

## ABSTRACT

### FEMALE POWER IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

Fitzgerald and his novel have ebbed and flowed into the nostalgia and literary tradition of America, and by the late-20th century literary critics began to notice the problematic undercurrents of this text. However, academia has overlooked the feminist undercurrents of this text. Fitzgerald uses the language spoken by his female characters to stand against a patriarchal representation. He uses the rhetorical spaces that are typically attributed to being feminine or domestic to explore and expose their anti-hegemonic construction. On a surface read, the novel appears to be reinforcing the patriarchal messages that we are very familiar with: women are mothers, homemakers, followers of the men in their lives. Furthermore, the rhetorical space in which most readers first encounter and interact with this text is the classroom. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel that most, if not nearly all, American teens experience reading and discussing in their high school English class. As a result, how the novel is taught greatly affects the interpretation and perception of the discourse surrounding this novel. A deeper interpretation of these female characters has not translated into the rhetorical space of the classroom. After exploring these aspects of Fitzgerald's book, I will discuss how the understanding of these female characters is shaped within American culture through the classroom, and how the ways this novel is taught actually runs in opposition to how Fitzgerald actually writes the females of this novel.

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FEMALE POWER IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

by

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CHAPTER 1: WHERE WE HAVE BEEN AND WHERE WE  
NEED TO GO: AN INTRODUCTION TO FEMININE  
POWER IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

*“Feminism isn’t about making women stronger. Women are already strong. It’s about changing the way the world perceives that strength.” – G.D Anderson*

*The Great Gatsby* is a novel that is known by most Americans. It has become a novel that nearly all American teenagers read in high school, and the text that many think of when delving into the conversation about the American Dream. The novel is set in a New York City of Fitzgerald’s imagining, in which he places his upper crust narrator, bootlegger protagonist, and blue-blooded antagonist representing only a small group of American caricatures from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many Americans know the story line of the tragic and enraged murder of Gatsby by Mr. Wilson. Nick Carraway, the carefree and cynical narrator of this story is, for most unassuming readers, a reliable one, a man to be believed, with his only function to leave the reader disillusioned with the American dream.

However, what about the women of this novel, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson? How have the teachings and the traditional readings of this novel affected the constructions of these female characters as a result of the rhetoric surrounding the common reader’s interpretations? These kinds of questions are what drive scholars not only to challenge a traditional reading of this text, but also to challenge the American literary canon itself.

My claim is that academia has overlooked the feminist undercurrents of this text. Contrary to conventional assumptions, Fitzgerald uses the language spoken by his female characters to stand against a patriarchal representation. He uses the rhetorical spaces that are typically attributed to being feminine or domestic to explore and expose their anti-hegemonic construction. After exploring these



aspects of Fitzgerald's book, I will discuss how the understanding of these female characters is shaped within American culture through the classroom, and how the ways this novel is taught actually runs in opposition to how Fitzgerald actually writes the females of this novel.

As the leading scholar about Fitzgerald during the 1960's, Matthew Brucoli stands as a good representative of the more traditional reading of the novel. In the introduction of the book *New Essays on The Great Gatsby*, Brucoli states, "*The Great Gatsby* was classified as 'a book about the Roaring Twenties... in certain ways [Fitzgerald is] the historiographer of the Jazz Age (which he named)..." (6). Brucoli reinforces this idea in his book, *In Apparatus for F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*: "one of the qualities of Fitzgerald's fiction is the way he creates a sense of authenticity in details, which encourages the reader to believe in the action of the characters" (117). Brucoli is not the only critic who holds these sentiments about *The Great Gatsby*. Most scholars in decades past would have agreed with his assertion that this novel upheld the status quo of the social context that the novel was set in, just as the New Critics who considered the characters and paradigms of this novel as suited to the social climate in which Fitzgerald wrote. Brucoli's ideas resonate with the claim of Robert Sklar, who saw Fitzgerald as providing "a firmer understanding of the moral qualities and values he dramatized..." (342). These two scholars can be viewed as a sample of what was being supposed about the novel for decades. Therefore, during much of the 20th century *Gatsby* was viewed as a period piece that artfully and thoughtfully captured the Jazz Age.

However, Fitzgerald and his novel have ebbed and flowed into the nostalgia and literary tradition of America, and by the late-20th century literary critics began to notice the problematic undercurrents of this text. Literary critics have analyzed

topics from anti-Semitism to gender stereotypes/categories both inside and outside of the text. As Maggie Froehlich straightforwardly proclaims, “Nearly every early twentieth-century American social bias is represented in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925)” (81). Her statement unearths the depths to which this novel has been and can be explored.

Many critics agree that Fitzgerald was sexist in his understanding and construction of his female characters, and that he wrote women that were clichéd and only embodied the archetypes by which women of 20<sup>th</sup> century prose usually find themselves represented. Veronica Makowsky asserts, “Fitzgerald does not really develop... [female] character beyond its utility as a handy narrative technique”. She starts where other theorists have left off, by saying that women are used for plot purposes only. Building on this idea she continues, “she [women] must practice self-reliance while still appearing to be an attractive prospect for wifely dependency” (29). Makowsky shines the light down the literary path that there is a duality with Daisy but she does not fully explore it.

Linda Pelzer ‘s assessment has darker overtones: “In Fitzgerald’s novel, women remain prisoners of patriarchy . . . commodities to be possessed and discarded by brutish louts” (127). She continues, “women’s own attitudes about men, especially Daisy’s, paradoxically belie the depth of any real change in gender roles and expectations” (129). She is making the argument that because of how Fitzgerald writes his characters they are locked into eternally being oppressed. Pelzer is not alone in her interpretation of this text. Sarah Funderburke states that, “There are many passages in [the novel] that clearly show woman are being discounted” (77). This, along with Pelzer, exposes a clichéd oppression of women being read and interpreted in terms of how they relate to the men in the novel. Along with Pelzer and Funderburke, Mary Balkun writes, “[the] woman about

whom Fitzgerald wrote; she is a consumer rather than a producer, economically dependent, and, ultimately, a commodity” (122), which is the place where most female characters find themselves in American modernist novels.

