions. The connections between people who have money, who don’t, or who have just gained considerable wealth lend themselves to the same argument—that money corrupts, and it often converts perceived heroes and champions into antagonists or even literal thugs.
In Fitzgerald’s work, the wealth inequality is in the background. While WWI economically benefited the United States as a whole, through the sales of general goods and supplies to feed the Europeans overseas, not every American citizen saw a piece of the proverbial pie. Even so, “[b]usiness was booming when Warren Harding died…[and] Colonel John Coolidge administered to his son Calvin the oath of office as President of the United States [since the] hopeless depression of 1921 had given way to the hopeful improvement of 1922” with many speakeasies and jazzed-up parties flourishing among the upper classes by 1923 (Allen 137).

_The Great Gatsby_ takes place in the summer of 1922. F. Scott Fitzgerald was effectively making drafts of his third novel during the prosperity of the Coolidge Era, acknowledging how the First World War greatly contributed to the organization and growth of capitalism in the United States. However, it was select industries that saw prosperity. Farmers were drowning in the effects of overproduction and had desperately “campaigned for federal aid, and by the hundred of thousands they left the farm for the cities” while other forms of productivity such as coal mining, textiles, shipbuilding, etc. in “[w]hole regions of the country” were dying off and creating extensive poverty (Allen 139). With the First World War over, there was less need for wartime supplies.

In _Gatsby_’s New York, there are two types of wealthy: the old money (East Egg) and new money (West Egg). There is also the destitute valley of ashes, which is the literal and symbolic representation of the waste those with money leave behind. This is where the aforementioned farmers who abandoned their posts have likely gone, alongside others whose fading industries forced them into the big cities to become cheap, hard labor. The main cast of _The Great Gatsby_ all have some kind of wealth, and they are seen passing through the valley of ashes frequently as a midway point between their nice hotels and shops and typically only stopping there for nefarious
or deceitful purposes. The valley is a wasteland where “Jazz Age” villains dump their literal garbage and indulge themselves at the expense of the impoverished and where heroes go to die or shrivel away, shedding whatever ideals and righteous purposes they may have once had.

There are, arguably, two protagonists in *The Great Gatsby*. The story follows Nick Carraway’s and Gatsby’s actions and exploits while traversing their world of adultery, illegal liquor, poor judgment, and grand parties. The wealth inequality in the background shapes some of the hidden conflict of the Roaring Twenties, because without the lower classes cleaning up after the upper classes have their expensive romps, there would be more waste and bedlam than usual. The lower classes are dependent upon the upper classes to employ them, as evidenced by the many people Gatsby hires to serve and entertain at his parties and even those who work in the valley, where cars and industrial commodities are produced for those who can afford it. The perceived peace between the rich and the poor in the Roaring Twenties is held together by the fact that yes, the wealthy love to spend money and party and drink—and the poor observe this with the hope that they get to take some of the wealth while they clean up broken bottles, cook, sing, and scrub away debris.

Nick Carraway, the novel’s first-person narrator, immediately defines himself by his socio-economic class. In the first chapter, he states:

> My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we’re descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my
grandfather’s brother, who here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today. (Fitzgerald 3)

Nick understands both his social class and his background. He’s even had a few conversations about it with his father, noting that “fundamental decencies [are] parceled out unequally at birth” (2), suggesting that Nick Carraway is very aware of the class issues of his era. He recognizes the enormous fortune imparted to select groups, because Nick himself is an individual of these select, wealthy groups. So although Nick acknowledges these wealth disparities, he shows no interest in trying to uplift those around him or even offering any aid.

Scott Donaldson comments that “Nick Carraway is a snob. He dislikes people in general and denigrates them…Neither his ethical code nor his behavior is exemplary; proprietary rather than morality guides him,” and he has a nasty habit of lying to both himself and the others around him (98). These characteristics are unflattering, not the trimmings of an ethical protagonist. However, Nick Carraway is interested in the happiness of the people that he likes. For his cousin Daisy, he sees her adultery with Gatsby as a means of attaining not only some leverage over her life, but an escape from her marriage. Tom has already achieved this by parading around with Myrtle. Nick’s unfavorable traits that Donaldson points out are subtly apparent in the beginning, and they become more pronounced as the story goes on, when he becomes appalled with how Daisy and Tom so easily dismiss the dead and allow Gatsby to take the fall for everything. Nick Carraway famously voices his disgust, saying, “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made….“ (179).

Because of these strong emotions and opinions at the end, Nick may be perceived as one of the
heroes in Fitzgerald’s tragic narrative, since he does appear to be the only who cares much about the death of Gatsby and the end to his long crusade for Daisy Buchanan’s love. Even so, Nick is not a true hero or even a rising protagonist that stumbles into antagonistic straits like Jay Gatsby. In Nick Carraway’s case, we are initially given the notion that he is a neutral party who prefers to hide his genuine opinions and feelings, although he is willing to engage with other people’s deceit either out of polite association or because he genuinely enjoys their company.

The origin story of the title character, Gatsby, is given after Daisy and Nick tour his enormous mansion. Prior to the new money, Gatsby was just as poor as the many Americans who had lost their jobs after the war. He was not born into an inheritance and he likely would have received very little if he had stayed with his family, who were poor farmers (a.k.a. people who had not benefited from the Coolidge-era Prosperity). “James Gatz…He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career—when he saw Dan Cody’s yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior” (98). Gatsby always had a sense of his future glory and socio-economic rise, and when he got into a rowboat and essentially saved the older man’s life, the possibilities were spread out before him. With all the sailing and time he spent as Dan Cody’s assistant, he had “the vague contour of Jay Gatsby” and had learned the appropriate mannerisms of the upper class although he received no money (101). It was thanks to the First World War that Jay Gatsby found his ultimate goal and love: Daisy.

Daisy’s allure is already apparent when we first meet her through Nick Carraway’s eyes in the beginning, but after the car accident involving Myrtle, we are fully drawn into the fact that “Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot
struggles of the poor” (150), which he was once a part of and which people like Tom and Daisy actually still associate him with, because ‘new money’ could never reach the same respectable heights as old money with the then-typical bootlegging, colluding with gangsters, and other heinous crimes Gatsby and others like him had committed to achieve their enormous wealth.

Additionally, the effects during and after WWI directly influence the main cast of Fitzgerald’s novel by inciting a restlessness felt by the old money characters. In terms of *Gatsby*, Nick comes back restless, and so does Tom Buchanan after the war. Tom, arguably the most outwardly villainous, is always trying to recover some old excitement, and this restlessness is the direct synonym for their recklessness which persists throughout the story and eventually causes and exacerbates all kinds of trouble. The war was also important for Gatsby’s rise and financial gains, since after armistice by “some complication or misunderstanding,” he is sent to Oxford, giving him the convincing veneer of an Oxford education and yet another leg up when he presents himself to the uber wealthy and influential people he later comes to meet, like Meyer Wolfsheim (151). The class and privilege offered throughout Fitzgerald’s writing shines a light on a gross inequality of wealth and how it usually stays within select circles. The reader can detect all the poverty in the background, but it’s never the main focus. Fitzgerald’s writing process focused on layering widespread hardship with the more eye-catching richness of the wealthy.

Even the descriptions of the valley of ashes itself: “a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke…[where] ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight” (23) all offer images of poverty and likely hidden and criminal activities. Had Gatsby never met Dan Cody but made it to New
York, he likely would have settled in this visibly hazed and emotionally desolate wasteland to be used up much sooner, like Myrtle and Wilson. But because of this meeting and consequent assistantship with a wealthy miner, Gatsby is kept afloat a bit longer. He is polluted by the eventual bootlegging, yet he does maintain some of his more hospitable qualities. Gatsby is quick to offer compensation when he causes others perceived trouble, like the party girl who tore her dress, and even Nick when he agrees to set up a seemingly innocuous tea date with Daisy. It is through these actions that the reader is swayed towards the plight of heroes gradually falling from grace.

