

ON CAPITAL AND CLASS WITH BALZAC, JAMES, AND FITZGERALD

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What definition and relation to capital and to class open up opportunities for another sociality and social formation? Secondly, in order to renew the world from a perilous and worsening oligarchic inequality, how can another macroeconomic and political era be constituted for an egalitarian reconfiguration of the biosphere and of the social? For this we need first to reconceptualize, repoliticize, and transvalue money and power, i.e., capital and class. In this light, this chapter argues that languages and forms of class and capital mark and suffuse writings by Honoré de Balzac and Henry James, as well as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. These narratives may not convince those holding the whole bag of marbles to give some of those up, but they offer the possibility for critique for the other ninety-nine percent. Indeed, Karl Marx wanted to write a book-length study of Balzac, though he did not live long enough to do so. Not only this, if read in a certain way, our chosen texts are clearing the deck of cards for other alternative visions of what may be possible for an equitable world. To be clear on the structure from the outset, the present analysis will open with a contextual assessment of our trio of writers, then examine texts by Balzac and James, followed by Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, before ending with some concluding remarks.

Paradoxically, by embedding and identifying with certain class assumptions, oligarchic values, and inequalities, these writers expose the contradictions between the means and relations of production produced by the class dynamic. Thus, our chosen texts may function as provocative springboards for investigations into the environmental effects of the capitalist political economy on the emergent situation of massive extinction driven by the advancement of capital's profit logic and sociality based on infinite economic growth. Our three chosen writers, through their reflections on society, stood for something new, and they pointed the way to a certain societal shift, which we are now undergoing. Perhaps this is why Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, Marx, Friedrich Engels, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Fredric R. Jameson, inter alia, saw Balzac's writings as revolutionary for their own emancipatory causes, or as trenchant for materialist criticism. Or this may explain why critics such as Julian Markels champion James's sympathetic "Marxian imagination" with special reference to the worlds that clash and populate *The Princess Casamassima*. Markels also argues more generally of

writers ... who keep striving toward a Marxian imagination and the tragic forms of writers like Shakespeare and James who reluctantly reach it. Such multiform tragedy is what Marxism conceivably could lead us to expect: a resistance to its imagination, ingrained in the texture of bourgeois culture and consciousness, which then makes its impact and value all the greater for being so rare.

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The principal point thus is not the avowed allegiances or explicit political messages of texts authored by these writers, but of what the reader can do with their artistic worlds as scenes for a co-creative response. This may seem counter-intuitive given the complicity of elite writers with big capital and class, but one function of the artwork is to provide a tabula rasa for rethinking and reconfiguring possible alternative worlds in the light of the construction of encounters between fiction and critical thinking. Our writers are giving, in their texts, valuable signs and signals they were incapable of knowing or controlling. One may find phenomena they did not consciously intend. Those matters are still there, like slavery issues now being found in Jane Austen, who never intended to write about the issue, about which we do not even know how much she knew or cared; this distinction between artistic intentionality and outcome is very helpful, so that you can know the difference between what they knew/advocated for, as against what I theorize from their works.

The present interdisciplinary analysis focuses on the conceptual intersections operative between forms of class and capital, especially the monetarist system of capital, structuring the above-indicated works. The discussion will assess Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* and its stamp on James's *Washington Square*, which functions as a recalibration of *Eugénie Grandet*, as well as the late-style James in three novels and a travel work. Although not directly adduced, James's five critical texts on Balzac also inform the aesthetic and analytic sensibility of the present chapter. The time from 1799 to 1940 (Balzac's birth to Fitzgerald's death; James died in 1916) constitutes an historical era of immense changes in France, England, and the USA as geopolitical and financial powers. Those changes inform the general attitude and aesthetic sensibility toward class and capital in our selected texts. To understand capital and class we have to rethink each of them afresh for new forms of conceptual, aesthetic, and spiritual/material knowledge for another social configuration or for what Jacques Rancière would call another "distribution of the sensible" (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 12). From another perspective, un-capital is a view on capital from the view of the exploited people (as in that which is lost as surplus extracted from labor and basic exchange to be transferred into commodities). Works by Balzac, James, and Fitzgerald clear space for thinking capital and history from the axiomatic angle that history is what gets told by the winners, for they reveal forms of hierarchy that overdetermine what has been rejected, excluded, and expelled. Thus, their writings invite us to tease out layers of class-driven meaning to which they may have been oblivious, and their texts are able to promote conceptual, sensuous/aesthetic, and spiritual thinking about capital and class for a new epoch and for another linkage to the sensible and to the intelligible world.

Allan H. Pasco writes,

Balzac knew that we can never know the substance of reality. We can only grasp its idea. But in doing so, he showed that it is possible to conceive of the *raison d'être* of economics, fiat versus "hard" money, the opposition between Paris and the provinces, the reality of love and marriage, art and journalism, creation and imitation, class structure and the dissolution of families.