This is an all too common occurrence, with women being understood only in terms of how they relate to men. Another critic, Joan Korenman, adds that “the character that [Daisy] results is both cool innocent princess and sensual *femme fatale*, a combination that further enhances Daisy’s enigmatic charm” (578). Her argument is that Fitzgerald writes a stock female character that embodies both sides of a typical female literary character. Other critics have looked at authorial influence of character construction. Sarah Fryer writes, “*The Great Gatsby*... [was written] during a time of erosion of Fitzgerald’s marriage to Zelda ... may have decreased his sympathy for feminine conflicts” (47). Ultimately, most critics believe that “Fitzgerald was avoiding trying to sound or evoke anything associated with the feminine” (Kerr 409). According to these scholars, we have reached our threshold in understanding and discussing the female characters, yet it is this glass ceiling mentality that has limited the literary analysis of this classic novel’s female characters.

Elizabeth Gibbens agrees with Pelzer, Funderburke, Korenman, and Balkun but adds an essential layer to the discussion of gender and *Gatsby*, which is the discourse within the novel. In her article, Gibbens asserts, “in his fiction, he used many of the metaphors of patriarchy [when constructing female characters]” (51). This acknowledges what her predecessors said before her, that female characters are stock, but here she makes a move that opens the door of interpretation, arguing that the language of *The Great Gatsby* provides multiple readings. The next logical step is to accept that what people have said about the narrative of *Gatsby* is stunted because it only discusses the female characters of this novel in terms of

how they relate to or foil male characters. Whereas, what needs to be done is to examine how the language embedded in the text of *The Great Gatsby* adds a new and deeper understanding of the subtext in Fitzgerald's prose regarding its female.

That "this system [analyzed by the novel] is sustained by the logic of patriarchy, male chauvinism, and gendered political mechanics..."(Uzoечи Nwagbara 175), is a good definition of the rhetoric that has shaped the way the beloved novel *The Great Gatsby* has been read, as well as the societal influence of this novel in contemporary American society. The rhetoric of this novel at first glance seems to align itself within that ideology. As derived from Kenneth Burke, my definition of rhetoric is that every situation is surrounded by the idea that all texts, words, or utterances have a purpose, audience, and ethos, logos, and pathos (113). Thus, from this definition of rhetoric, Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby* with a specific intention and a certain audience in mind.

Regardless of Fitzgerald's intentions, how a reader chooses to interpret the text still stands. A perspective that enriches and empowers this is Bakhtin's idea of the authoritative discourse. He states that the authoritative discourses will "demand that we acknowledge it...we encounter it with its authority already fused to it" (683). This is exactly the case for the traditional reading of *Gatsby*. Bakhtin argues that certain discourses have more influence than others, and that discourses from certain people or groups also carry more value in societies, which in turn gives what these discourses are promoting a greater acceptance and following. As I will argue in the following pages, this has led readers to not notice the non-traditional qualities of the female characters in this novel. Until we start reading the text differently, the larger issue is not addressed. That larger issue being, that women are victims, but not without agency and voice. This incorporates

Bakhtin's idea of the authoritative discourse, and how that discourse is what is creating the powerlessness that we on the surface regarding female characters.

However an unbiased reading exposes that the female characters of this novel are aware and subtly speak out against the powerlessness that they are shrouded in. The same authoritative discourse, which is prejudiced by the male normative that Daisy and Jordan are speaking against, is the same discourse that is present in the American readers of this novel. Erica Burman Jackie Stacey argue that we need feminism juxtaposed with the male normative to counteract a traditional reading that leaves out female thoughts and feelings (21). Fitzgerald gives us this juxtaposition, but as readers we need to point it out, and speak about it as well as reimagining how we teach this novel in a classroom, because the classroom is a rhetorical space where a male normative heavy discourse can be perpetuated and this discourse of this novel is discussed.

Many scholars have explored the question, 'who is truly narrating and constructing the females in this novel?'. Answering from an autobiographical perspective, Frances Kerr asserts that "Fitzgerald, not Nick, tells [Daisy's] story" (261). More seriously, Peter Messent in *New Readings of the American Novel: Narrative Theory and Its Application* writes, "His [Nick Carraway's] perspective on events, the way the words of others are filtered through his own, the tactics he uses as narrator...all suggest his control, indeed domination, of the materials at his disposal" (10).<sup>1</sup> This is the beginning of the analysis regarding who is the true narrator of this novel.

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<sup>1</sup> Another critic who believes Fitzgerald's own voice is spoken through Nick is Preston, who asserts that Fitzgerald uses the voice of Nick to act as his representative to become a, "... producer of historical change, reflects the dialogism of a network of discourses and plays a role in changing the formation of social institutions...(25-26)."

The reliability of the narrator has often been a focus among academics. Brucoli fully accepts that Carraway is a reliable source of information in this text. Colin Cass agrees with Brucoli, Kerr and Preston by writing, "Fitzgerald's attempts to establish the reliability of his narrator; ... his tactics are consistent with what we would expect...his success depends, indeed, on his seeming to be a believable human with normal faults" (324). Many scholars argue about the reliability of the novel's narrator Nick Carraway, in that most don't believe that he is reliable, but the foremost scholar, Brucoli, and a few others assert that he is.

These scholars argue that Nick is not a reliable narrator, an interpretation that I agree with, and that has gross effects on what is and isn't relayed in the novel. Ronald Berman asserts, "Much of what Nick discovers is the opposite of what he sees, hears, or is assured" (24). Keeping this in mind, critic Sarah Fryer states, "Since Nick is the narrator of the story, his failure to perceive what makes Daisy behave as she does makes it easy for readers to jump to conclusions..." (43). Both scholars make valid and compelling points about the reliability of Nick as narrator. They are broadening the scope of this novel by laying bare the bones of rhetoric that are subtly embedded in this text regarding women.

By combining Fryer's point with Messent's, the understanding of how Nick operates as a narrator, the conversation takes a shift because it blends gender with narratology. Fryer is stating that the bias of the narrator affects the presumption of the reader about gender, and she acknowledges the subtle misgivings over Daisy's character, especially due to the unreliability of the narrator. Of Nick Carraway, she writes, "Guided only by Nick's very limited view of her...readers often...[have] no apparent awareness that her silly manner conceals a woman of feeling or that her final 'irresponsibility' towards Gatsby stems from an acute sense of

responsibility towards herself”(44). By combining gender and narratology the reader can begin to directly examine the feminist aspects of this novel.

