

## Honors English III: "The Great Gatsby" Chapters 1 & 2

### Similarities and Differences

To compare Daisy and Myrtle, complete the following Comparison Chart. For each point of comparison, make notes of details you learn about Daisy and Myrtle. You should have at least 5 direct quotes with page numbers. In the "Points of Comparison" column write a statement about what idea is suggested by each point.

<b>Points of Comparison</b>	<b>Daisy</b>	<b>Myrtle</b>
<i>Name- Describe the flower</i>		
Idea Suggested:		
<i>Physical Description</i>		
Idea Suggested:		
<i>Styles revealed in clothes, furniture...</i>		
Idea Suggested:		
<i>Mannerisms and attitude</i>		
Idea Suggested:		
<i>Ways of dealing/ interacting with Tom</i>		
Idea Suggested:		

### Chapter 3

**1. Literary Techniques:** on pages 39-41 (the first 3 pages of chapter 3) we can see how Fitzgerald uses numerous poetic qualities to highlight the magical qualities of Gatsby's parties and to show how they first of all impressed Nick. Find examples of each of the following techniques and comment on their effect.

Technique	Example with page number	Comment
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Simile

Metaphor

Colors

Sounds

Listing

Alliteration

**2.) Gatsby - make a list of all the things that we learn about Gatsby including...**

Gossip about him

What the narrator says (Nick)

What Gatsby says about himself

What impression do we get of Gatsby in this passage?

**3.) Role of Women-** It is a girl, "one of those gypsies" (P. 41) who starts the party. Her extreme behaviour is presented as the trigger for the night's events. It is this presentation of women as being the instigators of unruly and strange behaviour in men that has been the cause of much criticism by feminists of Fitzgerald's work.

So far, what effect do the women in the novel have on:

1.) Nick-

2.) Tom-

3.) Mr. Wilson-

# The Role of Women in the Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Modified from a Ph.D. candidate journal

## Abstract:

At the end of the World War I the role of women as housewives changed dramatically. One perfect example is Daisy from *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The novel was written and is set in the decade following World War I, which ended in November 1918. The Roaring Twenties, or the Jazz Age, a term coined by Fitzgerald, was a period of enormous social change in America, especially in the area of women's rights. (A Feminist Reading of the Great Gatsby, 2013) Before the war, standard dress for women included long skirts, tightly laced corsets, high-buttoned shoes, and long hair. A few years after the war, skirts became shorter, laced corsets began to disappear, modern footwear frequently replaced high-buttoned shoes, and "bobbed" hair became the fashion for young women.

Perhaps most alarming for proponents of the old ways, was that women's behavior began to change. Women could now be seen smoking and drinking, often in the company of men and without chaperones, even the new dances of the era, which seemed wild and sexual. In other words, as we often see during times of social change, a "New Woman" emerged in the 1920s. (Bode, 1990) And, again as usual, her appearance on the scene evoked a good deal of negative reaction from conservative members of society, both male and female, who felt, as they generally did at these times, that women's rejection of any aspect of their traditional role inevitably would result in the destruction of the family and the moral decline of society as a whole.

Literary works often reflect the ideological conflicts of their culture, whether or not it is their intention to do so, because, like the rest of us, authors are influenced by the ideological tenor of the times.

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. In fact, they are often seen as negative things. Fitzgerald presents very contrasting roles for women in *The Great Gatsby*, making distinct challenges to both Flappers and the traditional woman. (Flapper Fashion Look Book, 2013)

For example, Jordan Baker represents the new woman of the 1920's, who is characterized as an erogenous and therefore oddly desirable for Nick, the narrator. Jordan is a symbol for the principles of the Flappers, as she is arrogant, unemotional, and often irresponsible. Fitzgerald criticizes Jordan in *The Great Gatsby*. However, Gatsby also criticizes the traditional roles of women by his characterization of Daisy, a damsel in distress and object of desire in men. Daisy abandons love and Gatsby and settles down with Tom, a man who is wealthy and can provide for her financially. Yet Daisy also embodies some Flapper values of irresponsibility and detachment, in her treatment of her daughter, as well as irresponsibility for her actions. To Fitzgerald, Daisy may have embodied the 1920's woman in transition between old and new values.