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Here the blind, contingent, hard reality of spiritual and conceptual un-capital versus the false fundamentalist ideal of power surfaces, creating the possibility of a wider and richer existence for capital, wherein instead of being passive, expropriative, and predatory, egalitarian forms of emancipatory un-capital as outworkings of the imagination would dynamically contribute to what we all share, to the commons. These conditions occur when our authors decondition and disarticulate our historical capitalist gaze. After the catastrophic and historic takeover of our planet by the religion of capital, we may thus be given a second chance. By mediating forms of disidentification for the reader from this dominant narrative, scenes from Balzac, James, and Fitzgerald make an important contribution to another set of sensibilities.

Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* displays a profound interest in and rhetoric articulating forms of capital and their relation to class power. In his avowed political views, Balzac is, for some if not all, psychobiographically complicitous with class domination. However, because his works illuminate the workings of money and power, they enable us to read Balzac against Balzac, for his narrative worlds teach us about a vain and futile, because power- and profit-obsessed, commodity society. Jacques Rancière writes of the world of endless striving for so-called practical success in Balzac: "This waste of energies will be the common moral of Balzac's *Human Comedy*" (*Aisthesis* 52). In this context un-capital, unclass, and unpower surpass limited capitalist human vision, not only abstractly but also about what is concretely feasible. These terms were unavailable to Balzac, who was writing in an earlier period of capitalist development, but for the twenty-first century these progressive terms free up space to rethink a postcapitalist relation to capital, class, and power. Balzac's portrayal of the historicity of class capitalism pervades the panorama of *La Comédie humaine*. For example, in *Le Cousin Pons* (*Cousin Pons*) Balzac delineates the unwarranted disdain visited upon the amiable if less money-rich Pons by his well-heeled relatives. Or in *Illusions perdues* (*Lost Illusions*) we witness the furtive machinery of class, capital, and duplicity in the book trade. *Histoire des Treize* (*History of the Thirteen*) illumines the workings of society, which revolves around the quest to gain rank and class and so to achieve social capital and power.

New forms of egalitarian thinking will promote another macroeconomics that would institute a deinstrumentalized state of more cosmological equilibrium. À la Georges Bataille's idea of a general economy, unclass power/un capital is handed down from the stars above us in a solar economy, and thus is here always and already. These two terms are an enlarging of the posited conception, function, nature, and organization of class power and capital, which mediate a less class-hardened state of affairs. Money and power as (capital and class) comprise the circle in which Balzac remains trapped, searching for a solution. Moral-ethical power/class and capital are unpower/unclass and un-capital, for they reduce forms of domination and function cooperatively and in a sharing way for the universality of the commons. For James, as Balzac's transindividuated reader and mentee, the reductiveness of power proved seductive, and for Fitzgerald too, as a disavowed international trans-individuated disciple of James and, by extension, of the cultural unconscious of Balzac. Class power and capital are thus to be thought concretely and transformed in our chosen writers in a terminological shift from capital to un-capital; this is because their delineations of class and capital promote thinking outside convention.

In writings of Balzac, as well as Fitzgerald and James, the exchange rate between different forms of capital and class inform inter-human relations, and different vocabularies emerge to open space to rethink and to reconceptualize the concept of capital as un-capital and of class as unclass; or non-capital or non-class, which are synonymous with un-capital and unclass. Unpower, un-capital, and unclass/non-class turn power, capital, and class on their head, so that they become subject to transformational thinking in ways that would serve the democratic, to what we have in common (the commons), and that which is egalitarian. Consequently, the most heinous and vulgar class power and capital may attain something progressive for the world of a global commons. One may see this microscopically in Balzac's *La Rabouilleuse* (*The Black Sheep*), which portrays the brutality of competitive human relations with an inheritance at stake between the brothers Philippe and Joseph in the Bridau family, wherein over against the nefarious acts of Philippe that lead to his demise, the artist Joseph, and so possible instigator of a confluence of egalitarian unpower, un-capital, and unclass (art's very dedication is cooperative), gains the inheritance of capital. This is not itself a positive thing, but it reveals a condition of possibility for a positive emergent form of capital such as cultural non-capital.

Adam Verver and his daughter Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl* also reveal this class dynamic. Adam buys objects including people, and Maggie is in league with this power of capital in order to regain her spouse Prince Amerigo. This scene indirectly links up with the bullying mechanisms and authoritarian twenty-first-century class capitalist society.

The challenge then is to break the posited unity of money and power, and reground the meaning of luxury and wealth for a changing third millennium and world. To develop affect, discernment, and sensibility in this direction is a key adventure in our phenomenal universe. Balzac and James foreshadow this central economic concern. Insofar as James wrote international books, the topical idea of a new internationalism interests us in revising and globalizing an economically ethical affect. Balzac's narratives also show a concern for gaining capital and achieving class power, revealing foresight in highlighting current ideological values regarding profit logics and the problem of a basic income to redress the contradictions of rentier capitalism. Yet, to change consciousness and the sensibility of a generation would require notions such as non-capital and non-class. This cognitive and affective shift would restore the ideas of money, power, and class to another potential content from what has been obfuscated. Unpower/unclass and un-money as a small "other c" for capital are also mediating agencies of the life of the spirit that is important for the expression of the void. In this context, Žižek considers the concept of materialism as "a position which accepts the ultimate void of reality ... there is no 'substantial reality,' that the only 'substance' of the multiplicity is void" (Žižek and Milbank 97). This attitude represents the paradoxical materialist conception in Balzac, James, and Fitzgerald. A reconfigured new epoch would require egalitarian and materialistic-spiritual unpower, un-capital, and non-class.

Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* (1841) illustrates the power of non-power, the capital of non-capital, and the class of non-class in the protagonist Ursule's somnambulist capacities, which allow her to recover her lost inheritance and to live in connubial bliss with Savinien, both of whom as we read

have suffered in advance their quota of life's misfortunes. "Theirs is the most wonderful happiness I have ever seen," the Comtesse de l'Estorade remarked of them recently. Bless therefore those happy children, and feel no jealousy, and look yourselves for an Ursule Mirouët, a young girl brought up by three old men and by the best of mothers: Adversity!
(*Ursule Mirouët* 265–266)

As Armine Kotin Mortimer writes, "For Balzac, this combination whereby a spiritual faculty produces a material gain is not in the least contradictory. It is central to the effectiveness of the narrative semiosis of [*Ursule Mirouët*]" (*For Love* 154). Here spiritual/material non-capital and non-class prove potent. "The circulation of money," Mortimer writes, "never secondary or insignificant in Balzac, follows a complex structure analogous to the excessive complexities of the genealogy" (*For Love* 158). Crucially too, and in consequence of a superficial understanding of materiality,

Autochthonous families thus form the bourgeoisie of Nemours, which is endogamous, materialistic, anti-intellectual, and anti-musical. The heirs fail to appreciate Ursule's piano-playing ... They want nothing so much as to demolish Minoret's exquisite library after his death. In contrast, Minoret's chosen company explicitly excludes the bourgeoisie and is exogamous, spiritual, intellectual, and musical.

A denoeticizing anti-intellectualism here stands tall, which informs today's lifeworld, not least in places that should be otherwise. This derives from the hyper-reification of knowledge, no less artistic expression, which turn cultural products into forms of property or capital (as opposed to the egalitarian promise of un-capital). Mortimer adds,

Ursule's upbringing reproduces the ideals of the Enlightenment ... From the opening pages, after Minoret's conversion, the mystical and spiritual hold sway in his household, with the support of the priest. In the confrontation between the heirs and Ursule, these many structures of opposition repeatedly place Ursule outside the materialistic pathways by which a succession usually passes.

(*For Love* 158)

Ursule embodies non-capital and so non-class. As for the money/capital stolen from Ursule, Mortimer notes, “When it is at last returned to Ursule, it figures the reward of spirituality and recovery from error” (*For Love* 166). Accordingly, this narrative illumines unpower and un-money as forms of un-capital and unclass. Or, as Mortimer puts it, “*Ursule Mirouët* achieves a momentary unity that I can only describe as miraculous: Love and Money allied in perfect harmony. Their disastrous disjunction in so much of *La Comédie humaine* is here overturned” (“Balzac’s ‘Ursule Mirouët’” 861). In this account, state power, capitalist dogma, and class society are also on some level overcome and overturned, and non-power, non-capital, and non-class activated for a more egalitarian scene.

Pasco adds some context:

Recent works by Thomas Picketty and Karl Gunnar Persson make well documented arguments that the general economy of the July monarchy had reached a period of very low growth in which individuals had little or no chance of making a personal fortune without inheriting or otherwise stumbling across a substantial sum of funds ... While these necessary riches may originate from theft ... or from legitimate earnings, as in *Eugénie Grandet* ... most often such funds come from an inheritance.

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True. However, we are aiming at an anti-imperialist and progressive capital, power, and class, which would favor egalitarianism and forms of progressive non-hegemonic non-capital and non-power for a working notion of a classless society of posited equality. Hence a point of departure for a societal work in progress. James and Balzac reflect on the historical processes that have led to the current situation in this passage on

Monsieur Grandet, who exults over his gold in his attic in *Eugénie Grandet*, it indexes an immense reference to capital ... the role of significant objects in these two respective aesthetic universes of James and of Balzac’s work in novel writing anticipate what McKenzie Wark writes ... “The true celebrities of the spectacle are not its subjects but its objects” ... As Balzac wrote of Grandet: “There, incarnate in a single man, revealed in the expression of a single face, did there not stand the only god that anyone believes in nowadays—Money, in all its power?”

(*qtd. in Roraback, Late Capital* 356)

Here is the foregoing Balzac quote in French: “N’était-ce pas le seul dieu moderne auquel on ait foi, l’Argent dans toute sa puissance, exprimé par une seule physionomie?” (Balzac 1976: f. 1052). Capital emerges as the reified, mystical potentiality of the money divinity. Further quotations are illuminating in a similar way. “Like Grandet, who ‘brooded over her [Eugénie] as if she had been gold’ (214) [Dr] Sloper with real intellectual violence reductively commodifies his daughter” (*LCP* 79) [that is, Roraback, *Late Capital* 79] “time and again in the ideological universe of James’s [*Washington Square*]” (Roraback, “Thinking Materialism” 357). Capital thus here towers up. Moreover, James and Balzac describe what Wark declares is a current necessity,

“a different kind of social practice for expressing the encounter of desire and necessity, outside of power as representation and desire as the commodity form” [Wark, *qtd. in Roraback, “Thinking Materialism”* 359]. Our categories of un-money, un-power and un-cruelty inform the logic of these statements. Currently each functions basically outside of the order of representation of the current practical and ideological regime.