Other critics who have looked at gender construction in the novel have different assertions to make about how it affects the reading/interpretation of the text. Beth McCoy thinks Fitzgerald’s anxieties surrounding femininity and how it is constructed in his prose have a direct effect on the novel and its narrative structure, stating, “...her body [Jordan’s] ultimately provides the spark that impels the novel towards the ‘holocaust’ of Gatsby’s death and Nick’s concomitant loss of faith in the American dream” (16). Along the same lines, in her essay, “Disembodied Voices and Narrating Bodies in *The Great Gatsby*,” Barbra Hochman makes the observation that the narration of this novel is purposeful. Nick is constantly trying to clarify and guide the reader in a direction he wants them to go. All the women in this book are presented as objects for men to acquire, and through the description of these female characters certain ideologies are portrayed. Moreover, Person, in her essay titled “‘Herstory’ and Daisy Buchanan,” believes, “Rather than rewriting the novel according to contemporary desires, such a reading of Daisy’s role [how she is shaped and affected by the men in the novel] merely adds a complementary dimension to our understanding and appreciation of a classic American novel” (251). And Greg Forter states in his book, *Gender Race, and Mourning in American Modernism The Great Gatsby*, “tempers its misogynist formal impulse with the contrary movement of an empathically lyrical and implicitly “feminine” expressiveness” (53). These scholars make the typical move of acknowledging the inequality that gender presents, but they do not go beyond simply discussing the dominant tone in the text that is misogynistic and patriarchal.

However, I feel this novel, like the female characters in it, has a glass ceiling when it comes to analysis. There has not been a more contemporary discussion about female narration, the language shared between women, language shared in female spaces (which I will define later), and the direct quoted speech in the text; which shows a feminist tone toward women and how they are constructed.

The methodology that I will use involves feminist theory and narratology. One of the prominent theories that I will be using is Bakhtin's idea of authoritative discourse; it is important to understanding the impact of direct female speech in this novel. However, Ruth Page explains the difference between narratology and feminist narratology as the latter "embraces the exploration of narrative from [a gender] point of view". There is a parallel between what Page considers feminist narratology and authoritative discourse. They are mutually exclusive because feminist narration is stating that it is equal to the authoritative discourse and is not understood simply by not being what it is not. This concept will aid in my understanding and explaining my interpretation of the text and what still needs to be discussed about the females of this novel. Pages continues with, "[gender] is always interrelated with an open ended number of other factors that may vary from context to context" (1). Which leads into the feminist idea of resistant re-reading and how it's important to how I will read and analyze the text.

As defined by Patricia Bizzell in "Opportunities for Feminist Research in the History of Rhetoric," "to be a 'resisting reader' of traditional rhetoric would be to notice aspects of the canonical texts that the reader is not supposed to notice, but that disturb, when the reader is woman, and create resistance to the view of reality the work seems to want to purvey" (51). The "disrupting" element that is



discovered through a rereading leads us to understand how powerful and aware the female characters are in *The Great Gatsby*.

On a surface read, the novel appears to be reinforcing the patriarchal messages that we are very familiar with: women are mothers, homemakers, followers of the men in their lives. This surface read can be supported if we consider the potential audience that would have encountered this novel as well as the discourse used in this text. Although the narrator of this novel, Nick Carraway, is a mouthpiece for the patriarchal rhetoric of early twentieth century America, critics need to apply a re-reading and deconstruction of how the female characters are constructed, as well as an analysis of what the rhetoric surrounding the teaching of the hegemonic view of these characters has done to the framework of societal rhetoric around this novel both in academia and American culture. Cheryl Glen furthers this idea in her book, *Rhetoric Retold: Regenerating the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*. She maintains that "... canonical rhetorical history has represented the experience of males, with no provision or allowance for females...[it] has so consciously rendered women invisible and silent" (2). Roxanne Rashedi applies the same concept to reframing and, as a result, empowering women. She writes, "Countering the traditional takes on the erotic...[we need to] invite female readers to participate actively in the act of reading"(2). Even though she is dealing with eroticism and the feminine, she is speaking to the fact that women are active participants in literature, both as characters and readers. Bianca Archip writes:

Moreover, the entire undertaking of defining was contradictory, because the notion of "human being" itself had been delineated by reference to men, not women. The very distinction between masculine and feminine – like all distinctions in general – is a typically masculine attempt to order and categorize a

fluid reality in which both genders should be allowed to possess both sets of qualities.” (1138).

Discovering how female characters are subversively empowered opens up discourse, and allows us to see women not by how they are defined against men, but how they are defined outside of the patriarch completely.

In this thesis I will be arguing that the construction of female characters perpetuates a particular reading of *The Great Gatsby*, and will show that traditional gender roles are not perpetuated in this novel. By shifting the focus of analysis from male characters to female characters, new understandings and readings emerge to show that there are a multiplicity of readings and understandings embedded in this text. Moreover, this allows us as readers of this text to see that Fitzgerald was aware of female subjugation and that the female characters demonstrate agency in his text by subverting pre-existing gender roles that were expected of women during the era that the novel was written.

Rhetoric of that time as well as today is dominated by Anglo/Eurocentric values and practices that glorify wealth, whiteness, and maleness. According to this rhetoric, how women are perceived puts them into a submissive role. At first glance, the female characters in Fitzgerald’s novel, might appear to be static characters that help the reader understand the elaboration of the relationships and motivations of the male characters of the novel. However, a deeper reading of the text shows something different. Women do have opinions in *The Great Gatsby*; there are signs of female independence. Daisy Buchanan is a character that speaks out against her husband, and Jordan Baker defies a traditional idea of femininity.