Like in *The Great Gatsby*, there are two conceivable protagonists within Mariano Azuela’s *The Underdogs*. This accurate and insightful retelling of the Mexican Revolution is primarily focused on General Demetrio Macías and Luis Cervantes, following similar themes of adultery, excessive liquor consumption, often murderous grand parties, and a disproportionate amount of wrongdoing. The trajectory of General Demetrio follows much more closely the tragic path of Gatsby from hero to anti-hero, whereas Luis Cervantes appears to parallel Nick Carraway as a mixed bag of likability and deceit. Like Nick, Luis Cervantes comes from money. He tries to reserve judgment towards people he perceives to be either similar through ideals or potential allies, since Azuela’s novel does take place during a war. He maintains this stance even though he appears to be nothing more than “a young fellow covered in dirt, from his American felt hat down to his worn-out, clumsy shoes”—all of which immediately labels him as an outsider to the revolutionaries (18). Only the supremely wealthy in Mexico’s pre-revolution sphere could afford foreign products, and the lack of bare feet or even a freshly stolen pair of boots intensifies the image of Luis Cervantes as nothing more than another greedy individual fighting to keep his money from the starving poor.
Luis initially fought alongside the book’s first enemy, the Federales and the government, until General Demetrio and his ragtag team captured him. Although by then, Luis had deliberately deserted the Federales. Many of Demetrio’s men are eager to kill off this young stranger, but Demetrio didn’t become a general overnight. He always calculated his best chances, so Demetrio Macías contrives a plan to determine if Luis Cervantes arrived to bring him and his troop some great harm. An injured Demetrio is surrounded by his men when he tells them, “If this curro has come to kill me, it’s very easy to get the truth out of ’im. I’ll tell ’im that I’m having ’im shot to death. Then Quail dresses up like a priest and takes his confession. If he confesses to the sin, I do ’im in. If not, I let ’im go” (The Underdogs 25). The term “curro” is used throughout the text as a pejorative nickname for an upper-class individual. It specifically refers to a wealthy person perceived as arrogant and unsympathetic towards those considered lower-class or of a lower race (such as Indians and mestizos, not those of either pure or primarily Spanish descent).

Azuela’s pre-Revolution novel, Mala Yerba (1909), was a revealing narrative that exemplified the horrendous relationship between laborers and their masters during President Díaz’s reign. It was one of those unfortunate things that everyone knew about, but few refused to speak out against because there was no formal justice or benefit—and the hard-working people that Azuela portrayed had no hope for an education or any form of improvement to their lives. The age-old villain of general ignorance, illiteracy, and “the tienda de raya” aided in the enslavement of the laborer to the land. This store (tienda) controlled by the hacendados (the masters) was a place that allowed exchanges of goods through a credit system that never actually permitted laborers to pay off their perceived debts. This financial burden became the only secure form of inheritance between family members, establishing a cycle of seemingly unending suffering and servitude.
The mistreatment and powerlessness of humans who lived on haciendas (large land-holdings and estates, anything from a rancho to a mine or even a plantation) was an experience that Azuela wanted to change. About a year into the Mexican Revolution, Mariano Azuela really began to allow his pessimism to show, as evidenced by his novel *Andrés Pérez, Maderista* (1911). The entire story was published after the fall of President Díaz. Dulsey observes that “this book is laden with pessimism: the same pessimism that is later met in his masterpiece, *Los de Abajo*”—and it is a sentiment that followed Mariano Azuela throughout much of his writing career (383). F. Scott Fitzgerald himself was no stranger to this pessimism. The expression of gloom and doom is justified during times of enormous hardship and unrest, even if the reader themselves may not be responsive to the material at the time. The comparable authors appear to be analyzing and giving multiple meanings to their lives by using fiction as their primary focus, with a secondary priority to inform the mass populace of these new meanings through their writing.

One can also infer that each body of work informs the other. Since the protagonists in *Gatsby* are wealthy, Mariano Azuela offers the flipside in *The Underdogs*. Demetrio’s men are all poor and uneducated, and it is because they have a tactful individual for a general that they don’t come apart right away. Their daily operations and eventual successes are all due to the quick thinking of a poor Indian who was driven away from his home. The General’s origin of being chased by Federales and witnessing “his house ablaze” (8) immediately generates sympathy for him. His home is now nothing but ashes and smoke, and he has left his wife and child far behind. However, it is through critical analysis and patience that Demetrio Macías that makes his true mark. He is a great rifleman as well, and he uses all of these skills to provide the outline of a hero that Luis Cervantes and all of the lower-class rebels and even townsfolk they come across cling to for a large portion of the book. After initiating the plan of getting the curro to confess to a disguised
priest, the exchange reveals that Luis Cervantes did indeed approach General Demetrio and his men to join their side of the cause and not enact any form of violence. A bit later, they also realize that this young man is a medical student. With this new information, Demetrio Macías determines Luis’s worth and uses his invaluable medical skills, since home remedies aren’t working.

Having someone who is both educated (upper-class) and medically trained complements the decisive thinking, natural leadership, and charisma that the lower-class general exudes. When Luis Cervantes appears before General Demetrio, he humbles himself and mentally begins working on his plans to gain favor with the revolutionaries. Di Stefano summarizes the situation that led to the Mexican Revolution, stating that “the Mexican Revolution was primarily an agrarian conflict and was fought mainly by and, nominally, for peasants” (133). Luis Cervantes has nothing to physically gain. He is already wealthy and has clearly benefited from being on the right side of the now-collapsing government. It is through his empathy for Mexico’s poor and indigenous population that other characters, and readers, begin to view him as another form of hero.

This young medical student is determined to help against the fight of the old Mexican government. One might even say that Luis Cervantes’ ideals closely resemble those of Mariano Azuela himself, since Azuela was adamant about his participation against the mistreatment of the lower classes. The possible dangers of this war did not deter Azuela, no matter the amount of time it would take to finish and even more likely at the cost of his life. Despite a similar reach of principles and perceived morals against a common enemy, this first official meeting between Luis Cervantes and Demetrio Macías is fairly muted. Neither man said a word when Luis Cervantes entered the room and began administering quick but precise treatment to Demetrio’s injured leg. Still, the moment...
is followed by the praise the General gives afterward and how the rest of his troop warm up to the presence of a curro who does seem to be an avid supporter.

In his article, Professor John G. Peters discusses the importance of comparing revolutionary literature from inside and outside perspectives. Not only do these surface-level opposites find similar and distinct ways to examine and produce reflective literature, but they do so while also coming to the same conclusion. Peters argues that Mariano Azuela characterizes war as a chaotic, messy business that often makes things worse—and that the effort of the Mexican Revolution was essentially futile. This sentiment stems from the fact that the revolutionaries became just as cruel and selfish as the Federales they initially fought and life did not get better after the revolution.

