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The Great Gatsby and the Unwelcome Entrance of the New Woman

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***Abstract*---**This paper examines the presentation of the "New Woman," the western woman after World War I, in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. New roles for women were not quickly accepted by the male-dominated society of the 1920s. The Great Gatsby, as a literary work originating from this time, reflects the ideological conflicts of Fitzgerald's culture, and it shows examples of the "New Woman" in multiple situations, presenting a largely negative viewpoint of social changes associated with gender. Regardless of Fitzgerald's personal point of view, this novel clearly shows his culture's discomfort with the image of the "New Woman" as it emerged after World War I and her new roles in society. The papers finds that Fitzgerald's narrative choice to focus his storytelling through a male perspective sets the tone for the cultural bias he illustrates, as he filters the female characters through a male point of view, normalizing this perspective as the default, valuable one. Examples of the "New Woman" in the three major female characters Daisy, Jordan, and Myrtle are all demonstrated as troubled beings who, despite the relative freedom that they enjoy, remain dependent on men.

***Keywords*---**class, The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald, New Woman, World War I, social change, gender roles.

Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was written in the 1925, after World War I. Maggie Froelich (2010) argues in her article "Jordan Baker, Gender Dissent, and Homosexual Passing in *The Great Gatsby*," that the novel depends on and depicts the biases of culture contemporary to its writing. Froehlich states: "We see such bias in narrator Nick Carraway's ruminations on class and on women, in the rumors of criminality surrounding the newly rich Jay Gatsby, and, most explicitly, in the racism, classism, anti-Semitism, and anti-immigrant sentiment espoused by Tom Buchanan, whose wealth, race, and gender position him as the

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voice of the dominant ideology" (p. 81). Among the social biases that the novel presents, the most provocative is the "rumination" on women, as Froehlich calls it. In the early twenties, social changes abounded in America, especially the new changes in women's roles in society. After World War I, the traditional roles of women as mothers, wives or daughters dramatically changed in the United States, with the "New Woman" experiencing more social and economic participation. Opportunities for women to work in order to earn their own money increased, and, in turn, this increased independence. Another change that also affected the role of women in American society was the shift towards urbanization and industrialization; a lot of families left farms to live in urban areas. Whereas opportunities for employment were greater in urban areas, the cost of living necessitated multiple incomes to feed a whole family. In her article, "The Changing Role of Women in American Society," Cynthia Harrison (1997) argues that "No change had a greater impact on women's roles than the transition from primarily an agricultural economy to a corporate, commercial, industrial one, a change that took place slowly over decades" (p. 10). Women were, definitely, part of the thousands of people who benefited from moving from rural to urban areas because they became part of the workforce. Harrison (1997) suggests that this was true across race boundaries and that by 1920, as much as nine percent of married women were employed outside the home, bringing in wages. Women's roles were changing, but, male-dominated society did not easily accept the roles of the New Woman. A distinct and forceful resistance to this change pervaded society, and, whether it was Fitzgerald's intention or not, *The Great Gatsby* reflects the ideological conflicts of his culture at that time. Since Fitzgerald figures the New Woman prominently in his novel, this might imply a certain level of acceptance of these changes, but his depictions are troubling in the ways that they critique the evolution of femininity, often demonstrating women as fragmented and dependent. This, in turn, presents a contemporary bias against the New Woman as a product of change.

The Great Gatsby dwells on the discomfort Fitzgerald's culture experienced with the image of the New Woman as it emerged after World War I and the new roles it defined in society. This discomfort is especially shown through the minor female characters of the novel. The novel is full of minor female characters who are identified by their activities and dress as the New Woman, and they are all shown as copies of one negative type. They are shown as betrayers, shallow-minded and revolting people, and exhibitionists. For instance, at Gatsby's parties there are hypocritical but "enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 40). In addition, Fitzgerald depicts many egoistical attention-seekers who are shown in different situations while they are drunk. Culture's discomfort with the New Woman is also shown in a more complex way through the major female characters such as Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson, all of whom exemplify the New Woman regardless of their various differences in marital status, social class, and personal appearance. Examining the New Woman requires some effort to explore their counterparts, the men who Fitzgerald illustrates interacting with his female characters, especially since Fitzgerald consistently seems to filter the female characters through the male perspective.