As previously stated, a way to begin to deconstruct and re-read this novel is to look at the discourse of the narrator. Nick is our reporter in the novel. What he chooses to report or not report is strictly left up to him. John Fiske, in his essay

“Culture, Ideology, Interpellation,” makes the suggestion that reporters on the news use discourse in a certain way that makes viewers feel related to, and through this mutual understanding, viewers will share the assumptions and ideologies of the news reporters. Fiske talks about this concept of interpellation or “hailing,” which he defines as, “the process by which language identifies and constructs a social position for the addressee” (1271). Nick is using this technique when describing situations or characters to his reader in a way that perpetuates the ideology of how women are constructed and perceived. For example, Nick uses certain adjectives to describe female characters. In chapter 1 he uses the words “airy,” “thrilling,” and “helplessly” to describe both Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker. On the other hand, Tom Buchanan, Daisy’s husband and the antagonist of this story, is described differently using the adjective: “aggressively” is used multiple times. These adjectives are in opposition to each other and create a traditional characterization of women and men. If we switch our focus from the traditional male gaze to the female characters, a shift in where the power of the discourse lies occurs. In another example Daisy has an exchange of dialogue with her husband,

“You did it, Tom,” she said accusingly. “I know you didn’t mean to but you *did* do it. That’s what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen of a—“

“I hate that word hulking,” objected Tom crossly, “even in kidding.”

“Hulking,” insisted Daisy.

Here we see Daisy asserting her opinion and judgment of her husband. Before this exchange happens she plays the role of the traditional damsel in distress by saying: “her eyes fastened with an awed expression on her little finger.”

“Look!” she complained. “I hurt it (16)”.

However, she is the one who draws the attention to it, so there is intent and purpose behind her actions. Daisy wants to give her husband a label he objects to and she does not. Also, he wants it removed but it is not. This is an example of female power in this novel, because the narrative includes this dialogue because Daisy wants it to. She is in control of the narrative by at first appearing to be a clichéd distressed damsel; in reality she is consciously directing the narrator and the reader to a label of “hulking” that Tom, the hyper-patriarchal character objects to, which in turn makes this exchange symbolic of the subversive narrative that occurs in this novel. The true character that is driving what words are being used is Daisy.

This leads to other areas of the novel that deal with the language that is used to describe females and the symbolism that the metaphors used draw attention to the subtle power of female characters, how female space is utilized to empower women, and finally how this novel is dealt with in the classroom and the rhetoric surrounding how the female characters are taught to students.

CHAPTER 2: 'SHE LOVES ME, SHE LOVES ME NOT':  
FLORAL MOTIFS, LIGHT MOTIFS, AND  
NAMING IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

*"It is in writing... and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than silence."* -- Helene Cixous

The language of *The Great Gatsby*, in particular Fitzgerald's use of floral and light motifs in the novel, exposes an ambiguous power that women possess. Attention to these issues helps correct the over-reliance on theories of narration that have dominated criticism on *Gatsby*, beginning with scholars like Matthew Bruccoli, Ronald Berman, and Fredrick John Hoffman, who deems Nick Carraway "ideally suited to the tasks of narrating and judging Gatsby's story..." (13).<sup>1</sup> Such theories stifle the voices of characters like Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker, due to the fact that Nick's inherent male privilege is so glaring that he cannot see what it is to live in the shadow of masculinity. Although he can comfortably objectify women, it is difficult for him to go deeper. An example of this is when Nick introduces Myrtle and reduces her to merely a description of physicality and sexuality: "she carried her surplus flesh sensuously,"(29). To provide a richer understanding of the female characters, Fitzgerald must rely on Jordan Baker as an alternative narrator to allow the reader to move beyond the limited male viewpoint of Nick. Throughout the novel, Fitzgerald is doing more than merely depicting the "Roaring Twenties:" he is also subtly unveiling what it is to be a progressive female during that time, exploring what new freedoms exist in the still limited and

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<sup>1</sup> Hoffman in his book *The Great Gatsby: A Study* shares Bruccoli's simplistic and straight forward interpretation of this classic novel. Likewise, in his book *The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas*, Berman writes, "Nick (correctly) perceives character, statement, and idea..." (21).

largely oppressed female existence. As the reader is able to peer behind this veil through subversive text and figurative language, the use of floral and light motifs, as well as the naming of Daisy, poignantly reveals these themes.

Throughout *Gatsby* Fitzgerald uses the motif of flowers and light to show the differences between men and women.<sup>2</sup> Each of the two symbols, flowers and light, has a different connotation. Flowers in Western literature are usually associated with the feminine, frailty, and dependency, whereas light has a strong association with religious rhetoric and Christ. Here we have two symbols with differing social power and currency. The metonymic effect of the light symbol has powerful consequences for the semiotics of Western Culture. As a result, by constantly using light and flower motifs, Fitzgerald shows the dichotomy into which the women of this novel fall. Women have power, but men harness their power. These persistent motifs create a paradox that allows Fitzgerald to use familiar symbols and metaphors, which he employs to explore how women are poised to break out at anytime, but cannot because they are suppressed by the Patriarchy.

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<sup>2</sup> Doug Stenberg points out that "...motifs of a woman's rustling dress and breathlessness (11) are also evident in the text. Dresses ripple and flutter when windows are ajar (10) before Carraway describes Jordan's fluttering lips and Daisy's murmur that makes people lean towards her (11). Daisy has "bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth...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" (11). Her voice compels Carraway forward breathlessly (15), and stirring warmth flows from her as if her heart is "trying to come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words" (15). After an argument with Tom, Daisy returns with the flutter of a dress (16). And when Gatsby leads Daisy and Carraway through his house, it seems "strange to reach the marble steps and find no stir of bright dresses in and out the door and hear no sound but bird voices in the trees" (71). Years before, he had felt "an air of breathless intensity" in Daisy's house simply because she lived there (116). "I thought this was interesting that there is another pattern of motifs happening in the text that continues and supports my interpretation of this text, even though Stenberg is not referencing these motifs for the same reason I am.

A study of the flower references at first glance may lead the reader to assume a stereotypical interpretation of femininity and beauty, where what is feminine is strictly objectified and lacks the agency of masculinity. Fitzgerald's frequent and casual use of flowers in an environment of vibrant excess moves the reader rapidly through the novel, where there are moments in elaborate gardens that the reader can really focus on one flower. Roses are ubiquitously scattered throughout the novel and their meaning is fluid, from the basic descriptive ornamentation to a figurative representation of women, to a more complex and symbolic imagery that underlines women's agency.