However, the Mexican Revolution did allow new freedoms of identity to emerge with a reexamination of women’s roles, particularly those who wanted more autonomy after having run around with revolutionaries. Peters also discusses the two “surface-level opposites” of General Demetrio and Luis Cervantes, stating, “Macías and Cervantes are the novel’s protagonists. Although there are significant differences between the two characters, they share a common significance in Macías representing the revolution’s military leadership and Cervantes representing its intellectual leadership in the novel” (135). In addition, while both appear to be heroes in the beginning, they each exhibit cruel and deplorable characteristics as they gain power. Demetrio rises quickly in reputation with every government official he kills, and Luis becomes indispensable for his medical skills and loyalty, also gaining favor and wealth. They become a nearly inseparable duo for a time, as do Nick Carraway and Gatsby in Fitzgerald’s novel. In The Great Gatsby, the two central protagonists become closer through awkward interactions at parties and lunches, with Nick soon feeling sympathy for the love-lorn man and his quest for an old flame.
General Demetrio and Luis Cervantes form a similarly iconic alliance, since they loot, steal, and ruin lives together in their journey towards the top of the war chain, feeding off the poor and the people they had initially pledged to protect and lift into a better life. In *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*, there is no question of how or why any of these men became misguided. The immaculate quality they appear to have in the launch of their early lives and careers becomes dulled and sullied, even as they still believe they are fighting or striving for something greater and better, even as they arrive at their deaths and journeys’ ends.
3 New and Accepted Societies Within the Novels

Only power, influence, and strength in numbers can turn the tide of something atrocious (a massive war or a largescale social engagement) into either something worse or something slightly less terrible. This pessimistic approach is liberally dispersed throughout the primary texts by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mariano Azuela. There are no happy endings in these novels; they both end in tragedy. A select few characters are allowed to thrive by the stories’ conclusions, but the majority of characters are broken and beaten and very likely at the bottom of a mansion-sized pool or the foot of an enormous cliff in the Sierra.

3.1 Morality and Immorality in Cultural and Social Contexts

The term morality is loosely defined by nature. There are far too many opinions to provide a solid explanation. However, there may be a general consent—that the idea of morality is the equivalent of a metaphorical cloud containing good deeds and thoughts and temperaments, whereas immorality is the fair and identifiable opposite. There are no saints within The Great Gatsby and certainly not within The Underdogs. Both F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mariano Azuela engaged with the cultural and social endeavors of their generations. The authors’ backgrounds added a layer of sincerity to the texts during the writing process, especially since they knew and experienced their unique cultures’ vices first-hand. So, by discerning the definition of morality as a cloud of good deeds and thoughts, the reader may better understand just how cruel and punishing the worlds of The Great Gatsby and The Underdogs are. The first thing to realize is that nothing is sacred.
Towards the beginning of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick finds himself partying with Tom and Tom’s mistress, Myrtle. Arguably, Nick has already committed some immorality here because he is willingly riding in a vehicle with two adulterers and not saying much of anything, as some people might expect. An outspoken and morally engaged person would probably point out or bring up the fact that Tom Buchanan is married to Daisy and that Myrtle is married to Wilson. However, the pair have decided that they do not want to be bound to a single person for the rest of their lives, which might shock and appall people who have a traditional standard of morality in mind. Nick’s lack of response or discomfort normalizes their adultery.

Here is a threesome in a taxi. Nick, Tom, and Myrtle are going about their day with little regard to conventional societal mores. Then a seemingly unimportant event occurs, right before the private apartment gathering of Myrtle and her entourage. While remaining seated within the vehicle, Tom and Myrtle contemplate the purchase of a dog with “a gray old man who bore an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller,” a quotation that reveals some of Fitzgerald’s comedic side, since he satirizes an industrial giant as a poor man. There is a persistent ‘enabling’ throughout the novels from both the youth and the elders. This scene with a leggy mutt also presents some form of bargaining. When Myrtle asks about the breed of the dogs, the man replies promptly, saying, “‘All kinds. What kind you want, lady?’” and she responds, “‘I’d like to get one of those police dogs; I don’t suppose you got that kind?’” [and so] [t]he man peered doubtfully into the basket, plunged in his hand and drew one up, wriggling, by the back of the neck. ‘That’s no police dog,’ said Tom. ‘No, it’s not exactly a police dog,’ said the man” (*Gatsby* 27, Fitzgerald’s emphasis).

The old salesman wants to make a sale and get on with his life. He’s even compared to “Rockefeller,” who was an American oil giant and industrialist—and still alive during this novel’s writing—so there are some easy comparisons and assumptions to be made. The man even mentions
that the dog is more “Airedale,” as well as what he believes to be a few major selling points. Myrtle effectively says that the dog is cute, and Toms buys it. But why, then, is this an important scene? Because there is a hierarchy of social decay and denial, and it is one of the first moments in the novel where someone is aiding, whether passively or not, in the propagation of some form of immorality. This not exclusive to the Roaring Twenties.

Towards the end of The Underdogs’ first part, a very poignant passage succinctly describes Demetrio and his troops’ communal degeneracy. The text expresses how not everyone got along, and “[t]he following morning a few showed up dead: an old prostitute with a gunshot in her gut, and two recruits from Macías’s group, their skulls riddled with bullets” (61). Their esteemed leader couldn’t care less, saying, “‘Pshaw! Have ‘em buried,’” probably nursing a headache from last night’s revelry. During the Mexican Revolution, people often handled interpersonal disagreements as injured creatures allowed to act on their most basic instincts. General questions and answers during this time may have taken the form as, “What, he took your drink? Fight him and take his money,” or “You don’t like the way he looked at you? Kill him,” and the regrettable even more common, “You like that pretty girl over there? Grab her and take her around the back.” These sentiments became widely accepted and understood with the general disorder and carnage over who would be next in charge. General Demetrio and his men killed not only Federales but each other and at least a handful of townspeople they would come in contact with during their travels.

Santiago Daydí-Tolson accurately details that “[a]lmost half of the 15 million Mexicans at the time of the Mexican Revolution belong to the illiterate population, the underdogs, as attested by the census of 1910” and that “[a] majority of them must have been among the 40 percent of Indian, with a lower proportion among the 40 percent mestizo sector” because unfortunately, like the United States, Mexico has never treated their indigenous populations very well (76). These same
populations were continually abused and put down under the Díaz Regime, which helped spark the Mexican Revolution and likely aided in maintaining residual and primal instability. These various guerilla groups spread with clueless bewilderment once the old government was gone, and they propelled their violently careless and reckless attitudes well after the original enemy’s defeat. To this day, Mexico is still grappling with major issues and struggles that have carried on from the revolution. The immorality represented in this novel is a response to the pervasive immoral social conditions against the commoners during the Díaz regime.

Even in *The Great Gatsby*, immorality is heavily tied to the harshness of the Roaring Twenties’ socio-economic conditions. The unequal class structure of people forced to work in grimy places like the valley of ashes and being at the mercy of the upper-class for slightly better employment affects how the characters interact with one another. This sense of privilege from the upper class is coupled with a reemergence of the aristocracy (a.k.a. old money) in *Gatsby’s* world. In particular, Tom Buchanan is wealthy and refined from generations of prosperity enacted by his ancestors. He was born into comfort, which the newly monied were just getting acquainted with. In the United States, the bootlegging and flapper brand of instability that followed WWI stemmed from the same problem as the Mexican Revolution: most of the population was engaging in things that they shouldn’t, from both a moral and a legal standpoint. Scott Donaldson notes some of the expected attitudes and customs of Fitzgerald’s “Jazz Age” era, stating that “[w]ith women, the right clothes and accessories matter[ed] even more,” especially for the those seeking to enhance their socio-economic standing, like Myrtle (188). Myrtle resides in the valley of ashes with her husband, Wilson, and they subsist off of the waste left behind by the wealthy for a long time, much like their neighbors who share a similar space and circumstance in their dusty, inhospitable surroundings. However, Myrtle becomes secondhand rich by engaging sexually with Tom
Buchanan, and the purchase of a random canine is an example of how she wants to flaunt her position on this new social ladder she has climbed. She is essentially telling the world that yes, I am an unfaithful woman, and look! I’m rewarded for it with a brand-new accessory!