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Cultivation and nourishment guide the therapeutic conceptions of un-capital and unclass that are also the condition of possibility for capital and class, representing how they are terms with potential to be redefined from poisons to cures (i.e., Plato's *pharmakon* as deconstructed in Derrida's *La dissémination/Dissemination* and later discussed in Roraback's *Late Capital* and in Stiegler's *Dans la disruption/The Age of Disruption*, among others). These foregoing new forms of noesis (pathos/empathy as critical and revolutionary?) and categories for other possible pharmacological futures refer to real or good as opposed to bad, mock, and vain power and class. One may also have a non-capital form of class or stature without status, and status with neither class nor stature. The former is possible in a self-possessing non-capital of empathy. Hence it is important not to forget the emotions (Aristotle's conception of pathos) as therapeutic forms of non-capital that

One may adduce more with respect to thinking in the creative space generously offered by our sovereign notions of un-money, un-power and un-cruelty. It is the mediating function of these notions that constitute the true radicality of the atypical choices that many a Henry James protagonist makes at the end of his narratives, witness the forgiving and generous and so cooperative nature of Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* or of Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*.

(Roraback, "Thinking Materialism" 360)

Maggie may too be given a different reading here, as earlier in this essay. One may also include Milly Theale's sacrificial choice, in *The Wings of the Dove*, to leave her money to Merton Densher. Consider too the valuation James gives to his travel tome, *The American Scene*: "I would take my stand on my gathered impressions, since it was all for them, for them only, that I returned; I would in fact go to the stake for them" (1987 ix). From Balzac, James learns of a realist and humanitarian un-capital that would mediate non-class. Additionally, in the works of James and Balzac, consumer class capitalism is a principal struggle. Therefore, the following question:

should we follow our obligations in the service of capitalist growth and expansion, or should we embrace the invisible power [and so subterranean revolution] of un-power and the invisible money of un-money? ... We need to find the coordinates of the struggle with research in this direction ... for a more accurate picture of what money and power truly are.

(Roraback, "Thinking Materialism" 363–364)

For instance, are money and power not truly just fetish objects invested with symbolic value to maintain a regime of a territory or society?

This struggle leads, in texts by Balzac and James, to new views of capital and class. Our active, empathic, and giving imaginations can form a much larger socio-economic and geopolitical vision. When considering the inegalitarian depravities and stupidities of power/capital/class and the subversive egalitarian commons of non-power/non-capital/non-class, we discover new and exciting general and beautiful truths for other languages and forms of capital, including beyond the emancipatory and humane starters of non-class and non-capital. The race for profit asks for a thoughtful rest, so that we can stop and think and enact a new thinking subject. This societal non-power is a power that can alter things. Slavoj Žižek writes of another form of capital, temporality (the power of time):

Hegel was the first to outline the contours of a *logical temporality* ... some logical moves (precisely the right ones) can be made only after other (erroneous) moves have been done

... for Hegel, “contradiction” is not opposed to identity, but is its very core ... There is time, there is development, precisely because opposites *cannot* directly coincide.

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Here we need a logical understanding, as against a merely empirical one, of temporality, wherein mistakes from the past will have been structurally necessary for later corrective decision and action. This period is growth time.

In Fitzgeraldian/Gatsbian terms, a revolutionary construction concerns getting back to the beginning and to repeating matters for real and true success. However, Jay and Daisy’s co-return was not radical or true enough, partly because class power proves for him insuperable. Furthermore, Daisy does betray Gatsby for a second time when she refuses to go back to him after giving him hopes that she might do so and therein shows her susceptibility to the desires associated with commoditized class power and to the über commodity of an appealing spouse.

As for the modern religion of commodification, consider Gatsby’s monetized words describing his desire for the objectified Daisy Buchanan, “her voice is full of money” (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 120). Reified here are the raw love or desirous feeling, and its adjunct of a human voice that locks Gatsby into the conceptual and linguistic servitude of money. Thereby, financial capitalism ingrains itself into the human voice, making it difficult to shed the skin of the commodity fetishism that lies atop everyday primordial and non-monetary wealth and riches. Here we observe the power of capital in an ironclad class capitalist system of exchange. The mediation of finance capital has become the existential absolute. And this kind of commodification subtends the dominant and elite capitalist class and instrumentalized human relations.