Methodology

This study traces the critical portrayal of women by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* by adopting a dual approach: One, examining the narratological instances that point towards the casting of the 'new woman' as a morally degraded being fit to be given a place subservient to societal patriarchs; and two, by critically analyzing gender studies on the novel. Long touted as an American classic by virtue of its chronicling of the changing American society and the great American dream touching the fairer sex, the idea of gender superiority (or inferiority) still remains a predominant motif amongst the lesser ones, such as, class consciousness, material achievement, race, and even environmentalism. Cain (2020) rightly notes that connecting this novel with the 'American Dream' is an odd practice indeed, given the fact that it runs contrary to the ideals of this dream which are equality, opportunity, success and happiness for all. The tag of 'classic' though is justified by all or most of these issues being still relevant to the American society even almost a hundred years later.

Fact and fiction are bound together in an indelible manner and *The Great* Gatsby is also no exception with striking biographical parallels. This study, accordingly, delves into the personal experiences of Fitzgerald with women, his opinions formed therefrom, as well as his reflections on the developments taking shape in the American society in the 1920s, which he uses to tell his story. In fact, the factual parallels are far too many to ignore, and from hence springs the claim of this study that the author realizes his self through the narrator and protagonist of the novel. For instance, both Nick and Fitzgerald hail from the Midwest region and are ill at ease in the east, the Ivy league education shared by both, and the unrequited love of the author and Nick, the narrator, killed in the bud for want of class equality. Then there is Gatsby, absorbed by his mad love that ultimately becomes his undoing. Subtly, Basu-Zharku (2011) calls it the two parallel worlds that show themselves in the novel: One, the real world seen through the eyes of the protagonist-narrator Nick Carraway, and the other, Gatsby's fantasy world.

The study therefore, juxtaposes biographical information with fictional content to highlight the author's deep despise for the 'new woman', his sense of angst and ennui at the new social order, and the almost cathartic exultation in his unabashed slaughter of the 'amoral' 'new woman'. Here also are reviewed other studies that critically examine Fitzgerald's views and portrayals of his women characters, which when read together with his expressed views on the subject, reveal the scornful clarity of the creative mind for the merging American woman of the 1920s.

In the following section, the study moves to a detailed reading of *The Great Gatsby*, and analyzes the author's conviction that strength of character and the 'new woman' are like two worlds that can never meet, and that no matter which woman it is or where, the thread that joins them is the lack of character. At the same time, the study expertly shows the author's sympathy for the American man who is not only wronged by the amoral womenfolk, but who still holds tight the staff of chivalry (as depicted in Gatsby's owning up of Daisy's crime on the wheel). The study thus establishes not only Fitzgerald's confounding sense of gender superiority, but also, his complete rejection of the changing social equations that

are apparently the bane of the American land. Or as Sciortino (2018) points out, in his rejection of it, Fitzgerald (inadvertently) displays the shallowness of the American dream as a kind of utopia that can never be attained.