Even so, in this scene with the dog, the perceived immorality begins with Nick. He has not only unwittingly found himself spending the day with Tom and Tom’s mistress, but briefly meandering in the valley of ashes with the weathered, aging, and seemingly disapproving eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, an old advertising billboard representing an optometry practice (Gatsby 23). The valley is an industrial wasteland sandwiched between the more affluent areas and “bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let barges through, the passengers on waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour” (24). These passengers can even view those who work and live there and have become living personifications of the ash all around, since the valley residents are the used-up and exploited residue left behind by both the upper-class and 1920s society at large. Then there is Myrtle and Tom, both of them denying their actual spouses in order to try to be either happy or spontaneous—or neither—and the old dog salesman remains present for this one exact moment. There are four parties at play here.

Nick wants to be neutral, as evidenced by his earlier remark, stating, “I’m inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores” (1). Yet Nick becoming fully aware that Tom is unfaithful to his cousin, Daisy, adds a bumpy level of corruption to Nick’s initially good-hearted and respectful philosophy. Tom Buchanan’s infidelity can be tied to his class, since he is able to assert his dominance much easier over a woman who comes from a lower socio-economic status and can win her over with trinkets. Both he and Myrtle use each other to achieve a particular goal other than simple infidelity: Tom sees Myrtle as much easier to manipulate than Daisy, since his wife has proved to be rather
strong-minded (like when Daisy sadly and somewhat sarcastically comments to Nick on how “profound” (13) Tom is getting when he refers to ‘The Rise of the Colored Empires’), and Myrtle sees Tom as a means of rising within the uneven class structure. Old money marries old money to keep it exclusive, but they may more often seek outside comforts that are easily attained by sporting a little cash.

Nick is alarmed by all of this, but by keeping his mouth shut, he becomes an accomplice. Not that cheating on a spouse effectively means murder, but there are many deaths by the novel’s end, which suggests the aftereffects of immorality. So Nick watches on, just as the old man selling the dog watches on. Both of them, young and old, acting as spectators in a time of seemingly boundless change and wonder. They see a very enthusiastic woman, one that only Nick knows for sure isn’t Tom’s wife and a haughty rich man—Tom—who buys the dog simply because the woman had asked. As for the aforementioned bargaining, Nick is combatting any immediate judgment or feelings. The old Rockefeller (27) man is, of course, just trying to make a sale, not caring about what happens to the pup as soon as it leaves his hands. There is also some irony here, with a lower-class man looking like Rockefeller, which emphasizes class and concentration of wealth.

All of it is so seemingly metaphorical, with the elder passing off a new life—the puppy—and responsibility to the youth with neither instruction nor care, and another youth—Nick—presently staring at the absurdity of it because he knows it’s a mistake. The timing, the circumstance, and the fact that there are no questions asked and hardly any answers given, because “‘No, it’s not exactly a police dog…more of an Airedale’” (Gatsby 27) are what leave this scene so perfectly dismissive, immoral, reckless, and outwardly transitory with the four parties meeting and dispersing just as quickly. No one in this scene is completely honest with each other or with themselves, although they speak their desires with candor.
Fitzgerald’s themes and ideas of money equating irresponsibility, status, and power are also present within Mariano Azuela’s novel. Whether it is Towhead Margarito arguing with a waiter and knocking him “down by a loud slap across his face” (76) because he now has the power and money to do so, or an old woman going from person to person on the train nervously claiming that “a well-dressed man stole my suitcase in the station of Silao” while collecting bills with “jittery eyes” (113), no one is morally unscathed by class divisions. The scene with the woman on the train demonstrates one of many hypocrisies Azuela brings to light, denoting the general outcry of a wealthy gentleman daring to commit a crime against a poor, old woman, “‘Because there’s nothing that makes [an underdog] madder than a thieving curro’” (114, original emphasis). Peter G. Earle addresses this concept of the “underdog” further, offering, “Top dog is defined as ‘a person, group, nation that has, usually as the result of winning in a competition, acquired a position of highest authority.’ It’s in the double sense of underdog (i.e., loser and victim) and the expandable or singular-plural sense of top dog that representative works of modern Mexican literature can be read” (301) with a duplicitous view and possibly skewed interpretation. Mariano Azuela is exceptionally proficient in writing this dual understanding of who the underdogs really are. He portrays them as both heroes and villains within his brutally honest novel—both the top dog and the underdog. These once righteous men who initially fought for the poor and the people just like themselves are now the ones causing widespread panic and fear with their hostile whims.

Just as Tom Buchanan and Daisy use their money to disappear by the end of The Great Gatsby, General Demetrio and his men use their newly-acquired advances to drink, gamble, and fornicate away their confusion and sorrow and essentially disappear into themselves. Some of these men vanish completely into their primal urges, and some are claimed by death. Both Myrtle and Gatsby are also claimed by mortality (murder) due, however indirectly, to their new status and
sudden betterment compared to their old lives. The point both F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mariano Azuela appear to agree on is that an increase in wealth leads to an increase in immoral activities. Gatsby craves a better life and he’ll do just about anything to get it, same as Myrtle, although she uses her sexuality rather than unlawful pursuits. General Demetrio and his men simply want to be treated as human with proper wages and rights, leading them into the pockets of dead Federales and rotten politicians, making them flaunt their new wealth around while they wreak havoc. War Paint, the only female in Demetrio Macías’s troop other than the later addition of Camila, memorably says during a break-in, “As soon as ya get anywhere all ya have to do is choose the house that best suits ya and ya go and take it…If not, who the hell was this revolution for? For city dandies? No, we’re gonna be the dandies now, don’t ya know?” (Azuela 77). This line determines Azuela’s primary sentiment about the revolution: it was not a fight to dismantle class but to make the poor wealthy. The other main point here is that a humble and impoverished person is less likely to commit a crime comfortably than someone who has multiple connections to the law or has even designated themselves as the law. People who know that they have enough power and capital to defend their actions move on to their subsequent misconduct smoothly. As shown in both novels, these wealthy individuals will likely continue to their destructive paths until someone righteous and morally sound arrives or fate finally catches them.

### 3.2 How the Poor Become the Rich

There are no shortcuts for characters of newly gained status in *The Great Gatsby* or *The Underdogs*. These once-impoverished individuals who gained wealth and an upgraded social standing worked their way through a variety of means, but most commonly through illegal and questionable routes. The most notable characters who rose through their peers’ ranks and to the top of these materialistic crowds are Gatsby and Demetrio Macías. As for characters like Luis
Cervantes, he is an example of successfully assimilating and gaining favor with those in power. He does come from money and the privilege of having a formal education, so initial class position and social background place him a cut above the majority of people he interacts with.

Within *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald reminds the reader regularly that only those who have recently gained wealth feel the need to flaunt it. Scott Donaldson highlights this in his piece “Possessions in The Great Gatsby,” stating that Gatsby’s, or any freshly-made wealthy man’s, “clothes, his car, his house, his parties—all brand him as newly rich, unschooled in the social graces and sense of superiority ingrained not only in Tom but also in Nick Carraway” (188). Gatsby is ostentatious in the choice of car he drives (bright yellow) and the color of suits he wears occasionally (pink). He wants to exhibit this affluent reputation just as Myrtle Wilson does when she realizes that Tom will get her just about anything because he is rich and they are having an affair. He gives her jewelry she has and, of course, the dog. Ostentatiousness seems an affliction that only those who’ve just come into money appear to be stricken with, and this same phenomenon is seen throughout *The Underdogs* with General Demetrio and his men.

