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A FEMINIST READING OF *THE GREAT GATSBY* BY F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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"American literature is the literature written or produced in the area of the United States and its preceding colonies. Most of this literature is written in the English language, much of it by men and women whose forebears came from the British Isle" (Fisher 1). It is said, "Until seventeenth century the word novel meant a short story of the kind written and collected by Boccaccio in his *Decameron*. Most historians and critics agree that novel made no permanent appearance on the literary scene until the late seventeenth century" (Rees 121).

F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century. He was born in the Midwest and began writing at a relatively young age. Even though he achieved limited success in his lifetime, he is now widely regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. His finished four novels are *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *Tender Is the Night* (1934). A fifth, unfinished novel, *The Love of the Last Tycoon* (1941), was published posthumously. Fitzgerald also wrote numerous short stories, many of which treat themes of youth and promise, and age and despair.

The Great Gatsby is a tale of luxury, lust, and deceit. In Long Island, New York, Nick Carraway lives next door to the mysterious Jay Gatsby, owner of a huge mansion and host of frequent and lavish parties. Although prohibition has made alcohol illegal, Gatsby always has a surplus available at his wild social gatherings. As Nick starts to spend more time with Gatsby, he begins to learn about Gatsby's past, his strange profession, and his love for Nick's cousin, Daisy. When Daisy and Gatsby meet after a long time, their past love is re-kindled. Nick gets to know that Daisy and Gatsby have already been in love and the reason for Gatsby's lavish parties and his visit to Long Island is to get her back.

Tom and Daisy Buchanan and their daughter named Pammy live on the other side of Long Island, opposite to Gatsby's. After many years Daisy meets Gatsby and they start to spend time together, which soon turns into an affair. Later when this is revealed to Tom, Daisy is made to choose between the two and she chooses Tom and leaves town. Meanwhile Tom's mistress Myrtle Wilson was hit by a car driven by Daisy and Gatsby was blamed. So Myrtle's husband George believes it to be Gatsby who killed his wife and shots him dead.

The story is narrated from the perspective of Nick Carraway, what he sees and hears makes the whole story. *The Great Gatsby* is a story that highlights the scandalous and risky nature of the roaring twenties. "Even after many decades, the relevance of *The Great Gatsby* increases because it is the definitive romance of the American dream, a concept or vision that haunts our society." (Bloom 7). In 1920 women were given the right to vote and this elevated the women's status in the society. Women were given freedom to break free from the patriarchal social norms regarding their dress and lifestyle. The novel, *The Great Gatsby* is set in 1920's, it shows how women used this new found freedom for their advantage as well as how women are seen as passive objects.

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social rights for women. This includes

seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. On the other hand, women are described by the way they look, what they wear, and their relationships to the men in their lives. They are considered as 'girls' and property for men. Sexual attractiveness is the key, which is based on appearance and charm.

The women in *The Great Gatsby* reflect the flapper culture of the 1920's in that they are somewhat hedonistic and unconventional people who like to enjoy themselves. Even though they have the freedom, it did not empower them enough to cross the class and economic lines as emphasized in the novel. In spite of numerous differences of female characters, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson, are all versions of the New Woman. Women share much of the focus that the men do in this book; however, they are not always shown in a positive light, and are often seen as negative things. Fitzgerald presents very contrasting roles for women in the novel, making distinct challenges to both flappers and the traditional woman.

From Daisy's perspective, she allows herself to be bought like a piece of property in an economic transaction. She chooses to marry Tom Buchanan, a misogynist and patriarch, and share in his wealth and status rather than wait for Jay Gatsby, her true, but poor former poor love. After becoming quite wealthy, Gatsby, a suspected criminal, moves to Long Island in an effort to buy Daisy back with his abundant wealth. This whole scenario runs contrary to the feminist ideal of women being able to provide for themselves. Daisy relies on men for her happiness and material success, as evidenced by the fact that she is married to one wealthy man while being courted by another. However, she is not really oblivious to her marital and social situation.

Daisy's bitterness and cynicism is signaled early in the novel as she expresses a devastating comment of women's position in society with reference to her daughter: "I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." (Fitzgerald 17). Daisy feels personally victimized by her world; there is a wounded ambition inside her. It seems like Daisy has begrudgingly accepted the lifestyle that she has been dealt with. Although she appears superficial at times, one should not dismiss the potential wisdom of her character. In many ways, the text quoted is autobiographical, despite the fact that Daisy is talking about her daughter.

She is described as the epitome of beauty and desirability. Daisy represents the stereotypical married wealthy woman of the 1920's. She consumes herself with shallow relationships and places her value as a person solely on her appearance. She is essentially an extension of and puppet for her husband with no real personal power or freedom. Daisy and Myrtle Wilson have a great deal in common both are dependent and attracted to Tom for his money. Tom uses them as a source of pleasure and status. To Gatsby, Daisy represents the unattainable American dream. Gatsby's newfound wealth is not enough to win Daisy back. It does not grant him the social stature that is possessed by old-money families, like Tom Buchanan's.

Myrtle Wilson, Tom Buchanan's mistress, is another example of females as property in *The Great Gatsby*. Tom even refers to Myrtle as 'his girl' when he talks about her to others. However, Myrtle is married to George Wilson, an auto mechanic. Their marriage failed because Myrtle is dissatisfied with their financial situation. He does not provide her with a life style of her desires. So as a means of escaping from her economically and emotionally unhappy marriage she looks it in another man to satisfy her needs.

Jordan Baker on the other hand is one of the more masculine female characters. She is a golfer; she's direct, honest, straight and very cynical. In moments where most women in that time would hold their tongue Jordan takes charge. She does not take anything from anyone however she is still a woman of 1920s, therefore she is still held back by the social standards those women were forced to live by. Though Nick attempts to exert control or power over Jordan, but she refuses to be controlled, leading to their relationships demise.

In conclusion the women characters in this novel are shown to be victims of social and cultural norms that they could not change. This paper dealt with women's position in *The Great Gatsby* with feministic approach. The fact that in patriarchal society women are regarded as objects to be sold and bought rather than one to be respected. The age of Jazz is an age where women's roles are subdued and dictated but still it led to a standard growth in feminist upraise.

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