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Are they all victims?
An analysis of Myrtle, Daisy, Gatsby
and Tom in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The
Great Gatsby*

Elisabeth Kynaston
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Centre for Languages and Literature
Lund University
Supervisor: Kiki Lindell

Abstract

Patriarchal ideologies, gender equality and the conflict between the old and modern ways of life have always been topics of discussion in contemporary society. In 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*, when patriarchal ideologies were dominant in American society and American literature. Additionally, there is an ambivalence showing that although times were changing, the gender stereotypes and classes depicted by both male and female characters in Fitzgerald's novel appear to prevail. By applying theories of feminist and post-colonial criticism, it can be suggested that although it seems that the characters in the novel embrace the social changes by being depicted as the "New Woman" or as an advocate for the American dream, they still follow the rules of the patriarch and are submissive to the ruling class. The purpose of this essay is to discuss how men and women in *The Great Gatsby* realistically conduct their lives during a time of social development. Many scholars have previously written their concerns regarding these issues although this essay will deal with how men and women in *The Great Gatsby* are all victims and that despite the liberating times and post-colonial attitudes what can be considered "the other" prevails.

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1. Introduction

Considering the values of American society in the year of 2020, it is safe to say that the population as a group is both in unity and disagreement regarding thoughts on social, economic and political change. If we go back a hundred years we can see a similarity regarding the American population during the 1920s. When F. Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby* in 1925, American society was filled with radical change and after the First World War attitudes towards traditional values changed for many. The American economy was booming, working hours went down and there were plenty of jobs so people got more pay. Inventions like the telephone, the car, and the hoover entered Americans' daily life. More and more people moved from the countryside into the cities. Prohibition was passed and that led to a new way of meeting. Speakeasies welcomed people from different classes, race and religion. The 19th amendment was passed by congress which at last gave both sexes the right to vote. Women's role in society started to change and more and more women worked. The Americans started to create their own identity with the help of music, celebrities, literature and movies and the concept of the American dream. Many agree that F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is one amongst many American novels that is about the American identity that emerged after World War One. Examples of other novels that have played a part in creating the American identity include Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. The American dream is also a part of America's identity and it is as Jim Cullen writes in his book, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*, based on Christian values that have later evolved and developed, meaning that there are several different dreams. Why the American Dream is such a big part of America's identity is that the Dream is based on The Declaration of independence, later the Constitution.

The patriarchal roles in society were what the young generation rebelled against in 1920s' America. The Flapper emerged and new liberal views on women developed. In this essay, I will include an overview of the 1920s' New Woman and the Flapper, followed by an analysis and discussion of Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. I will focus on how the two female characters react to the patriarchal roles prevailing in the society in which they live and in doing so I will use the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, which focuses on myths and expectations of the female sex and the concept of othering. I will also use Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, which focuses on the concepts of "the other", "us and them" and post-colonial theory.

I will use the economic theory of Thorstein Veblen to study the different social classes and how they interact with one another. And I will also use Nietzsche's ideas of civilisation to further understand the characters Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan. The American Dream will also be part of the discussion trying to show how the dream is always an important part of American identity. Finally, the purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how Daisy, Myrtle, Gatsby and Tom embrace the liberating times of 1920s' America however they still are inevitably bound by the patriarchal structures and upper class values doomed for death, submissiveness and decline.

2. The New Woman and The Flapper

In 1920s' America, society went through many drastic changes. After the end of The First World War the younger generation started to see the world and their society differently. They started to question and challenge Victorian manners and patriarchal gender roles which resulted in the 1920s becoming known as the "Roaring Twenties". To clarify the changes that happened I will turn to Linda De Roche's book *The Jazz Age*, where she explains that the group which was most eager to embrace those changes were women. Although the "new woman" had been evolving since the late 19th century, Roche states that "the Jazz Age accelerated her transformation into the flapper" (xviii). The Flapper was a symbol of the New Woman. They bobbed their hair, disregarded the corset, wore looser dresses and raised their hemlines. The flappers also allowed themselves to smoke and drink in public where they also "flaunted their sexuality" (Roche, xvii).