Fitzgerald's New Woman

According to Frances Kerr (1996), Fitzgerald approaches his female characters with a bias towards the male, adopting a characteristically mainstream viewpoint that shows contempt for the women under the premise that they are inherently weak. In 1925, Fitzgerald wrote Marya Mannes that "women, and even intelligent women, haven't generally cared much for *[The Great Gatsby].* They do not like women to be presented as emotionally passive – as a matter of fact I think most women are" (Kerr, 1996, p. 406). Kerr also mentions that in 1935, Fitzgerald told his secretary Laura Cuthrie that "Women are so weak, really – emotionally unstable – and their nerves, when strained, break." Beginning with the premise that Fitzgerald thinks of women as weak and unstable can redirect our reading of some passages of *The Great* Gatsby. For example, in chapter eight of the novel, Nick Carraway, the narrator describes Daisy as functioning under a pretense of frivolous carelessness in her very social life. Carraway notes, that below the surface, she was both overwrought emotionally and without agency. Fitzgerald writes: "all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately — and the decision must be made by some force — of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality — that was close at hand" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 151). The helplessness bound up in emotion indicates that Nick presents Daisy as lost without a man. This passage occurs at time when Gatsby, her lover, was absent. She is depicted as unsafe and unstable; therefore, she goes out on "half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men" because she is in urgent need for a man to protect her. The ultimate example of feminine weakness in the novel is when Daisy strikes Myrtle Wilson while driving Gatsby's car. Gatsby steps forward to take the responsibility for her action. When Nick asks him whether Daisy was driving, Gatsby explains the situation, noting "When we left New York she was very nervous and she thought it would steady her to drive" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 143). Further, he comments on her indecisiveness at the moment of crisis, how she was unable to decide which direction to steer. Gatsby relates that he had reached for the wheel to help, but too late. This description makes clear that it is Daisy's gender which has caused the mishap, first through her emotional nervousness and then through her inability to decisively act in an emergency. Fitzgerald makes it clear that women are in a position to need conservatorship, that they are immature beings who because of inherent flaws are not able to take responsibility for their own actions. That leaves men with the natural obligation to take the blame for women's mistakes.

The significant element in Fitzgerald's negative appraisal of women in general is that it takes place during the age of the New Woman who aspires to social liberation. The weakness woman brings to the status of New Woman announces the danger of this development. Fitzgerald illustrates this through repeatedly unflattering depictions of such women. For example, he describes the young woman who "seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and…dances out alone on the canvas platform" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 41). In another place, he speaks of the drunk woman who "was not only singing, she was

weeping too," and her tears marked her face with "an inky color" when they "came into contact with her heavily beaded eyelashes" (p. 51). Then, there are the "four girls" who always arrive with Benny McClenahan. Nick says about them that:

They were never quite the same ones in physical person but they were so identical one with another that it inevitably seemed they had been there before. I have forgotten their names-Jaqueline, I think, or else Consuela, or Gloria or Judy or June, and their last names were either the melodious names of flowers and months or the sterner ones of the great American capitalists whose cousins, if pressed, they would confess themselves to be. (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 63)

In other words, these lookalike "four girls" who come with Benny McClenahan to Gatsby's parties lied about their names and biographies just to impress the people who they are meeting for the first time, showing how they depend on untruths. Women in *The Great Gatsby* are liars, but this trait is not exclusive to that gender; men lie too. Tony McAdams (2014) argues in his article "*The Great Gatsby* as a Business Ethics Inquiry" that "each character [in *The Great Gatsby*] is a 'liar' in some fundamental sense" (p. 654). McAdams points to Tom Buchanan maintaining a mistress, Daisy's coverup of her manslaughter of Myrtle Wilson, and the foundational motif of Gatsby's entire life as a lie. Obviously, what McAdams suggests here is that most of the characters are liars, and for that reason, Nick drawing attention to the subject, invoking judgment of gendered characters is unfair. Nick displays a personal prejudice in this, and this is presented as an extension of the prejudice of Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald incorporates the subject of truth into *The Great Gatsby*, where the narrator, Nick, describes himself as the most honest person he has ever known, establishing himself as a counterpoint for other characters in the novel. Later, when he talks about Jordan Baker, he describes her as "incurably dishonest" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 58). Far beyond that, Nick generalizes women as inherently dishonest: "Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply" (p. 58). In referencing Jordan Baker, again, Nick uses her to illustrate the nature of femininity. He tells the reader that he learned that Jordan had cheated on the first golf tournament she won and that he is not surprised to know that because, as he believes, this dishonesty is a genetic one that women should not be blamed for. This stance takes on special significance in relation to Fitzgerald's depictions of not just womanhood, but of the New Woman, acting as a specific social critique of recent cultural changes. Fitzgerald's story represents contemporary, mainstream ideas about the New Woman. Evidence from Fitzgerald's text, supported by Kerr's (1996) interpretation Fitzgerald's point of view about women, make it safe to argue that Fitzgerald's presentation of the "corrupted" image of the New Woman should be taken at face value as a direct statement of cultural valuation by the author.