Underground criminal activities of bootlegging and the sale of fraudulent bonds underwrite Gatsby’s capitalist successes, whose early mentor is Meyer Wolfsheim, who was also notoriously involved in the corrupt fixing of the 1919 World Series. This approach (what Marx might call the “primitive accumulation” in the end of *Capital Volume 1* that produces the originary surplus through brutal and violent means of gaining assets) to gaining capital exposes the tenebrous activities that inform Gatsby’s financial status, which contain no moral-ethical value of non-capital. Gatsby functions in a world that favors and rewards brutality, corruption, and egotistical behavior. That the national pastime, American baseball, links up with Gatsby’s economic success, underscores the complicity of the capitalist sphere with some notorious American incidents. Lois Tyson explains how characters climb the capitalist ladder:

George clings to his foundering business, and Myrtle ... tries to start one of her own ... she “rents” her body to Tom Buchanan, hoping he’ll want someday to “purchase” it by marrying her. They are victims of capitalism because the only way to succeed in a capitalist economy is to succeed in a market, and, as neither George nor Myrtle succeed in the only markets open to them, they are condemned to the “valley of ashes” ... one might argue that George and Myrtle are negative stereotypes of a lower-class couple: he’s not very bright; she’s loud, obnoxious, and overtly sexual.

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This passage captures embedded class stereotypes. Tom also mentions a racist book about the white race going under a flood of blackness.

Another problem is the moral agent of the book Nick Carraway’s overly credulous idealization of Gatsby. Nick on Gatsby:

We shook hands and I started away. Just before I reached the hedge I remembered something and turned around.

“They’re a rotten crowd,” I shouted across the lawn. “You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.”

(Fitzgerald, *TGG* 154)

Gatsby was heroic in overcoming obstacles, did his own work, unlike the inheritance vampire set of Tom and Daisy, and this in spite of Gatsby's oft-problematic behaviors to acquire his capital and so achieve a certain stature. Yet now that Gatsby has reached the peak of his capital he is intensely alone, owing to the atomized and hierarchical social fabric in which he has lived and made his money.

Nick's idealization derives from his complicity with the capitalist fantasy and his projection upon Gatsby of his own desire while simultaneously ignoring the "primitive accumulation" that makes that world possible. As Tyson puts it, Nick "is in collusion with Gatsby's desire, and his narrative can lead readers into collusion with that desire as well" (77). However astute these points, they elide that Nick does assert Gatsby's problematic nature when he declaims, "I disapproved of him from beginning to end" (Fitzgerald, *TGG* 154). This statement may be pure ideology, for what Nick says about his knowledge does not accord with what he does. The mythic and religious devotion to the commodity marks Nick's descriptions of Gatsby's parties, as Tyson has shown in adducing a "tray of cocktails floated at us through the twilight" as well as "buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of *harlequin* designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold" (Fitzgerald, *TGG*, qtd. in Tyson 77; Tyson italics).

Time and again Fitzgerald captures the magical properties of the commodity form, providing material for thinking about the symbiosis of culture and power; for it is the hypnotic and religious power of the de-individualizing commodity form (Marx uses the word "mystical" in *Volume 1 of Capital*) that reveals itself in one's concrete social practices that display making-it-egotism and the profit motive. Tyson closes with a frontal attack on *The Great Gatsby's* disavowed complicities with a depraved capitalist rationality.

While *The Great Gatsby* offers a significant critique of capitalist ideology, it also repackages and markets that ideology anew. This double movement of the text gives the closing line a special irony: if we do "beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (189; ch. 9), there is in this novel that which strengthens the back-flow, bearing us ceaselessly back under capitalism's spell. In the end, Gatsby fails to realize the American dream, but because the novel falls prey to the capitalist ideology it condemns, many readers will continue to invest in it.

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This reading underscores Nick's contradictory portrayal. Gatsby is a failed capitalist. The foregoing passage also illuminates art as a sustainer of the status quo big power and property structure. Balzac and James texts function likewise. On the one hand, their writings uphold establishment values, and yet both writers were radical in their critique of class and capital and so allow us to engage in forms of disidentification from the dominant power edifice.

Gatsby has considerable energy. Outsized passions. Will. Arguably even a bit of courage. Yet his *modus vivendi* lacks a moral-ethical sense informed by egalitarian non-class, non-capital, and non-power. So, his life journey becomes a highway to the consumerist capitalist American nightmare perpetually and egoistically desirous of a kind of self-spectacularization (witness Gatsby vis-à-vis his parties) if not of anti-depressants and much else besides. Undeniable is Gatsby's loyalty to his morally problematic and corrosive class capitalist values. Therein also lies the individual and collective cultural tragedy. A system that radicalizes and hyperbolizes the social and economic facts of commodification, commodity fetishism, exploitation, and big class/capital indoctrinates him. The result is a shallow and a superficial culture of money wealth that provokes desperate and instrumental behavior.

Importantly, for Fitzgerald:

the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.

(*The Crack-Up* 58)

The paradoxical structure of truth might teach us the merit of thinking class capitalism even as we think a new egalitarian commons within these coordinates for a profound metamorphosis of the apparatus. Also, we should demand precisely the impossible—to get things happening that would not have happened otherwise for achieving freedom, not around or behind but through the tradition of class capitalism that has been in many ways liberating from prior modes of production.