In the novel, we can see the ambivalence F. Scott Fitzgerald felt towards the Flapper and by reading Fitzgerald's personal letter to Edmund Wilson in Brucoli's collection, *Life in Letters*, we can understand the ambivalence he felt towards her. In his letter Fitzgerald writes: "If I had anything to do with creating the manners of the contemporary American girl I certainly made a botch of the job" (110). The Flapper was loud, outrageous, flirty and always challenged the patriarchal system which was of course the society Fitzgerald himself belonged to. Perhaps Fitzgerald felt that he encouraged the behaviour which was contrary to his own values. In order to illustrate how Fitzgerald describes the New women or the Flapper in the novel, I shall quote Nick as he sees four girls who have just arrived at Gatsby's party:

Benny McClenahan arrived always with four girls. 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, 40)

I would suggest that Fitzgerald belittles these women through Nick's voice. Nick is not able to identify them when they walk in the room and furthermore does not remember their real names. Additionally, Nick consistently speaks negatively of the Flapper, looking down on her and making her seem less important. Nick continues in this view through the whole novel. Some questionable examples of the descriptive words he uses for the Flapper are: "uncontrollable laughter", "slender worldly girl" or she "laughed immoderately" (20, 31). Even here we see how he describes the Flapper as uncontrollable, worldly and immoderate. Nick does not seem to approve of the women's emerging personality that comes with being a Flapper.

The Flapper had a reason for why she chose to look a certain way. Among other things, the bobbed haircut, her loose dress and her raised hemline was to become a symbol of the political and social development which emerged during the early 19th century. Roche writes: "In 1920, after all, with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, women had finally attained the right to vote, and they were increasingly taking their place in the workforce rather than keeping the homefires burning" (xviii). Nowhere in the novel is there any evidence that Daisy Buchanan or Myrtle Wilson, keeping in mind that they come from different classes, are taking an active part in the women's suffrage movement. However, there is a great deal of evidence showing how they play the role of a traditional housewife with no apparent income of their own. I would not go as far as saying that they are keeping the "homefires burning" but they are certainly not portrayed as living an independent life.

Nick Carraway recollects that he "had a glimpse of Mrs Wilson straining at the garage pump with panting vitality as we went by" (Fitzgerald, 44). Mrs Wilson, Myrtle helps out at the garage just as she would be expected to help on the farm or with household chores. Daisy on the other hand lives an idle life, a life full of leisure without any chores to attend. In the beginning of the novel, Nick's description of Daisy when he meets her is of a woman lying, stretching out leisurely in an enormous sofa together with her friend Jordan. Nick says: "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” (7). The social changes that meant that women from all classes were able to redefine their lives, as Linda De Roche explains, meant that “with their political and economic independence they redefined the gender roles and expectations with which they had grown into adulthood and made a fashion statement to mark the change” (xviii).

To state that Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson redefined their lives in this way would not be accurate. They have both joined the ranks when it comes to fashion, drinking and a freer sexual existence, but when it comes to real change they prefer or at least adhere to some of the past Victorian manners. Rena Sanderson’s interpretation of Glenda Riley’s, *Inventing the American woman*, in her essay “Women in Fitzgerald’s fiction”, explains how the life in the Victorian era was divided into two spheres, the public, economic sphere run by men, and the private, domestic sphere run by women. “Charged with maintaining the home as a safe-haven for their husbands and children, women were expected to embody the qualities of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness” (qtd Sanderson, 144). While piety and domesticity might not be something our characters practice, they are concerned with staying pure as we can see when Nick reflects: “So Tom Buchanan and his girl and I went up together to New York- or not quite together, for Mrs Wilson sat discreetly in another car”, or when Nick asks Tom if, Myrtle's husband does not mind her having an affair he replies: “Wilson? He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York” (Fitzgerald,18). I would suggest that Myrtle Wilson is concerned about keeping up the appearance of being pure while she also embraces the new modern life of the 1920s. Both characters realise that they must remain submissive in order to not just survive, but to keep their places as wives and, in Daisy’s case, also as a mother.

3. The Great Gatsby

3.1. Myrtle – The vital and exuberant woman

Before we meet Myrtle for the first time, Fitzgerald sets the scene of the “Valley of Ashes” where she lives with her husband George Wilson (17).

I followed him over a low whitewashed railroad fence, and we walked back a hundred yards along the road under Doctor Eckleburg’s persistent stare. The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it, and contiguous to absolutely nothing. One of the three shops it contained was for rent and another was an all-night restaurant, approached by a trail of ashes; the third was a garage—Repairs. George B. Wilson, Cars bought and sold. — and I followed Tom inside. (17)

In his collection of essays *Nation and Narration*, theorist Homi Bhabha explores the way authors have used narrative strategies to construct an image of their nation. It is of importance to point out the fact that Nick is not speaking of a nation. However, he does speak about the working-class by describing the surroundings. I would suggest that there is a parallel between Fitzgerald’s narrative strategies and Bhabha’s research given the clear distinction of nation and class. Through Nick’s voice, Fitzgerald uses the narrative to construct an image of class through surrounding and by using this narration, Fitzgerald creates a notion of how Nick Carraway believes the working class to be. Here we can draw parallels with Fitzgerald’s description of the Flapper. There is not one positive description of the “valley of ashes” and its surroundings are dusty, dim and grey and the scene is set with the notion of boredom according to both Nick and Myrtle.