At the very start of part two in Azuela’s novel, there is an image of Demetrio Macía’s enhanced life. The text states that he “prefers the clear tequila of Jalisco to bubbly champagne that fizzes under dim candlelight” in a room with “[m]en covered in dirt, smoke, and sweat, with kinky beards and wild manes of hair, dressed in filthy rags” (73). It’s one of the most explicit pictures given in the novel. This scene marks the opposing expectations of what defines those who have class, since our impoverished protagonist not only has a choice between tequila and champagne, but he is comfortably enjoying his drink in a room full of his peers and lower-income people. He wants a crowd to see him. After Demetrio and his band of revolutionaries combat the majority of Federales
in the first part, they find themselves regarded as “‘[t]he men who live in the Sierra [who] are made from the…solid substance out of which heroes are made’” (121). They are the heroes of the common folk in the subsequent sections. This title is pristine and uplifting, although most of the men are visually still what they once were—guerilla soldiers caked in mud, blood, and debris.

It’s an intriguing contrast, but General Demetrio undergoes a similar transformation to Gatsby, as he flaunts a “stone-encrusted gold pocket watch and asks Anastasio Montañés to tell him the time” (77). The amount of irony and destruction of expectations regarding the image of neat, polite rich people (or even curros) is inexhaustible. Although Demetrio Macías has technically become someone of great wealth and respect, he is still an illiterate and uneducated Indian. His companion, Anastasio, has a similar background. He cannot read the face of the watch and instead looks out to the sky, judging the position of the Pleiades star cluster to tell the General that dawn will soon arrive. It’s all part of one grand farce in The Underdogs. The absurdity of these scenes connects back to what John G. Peters discusses with his analysis of Azuela’s work and how the Mexican Revolution appeared to be one big mishap that backfired, with “revolutionary [causes] that profess the overthrow of an oppressive regime and the establishment of a benevolent government in its place…[al]though, the narrative eventually undermines revolutionary ideals” (133) and reverts into another oppressive government formed by the uneducated and hot-blooded masses that won the first phase of the war.

A majority of the poor stayed poor, and those who gained the upper hand were the ones who fought in successful revolutionary groups that then opposed similar rebellious factions. In-fighting and innocents consistently caught in the crossfire were regular occurrences, and this struggle between peers is seen in The Great Gatsby as well. In “Gatsby’s Pristine Dream: The Diminishment of the
Self-Made Man in the Tribal Twenties,” Jeffrey Louis Decker points to Nick Carraway as a way for the reader to view Gatsby “in the guise of an archetypal, if somewhat misguided, self-made man in America…[who] connects [his] business schemes to the tainted hand of immigrant gangsters” (52) before being freed of them in death. However, these immigrants enabled Gatsby’s rise, and Tom Buchanan is cognizant of these dealings, announcing to everyone at the story’s climax, “‘I found out what your ‘drug stores’ were…[Gatsby] and this Wolfshiem bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That’s one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn’t far wrong” (133). To Gatsby, bootlegging was the best and possibly quickest path to achieve his ever-hopeful dream of impressing Daisy and winning her over, since he was not born into money, like Tom, Daisy, Jordan, and Nick. While our tragic hero does die unfulfilled, one cannot fault the hard-working people like Wolfshiem and similar contacts who boosted him up to the new heights he achieved while extending free booze and entertainment. It was all Gatsby’s choice, in the end. Like Demetrio Macías, Gatsby pushed past others like him.

Both Gatsby and Demetrio climbed a personalized social ladder. Gatsby’s was in the gangster underworld, gaining favor and power through bootlegging and other illicit activities. Demetrio gained military strength and fervor with his impressive shooting skills and strategic thinking, looting everything he could along the way from just the rich at first, though later the poor also become subject to his caprices. Both characters had a nose for the paths they sought. Using newly acquired skills and titles, they propelled themselves forward. Gatsby was nothing but a poor farming boy named James Gatz, living with his luckless parents. Since his focus was gaining Daisy’s favor, he continued to engage with gangsters to produce more and more capital. The whole mansion tour Gatsby gives Daisy and Nick in chapter five is the visual and tangible culmination
of his efforts to impress the woman he loves, the same way he brandishes his wealth by throwing extravagant parties. “With enchanting murmurs Daisy admired this aspect or that of the feudal silhouette against the sky, admired the gardens, the sparkling odor of jonquils and the frothy odor of hawthorn and plum blossoms and the pale odor of kiss-me-at-the-gate” (90). This passage signals the fervor of the uber wealthy trying to recreate the notion of European aristocracy and the enormous divisions it created between those considered royalty and their subordinates, which goes against what America claims as its traditional values. Gatsby appears to be actively trying erase his own country-dwelling past by showcasing the stature to which he has risen.

Demetrio Macías is similarly obsessed with impressing a particular female. He was a poor Indian driven from his home by Federales, and since he has accumulated more than enough wealth and clout in the novel’s second act, his new focus becomes making the rancho girl, Camila, his one and only love. In a brief conversation with Luis Cervantes, General Demetrio reveals his lack of satisfaction as of late since he seems to have everything he could ever want. General Demetrio sees the jewels Luis Cervantes is offering him and says, “‘Keep it all for yourself. Really, curro…You know, I really don’t care for money at all! Want me to tell you the truth? As long as I have me a little gal to keep me warm, I’m the happiest man in the world!... There’s that Camila, you know, the girl from the little rancho. The girl’s not the prettiest, but if you only knew how I dream of her…” (93). Luis Cervantes then proves to be an amazing wingman, much like Nick Carraway, since he brings Camila to the love-sick man’s feet. Demetrio wins Camila’s love by spoiling her, offering a gorgeous black mare as her prized ride and making sure he always has “‘lodgings for [him] and [his] woman’” wherever they go (100). In the end, he and Gatsby are interested in nothing more than the real prize of a specific human connection, although they do enjoy their riches immensely and become greatly accustomed to their new lives.
According to both Fitzgerald and Azuela, the poor become the rich by emulating them. Having watched closely and learned, they crawl out of their impoverished backgrounds. However, only the persistent and determined ones tend to make it, if only briefly. Gatsby becomes a “self-made man” by watching another “self-made man” in action (Dan Cody), and General Demetrio becomes rich by stealing from the same people (the poor) that the old government once did. Both protagonists gain their enviable resources by breaking the law and doing questionable things to other people. It’s how they were self-taught, and the system proves successful until they both meet an untimely demise.
4 Patriarchy, Female Agency, and Sexuality

There are many intriguing facets to *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*, but perhaps none is as fascinating as the way men and women come together to scheme. Concocting the perfect plan to entice and then commit adultery, to steal, and in some cases cover-up or carry out murder are all subjects found within F. Scott Fitzgerald’s and Mariano Azuela’s iconic works.

The most notable alliances in these dubious situations include Jordan and Nick as they work together to help move along Gatsby and Daisy’s affair, and War Paint’s consorts with the other bandits and thieves in General Demetrio’s troop, all of whom are male until Camila joins up later. Female agency should also be brought up for scrutiny, since identified females in both works make dire choices that derail the outcome of blissful love at the very end. Male-female relationships in sexual settings and how often people change and intermix with similar partners also helps to reflect a looser sense of morality envisioned and replicated by the authors’ and their then-current societies, which both have largely Christian/Catholic values when concerning marriage and the expected monogamy from those kinds of unions. *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs* remind readers that the historical change seen from both the Roaring Twenties and the Mexican Revolution would not have been possible without the participation of both men and women.