As for *The Great Gatsby*, one critical gesture would elucidate such a function for the substance of the USA's dream and experiment in social engineering, one that would tarry over the problem of the spiritual force of rebellious energy once more and the need to define the meaning of our lives and struggles in terms of the commons that we share in today's terms, if not in those of the eighteenth century when early high capitalism was a more functional force. Capitalism's current dysfunctional forms help less than they hinder for the imagining and construction of a better world. Where do we stand in the 2020s? Is our future like a moment from quantum physics? These authors are coming from the future; thus, what has true value in Balzac, in James, and in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is an unwritten part that is ours to compose.

Gatsby belies the American dream of success through the acquisition of wealth because he makes the wrong kind of money. Perhaps only now can we better apprehend *The Great Gatsby*. Paradoxically clean capital is spent by the children of mobsters. They ride into the world with doors swinging wide open. All the stench is bleached from their inherited wealth. This does not make them more sublime from others, such as Gatsby in the Valley of Ashes or as crooked pushers and thugs. For they too possess the wrong sort of capital. We had to subject ourselves to erroneousness, to failure, and to a categorical mistake (is atonement or greatness capitalist success or something other?) in order to discover the novel. Again we require a logical view of time, as against a simple empirical one, wherein the mistakes of the past will have been necessary for the new possibilities of the present and beyond. It was a structural necessity that things would be so problematic historically, so as somehow to set things right. Gatsby's decision to adhere to the value ideals of his day must be reversed by understanding and explicating them. This reversal is the meaning of Fitzgerald's statement adduced above about "the test of a first-rate intelligence" (*The Crack-Up* 58).

Fitzgerald's novel displays reflexivity in testing tenets of the US institution of private property and of the desire to join the bourgeois class of home-owners, with such mentions as "that incoherent failure of a house" (*TGG* 188). One conundrum is that Fitzgerald remains ambivalent about both his own and his book's ideological investments. The power of habitation as a leading index of the American aspiration comes under scrutiny, as does the confused nature of a twenty-first-century situation. Bruccoli makes the relevant point that in *The Great Gatsby* the word "House" appears 95 times" (11). As for Balzac, he was a Royalist who believed in the societal pillars of family and of the Catholic Church. Even so, Balzac was, against his better judgment, a flaming capitalist and as such close to thinking the opening out of a global commons beyond hierarchical and inegalitarian big capital. Under his sartorial capitalist finery, James was a most interesting and provocative thinker on the economic and the political. He remains, as do Balzac and Fitzgerald, with what has still to be brought into existence: unclass and un-capital. For at a disavowed level the text and author both work to create value that produces even more precarious capitalist if not non- or postcapitalist value. In the modern capitalist class struggle therefore *The Great Gatsby's* oscillations underscore if not exemplify the contradictions and paradoxes of the American aspiration that now circulates the globe. This attitude accords too to Balzac and James. The semblances and contradictions of capital (that it is in its aggressive accumulation, true authority, and power, et cetera) for Fitzgerald's imagination have become our own. Fitzgerald lyrically throws light on this vector of big capital and class; allegorically these have become so global that one may argue class capitalist globalization is a form of class-oriented Americanization.

Although Jay Gatsby wants some aspirational and inspirational kind of ego ideal, his regressive ego ideal leads to his destruction and ruin. The power of capital corrupts Gatsby, and in spite of his thuggishness, he gains the reader's sympathy. As Frédéric Lordon writes in a philosophical treatise, "it

is capital that can afford to wait things out” (18), which also applies to how capital outlives Gatsby’s life narrative. Therefore, is Gatsby merely an epiphenomenon? Is his life story about the competitive nature of life under an oligarchic economic class system? Gatsby’s literary magic derives not only from his epiphenomenal status, but also from his clandestine potentialities. His force derives from the sensitive and social fact that he shows what might be possible in our capitalist constellation if we could get our ideological values right. Gatsby’s problem is not one of a certain deficit in the spirit of steadfastness and courage (albeit he is a corrupted figure) but of what to do ideologically with the means of production at one’s disposal. Put simply, he needs a paradigm of a community of radical economic equals. The fetish effect of his love of Daisy, combined with his naïve confidence in the capacity of money to win her back, institutes staged spectacles such as his parties.

If one could channel Gatsby’s revolutionary energy, spirit, and commitment in new areas to free humanity, then new standards of equality might be glimpsed if not attained. Like the *pharmakon* wherein the poison may become the remedy, the toxicity that Gatsby represents could become the curative remedy. The British poet W.H. Auden underlines Fitzgerald’s take on money, which helps to explain the complicity the book and author have with the national if not the global ideology of capital, power, and class:

Around the twenties a new romantic attitude had formed in regard to money. Take the case of Scott Fitzgerald. In a naïve way Fitzgerald romanticized money; his wife required it (safer in the long run). But this did not work to Fitzgerald’s advantage as a writer. With all his endowment he should have written a great deal more, good as what he did write was. His feeling—for it was a feeling—about money is curious; he thought it made a man freer; that it made him more interesting.

(Griffin 82–83)

This constitutes one legacy in the history of capital that indexes how seductive and infectious a general belief can be without people actually believing in it.