When Myrtle Wilson makes her entrance, she is, from the moment Nick lays eyes on her, an object to him as he describes her “thickish figure”, her body being “faintly stout” and that she “carries her flesh sensuously” (17). One could suggest that he views Myrtle with a post-colonial eye. Although one could argue that a more appropriate theory to use may be a feminist approach, I would suggest that even the post-colonial theory would be suitable to use as I analyse Myrtle. If we apply the post-colonial theory to Myrtle, we see how Nick describes Myrtle Wilson like an echo from the colonizer that exploits the exotic female, the dark and sensuous woman, “the other” or the “us and them” as Edward Said puts it in his book

Orientalism (9). Lois Tyson writes in her book, *Critical Theory Today, A User Friendly guide*: “Patriarchal subjugation of women is analogous to colonial subjugation of indigenous populations” (405). Coming from the same patriarchal background, Nick and Tom could therefore be seen as the coloniser who views Myrtle as the exotic, sensuous female.

Myrtle’s vitality and exuberance, her excitement and aspiration to do better, to have more, and her pursuit of happiness, are all part of what Jim Cullen would call the ever changing American dream. According to Cullen, the dream was initially based on religious themes but gradually evolved into a dream for individuals who dreamt about social change and financial opportunities. James Truslow Adams’ *The Epic of America* discusses the American dream, which according to him, is just a dream; a dream where everybody has a chance to live a richer and fuller life regardless of their social status at birth (404). In Fitzgerald’s novel, Myrtle dreams of a life filled with prosperity, an abundance of consumer goods, love, sex and excitement. There was a time when her husband George Wilson was a part of her dream but now that dream has changed. Wilson’s fight for his and Myrtle’s survival is of no interest to Myrtle. Her dream is materialistic, meaning that she dreams of upward mobility and an abundance of consumer goods. Cullen writes that the American dream has changed over time. The Dream was originally based on religious themes, but over time it gradually becomes a dream of social and financial gain and the dream of personal fulfilment (Cullen, 8-9). When Myrtle’s sister Catherine reminds her of how she used to feel about her husband “You were crazy about him for a while” we sense that Wilson was once part of her dream (Fitzgerald, 24). However, Wilson now fails to fulfill her dream of happiness and Myrtle moves on, moving forward never stopping to hope and aspire for something better, something richer and above all more exciting.

Myrtle is what Menken would categorize as the first caste: that of the rulers. “Its members accept the world as they find it and make the best of it” and “these individuals of the first caste are the creators of their own values and pay no heed to law and conventions” (qtd Lena, 28). Myrtle shows no remorse whilst cheating on Wilson. We see this in the novel as she recalls her first meeting with Tom on the train to New York and says:

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, 24)

Wilson is no longer part of her dream; she needs him only as an escape route if her glittery life with Tom ends and in that respect, she is bound to the patriarchal society with its rules of marriage and the need for submissiveness to keep her place and to be cared for. Fitzgerald does not describe Myrtle as politically and economically independent. Fitzgerald writes about Myrtle's aspect of the American dream as a dream of "personal fulfillment" and to her the Flapper only embodies consumerism, partying, free sex and taking as much you can as fast as possible. In an interview in 1922, Fitzgerald asserted: "Our American women are leeches. They're an utterly useless fourth generation trading on the accomplishments of their pioneer great-grandmothers. They simply dominate the American man" (Brucoli, 256). Fitzgerald has portrayed this idea of the non-submissive, domineering woman in Myrtle. When Tom tells her to stop mentioning his wife's name, instead she shouts "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!" and "I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai-", the only way to stop her is for Tom to break her nose (Fitzgerald, 25). Could that be the reason why Myrtle gets killed in the end? Fitzgerald's ambivalent feelings towards the Flapper, his own creation, at least in literature, was that something he wanted to kill? When Wilson decides that they should move West "I've got my wife locked in up there, explained Wilson calmly. "She's going to stay there till the day after tomorrow, and then we're going to move away" (87). However, Myrtle will not obey the patriarchal control and refuses to be submissive and that is what kills her. One could argue that if she had obeyed to her society's traditional patriarchal roles she would have been allowed to survive.