4.1 Patriarchal Expectations and Reversals in Both Novels

One of the greatest and most identifiable back-and-forths throughout history has notably been the struggle between the young and the old. This skirmish between the ages is seen repeatedly, whether
it is with new and young voices calling out for a change to the old ways or with the elders and those in power hoping to keep full-control. Some may even say it’s a tale as old as time, and it truly is, especially when concerning novels about cultural revolution. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is easily recognized for its contact and intermingling with the youths and the elders within its “Jazz Age” setting. On the other hand, there is Mariano Azuela’s *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs*), which may not be as acknowledged when concerning disparities between the generations. However, both works exemplify generational divides and intersections of like-mindedness, which will be critically examined alongside supplementary materials. The old-fashioned and power-hungry patriarchy is a particular interest when assessing these novels.

*The Great Gatsby* ends in much heartbreak and unfulfillment. The unfortunate events that occur help to define the novel as it is: a tragedy. Gatsby cannot accept his reality and consistently lives within the rose-colored portrait of the past, maintaining his singular tragic flaw, which leads to his death. Fitzgerald’s novel is a culmination of factors from both the young and the old. The combined culpability during the Roaring Twenties makes both generations responsible during this time-period—although the elders hold a much larger part of the blame. A society’s older groups (typically aging and well-connected men) have almost always held much of the influence in how laws and traditions run, as they tend to do. However, when referring to the Prohibition era, there are an eye-opening number of contradictions and character reversals.

Both sides of the aging coin are responsible for the seemingly lax and loose morality of the twenties, but, according to Fitzgerald, there is slightly more fault to be placed on the elders. Throughout Nick Carraway’s narration, we quickly realize that Gatsby “has no wise mentor to lead him on his journey; older men like Dan Cody and Meyer Wolfshiem have shown him the path of deceit and felony, and he follows it” (Giltrow and Stouck 479) like an eager pup, because all
Gatsby wants is to recapture the past. The control and power of the older generation are regularly brought to the reader’s attention, whether it’s through run-ins with old Rockefeller-looking men or impromptu meetings with even older gangsters. Although Gatsby doesn’t struggle much against these older authorities, we have others, such as Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker, who more subtly condemn them. Jordan soon allies herself with Nick and appears to maintain a refusal to drink since she is “‘absolutely in training’” (Gatsby 10), meaning she not only rejects a core component of the Roaring Twenties with its pervasive bootlegging, but she acknowledges the illegal customs and thumbs her nose at it since her physical prowess and career are far more important.

The collections of youths who attend Gatsby’s parties outwardly snub the old ways while Nick and Jordan facilitate their own form of justice by aiding in Gatsby and Daisy’s affair. Jordan Baker herself represents the flapper and new woman of the Roaring Twenties. She is proactive in what she wants, energetic, and incredibly nosy. Flappers during this time were often defined and recognized by their bobbed haircuts, skirts that went just above their knees (which were considered supremely scandalous by older and conservative generations, who were more accustomed to skirts that reached at or below the ankles), and the way they passionately danced and spoke and occasionally smoked. A flapper was also much more likely to be a young woman, particularly one who had come of voting age around the time the Ninetieth Amendment was ratified.

In The Underdogs, the existence of Luis Cervantes, Camila, War Paint (La Pintada), and other young people help represent and offer similar representations of youth and female agency against the older and more patriarchal masses that are present. They are juxtaposed and aligned with the young General Demetrio Macías, the wide-ranging ages of men within his troop, and other older people they run into, rob, or even harm throughout the course of the story. Similar to Gatsby, the young and old populace in Azuela’s narrative soon become just as responsible for the widespread
change and chaos enveloping their society. However, one of the biggest differences between the lens Fitzgerald and Azuela offers is through the presented point of view.

Dick Gerdes offers his own assessment of the narrative lens the reader is given in *The Underdogs*, stating, “My remarks about narrative viewpoint center around the idea that we are experiencing an omniscience in the novel which is more closely tied to the reader than to a character or author, and whose narrational focus is constantly changing” and developing as the reader comes into contact with all of the questionable actions the characters perform (558). In *The Underdogs*, the reader is led to form their own opinions. The young and old within this work are given choices and circumstances and how they perform under these typically stressful moments are up to their own unique characteristics. Their level of humanity is placed on display for the voyeur, so to speak, and this voyeuristic perspective differs from Nick Carraway’s viewpoint in *Gatsby* simply because the text Azuela presents contains no identifiable narrator.

When Demetrio and his marauding troop arrive at an untouched town, “They entered full of joy. Smiling faces with beautiful black eyes looked through windows...[and] then the soldiers dispersed, as usual, in search of ‘advances,’ under the pretext of gathering weapons and horses” (Azuela 105). Here the text maintains an omniscient third-person voice and narrates an event that happens towards the end of part two, when Demetrio Macías has established himself as a proper militant in the eyes of the revolution and has gathered many riches as a result. In this section, the reader is directly told several things: 1) The soldiers were happy and eager to visit the pleasant sight of the town, 2) the residents were equally excited and thrilled by the soldiers’ arrival, and 3) the soldiers didn’t waste much time before they went around stealing and ransacking. Within *The Underdogs*, the term “advance” is used regularly as a euphemism for whatever food, liquor, jewelry, etc. the soldiers can find when they sweep through small communities. It is usually based
on a first-come, first-served basis, although there is plenty of trading and even arguing that comes from such fervent looting. Azuela’s words on the page don’t lead the reader to a formal conclusion, but they do offer a scene which can be dissected and pondered.

In *The Great Gatsby*, however, our first-person narrator is not as objective. The core mechanic of using a character to narrate the story is to elicit certain feelings and directly impart opinions and ideas to the reader. One of the many famous quotes Nick offers us in the first chapter is: “No—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men” (Fitzgerald 2). Here, Nick is saying that Gatsby, for as flawed and hopeful as he was, was not responsible for the destruction of his life and dreams. It is those things that “preyed” on him, the actions of both the young and the old that truly destroyed him, and Nick feels resentment not only for many specific individuals but for the unspecified masses that contributed to Gatsby’s death as well. There is no blatant judgment within Azuela’s text, but there is a point to be made when seeing youths and elders clashing in the midst of a bloody war.

The omniscience in *The Underdogs* and using Nick Carraway as a narrator in the first person offers two different ways to address social history. Instead of the people and their society being put on display, like in *The Underdogs*, Nick takes the reader behind the curtain of “Jazz Age” culture. He does this to funnel the attention away from some of the more questionable and poverty-stricken elements in the novel. However, he is not dismissing it. It would appear to be a polite gesture on Fitzgerald’s part to point out a few things and then shuttle the reader to something slightly more digestible. Azuela differs here because he is not trying to make anything agreeable and is far more determined to write things as they are, which means showcasing the unpleasantness of being poor.
Even more intriguing is the similarities drawn between young people like Demetrio Macías and Gatsby, who both find themselves to be of extremely poor backgrounds until they observe the older generation and finally decide to learn their ways and take matters into their own hands. Gatsby found his initial salvation during his time with Dan Cody, and Demetrio is run out of his village by Federales (all controlled by the older generation and those in power, specifically the aged President Huerta, who murdered the younger and democratically elected President Madero before him) and so Demetrio joins forces with Pancho Villa’s guerilla armies, becoming a general. These young men are the perfect examples of how and why a giant rift began to form between the youths and the elders within early-twentieth-century Mexican and American cultures.