For instance, inside the Buchanan home is a "bright rosy-colored space" (12); Nick Carraway's house is lined with "lilac trees" (90). Both of these examples are strictly descriptive. In contrast, we learn that Tom Buchanan maintains a "rosy-colored porch" (12) and a garden filled with pungent roses. In Gatsby's house "were always rooms that throbbed incessantly with this low sweet fever, while fresh faces drifted here and there like rose petals blown by the sad horns around the floor" (114). Unlike the two earlier-cited passages, these are allusions in which flowers are a symbolic representation of women. Tom's garden is introduced when he proudly shows it to Nick with a sweeping bravado, and his garden filled with pungent roses alludes to his cultivated ownership of thriving domesticated roses whose sole purpose is to provide something beautiful for him to gaze upon. Gatsby's house is where the rose comes undone and there is a somber tone that depicts the chaos of living outside societal ideals of femininity. As seen in the above two examples, the female characters at times exist in an atmosphere where they are interchangeable and without agency, but Fitzgerald also gives us glimpses of the female characters being powerful and singular.

At one of Gatsby's many parties, a woman makes a request to Nick, "Reach me a rose, honey" (65). In this quote the woman is speaking directly and making a command to Nick that he must comply with. Fitzgerald chooses to have the woman request a rose instead of a cocktail or napkin, because it continues the use of flowers as a representation of women. In the previous example of the roses involving the Buchanan house, the word garden implies that the flowers are fenced off and contained, and Tom and Nick are shown to be gazing up these flowers. Gatsby's house, though, is a space where the flapper girl, the epitome of the progressive female of this era, can speak freely. Here, she is the one gazing on the rose and the rose is singular instead of a group of roses at the Buchanan home. The woman is the one who chooses to have it plucked from the landscape of his house, which suggests a more untamed and less domesticated rose than a rose from a garden that is planted purposely; the roses at Gatsby's are growing naturally and are uncultivated.

Toward the end of the novel, after Daisy has struck Myrtle with her car and Gatsby is intending to take the blame, Fitzgerald has Nick utter these words "he found what a grotesque thing a rose is" (169). The use of a rose in this quote is an allusion to Daisy, as Gatsby realizes his dream of the life he tried to cultivate for himself which is all fabricated (whereas a rose is based in nature that is real and cultivated not faked and fabricated), that the undoing of this, Nick realizes the "grotesque"-ness of Daisy, and that the dream that Gatsby had, which involved Daisy, will never come to fruition. In this quote, Daisy is being associated with the qualities of a flower and the reader is given an alternative to the flower motif, and this allows us to see the true nature of Daisy as a character. Here she is being presented for the first time for who she is. The opposition lies in the contrast between the fabrications of Gatsby verses the real or nature of Daisy. Hence, the



rose motif comes full circle, so that it is so intertwined and subtle that the characteristics of a rose become a marker of the reality of Daisy's character.

The same implications can be seen with the light imagery in this novel. An example of this is the Buchanan house: "inside, the crimson room bloomed with light" (22). Fitzgerald is creating a feminine atmosphere when he adds the word bloom to this domesticated space inside of the house. Whereas with Gatsby's house the light becomes metaphoric and captures the Christ-like allusions that light has, with Gatsby becoming the "patron saint of recurrent light,"<sup>3</sup> and is a place where "the whole front of it catches all the light," (69). Fitzgerald is reinforcing westernized expectations of both space and the light that illuminates it. In the feminized example the space is limited, whereas in the Gatsby's house it is expansive and powerful, in addition to being ethereal.

These examples illustrate the trend of the feminized being subtle and quiet, whereas in the Gatsby example it is expansive and demands the reader's attention. Nick attaches light to Daisy when he sees a pale square of light<sup>4</sup> in the city and uses it to show the reader the depth of Gatsby's longing for her. Unlike the use of light with Gatsby's house, here a female character is gaining the qualities that are associated with light by Nick using it in this comparison (89). This passage is subtly speaking to the female agency that Daisy has in the novel.

At first, like the example in the Buchanan home and Gatsby's mansion, it would seem that the purpose of these motifs serve to reinforce the privilege of white males, yet when we see the example of Daisy being compared to light, it draws out a more complex reading of the novel's female characters. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Light mentioned again in Gatsby's house on page 73, 76, 83, 116

<sup>4</sup> Is noticing different squares of cheerful light, are all places where square light is mentioned by Nick 14,33,53

following scene Jordan and Tom are illuminated differently: “The lamp-light, bright on his boots and dull on the autumn-leaf yellow of her hair, glinted along the paper as she turned a page with a flutter of slender muscles in her arms” (22). His boots, the lowest part of him, gleam and there is no lofty description needed as he commands the most light, whereas her hair, the zenith of her being, is dully lit but she is endowed with an earthy loveliness that demands the reader’s attention subtly. Daisy exists in the dull light as well: “each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk” (18); not only is the power that light gives diminishing in this passage, but she is compared to children at play, her existence muted to children being called home for the night.

As mentioned in earlier examples both in this chapter and the introduction, Fitzgerald’s depiction of both Daisy and Jordan is complex. At times they are the masters of their lives, at times they are an extension of one of the male characters that they are attached to, and they wrestle with the desire to be seen for who they are, and yet still be adored for who they are told they should be. This internal conflict is the product of being a woman in a man’s world. She is only able to bask effortlessly when she is talked about in relationship to the men around her. This is also the conflict that shrouds the feminist tone of this novel. There are moments, as has been mentioned above and will be shown, where Daisy and Jordan both rebuke societal expectations and assert their power, but are hemmed in because of the overwhelming suppression of patriarchal discourse. These subtle and subversive moments become important to discuss because in them lies the true agency and nature of both Daisy and Jordan. Flowers and light help paint this picture of women’s precarious balance. Not only does Fitzgerald do this with Daisy and Jordan, but also nameless women of the novel, “a gorgeous, scarcely human orchid of a woman” and “I have forgotten their names — Jacqueline, I

think, or else Consuela, or Gloria or Judy or June, and their last names were...the melodious names of flowers and months” (111). It is important to point out that in this example he always says “scarcely human,” because the flower motif Others at the same time that it complements and foils women in the novel.