3.2. A sad song for Daisy

The features of Daisy Buchanan's home described by Gatsby's amazement gives us an image of where Daisy comes from and the luxurious lifestyle she is used to living. Gatsby was amazed by the beauty of the house together with the fact that Daisy lived there. He told Nick that:

There was a ripe mystery about it, a hint of bedrooms up-stairs more beautiful and cool than other bedrooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through its corridors, and of romances that were not musty and laid away already in lavender, but fresh and breathing and redolent of this year's shining motor-cars and of dances whose flowers were scarcely withered. (Fitzgerald, 94)

By presenting the comfortable, lively and luxurious ambience of Daisy's childhood home Fitzgerald shows a clear distinction between her and Gatsby's upbringing regarding wealth and prosperity. As a young girl, I would suggest that Daisy did not have much to worry about regarding financial stability, love problems or whether she could enjoy leisure time with friends. Jordan Baker tells Nick about Daisy as a young girl before she ever met Tom Buchanan or Jay Gatsby for the first time. Jordan says: "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" (48).

By analysing Jordan's comments about a younger Daisy, it is indicated that she did not have much to worry about as a young girl. She was as popular as she was pure; she was admired by many people and surrounded by young officers trying to steal her heart, leading to a very energetic and vibrant life. Daisy's life however changed as she got older. Jordan explains to Nick how in the year nineteen-seventeen there were rumours going around about Daisy and how she wanted to travel to New York to wave off a soldier, who later turned out to be Jay Gatsby. According to Jordan, Daisy's family prevented her from going away and for a few weeks Daisy was not on speaking terms with her family. However not long after, Daisy was happy again and a few months after she was ready to marry another man, Tom Buchanan. In her book *The Second Sex*, about history of feminism, Simone de Beauvoir discusses "The Girl". De Beauvoir states:

[the girl] has always been convinced of male superiority; this male prestige is not a mirage; it has economic and social foundations ... everything convinces the adolescent girl that it is in her interest to be their vassal; her parents prod her on; the father is proud of his daughter's success, the mother sees the promise of a prosperous future. (395)

We cannot be certain of Daisy's past or be certain of her family's values concerning her. However, there could be a possibility that her family did not approve of Daisy running off to New York risking that she would stay with Gatsby. De Beauvoir writes about how the girl and in this case Daisy is to marry someone for economic and social reasons. Did Daisy's parents possibly have had an idea of who Gatsby was, knowing that he was not fit to marry their daughter and therefore preventing her from going? It is of importance to recognise that although Daisy did not agree with her parents about going to New York, she did as she was told in the end. De Beauvoir continues by stating how the parents' expectation for the girl is that she should be there for her future husband. By applying these theories to Daisy, we can see how Daisy has freedom before she gets to the age where she falls in love with Gatsby. She tries to not speak to her family after being forced to stay home although after a few weeks she decides to move on with her life and she is, according to Jordan, "gay again, gay as ever" (Fitzgerald,49). De Beauvoir continues by stating that "Marriage is not only an honorable and less strenuous career than many others; it alone enables woman to attain her complete social dignity and also to realize herself sexually as lover and mother" (De Beauvoir, 396). After a few months, Daisy is suddenly married to Tom Buchanan. I would suggest that considering De Beauvoir's theories of how a girl's parents could steer the girl into marriage, Daisy similarly was manipulated into marrying Tom in the end.

The example above shows how Daisy is submissive to her parents' choices regarding her own life, although now that she is married to Tom Buchanan her submissive state continues with him. I will further show how Daisy expresses her submissiveness and her accepted fate of being compliant to the patriarchal society by giving a specific example from *The Great Gatsby* as Daisy talks to Nick about her child and the day she was born. At the time when her new-born was less than an hour old, she asked to know the sex of her child. As Daisy was told it was a girl she said: "All right,' I said, '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, 13).