The Bad Character of the New Woman

Fitzgerald demonstrates society's discomfort with the New Woman in his representation of the major female characters Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson, who, regardless of their various differences in marital status, social class, and personal appearance, all exemplify the New Woman. Although two of

them, Daisy and Myrtle, are married, they do not keep their unhappy marital lives secret, and they try to break the irons of their unhappiness by embracing acts to change it. While they fit together in this way, Fitzgerald maintains distinctions of individuality for both Daisy and Myrtle. They are similar in the fact that they both seek their needs, defined through money and status, but they are also distinct. Rena Sanderson (2002) states in her article "Women in Fitzgerald's Fiction" that "Readers familiar with Fitzgerald's earlier fiction will immediately recognize Daisy as Fitzgerald's golden girl and Myrtle Wilson as the lower-class sexualized woman" (p. 155). That may be superficially justifiable, but Daisy and Myrtle are both portrayed as betrayers and money seekers who would sacrifice love and loyalty for the sake of money and social elevation. Fitzgerald creates a more positive position in the reader's mind about Daisy, making her character much brighter than that of Myrtle, but this difference remains relatively superficial, as the author inserts no elements to show any moral difference between them. Fitzgerald depicts Daisy as keeping "half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 151) in order to guarantee that she gets married, and the crux of *The Great Gatsby* is that she sacrificed her love for social status when she married Tom Buchanan and did not wait for Gatsby. This is not significantly different than what happened with Myrtle Wilson, the only real distinction being that Myrtle occupies a separate class than that of Daisy Buchanan. As a "lower-class sexualized woman," (Sanderson, 2002, p. 155) Myrtle seeks to uplift her social status by being a rich man's mistress. By doing that, she sacrifices the love and loyalty of her husband as Daisy did.

Although Daisy is not emotionally satisfied as Tom Buchanan's wife, she does not consider her sacrifice of Gatsby's love a drawback; instead, this choice is conveyed as an intelligently reasoned one because she abandoned her heart to follow what the logic suggests, getting married to an upper-class man. When she talks to Nick about the time she gave birth to her daughter, Pammy, she says that she wept when she learned that she gave birth to a girl. When she had finished crying, Daisy told herself: "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, 2004, p. 18). These lines indicate some of the usual indecisiveness Fitzgerald associates with the feminine; Daisy's feelings are confused. She says that she turned her head away and wept when she learned that she gave birth to a girl, and then says that she is "glad it's a girl." Interestingly, Daisy says that she hopes her baby girl will be fool because she thinks that it is "the best thing a girl can be in this world." This adds another level of confusion to what she says because the terms she uses are ambiguous. Daisy might be suggesting that the best thing a girl can be in this world is to be fool and follow her heart regardless of the social and economic consequences of her decision. This indicts her own "cleverness" in choosing to marry Tom and seek social status through relationships. However, another reading of the same statement might suggest that Daisy is saying that the best thing a girl can be in this world is fool enough to not recognize how bad her life in this world is. Confusion and indecision carry on in Daisy's later relationship with her child, adding further critique of the New Woman. Daisy is demonstrated to be an affectionate mother, calling her daughter a "dream," promoting self-esteem in the girl by pointing to her perfection (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 117). Yet, her interactions with her child occur circumstantially, even accidentally, and this must send a very different message to Pammy about how

her mother feels about her. Daisy's "freedom" to do as she will is invariably selfish.