An example of that oscillation can be found within the first chapter of the novel. While visiting Daisy and Jordan in the Buchanan’s living room, Nick makes a comment about Daisy’s life as he describes her as a woman “whose flowers were scarcely withered” (114). Here the comparison is empowering because her life has not withered away but is thriving. As Nick is leaving Daisy and Tom’s house, with them standing in the public space of the driveway, he says this of Daisy, “[she was] opening up again in a flower-like way” (24). She is being compared to a flower and her unfolding bloom is in correlation to her interaction with Nick. He has the power in the exchange, because she is opening up as a result of what he is saying and doing. In contrast, another example describes Daisy using light instead of a flower metaphor. She is having a conversation with Nick in her home, “her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened — then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret” (18). In this quote Daisy has control and power over the exchange. She is entrancing Nick into the conversation which is in contrast to the previously quoted moment.<sup>5</sup>

A similar scene can be found in chapter 1 (17) in which Daisy is lamenting to Nick in her living room about how foolish her life, and subsequently her daughter’s life, is because they are women. Here, there is a much different tone.

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<sup>5</sup> The first moment happens outside the domestic space whereas the second moment is located within a domestic space. This is important to understanding the agency that is given to Daisy and how it varies in different locations. I will focus on the importance of space in chapter 3.

Again, Daisy and Jordan are compared to flowers in a domestic space, “fresh faces drifted here and there like rose petals” (116). The adjective fresh and the verb drifted are empowering because both women are alive and moving, even though drifting suggests some restraint, which is where we see the subtly subversive nature of their characters; they are moving and in control of where and how they move. This is in sharp contrast to the previous mention of nameless women being compared to flowers and being barely human. We see a pattern that continues throughout the novel of women, especially Daisy being compared to flowers. And that pattern or motif is important to drawing out this subversive nature of these two characters.

Another example with the flower motif is:

Under the dripping bare lilac trees a large open car was coming up the drive. It stopped. Daisy’s face, tipped sideways beneath a three-cornered lavender hat, looked out at me with a bright ecstatic smile (90).

By not having a comparison but an association there is still agency given to Daisy that draws attention to her magnetic power that she has over all the male characters of this novel. She is associated with the flowers through the hat, both being purple in color. And then Nick is greeted with her bright smile. Fitzgerald is having the light of the scene on her smile and the covering hat that is like the bare lilac trees. This speaks to Daisy’s ambiguous power by drawing the attention to that fact that she is being gazed upon, but she chooses to show her face and smile, just as the bare lilac trees are hiding their bloom. Nick’s gaze does not control what is being shown to him by the trees, his gaze does not reveal Daisy; she does.

Fitzgerald uses things found in nature to compare women to because “man” does not own nature. Nature is fluid and free, which continues the idea that women of this novel do have agency because women are compared, associated, alluded to through the use of flowers, light, and other elements of nature; their ambiguous power is exposed to the reader, but it is not actualized because of the dominating patriarchal discourse of the novel. This association with women and nature also includes precious metals. Several times Jordan is described with elements of her body being golden. At the beginning of the novel, “Jordan’s slender golden arm” (47) rests in Nick’s, while the “yellow of her hair, glinted” (22), with Nick placing his arm “around Jordan’s golden shoulder and drew her toward me and asked her to dinner” (84). The light glints and is the agent that makes what Jordan wants to show. Just as in nature, what men view is how it is, not how it is reframed through hegemonic discourse. Although, it is under the gaze of men, the women are choosing to show what they want in a public space.

As previously mentioned these examples of comparing Jordan to precious metals embody the same dynamic of highlighting the ambiguous power that women possess. Furthermore, by bringing in precious metals, the idea of gender of the feminine having a duality is continued. Fitzgerald is using these as commonly understood metaphors and what is attached to precious metals is they are highly desired and valued amongst men and used for exchange and power within the hierarchal structure of society. However, these examples can also be read in the way that I have presented: that the natural not societal association is where the subversive agency of women can be seen.

Even Daisy’s voice carries elements of golden or metallic light; it carries all the allure which gold held for men in those days:

Her face was...with bright things in it, bright eyes and 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 (13-14).

This example shows how there is power harnessed in her voice. Daisy is in control of how her past is viewed and what she and these men will do next. So, even though she is being gazed upon and recast through that gaze of Nick, the association with light is where her ambiguous power lies. Both the comparisons with Jordan and the light glinting off her hair and Daisy’s bright and alluring face and voice are untamed because it occurs naturally without the need of the patriarchal gaze or hegemony.

Yet the men in the story try to delimit this power by diminishing it, by fitting it into a system they understand and control. The brightness of Daisy’s eyes and mouth are reduced by Gatsby and Nick to material goods:

‘Her voice is full of money,’ he said suddenly.

That was it. I’d never understood before. It was full of money— that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals’ song of it...High in a white place the king’s daughter, the golden girl... (127).

In this exchange, Daisy is being compared to things that do not occur in nature, but instead to valuable things that do operate within the hegemonic system. Because gold has a duality, functioning both inside and outside of hegemony, this echoes the reading that I am promoting, that gender in this novel has a duality.

Woman have agency, but is not actualized because of the dominant discourse; moreover, understanding this duality or ambiguous power provides a

reading that has gone unnoticed but is detected in the pages of this novel. Having this difference is where the layering of agency can be seen within both women. They both have power within the examples that are associated with flowers, light, and precious metals. All of these elements have a connotative meaning that works inside and outside of patriarchal discourse. The motifs are what allow this agency to be exposed and are at the same time what work to keep it covered. In the last example, which does not occur in nature, the dialogue between Nick and Gatsby discuss Daisy's voice in the terms of an item whose connotative and denotative meaning can be actualized in the hierarchy of the patriarch. Hence there is a lack of agency that the women possess in that example. Therefore the purposeful subtleness of female power can be seen in the duality of the motifs in this text.