Amiee Pozorski and M. J. Martinez discuss Daisy's famous line in *A Portrait of the Lady in Modern American Literature: Poor Little Rich Girl* discussing how the word "fool" could be Daisy referring to both men and women (9). However, I would like to quote Tony McAdams in his article "The Great Gatsby as a Business Ethics Inquiry". He states that: "Scholar Mary McCay argues that Daisy represents something of emptiness of life for many women of that era who really had no role of their own" (656). I would argue that Daisy's despairing comment about having a daughter tells us how even if the 19th amendment has been passed in congress she, on a personal level, feels no freedom, but rather a lack of power. What actually is an empowering and liberating time for women in America does not seem to affect Daisy Buchanan's hopes for herself or her daughter. A possible explanation for why Daisy accepts this for both herself and for her daughter could be argued with the help of Thorstein Veblen and his book: *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Veblen explains how women are objects for the ruling classes, just like consumer goods. He continues by stating how it is important for a man of the leisure class to make sure that others see his wealth and therefore it is of importance that Daisy is confined to the stereotypical role of a housewife disregarding chores seeing that she herself is upper-class. Tom can therefore keep his wife, have servants to do the chores and therefore his wife, his servants, his big house and his idle life is proof to the world that he is the dominant one of their relationship. Through her lines about her daughter she expresses her despair to Nick knowing the realities for her and her child.

3.3. James Gatz – the boy who dared to dream

In Fitzgerald's novel, James Gatz reinvents himself and becomes Jay Gatsby. We know from what he tells Nick Carraway later in the novel that he comes from a poor background and that he learned everything he knows about manners, etiquette and elocution from his dearest friend Dan Cody. Nick recalls earlier in the novel that Gatsby appears extremely keen to learn useful knowledge after the fashion of Benjamin Franklin as he "read one improving book or magazine per week" (116).

How is it then that he feels the need to lie and make up a story about him and his past: "I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years ... My family all died and I came into a great deal of money" (Fitzgerald, 42). Gatsby talks a great deal about his made-up past although these two sentences conclude

the image he wishes to portray of himself as an educated man, with a great deal of money and especially money from older generations that has been passed down to him. In order to explain why Gatsby does this, we have to examine the American dream. James Cullen explores the meaning of the American Dream in his book *The American Dream: A short Story of an Idea that shaped the Nation*. Cullen notes:

the United States, unlike most other nations, defines itself not on the facts of blood, religion, language, geography, or shared history, but on a set of ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and consolidated in the Constitution. The version that dominates our own time “The dream of the Coast” is a dream of personal fulfillment, of fame and fortune all the more alluring if achieved without obvious effort. (Cullen, 6-8; quoted in Mitgang)

Can this be a reason for Gatsby's need to lie about his past? His dream is a personal dream, his personal pursuit of happiness. Cullen states that there are many different dreams and that the Dream has changed over time (5-9). Gatsby is not content with riches and fame as he also desires personal fulfillment and that it is of importance that his achievements, that are seen by others, to come effortlessly. I would therefore suggest that Gatsby's personal fulfillment of the dream is to be part of The Leisure Class with its inherited wealth, a leisurely life, strict social etiquette, strong rules of who is accepted and that you marry within the class. This is an impossible dream and a failed dream if he does not lie. A part of Gatsby's character is to be amoral, which explains how easy it is for him to lie. In the novel, after Tom attacks him about his illegal affairs with Meyer Wolfsheim in front of Daisy, Gatsby tries one last time to hold on to the pretend image of himself for Daisy. “He began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made” (Fitzgerald, 86). Even as Tom is about to break Gatsby's possible reality of living the dream he lies till the end to get what he wants, however, he is not strong enough to withstand Tom's rage and defamation of his character.

In order to explain his amorality as part of the otherwise gentle and spiritual Gatsby I will turn to Alberto Lena's analysis of how Henry L. Mencken interprets Nietzsche. Lena describes how Mencken interprets Nietzsche's notion of civilisation as a division into three different classes: “The first class comprises those who are obviously superior to the mass intellectually; the second includes those whose eminence is chiefly muscular, and the third is made of the mediocre” (Mencken, 163; quoted in Lena 27). Lena continues that to each class is a particular notion of morality as well as of perfection meaning Gatsby is part of the first class, the rulers.

“Its members accept the world as they find it and make the best of it” and “their delight [lies] in self governing” (Mencken, 163; quoted in Lena 28).