Both novels relay that the older generation are the ones enabling these youthful people to be reckless. The older generation offers incentives for violence and outcry, yet they complain and critique these actions, all while watching and then participating in the same activities. Fitzgerald makes this hypocrisy abundantly clear within his “Echoes of the Jazz Age” piece (1931), commenting on the year of 1922 as:

    the peak of the younger generation, for though the Jazz Age continued, it became less and less an affair of youth. The sequel was like a children’s party taken over by the elders, leaving the children puzzled and rather neglected and rather taken aback. By 1923 their elders, tired of watching the carnival with ill-concealed envy, had discovered that young liquor will take the place of young blood, and with a whoop the orgy began. The younger generation was starred no longer.

Most past and unactive participants were left scratching their heads. The same old men who were lamenting the loss of morals and good faith were now the ones drinking bootleg liquor in
speakeasies and dancing at jazzed-up parties as if they had no cares in the world. They helped criminals break the law and promptly dismissed the Eighteenth Amendment, something they had pushed for so vehemently after the First World War.

There is evidence of this generational divide and confusion within the backdrop of *The Underdogs* as well. Once President Huerta resigned and fled the country, the original opposition forces of Pancho Villa, Venustiano Carranza, and Emiliano Zapata quickly began to dissolve. These men were all over thirty, and their factions scrambled for the newly available power. However, the three revolutionary leaders’ ideas and commands occasionally clashed with some of their men, who were often much younger than they were. These differences in opinion and the uncertainty over who would take control are embodied by the poorest soldiers, like Demetrio and his men, since after all the violence and even in-fighting among themselves, they no longer knew who or what they were really fighting for. It is with these disparaging conceits and inquiries between the generations that both novels highlight. As much as the young and old seem opposed, they still live side-by-side and observe the other’s often-careless movements.

4.2 Female Agency, Sexuality, and Female-Male Interaction

Female agency is something that might be ignored in the grand scheme of largely male exploits and voices within these novels. Even the idea of overly feminine writing or semi-feminine male characters was reviled during Fitzgerald’s time, with Frances Kerr emphasizing, “Not infrequently, the modernist avant-garde chose female images of disease, fat, ignorance, laziness, or sentimentality to signify a lack of either emotional or intellectual vigor” (405) especially in forms of literary writing. F. Scott Fitzgerald was criticized by H. L. Mencken for his portrayal of Gatsby’s unconcealed sappiness and romanticism, which was apparently too feminine. Even more intriguing
is the fact that many 1920s women were actively pushing against these gender stereotypes, as evidenced by the incarnation of the iconic flapper and some women delighting in the right to vote.

As for Mariano Azuela’s work and the backdrop he was writing within, his female characters went largely unnoticed by the general scholarship until Pascale Baker decided to fill in the missing discourse on the unique and multi-faceted character: La Pintada. Baker applauds Azuela’s novel and how it “defies the notion that women bandits did not exist or that if they did they were merely followers of male bandit chiefs. A forceful character, Pintada embodies the role of the soldada, as she actively engages in raids, rather than conform to the soldadera stereotype, that of the woman who accompanied the soldiers in their campaigns in a servile role” (721, emphasis in original). Soldaderas were mainly comprised of women and young girls who were forcefully taken from their villages and homes in order to cook, clean, and engage sexually with the revolutionaries they supported, whether willingly or not. However, they were also women who genuinely used the Mexican Revolution to their advantage and gained a little personal freedom outside of the usual confines of domestic housework and child-rearing. Mariano Azuela observed these women with great interest and created War Paint (La Pintada) as their rouge-smeared and outspoken champion.

In *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*, we have two female killers, Daisy Buchanan and War Paint (La Pintada). These characters represent a strong-minded and sexually present women who feel jealousy and remorse just as much as the male characters all around them. Leland S. Peter Jr. even emphasizes, “[i]n addition to being a symbol of Gatsby's illusions, Daisy has her own story…even her own dream. Nick, for example, senses a similar ‘romantic readiness’ in Daisy as in Gatsby, and during the famous scene in Gatsby’s mansion, Daisy herself expresses the same desire to escape the temporal world” (251). Daisy is very aware of her own feelings, and she knows
that Tom is cheating on her. She is also highly emotional by the end when she runs Myrtle over, but Peter argues that Daisy didn’t get to this point on her own: “Daisy's reputed failure of Gatsby is inevitable; no woman, no human being, could ever approximate the platonic ideal he has invented. If she is corrupt by the end of the novel and part of a ‘conspiratorial’...coterie with Tom, that corruption is not so much inherent in her character as it is the progressive result of her treatment by the other characters.” So while Daisy does become an active character, she is somewhat forced into the role since Jordan Baker and Nick Carraway collude to get her and Gatsby alone at Nick’s home. Daisy further initiates the climactic narrative action after Tom and Gatsby first collide, saying, “‘Who wants to go town?’” (Gatsby 119). She is desperately trying to diffuse the situation, but this foray only prolongs it. Their party of five move into the city to a little suite where the arguing and unpleasantries continue, since Tom fully comprehends the fact that his wife has been cheating on him with a bootlegger—someone he considers just as low-class as Myrtle.

The compounding expectations of Gatsby and the hypocrisy and fervor of her husband, Tom, prove to be too much for Daisy, likely too much for any human being. When Myrtle runs out into the middle of the road, “‘Daisy stepped on it. [Gatsby] tried to make her stop, but she couldn’t, so [Gatsby] pulled on the emergency brake. Then she fell over into [his] lap’” (114) and they kept driving, because Daisy knew that staying around a crime scene would do her no good. There are three primary male-female couplings within The Great Gatsby, and they are brimming with emotional decadence and corruption. They involve Gatsby and Daisy, Nick and Jordan, and Tom and Myrtle, all major players within the more youthful culture of Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby. A long list of instances and character interactions lead to the ruin of these relationships, which are unconventional in some aspects yet representative of the mores the novel explores.
However, if Fitzgerald has proven anything, it’s not only that these relationships do not last but, moreover, the lower class are once again the real victims when things go awry. Gatsby is sacrificed for the sake of Daisy moving on with her life, and Myrtle is the sacrifice for Tom so he can attempt to patch up his marriage or find a new lover. Nick and Jordan, however, face no sacrifice; they both come from old money. They merely part ways irately after all of the death and disaster, with Jordan saying, “‘You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn’t I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride.’” Nick responds, “‘I’m thirty…I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor’” (177). The female–male interactions in *The Great Gatsby* are heartbreaking and unfulfilling. The female–female interactions are not so different, with Jordan Baker no longer speaking much to Daisy since Daisy and Tom flee. Myrtle’s only interaction with Daisy is the terrible moment Gatsby’s yellow car runs Myrtle over.

Our female murderer in *The Underdogs*, War Paint, is similarly distraught when she murders Camila. When the two females first interact, War Paint acts as a mother to the young girl who has been tricked by Luis Cervantes into coming to their band of misfits. Camila tells War Paint, Luis Cervantes “‘lied to me, he lied! He came to the rancho and said: ‘Camila, I’ve come back just for you. Won’t you come with me?’ H’m, and ya tell me if I didn’t wanna go with ’im! Do I love ’im? I more than love ’im! I was so sick just thinkin’ about ’im!’” (95). War Paint understands that Camila was actually brought for General Demetrio. Luis Cervantes is merely fulfilling his end of a bargain to the General, and War Paint is very aware of the practice concerning the coercion and often force of bringing along a female into a revolutionary group that is always on the move.
Chris Harris states, “the hegemonic gender norms portrayed are understood to be cultural and political rather than natural. From this it follows that oppressive practices associated with patriarchal models of hegemonic masculinity can be subverted, as indeed they are in this Mexican narrative by La Pintada” (648). There is no reason for women not to climb aboard the revolutionary tide and reap their own benefits just like the men. There is also no reason for women to not want to seek some form of personal betterment or an enhanced quality of life, which is why the women that La Pintada represents were more likely to maintain their own set of morals and ideals that best suited what they wanted out of their new, chaotic lives during the Mexican Revolution, as the men did. The maternal side of the often boisterous and scantily clad War Paint takes over when she consoles Camila and comes up with a plan. She tells the rancho girl, “When Demetrio tells ya to get ready to go, ya tell ’im that ya’re sore and achy all over, that you feel like someone’s beaten ya, and ya stretch and yawn all the time…[t]hen I tell Demetrio to go on ahead and…I’ll take ya home, sound and safe’” (95). The specific way War Paint details this plan hints at her having done it at some point herself. She wants to take this girl home, far away from these ruffians.