The social discomfort with the freedom of the New Woman is also shown in *The Great Gatsby*'s unsympathetic display of female characters who exercise freedom. Sanderson (2002) quotes Fitzgerald's own opinion that the novel has no important female character, but contrasts this by emphasizing how "Daisy Buchanan occupies a prominent place within the American literary tradition that features females of questionable morality" (p. 154). The moral ambiguity of Daisy is rather obvious from her choices in allying with Tom Buchanan and from her actions as an unprincipled killer. When she hits Myrtle, she doesn't stop to help her, but she speeds off and lets the blame fall on Gatsby. Yet, Daisy's character is sophisticated in its complexity in Fitzgerald narrative. On the one hand, she is the pure, beautiful, charming creature who has that voice "with its fluctuating, feverish warmth… a deathless song" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 96). For Gatsby, she cannot be anything else but the dream that he has always wanted to achieve. She is the past for him, the future that he dreams of, but she is never the present, the real. On the other hand, Daisy is practically shown as the one who loves to be the center of attention and only cares about her own needs and neglects others. Therefore, when she learns that Gatsby is not from an appropriately high and desirable social status, she abandons him and runs to the wealth and status of Tom Buchanan. Her presence in the novel is torn between Gatsby's idealized, romantic vision of her and Tom Buchanan's materialistic vision of her. Although she is married to Tom, she is still that ideal beautiful girl whom Gatsby loved and will continue to do so, but for Tom, we do not see her as more than a valuable object among his materialistic belongings. Fitzgerald offers no evidence that any romantic relationship exists between her and Tom, except the fact that they have a daughter of their own.

Beyond the triangle of Tom, Gatsby, and Daisy, Fitzgerald also shows Daisy primarily as an object of lust for the male characters at large, even her own male relatives, and this justifies and normalizes Tom's view of her, making it part of a wider cultural pattern. For example, when Nick describes her in the first chapter, his approach to her gives the impression that she and the narrator experience some kind of unusual relationship between them. Nick says:

I looked back at my cousin who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth--but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered 'Listen,' a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour. (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 9)

Speaking of his own cousin, this is a very intimate and romantic appraisal, but its suggestiveness remains purely theoretical through the novel. However, Nick's lustful description of Daisy might be a technique used by Fitzgerald to give the readers the impression that Daisy's beauty is the kind that any man may dream of; coming from her cousin, this makes the reduction of Daisy's personhood to

sexual appeal a universal. In turn, this lines up with Fitzgerald's broad dismissal of the significance of his female characters and his pointed dismissal of woman and the New Woman in his contemporary culture.

This dismissal is illustrated especially in Daisy. Regardless of the fact that Daisy is demonstrably the main female character in *The Great Gatsby*, her emotional side is never deeply explored. That emotional side is implied to a certain extent by the past romantic relationship she had with Gatsby before she married Tom Buchanan. That is correct, but from the given facts of the novel, readers get to know how much Gatsby loves her, but practically nothing about her feelings towards him. She is presented as a seeker of marriage shelter and the fact that she starts looking for other men and keeps "half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men" proves it. Fitzgerald refrains from exploring Daisy's feelings, and this sends a message about this aspect of her as a New Woman, suggesting that these feelings are either inchoate, non-existent, or not worth mentioning. This message is supplemented by Daisy's objectification through the novel, the places in which she is introduced as a decorative figure among the valuable objects of the fancy house of Tom Buchanan. Early in the novel, Nick describes this home and Daisy's part in it:

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor. (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 8)

In these lines, Daisy and Jordan Baker are described by their physical appearance, becoming decorations in the room. They are described as if they are two antiques or some other valuable objects and nothing defines them as human beings except the word "women." The inanimate nature of the women in this scene is emphasized by the contrast of Tom's loud, decisive, masculine action. Feelings are clearly absent in describing Daisy's marriage to Tom Buchanan which is depicted as more of a property exchange than of romantic union between two lovers. In chapter four, Jordan tells Nick about Daisy's background prior to her marriage, saying:

She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville. She dressed in white and had a little white roadster and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young officers from Camp Taylor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night, "anyways for an hour!" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 74).

Jordan interprets Daisy's life according to romantic standards, reading her actions positively. However, as Froehlich (2010) explains, "Daisy's life, being courted by military men and wealthy men from cities like Chicago and New Orleans, 'seemed romantic' and glamorous to the sixteen-year-old Jordan, so she

is understandably traumatized by Daisy's behavior the night before her wedding, which reveals to Jordan the truth about marriage in a patriarchal capitalist society" (p. 96). Perhaps Daisy has sold out her feelings, or, perhaps the feelings were never really present. In either case, the implication, here, is that Jordan is learning something about the nature of the New Woman, something which will become a model for her.