What precisely is the status of American capitalism in this novel? With Žižek we may hypothesize that “poverty is not just a social fact but a wrong done to one class by another” (35). *The Great Gatsby’s* excesses of monetary wealth are allegorically part and parcel of the poverty of a fictionalized class capitalist era as well; a corporate model of the social body reveals this causality and phenomenality. Gatsby’s parties display, too, a certain vulgarity and moral-ethical catastrophe. This ties up with the brutalities, injustices, and exploitations committed by ruling-class power within the capitalist system’s egoistic and instrumental logic. Should we impute negative motives to Gatsby that harm his future? Carraway notes for one Gatsby out there, if not for all of them: “there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away” (Fitzgerald, *TGG* 2). Gatsby communicates something of the poetic, if not of the poet, and of the apocalyptic and messianic. The problem remains the evil nightmare dream to which he fastens himself. Carraway’s words about Gatsby’s “extraordinary gift of hope” (*TGG* 2) mediate the kind of perpetual self-revolution that capitalism performs on itself by constantly borrowing from the future. In a way, this movement and circulation of capital allegorically display how in late capitalism each older generation steals from the younger one. The same point could be said about Balzac’s and James’s narratives in circulation.

As for Gatsby’s fictionalized imaginary of the early 1920s, consider Žižek’s tack on capitalism’s historicity:

capitalism was progressive until the middle of the nineteenth century, when it had to be supported in its struggle against premodern forms of life, but with the aggravation of class struggle, capitalism became an obstacle to the further progress of humanity and will have to be overcome.

(474)

If true, what are the critical implications for the novel's cognitions and for thinking today? Paul Michael Levitt incisively argues that Fitzgerald's book delineates "a bitter class struggle. Tom Buchanan, Daisy Fay, and Jordan Baker constitute the old-moneyed rich ... Gatsby represents new money."

His feminine equivalent is the poor and lower-class Myrtle Wilson ... Both were born into poverty and have questionable relatives: Gatsby's father eats like a hog and used bad grammar; Myrtle's language marks her as unschooled, and her sister is a prostitute. Both are willing to use immoral means to improve their stations in life, Gatsby through the illicit sale of alcohol, Myrtle through sex. Both have execrable tastes ... Both are poseurs.
(261)

The solid realities of the commodity form remain unexamined for Gatsby. His designer shirts, uncut tomes, luxury home, and his use of linguistic exchange in the spectacle and show of his life embody this. Also evident here is the class conflict between old and new money in modern and postmodern economies of desire.

Levitt writes: "Wolfsheim introduces Gatsby to a get-rich-quick scheme, namely criminal capitalism and gangster economics. The classless and even-handed society advertised in handbills inducing immigrants to come to America proves to be a lie. A person ultimately needs 'gongneg-tions'" (260). The American aspiration has become the American descent downhill into darkness. An obscene and egoistic subtext of greed and aggression traverses the novel. Lucidly, Levitt writes, "just beneath the surface of each of the characters is another person, usually one made worse by the worship or acquisition of wealth" (262). Levitt builds on the early Marx of 1844 to aver "it never dawned on him that the more he obtains, the less he keeps of himself. This equation virtually defines Gatsby's quest; but it also holds throughout his world. Hardly a person escapes whoring" (262). The idea that universal prostitution is the end game of the capitalist show seems an undeniable progression of the system if the emergency break is not put on to halt its forward movement. Adds Levitt:

The tragedy of James Gatz is not that he abandoned honest (Horatio Alger, St. Olaf's) capitalism for dishonest (Wolfsheim) capitalism, but that he never envisioned an alternative to a class structure in which the rich grow richer, and the poor poorer.
(266)

Levitt closes thus:

neither recklessness nor rapacity killed Gatsby and Myrtle. They were victimized by their pasts. Without old wealth and family ties they were outclassed. Small wonder, then, that Fitzgerald is ruing the loss of an Edenic America and dreaming of a classless one.
(266)

In reproducing exploitation, Gatsby's narrative is a travesty, a lie, and a cruel instrument. Gatsby proves hollow in how he makes a commodity spectacle of himself, only to achieve a broken promise. He requires a way of thinking economic and existential experience beyond the stultifying class-suffused capitalist one. His interpreters give Gatsby/Fitzgerald a rich legacy by thinking beyond the class structure possibilities for organizing reality.

Even if all looking to the future is not harmful, and is in truth needed if we will survive in a future world, Nick's melancholic and wistful voice on the last page of *The Great Gatsby* suggests the gloomy, alienating ability of capital in the human imaginary to deny one's social symbolic substance and substantial content:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther ... And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

(180)

In a word, we continue to return to the past, but in an insufficiently radical way for a successful revisiting. This opportunity remains in wait with emancipatory potential.

The revolutionary version of the American aspiration in *The Great Gatsby* is to have another go at the composition of the self in another economy of non-class relations that would minimize these destructive and false power games and setups. The dream of a more rational, just, and free society that honors the call of the cultural riches of an egalitarian humanity would go in this value-oriented direction. Gatsby should retroactively and counterfactually be given by the reader's response the awareness befitting his courage and energy. His readers may give value and meaning to the economic and social disaster of class exploitation and problematic spectacle values. Capital's alienating and imperious abusive power merits such a response. Gatsby's individual social vanities need redressing and correcting. To sustain the glare, his readers may assert themselves in new ways in the labyrinth of reading and thinking today for another shared commons and for another experience of collective social symbolic life substance for common forms of life.