I would like to go back to the beginning of the novel and connect Lena’s discussion on morality to James Gatz: “[he]... borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the *Tuolomee* and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour” (Fitzgerald 63). Here we can see an example of the determination Gatsby had from the beginning to never look back. He invented his new self and became Jay Gatsby, an educated, spiritual and well-spoken young man. However, although Gatsby has the drive to fulfill his American dream, is prepared to lie to reach his goal and even has the amorality to get there, there is one essential reason why Gatsby could never achieve it. A part of Gatsby’s American dream is to be part of the leisure class, although Veblen states that an essential part of being a leisure class man is to be aggressive, something that Gatsby lacks in his personality. As Lena interprets Veblen he describes that “behind the cloak of virtue with which the members of the leisure class envelop their lives, there lurks a type of person whose manners bear a close resemblance to those of the barbarian” (Lena, 24). Lena discusses Veblen’s thoughts and explains that these were the qualities that in the past introduced one to the class. Virtues like clannishness, massiveness, ferocity and unscrupulousness were examples of the qualities that counted to acquire full membership to the highest social class. Moreover, Lena explains that for Veblen, these qualities still endure in the supposedly civilized members of the leisure class. In the novel, Nick Carraway describes Gatsby as spiritual. However, I would argue that to be spiritual when you need to be ferocious would not make him accepted to the highest class and I suggest that due to Gatsby lacking these essential qualities are in part to be the reason for his failure to achieve his dream. When he is confronted by Tom in front of Daisy he falls apart and his dream vanishes even if he refuses to accept it (Fitzgerald, 42).

As Gatsby’s dream is crushed by Tom, the green light he constantly looks out for throughout the novel as a symbol of anticipation for what could be a reality is slowly fading and is an indication for us readers that Gatsby’s quest for the American Dream could possibly be over. His dream of marrying Daisy and living the prosperous upper class life was from the beginning an impossible dream and the reason for this is Tom Buchanan. Tom uses his wit and warrior instincts to beat Gatsby down and even if it is not Tom who pulls the trigger and kills Gatsby at the end of the novel, he is the reason behind Gatsby’s death. I would suggest that Gatsby never had a chance of reaching his dream. Being a man who lacks the aggressive characteristics in his DNA and who does not have the instincts of a barbarian, he would not be fit enough for

the leisure class and this is also the reason for why Tom is his downfall. Tom may not physically abuse Gatsby. However, Tom shows no mercy when he, later in the novel, expresses his contempt for Gatsby. Tom defames and shames Gatsby in front of Daisy by revealing all his secrets concerning wealth, education and further stating that there never was any love between Daisy and Gatsby. If Gatsby were to be a true barbarian, he would have fought back and claimed Daisy, his trophy, but instead Gatsby gives up his dream (Fitzgerald,82-86).

3.4. Tom - Possibly objectified

Tom Buchanan like many of the characters in *The Great Gatsby* revels in 1920s' America although with more ease compared to both Myrtle Wilson and Jay Gatsby. Tom has the opportunity of living on inherited wealth and has a life full of entitlement. He is rich, handsome and part of the upper class of America, meaning that he is part of a class that does not have to work or produce but has the choice to simply spend his days in leisure and amusement.

I would suggest that many changes that occur in America during the 1920s are enjoyable for Tom Buchanan. The changes that he does not approve of are easily resisted and demolished by Tom. He sees himself as entitled to act as he pleases because of his social class. When we first meet Tom Buchanan in the novel we learn that he is excellent at sports, an honorable occupation for a gentleman of his class, and that his family is “enormously wealthy” (Fitzgerald, 6). Further we are informed that he and his wife Daisy “had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together” (6). We are even told very early in the novel about the house he lives in: “a cheerful red-and-white Georgian colonial mansion...with French windows” (7). All of these descriptions of Tom indicates his extreme wealth. Without regard to Tom's leisure life, I would argue that Fitzgerald's approach to introducing Tom in the novel is somewhat displeasing. I would like to point out the importance of Nick's description of Tom as he says:

Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body. His speaking voice, a gruff husky

tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts. (6,7)

Just as in my analysis of Myrtle, the theory I use to analyse Tom may be questionable. What if Tom was female? If we saw Tom as a woman we could examine how the American narrative describes another human being as an object. In Nick Carraway's description, we are introduced to "A man with ... arrogant eyes" and a "cruel body" (6-7). Fitzgerald compares Tom's muscular arms and body to his light, feminine riding clothes. His hard body and "husky" voice adds to the impression of a stereotypical dominant man who "has an air of contempt even towards people he likes" (6-7).

The Great Gatsby is one of many novels that paints a picture of the American identity and the American dream. It is of importance to discuss how the American dream portrayed how an American man was supposed to look and behave towards other men and women. Was it necessary for Tom to look and act in this way to be part of the highest class and represent the man everybody wanted to be, or is the American narrative working against Tom by making him look bad so that Gatsby can become the hero? There is a possibility that Tom is just an echo from the past aristocracy, inherited wealth and barbarian manners, which could be the reason of Fitzgerald's devastating portrayal of Tom Buchanan in the novel.