As we begin the book, Daisy is seen as a sort of pessimist when mentioning her newly born female baby. When she first offhandedly mentions her daughter, she doesn't even specify the gender. This could be taken several ways. One way is that Daisy doesn't care much about her daughter at all. This idea is supported later when Daisy says after Nick has asked about her daughter, "I suppose she talks, and-eats, and everything." (Fitzgerald, n.d.) Another way to look at it, which seems to be more plausible given the context of the book, is that she is disappointed in having a female, rather than a male, child. When Daisy is explaining to Nick her daughter's birth, she explains how she wept and said of her daughter, "... I hope she'll be a fool - that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." (Fitzgerald, n.d.) This not only shows Daisy's cynicism for the world they live in, but also her idea of women in the world. In her eyes, women have no place in this world to be intelligent, only beautiful and stupid. The best thing a woman could be in the world is eye-candy for the hulking brutes. To her, that is the best way for a woman to get ahead in life. While this may seem as recognition of the plight of women in the world from Daisy, her actions later in the book imply that she wants to do nothing to change it.

Before the 1920s it was considered that women's main role in their lives was to take care of their husbands and children, but in the novel we can see that later they care more about themselves and about their place in society and they became careless and unfaithful towards their families. Myrtle cheats on Wilson with Tom. "Tom's got some women in New York." Another kind of unfaithfulness could be Jordan Baker. The above quote shows that she was aware of the affair, but did

not tell Daisy. Although it's a sticky situation, her refrain from telling Daisy the truth was a betrayal to their friendship. All the women in the Great Gatsby to some extent or another are unfaithful, whether it is their husbands, or friends.

From their unfaithfulness stems foolishness. Myrtle and Tom's views of their affair were completely different. Myrtle saw it as a way to receive materialistic gifts and as a way out of poverty. Tom thought of it as a game where Myrtle was just a sex object kept on a leash of luxurious bestowments. Myrtle's foolishness is that she saw what she wanted to see, a man who was providing her lavish gifts because she thought he loved her. She thought Tom would leave Daisy for her sake. In reality Tom was using her, but blinded by her own foolishness she couldn't see it. Daisy is also foolish in the context that if she had waited for Gatsby to come back from the war and married him instead of Tom, she would not have regretted about marrying him. Daisy's dissatisfaction with her marriage is revealed through her attempt to become unfaithful to Tom.

The marriage also has other problems like Tom being rude with Daisy. He bruises Daisy's knuckle. Tom's aggressiveness is also showed when he strikes Myrtle. Tom's display of physical power over Daisy and Myrtle reflects that in both relationships they are powerless. Tom doesn't use physical dominance but flaunts that Daisy won't leave him.

## **Conclusion**

Women In the 1920's took a step forward by changing their haircut, dresses, behavior in society and their attitude towards their families, but *The Great Gatsby* manifests that women were still in many ways powerless. The author accentuates as well the shortcomings they all had. These shortcomings are often the source of many conflicts in *The Great Gatsby*. We presume F. Scott Fitzgerald reflected his wife's many problems through his novel's heroines' problems.

### **4/1- Journal #1- Role of Women**

Answer the below questions about the article in complete sentences in your new electronic journal. When these are due, I will ask for you to email and share these. Remember to be as detailed and complete as you would have been in class hand writing them.

- 1.) Do you agree or disagree with the point that the author has made in this article? Explain why or why not.
- 2.) Think of an example that was not mentioned in the article that illustrates feminism as a theme of the novel.
- 3.) In what ways does this article challenge your views of women in *The Great Gatsby* from what you have read in chapters 1-3?
- 4.) Look at the description of the women at this first party. Here are some examples:
  - "Gaudy with primary colours, and their hair bobbed in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of castile."
  - "Old men pushing young girls backward in eternal graceless circles", page 47.
  - "A great number of single girls dancing individualistically", page 48

Do these descriptions (and/ or information from the article) celebrate the emancipation of women OR is it more critical?