A miraculous reversal (such as the aforementioned Balzac story of the eponymous Ursule Mirouët) of the egoistic logic of the capitalistic system would be structurally necessary in a posited community of radical equals. The risk of this happening is not an increase in the development of a capitalist serfdom and a numbing and bruising of sensibility that would make the subject ever more servile, and so a servant, of its egotisms and coarse de-individualizing consumerism (even if consumers are deluded it is anything otherwise). Transformative thinking about class and capital would promote an exacting and active culture of freedom. What could be a finer tip of the hat to *The Great Gatsby*, which on some level Fitzgerald took as a confrontation with a passé American ideology of capitalism? When that sensual object named Daisy quips to that other sensual object Gatsby, "You resemble the advertisement of the man" (119) it teaches that Gatsby has passed out of his substantial content and into the world of advertising, publicity, and a culture of systemic lies. Is this not where we stand today? What needs reversing to upend the ongoing catastrophe of Gatsby's literary-cultural relays is to halt class exploitation and vain and useless values. Richard Godden notes relevantly here vis-à-vis Gatsby: "Fashion is always *disintegrative*; it aims to give us several selves, thereby providing capital with a diversification of markets" (21). Moreover, for the early Jean Baudrillard, "it is a class logic which imposes salvation by objects" (60).

Jordan quips to Daisy in Chapter 7, "Don't be morbid ... Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall" (118). If this apothegm is one basic lesson of *The Great Gatsby*, does the book not always begin again? Like the uncut pages of the books in Gatsby's library, a new world will issue from the separation of the folios. Everything for the novel's reader might similarly remain to be written both in word and in deed, in language and in action. Fitzgerald's novel longs for something beyond American capitalism, even if the novel must go through that logic in order to give birth to something new, because something radically revisited, revitalized, and transformed in the spirit of the *pharmakon* of writing. In short, Gatsby has class capitalist desire if not some drive on his side, but neither speaks to the reason nor to the moral-ethical of non-class and non-capital. Hence, he remains a tragically stunted figure.

In short, Balzac, James, and Fitzgerald all advance insights into the mechanics of class power and the phantasmagoria of forms of capital and power. Their texts furnish scenes in understanding our present history that highlight living in equilibrium with other sensible and intelligible life forms, even as digital technologies and cognitive science have become the new instruments of social engineering. Technologies make microorganisms sensible and thus relevant to art in ways

they could not be under prior regimes and means of production. Literary economics in narratives by our trio of writers as responses to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century capitalism serve as affective and conceptual resources for rethinking and regrounding digital twenty-first-century class capitalism.

Fitzgerald, James, and Balzac's work anticipates and underscores the inordinate importance that the economic holds in today's hierarchical and pseudo-globalized life. The money or economic myth also measures how people want, at whatever cost, a sense of belonging. But the situation is even more retrograde. An unprecedented new political form of authoritarian class capitalism emerges today, even as money cries for its lost relation with power for a distribution of newfangled egalitarianisms and equalities. The loss of our so-called cosmological margin (not center) has led to a centripetal world of big finance and big capital that constitutes a subtending immoral actuality. Freedom from money and power, i.e., capital also means liberation from, including identification with, class power. This is increasingly so in our homogenized and standardized world that exists to serve the interests of financial capital and the metaphysical project of more circulating global capital and consolidated class power. The biblical god has been in major retreat for six centuries now, which has contributed to how oligarchical money rules our financialized social multiverse as a replacement fetish (humans always need, à la Marx's commodity fetishism, fetishes to charge with social energy and power). We need to rethink finance capital from the bottom up. Class capitalism has become careworn and metastasized as a cancerous ideology because of an incapacity for it to be progressive without commodifying progressivism.

Consider what we do not know. Giorgio Agamben alludes in *The Fire and the Tale*:

to books that have not found what Benjamin called the time of their readability; books that were written and published but are—perhaps forever—waiting to be read. I know books that are worth reading but have not been read, or have been read by too few readers—I think all of you could name books of this kind.

(79–80)

James, Fitzgerald, and Balzac texts fit this description in formulating a new calculus for a possible future-oriented economy of conceptual and egalitarian non-capital forms of capital (simply shared communal wealth) for a society based not on the material exploitation of souls but on sharing and cooperation.

Although they cannot be said consciously to intend this, Balzac, James, and Fitzgerald's work in language informs our contemporary rhetorical situation about inequality, for they anticipate and express with the interpretive reader and critic the egalitarian concepts of non-capital and non-class, both of which help us approach a new social contract of radical equality for the twenty-first century. Non-capital is posterior to a global capitalist system for a post-capitalist commons. Non-capital is also capital that is anterior to capital when it starts to circulate. So, it is capital when we think about it critically, ethically, morally, and without damaging presuppositions as to its emancipatory potential and bounteous possibilities as a gift to and from the social body of the universalist commons in the service of a coalition toward a non-class world society in the biosphere.

Afterword

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