Fitzgerald only once uses flowers to describe men. Daisy says about Nick, "You remind me of a — of a rose, an absolute rose. Doesn't he?" She turned to Miss Baker for confirmation: "An absolute rose?" (19). It is in her direct speech, which is important to note because it is not a paraphrasing but the direct speech, which Daisy gets very little of in the novel. Both women are involved and using a flower to define Nick. He rebukes it, but his refusal of the label does not stick: "This was untrue. I am not even faintly like a rose. She was only extemporizing, but a stirring warmth flowed from her, as if her heart was trying to come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words" (19). Nick acknowledges the true nature of this statement and concludes by stating that what she is saying about him is enthralling. This moment exposes the ambiguous power of Daisy. She is renaming Nick in a sense by calling him a rose. Furthermore, having a male described as a flower in the novel highlights the pervasiveness of the flower motif to extend to males, and that it is a woman in the novel who appropriates the term and applies it to a male. In this one moment, we glimpse the

way women's words have power. Nick may attempt to deny it, but he is still left with the label that she gives him, demonstrating the duality of the nature motifs, which creates the subtle and subversive female characters.

The same thing happens in the lone instance where Fitzgerald uses light imagery to describe Gatsby. He writes, "But there was a change in Gatsby that was simply confounding. He literally glowed; without a word or a gesture of exultation a new well-being radiated from him and filled the little room" (94). Here Gatsby glows because of Daisy. This is the only time this happens in the novel, where the light imagery given a male character is bestowed by a woman; Daisy is the reason for his glow, and so the power of the light motif still lies within her. This is a kind of foreshadowing of what is to come and the power that Daisy truly has over Gatsby.

Fitzgerald's purpose for giving Daisy her name is because she is the female character with the most actualized agency in the novel. This might seem like an odd claim, but when you examine the colloquial usage of the word during Fitzgerald's time along with the more common and modern understanding of the word, it becomes clear that her character embodies the traits associated with the word. A common understanding of the word daisy is the denotative meaning that is ascribed to a flower with white petals. The connotative associations attached to the word daisy splay out in widely divergent directions, though. For instance, 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans used the word daisy as a superlative for something that was first-rate or charming. Idiomatic usage also associates the daisy with death, i.e. pushing up daisies. The word daisy is also associated with, like most flowers, being fragile, fleeting, and a beautifying ornamentation. Using the examples that have been referenced in this chapter, Daisy is used as an accessory to men in the novel: from Gatsby desiring her for her money, Nick finding her thrilling and



alluring, and Tom sharing social status with her. The sheer proliferation of meanings available to the word daisy and how those meanings are reinforced by the construction of her in the patriarchal discourse of the novel leaves her name overdetermined; yet through that overdetermination a level of agency is achieved by Daisy. However, the one trait that the word daisy is associated with death is the only attribute that is less noticeable in the hegemonic discourse of this novel. Where this trait becomes pronounced, and is discussed at length in chapter 3 is the act of her purposely killing Myrtle, which in turn leads to the death of Gatsby. Here her agency is finally actualized and the duality that I have discussed in this chapter continues and is reinforced with the strongest floral motif, her name. Her name reinforces the idea of her having ambiguous power, which she only actualizes when she kills Myrtle. In earlier parts of the novel her name reveals her agency is not actualized, but present.

Daisy does not choose her name for herself but she does have control over her fate, whereas in contrast James Gatz or Jay Gatsby does choose his name but does not have control over his fate: “James Gatz — that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career” (Fitzgerald 104). This is the typical dynamic that is found in a patriarchal society. A man is free to determine himself, but women are determined by what they are not. However, in this novel a very different dynamic prevails. Daisy eludes responsibility for her murderous actions, whereas Gatsby is killed because of Myrtle’s death. Not only does Daisy have control over her destiny but also over the fate of James Gatz, which is a more powerful role than the act of choosing one’s name.

The naming of Daisy and the subtle feminist rhetoric of the novel can be discovered through the floral and light motifs associated with women. It creates

the subversive agency that the women of this novel acquire. Fitzgerald's metaphors and symbols work to highlight their oppression, which in turn emphasizes the agency that Daisy and Jordan retain. For example, naming a character after a flower will evoke certain characteristics and ideals, yet it holds hostage the character and puts them into a certain category. This is the duality created by the language of this novel. It is used to control, and when used purposely it can also be subversive and call out its very oppressive nature. Naming Daisy after a flower automatically will give her qualities that we stereotypically associate with femininity. However, by Fitzgerald doing this he is pointing out that what keeps this all going is not the societal role that people have but language and semiotics. Throughout the novel Daisy constantly pushes boundaries with what the societal expectations are for women of that time. Fitzgerald is writing in the era that he coined "The Jazz Age," and he is examining flapper women of that era. Flapper woman can drink, have sex, step out of their marriage, or not marry at all, but they are still oppressed. The language, which Fitzgerald can use, that is "acceptable" to an audience is still very oppressive. Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, the women take ownership within the domestic space.

### CHAPTER 3: THAT WHICH LIES WITHIN: THE POWER OF FEMALE SPACE IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

*“The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.” – Gloria E. Anzaldua*

The figurative language, including elements of the Christ/light motif, discussed in the previous chapter take on physical presence in the creation of a female space in this novel. Feminine or Female spaces<sup>1</sup> are a widely discussed construct in academia and an important construct in examining the discourse of *The Great Gatsby*. The words used to describe women, their movements in these feminine spaces, and how they are compared and contrasted with objects located in this space are all markers of the agency that is constructed and given to them in this novel. I view this as empowering once you peel away the surface reading and look at where and when these things are said.

Commonly, female space is understood as a “private space controlled by women”; it can be either “protective and private” (Nodelman, 224) or a space that is “eschewing the formal” (Tamblyn 289). The implication of this is that a female space is different from a male space. In her interpretation, Shirley Stave uses the phrase “separate spheres” to define female space and continues this perception and understanding that there are different characteristics that go along with a female space. Stave states, “the ideology of “separate spheres” is commonly regarded as the social mechanism regulating the obligations of men and women and

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<sup>1</sup> I will use these terms interchangeably.

segregating them from each other in their daily lives.” This lends credence to the understanding that a female space is different in its totality from a male space.<sup>2</sup>

A traditional conception of separate spheres is that men have pushed women into the more constrained space and use that placement to oppress and control. Stave articulates this conventional understanding when she notes, “In Western culture specifically, women have been charged with maintaining the home and overseeing the domestic realm, while men have been entrusted with public life in all its aspects.” (23) This sharpens the distinction by showing that not only male/female but also public/private spheres are in opposition to each other. Yet I would argue that female space can also be a place to eschew the patriarch. As Pykett suggests, “Woman was to wield her influence in the domestic sphere, while man exercised his power in the hazardous, hostile, public domain” (12). This creates privilege that women have in this space that is not allowed or mimicked in a public or male space, which in turn makes this space purely female.