Although the main female character in *The Great Gatsby* is Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker is still important in presenting the image of the New Woman in the novel. She is a professional golfer, and this pursuit is unusual enough at this time to make her noteworthy since female athletes of any type were a novelty early in the twentieth century. Moreover, she is an essential link between the past of Nick and Daisy and their present; she is the one who tells Nick of their engagement before the war. However, Froehlich (2010) argues that "Jordan seems unremarkable, often indistinguishable from other women, particularly from Daisy" (p. 87). This is certainly true since Jordan and Daisy are just as indistinguishable from home décor too, according to the narrator. Regardless of the passive, chaotic, unreasoning nature of women in Fitzgerald's portrayal, the single detail of Jordan's athletic profession does announce her position as a New Woman. However, her sameness on all other accounts might be a critique where Fitzgerald suggests that there is nothing in the New Woman worth mentioning. He does not show her as if she is having an interesting life; she is clearly not being set up as a model to urge other women who are still of a traditional role to follow in her path. She remains bland and static; her characteristics are unchangeable to the extent that Fitzgerald does not even change the colors of her clothes. In the first chapter of the novel, Nick sees her and Daisy sitting in the Buchanan's house while "they were both in white" dresses (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 8), and again, in the seventh chapter he sees them lying "weighing down their own white dresses against the singing breeze of the fans" (p. 115). Moreover, Jordan's physical appearance has a similar static sensibility. When Nick first sees her, he thinks that he has seen her in a picture before and later, he confirms this, noting that her "pleasing contemptuous expression had looked out at me from many rotogravure pictures of the sporting life" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 18). The continuity from photo to reality suggests her physical appearance being static. Froehlich (2010) states that even Jordan's "language seems innocuous, indistinct" (p. 88). If the negatives associated with Daisy do not make a case against the New Woman, then neither does the inanimate, static Jordan make any case for it.

Fitzgerald's depiction of women reaches a nadir in the characterization of Myrtle Wilson, the most unsympathetic among the three major female characters. She is shown as an unpleasant and deceitful wife. This appears in her behavior at the party at the apartment Tom keeps for their meetings. She cheats on her husband, George, who is loyal to her, and she humiliates him as well. Moreover, she does not have the youth or beauty of Daisy or Jordan, elements which are used to mollify the negatives of those characters. Nick says about her, "She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout," and continues to describe her face by saying that it "contained no facet or gleam of beauty" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 25). Furthermore, she is shown as more sexual than Daisy and Jordan. This is clear in Nick's description of her when he and Tom show up at George's garage. Nick says: "She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost,

shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye. Then she wet her lips and without turning around spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 25). In these lines, Nick describes how deceitful Myrtle is, and how, contrarily, her husband is good and obeying. She is either so sexual that she cannot control her desires even in front of her husband, or she is a fool who does not know how to behave properly in such dangerous circumstances. Neither options speak terribly well of Myrtle as yet another example of the New woman.

Myrtle further demonstrates her lack of good judgment when she relates how she immediately took up with Tom after just meeting him, painting a picture of herself as being driven entirely by sexual desire. Needless to say, both the past action she describes and her choice to share this with a new acquaintance says much about her. She tells Nick:

It was on the two little seats facing each other that are always the last ones left on the train. I was going up to New York to see my sister and spend the night. He had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes, and I couldn't keep my eyes off him, but every time he looked at me, I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head. When we came into the station, he was next to me, and his white shirt-front pressed against my arm, and so I told him I'd have to call a policeman, but he knew I lied. I was so excited that when I got into a taxi with him, I didn't hardly know I wasn't getting into a subway train. All I kept thinking about, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever.'" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 36)