However, Camila changes her mind a little later on, much to the anger and chagrin of War Paint. This culminates in a moment when Camila makes a comment against Towhead Margarito, War Paint’s favorite lover, which incites the older woman to undo Camila’s braid. This action momentarily “made her lose her balance and fall off the horse, hitting her forehead against the stones” (107), and Camila is quite seriously injured since her face is bloody. War Paint laughs as she trots away on her own ride. Camila refuses Luis Cervantes’ medical care, since he tricked her. Then she cries to General Demetrio asking if she can go home, since War Paint has become so vindictive. Pascale Baker comments on how “[l]ess palatable revolutionary women than the idealized Adelitas and reformed tough women discussed above undoubtedly did exist. There were
those who enjoyed the fighting, swearing, drinking, violence and general mayhem that characterized the conflict as much as men, and could even be said to have outdone their menfolk in many of these activities” (725). War Paint is a prime example of this. Since Camila has rejected the offer to go home and become a well-to-do rancho girl, War Paint treats her as harshly as she treats the rest of the bandidos and misfits she comes across. Unfortunately, General Demetrio and the rest of his troop have grown tired of War Paint’s antics, despite the fact that many have slept with her and formed some kind of camaraderie with the singular female bandito in their group.

When Demetrio Macías tells War Paint to leave, and no one will defend her, “everything happened in the blink of an eye: she reached down, unsheathed a sharp bright blade from inside her stockings, and jumped on Camila. A shrill cry and a body collapses, spurtling blood everywhere. ‘Kill her,’ Demetrio screamed, mad with rage” (108). However, War Paint refuses to be killed by anyone other than Demetrio himself. They were on-and-off lovers, and when he raises the knife, he finds himself unable to commit the crime. He shouts for War Paint to leave and she disappears somberly into the dust, getting away with murder just as Daisy got away with the hit and run.

The female agency in The Underdogs depends upon both War Paint and Camila, with War Paint trying to save Camila from a life of immoral, drunken, and violent pursuits, and then Camila promptly deciding that she is okay with this new life. This exploration of female agency distinguishes this novel from other novels concerning the Mexican Revolution. No matter what Mariano Azuela may have thought of gender norms and patriarchal expectations in a largely male-oriented and self-destructive world, he was committed to documenting the truth as much as possible. He knew women like War Paint, and he knew young girls who had been tricked
like Camila. He engaged with the war just as closely as anyone else who had been on the battlefield, and he made certain that the people in interacted with were well-preserved in the pages of this text.

Both Mariano Azuela and F. Scott Fitzgerald can agree upon the fact that their times were indeed changing, and the old norms and patriarchal regimes were definitely bending in a new direction. There was no way that women were going to overthrow old governments and cultural practices by themselves. However, women in the novels ally themselves with the men through interpersonal and sexual interactions, and together they bring about change in their communities, their societies at large, and their countries.
5 Concluding Statements

The purpose of this project is to acknowledge the similarities between two iconic novels published during the nineteen-twenties: *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Underdogs* by Mariano Azuela. I want to bridge the academic gap between literature of different cultures and celebrate the commonalities that some scholars might not have considered when examining these texts. Within *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*, the class issues discussed follow the idea that money corrupts, that war isn’t necessarily a good thing for the majority, and that very few people prosper financially during times of cultural and revolutionary change. Scholars like Scott Donaldson and Bernard Dulsey understand the heavily historical backdrops of Fitzgerald and Azuela’s lives and they cross-examine key historical moments with the work fairly frequently. For example, their comprehension of the trends and habits of the wealthy in American and Mexican societies help support just how eerily similar the environments and divisions between social classes were. The assessment of similar themes, ideas, and structure of two famous novels birthed from the Roaring Twenties and the Mexican Revolution allow readers to access similar information in different contexts and provide insight as well as curiosity on what other culturally significant works may be out there that build upon comparable designs.

The inception of these authors and their parallel lives and participation in their countries’ conflicts help solidify their spaces in historical literature, since both Fitzgerald and Azuela drew heavily from their own experiences. The research that has gone into this project can and should be closely considered within the comparison of other works with the hopes of expanding and celebrating the written efforts of people from different cultures and backgrounds. English
departments interested in cultural and contextual research may even consider studies of social rhetoric and pose questions that can be answered by the examination of two or more historically distinct pieces from different parts of the world. There is plenty of intersection between American authors and their fellow writers during similar time periods, and sometimes the theorizing and research does extend to other eras and events along the United States’ timeline. Unfortunately, the field of comparative literature has been dismissed or somewhat ignored as of late.

I would like to resurrect interest in comparative literature and reinvigorate the literary conversation regarding intersections of great change, cultural innovation, and revolution from seemingly unconnected works. I do believe there is a risk of comparative literature being discarded from English studies, since many comparative literature fields appear to be losing their independence and are likely being subject to budget cuts, therefore dividing and absorbing these concepts into literature and foreign language departments. It is imperative that comparative literature continues whether in translation or in those works’ primary languages so scholars and readers can foster cross-cultural understanding for the humanities and feature cultural intrigue for work outside of the English language. I do believe there is a balance to be achieved regarding English literature and literature in translation. In these trying and uncertain times, especially where minorities and their works are being accentuated in online media and television, there is a social benefit for adding and strengthening these kinds of comparative studies. Currently, there is not enough comparative literature research and emphasis and that is why I chose this topic of comparing *Gatsby* and *The Underdogs*, to remind my audience that this is a viable and necessary line of work that should be gaining more traction in the English field.

F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mariano Azuela were only limited by their own imaginations, since they persevered through trying publications and times. The issues of morality, how the poor
become the rich, the restructuring of certain patriarchal ideals, and female agency within *The Great Gatsby* and *The Underdogs* demonstrate the familiar elements present within these works. The pessimism from the authors and how they felt about their changing worlds comes through clearly with how their characters comment, observe, or partake in the politics and the seemingly accepted or tolerated social interactions of their daily lives. Overall, old literature is important literature. It reminds us of the past and hopefully prompts us to never repeat past actions that do more harm than good. To continue to progress the field of English and maintain a freshness of perspective and appreciation for old and new communities in the coming years, I believe dissecting and examining the intersections and criticisms that come up within these historic works paves the way for social, contextual, and cultural differences to become visible. Recognizing and welcoming the parallel bridge of history between diverse works reminds people that we are all human, no matter place we come from, and the human experience of pain, war, love, and the struggle for power are concepts that transcend all borders and large swathes of time.²

² NOTE: I would like to develop further the feminist history of these novels and some of the other subsections I have included in this thesis. I believe everything here can be expanded and developed into larger projects and help expand the literary conversation concerning these works and their eras.
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