Many who read *The Great Gatsby* often react to Tom as the destructive character in the novel. Tom is a man who fits the description of what Thorstein Veblen would call a man from the leisure class. In his book *The Theory of the leisure class*, he states that the leisure class is a group of people that have the ability to not produce to survive but instead live off the producing classes. They often had occupations including some degree of honor. Some examples where to be a warrior, priest, politician or to play sports. Veblen describes that this class comes from the barbarians and the clan system who obey strict rules over who can be a part of the class (24). If we assume that Tom is a descendant from the barbarians and the clan system we can make sense of his aggressive and violent behaviour. We see this sort of behaviour in Tom throughout the entire novel. One example of this is when Tom brings Nick to Wilson's garage and speaks with Wilson about a car that is to be sold to him:

‘Hello, Wilson, old man,’ said Tom, slapping him jovially on the shoulder. ‘How’s business?’ ‘I can’t complain,’ answered Wilson unconvincingly. ‘When are you going to sell me that car?’ ‘Next week; I’ve got my man working on it now.’ ‘Works pretty slow, don’t he?’ ‘No, he doesn’t,’ said Tom coldly. ‘And if you feel that way about it, maybe I’d better sell it somewhere else after all.’ ‘I don’t mean that,’ explained Wilson quickly. ‘I just meant – ’ His voice faded off and Tom glanced around the garage. (17)

By analyzing the quote above we can see how Tom behaves towards Wilson. Tom appears to be the superior out of the two and acts with a sort of refined aggression against Wilson. Tom cheerfully slaps Wilson on the shoulder when they first meet. However, Tom’s mood towards Wilson can quickly turn. As soon as Wilson comments on the time it is taking for Tom’s man to work on the car, Tom threatens to sell his car to another shop. To his advantage, Tom knows that Wilson is a working-class man and that he needs money to survive. By threatening to sell the car to someone else, meaning that Wilson would lose money, Wilson is reminded of what advantages Tom has over him and his voice fades away as Tom stops listening to him (17). This is one example of Tom abusing another character in the novel. Verbally, he acts aggressively as he threatens Wilson. There are many examples of Tom acting in this way. Other examples that may be important to mention are for example when he speaks of himself and the group he belongs to as “the dominant race” and when Tom chooses to break Myrtle’s nose when she refuses to yield (Fitzgerald, 11, 25).

When the barbarians needed to keep the class or the clan together it was of importance to be violent and aggressive to keep their status in society. Tom Buchanan fits into the description of a man from the leisure class and Veblen’s theory could be an answer to Tom’s obsession with sports and his aggressive and dominant behaviour. Tom’s obsession with sports is evidence of his combative instincts. Nick Carraway describes Tom as one of the most powerful football players at University and now in his later years, Tom is a polo player. I would suggest that he plays sports instead of fighting and has the wealth to be able to play whenever and wherever he wants (Fitzgerald, 6).

What he does in 1920s’ America is nothing different from what individuals from the leisure class always have done. Tom shows no mercy for Gatsby when he shouts “Mr Nobody from Nowhere” (Fitzgerald, 83). He continues his bullying until Gatsby falls apart and gives up on his dream, his fantasy and his guiding light and quest for love. Although Tom has crushed Gatsby’s dream of a prosperous life, this is not enough for Tom to be satisfied. Gatsby had to

suffer even more and instead of using weapons to kill his contender he lies, manipulates and forces the chain of events that leads to Gatsby's death.

Another victim of Tom's carelessness is Myrtle. By being his Mistress and receiving things from Tom in return I would suggest that Myrtle's character could be connected to the prostitute or even a slave when speaking of earlier eras. Before writing *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald had read *Satyricon*, a Latin novel written by Gaius Petronius. Rose MacLean writes in her article about how the relationship between Fitzgerald's novel and the story about Trimalchio who is an "excessively wealthy, flamboyant ex-slave" (1). She continues by discussing how *Satyricon* tells a story about the Petronian brothel and suggests in her study that Myrtle's relation to her secret flat in New York is related intertextually to Trimalchio. In Myrtle's apartment that Tom rents, there is an abundance of food, drink, sex and things which are all provided by Tom. Comparable to Daisy, she is like a trophy for Tom which he decides to show off to everybody. Myrtle is seen as somebody who Tom can do whatever he wants with.

4. Falling as victims

Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson are in many ways the same. They are both described as objects and looked upon as possessions by the ruling class. They are both what Veblen would call trophies. Lena's study states that Veblen explains how the ruler collects goods, slaves and women. He further explains that it is of importance that these trophies can be shown off and for this reason are seen as objects for the men in their lives.