Fitzgerald has Myrtle indict herself with her own words for the reader's judgment. When she meets Tom for the first time, she stares at him because she likes his expensive suit and shoes, and off the train, he looms close enough to touch her, but Myrtle makes no mention of him speaking to her So, the start of their affair is accomplished through visual broadcast and body language, emphasizing the animal nature of their connection. Myrtle takes up with Tom after an instinctual display of his masculinity. Of course, Tom, at some point, tells her about his name and that he is married, but he fools her again by telling her that he cannot leave his wife because she is Catholic, and Myrtle is willing to bow to this fiction. She makes presumptions about her relationship with Tom, but unexpectedly, when she speaks his wife's name, he shows her his aggressive nature by breaking her nose. Myrtle confronts Tom, displaying more poor judgment, declaring: "I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai –" (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 37). Just as in their initial meeting, Tom's response to her is physical. Nick says: "Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand." Myrtle pushes for her own rights, her own authority, but she depends on rules of protection which are peculiar to traditional relationships between the sexes. Her status as a New Woman leaves her without any recourse to chivalry. She has nothing more than words while Tom, as a man, has the power to strike by action, this time with his fists.

Class is a central consideration in Myrtle's pursuit of Tom. She thinks that she married beneath her, and she always speaks about lower-class people as if she is not one of them. In the meeting apartment, Nick describes the way in which Myrtle speaks condescendingly about the guy who she asked to bring some ice:

“Myrtle raised her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders” (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 32). To prove that she was something of different order, Nick notes how Myrtle staged her exit from the group. He says: “Then she flounced over to the dog, kissed it with ecstasy, and swept into the kitchen, implying that a dozen chefs awaited her orders there” (p. 32). Myrtle demonstrates a commonality with the central character, Gatsby, her dissatisfaction about her own class. The only difference between her and Gatsby is that he is a tragic hero while she, as Fitzgerald portrays her, is a foolish, greedy woman. The reason behind this difference might be that Gatsby’s desire for class elevation was motivated by love while Myrtle’s was motivated by greed. Alternatively, Fitzgerald might be depicting the difference as inherent to the difference in their genders: Gatsby is portrayed as a hero because he is a man while Myrtle is portrayed as a ridiculous, greedy, cheating and shallow-minded character because she is a New Woman, one who is reaching beyond limits Fitzgerald considers natural for her gender.

Conclusion

All the female characters in *The Great Gatsby* prioritize excitement and enjoyment as an expression of their freedom and independence, and this is presented as contradictory to the traditional life of home. Daisy is shown as a beautiful, Jordan as an unusual woman because she practices a manly sport, and Myrtle is shown as an unpleasant low-class mistress. All the female characters who represent the New Woman share the same unpleasant common characteristics, and this presents a consistent and holistic view from Fitzgerald on the subject of women and the New Woman.

Finally, *The Great Gatsby*'s discomfort with the New Woman, cultural changes in expectations for femininity after World War I, proves that the novel represents or reflects a negative cultural ideology of the time in which it was written. Feminist criticism specially concerned itself with the stereotypical representations of the genders and their roles, and how literature reinforces the oppression of women. Expertly, Fitzgerald represents three types of the ‘new woman’ emerging in his times through the three women characters. Karlsson (2019) notes that the outcomes of the new women’s rights movements in Fitzgerald’s contemporary America are, one, the foregoing objectified womanhood in domestic life; two, the socially and financially independent woman; and three, the sexually liberated woman. Fitzgerald’s paints the New Woman as a careless mother, drunk, unprincipled killer, and deceiver who has extramarital affairs are the best examples to prove his negative outlook towards the New Woman. Even with their newfound freedom, however, Kynaston (2019) notes how Fitzgerald subtly injects the idea that the patriarchal norms still rule the roost as much as the ruling class, aptly denoted by the tragic end of the very much dispensable Myrtle. In addition, Fitzgerald takes care to portray the devastating results of the freedom of the New Woman, regardless of her social class. This makes *The Great Gatsby* a cautionary story, warning that any woman who wants to be free in the same way will suffer a similar fate and remain beyond the sympathy of society, or as *Bozorgimoghaddam and Moeen (2014) articulate it, when the world itself is a ‘masculine word’ in Fitzgerald’s novel, there is little space for the ‘Second Sex’.*

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