Daisy and Myrtle both rely on their husbands to support them and neither of them have economic freedom. Simone de Beauvoir describes in *The Second Sex* how economic freedom is fundamental for women's liberation. De Beauvoir discusses further how it is important for a woman to be economically liberated during the transition from child to adult (De Beauvoir, 753). In the novel both women are described by colour and sound but there is a difference in how Fitzgerald used certain colours for Daisy in contrary to Myrtle. Whereas Daisy is always dressed in white, everything about her is floating, glittering, clean and sweet, Myrtle is described in either grey or the bright red. Myrtle is sweaty and works hard whereas Daisy is beautiful and her movements are languid and sad and her voice is full of promises of hope.

Daisy draws people close to her with her alluring voice whereas Myrtle is hectic and abrupt in her moves and full of vitality.

Here we see a few examples of what Simone de Beauvoir would call an array of things and illusions. She continues by discussing how our views on society have developed. She argues that it comes from history and class, and that the “woman” has always been seen as “the other”, meaning that the male is the base and the women is the one who is different (De Beauvoir, 395). Fitzgerald creates a narrative that is on the surface fun and which embraces the liberating times. However, underneath we sense his personal ambivalence towards the liberation of women. The fact that Tom possibly knows that Daisy kills Myrtle means that Tom will always have leverage over her and therefore be in control of their relationship. In this way, Daisy becomes a victim of Tom’s patriarchal rules and will therefore in a sense be dead. One could say that because they do not obey to the rules of the ruling class they both die, although the difference is that Myrtle’s heart stops but Daisy’s freedom stops. One could say that they are both victims by trying to break free from their opposing gender however it is impossible because of the patriarchal society they live in.

Just like Myrtle and Daisy, Tom and Gatsby are also similar in the sense that they are both male but also opposites considering their class. We see how Gatsby falls victim to the leisure-class and Tom. One could say that Jay Gatsby is a self-made man who would do anything not to let go of his personal dream and his quest for happiness. His damnation is that he cannot focus on anything else but his dream and that he, like Myrtle, never gives up. His American Dream is to be part of the leisure class. Gatsby sees Daisy and everything she represents as one way to fulfil his dream. However, this dream also becomes his downfall. He will never be accepted into the leisure-class society because he is not of old money and not related to the long line of the upper class. Gatsby knows that his background does not fit the leisure class and therefore he chooses to lie from the beginning. However, because he does not give up in pursuing his dream, this will ultimately be his downfall and death.

Tom, as we have clarified earlier, is part of the leisure class and with that he is muscular and violent, but if we interpret him from Mencken’s view on Nietzsche’s findings we can see that he is not the ruling class because he does not have the intellectual superiority, meaning that his status could easily decline. I would suggest that Tom must hold on to his status by being violent, by using verbal threats and by using women as trophies and parading them. That is his only chance for survival. If Tom lets his guard down and gives in to anybody who chooses to

challenge him then his status will decline. An example of this is when Tom breaks Myrtle's nose. By Myrtle not giving up, the only way for Tom to win is to hit her which quiets her. Just like Daisy and Myrtle, he is doomed. He is a victim of the leisure class that promotes violence and ferocity as virtues. Although all four characters fall victims of both the patriarch and upper class values, for Tom and Daisy, it is just a desperate fight to try and escape decay and decline or the endless nothingness. However, for Gatsby and Myrtle their daring nature to dream of a better life ended them instead.

5. Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated how Daisy, Myrtle, Gatsby and Tom embrace the liberating times of 1920s' America by looking at *The New Women and Flapper* and further analysing the two characters Myrtle and Daisy. I have analysed Daisy, Myrtle, Gatsby and Tom using feminist, postcolonial and economic theories. I have further attempted to demonstrate how they are inevitably bound by the patriarchal structures and upper class values, doomed for death, submissiveness and decline. I have tried to show how the American dream is part of the American identity and that the dream is elastic showing how it is possible for both Gatsby and Myrtle to dream of a prosperous leisure-life. In demonstrating the different structures of the leisure class and showing how violence and aggressiveness is part of being the ruling class, I have analysed how important it is for Tom to act as he does towards both men and women who get in his way to be able to sustain his place in his social class and therefore being a victim of the upper-class rules. I have described how Daisy has no choice but to be submissive as long as she does not embrace the political and economic changes that society provides. In conclusion, I have found that the patriarchal structures depicted in the novel are too great for the characters to overcome, they are all victims in different ways and their quest for happiness fails.

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