However, female space is not simply a binary term that what is not male must be female. Julia Kristeva prominently points out “feminist theory departs from the “dichotomy man/woman as an opposition” (Theisen 530), meaning that the feminine is not to be only understood in binary opposition to masculinity. This allows an understanding of this space as its own entity, and that it can stand alone without the direction or definition of patriarchy. There is agency that lies within the domestic or feminine space. Mari McCarty asserts, “entering the boundary zone voluntarily, women can cast off Otherness” (367). This is important to

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Merry Pawlowski, who construes feminine space as “cyclical (time folding back on itself), and circulating (space folding back on itself), conception of space/time, which has little to do with linear time but very much to with ‘imaginary space’” (76).

acknowledge and understand about female space because this understanding is where the power truly lies. In this space, women speak, listen, and express themselves as they choose, not as they are told. Even though they may be forced into a domestic space, what makes it feminine or female is the choice that women make to be their authentic selves and that, “in doing so, women become aware that this “boundary” is in fact an infinitely-expanding space” (McCarty 367). That female space is where female’s agency lies: women are not defined only in terms of how they are not male. McCarty continues:

...because they are not defined by their attachment to a male...people in the new space are of course physically present in the same old world, yet are emotionally, psychologically, and linguistically unfettered by patriarchal convention” (367).

Emotional, mental, and linguistic anonymity and autonomy is what makes a feminine space unique and beyond the domestic. A female space can be located in a domestic space, but it can also be located in a public space as well. Two women talking can become a female space whether public or private.

The novel does utilize the traditional patriarchal discourse of binaries when describing women in relationship to how they are not like men. The opening scene where we first meet Daisy and Jordan contains examples of ambiguous female power: “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” (Fitzgerald 12). The women are being compared to a balloon and an enormous stationary couch. The couch stands as a symbol for the domestic space because it is an object that is typically found in private dwellings. The women being tied to the couch as anchored balloons shows their natural state as moving and dynamic, but the couch is what makes them stationary. Fitzgerald

takes the time to draw our attention to the couch, because he wants to use this object as a symbol of domesticity. This domestic fixture typically resides in a domestic space and the women are balloons that, if left to their own devices, will move about and fly away of their own wills. However, Fitzgerald has them fixed to the “stationary” and “enormous” couch, which creates a metaphor for the way he views women, that they should be free and unrestrained, which is in opposition to the ideals of femininity in the 1920’s. By using this comparison, it shows where they sit on society’s value scale; the women are décor that adds charm to a room and nothing else.

For example, the word choice of “buoyed” is interesting and adds to what the narrative of the novel is trying to do regarding female construction. The word “buoy” means to keep something afloat, cause to become cheerful or confident, and a price to rise or remain at a certain level. All three definitions work in different ways of seeing the attributes that these female characters possess. Fitzgerald does this repeatedly throughout the text, always in a female space and always about women in that space. In this example we see these women at first seemingly in their dutiful place and as most readers might assume a place by choice, but the word “buoyed” exemplifies how dynamically these female characters are portrayed. They are tied, restrained, tethered to the stationary couch that they lay upon, yet they are floating. Fitzgerald is creating a paradox surrounding these women by making them floating and yet anchored. By him using the word buoy, it creates an ambiguity and allows the women to be viewed in between something concrete (anchored or tethered) with something more abstract like freedom (floating). The metaphor continues to expose the paradox of the conception of female characters Daisy and Jordan. Here is where the agency of the female space can be discovered in the novel that might be missed: a subtle

feminist tone hidden or intertwined with the patriarchal discourse of this novel. The narrator Nick Carraway continues his description of Daisy and Jordan with, “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.” Once again, we see the comparison of the women to objects: fluttering white dresses and short flights. This comparison feeds into the typical feminine language that most western novels contain—women are light, airy, easy, fluid, close to nature, the purity of white, and homebound.

The same pattern can be seen in the same space but at different moments in the plot. This example can be found half way through the novel, with Nick saying, “Daisy and Jordan lay upon an enormous couch, like silver idols, weighing down their own white dresses against the singing breeze of the fans” (122)<sup>3</sup>. We see the repeating of similar imagery: the breezy, white dresses, the couch, and the concept that they are dainty; however in this quote there is the added element of the silver idols. Also, the same idea of the women being immobile is continued in this example: “We can’t move,” they said together” (122). Instead of being compared to a “buoy” now they are being compared to silver idols. Fitzgerald does this to deepen the paradox that he is creating that illuminates the portrayal of female characters in the novel and how the discourse of the novel at first seems to be traditionally patriarchal of the women’s portrayal but is in actuality feminist in tone.

Changing the object illuminates the qualities that Daisy and Jordan are being compared to; the fact that the description of the ladies stays the same further

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<sup>3</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the figurative language of this novel is also at play, and this example has both the elements of the Christ/light motif and as well as this being done in a female space.

highlights the shift that they now take on the qualities of an idol. An idol is revered, worshiped, admired, and appreciated. The connotative meaning carries with it power and prestige. By comparing the women to idols, they gain an elevated status; a status that is beyond the temporal. Through this elevated status, Daisy and Jordan gain more agency, and that agency is granted through this comparison and the space in which it is uttered. The only place in the novel where idol is mentioned, Nick describes these women this way only in a female space.<sup>4</sup> Fitzgerald is having this take place in a female space because it inherently lies outside of understood patriarchal discourse. While the words that Fitzgerald chooses to use allow, on the surface, for this to appear to be women who are traditionally restrained, anchored, and controlled by patriarchy, they are not. The pattern that this example creates has the tension between the subtle feminist tones and more over-toned patriarchal discourse.

Another convention used to bring forth the feminist tone of the novel is the multitude of contrasts between female and male characters. These contrasts create different tensions or exposures of different ideas and constructions about female characters. Additionally these contrasts happen within a female space. For example in chapter 1 Tom is contrasted with Daisy and Jordan: “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.” Tom is heavy, loud, dynamic, and has enough power to change the undercurrents of the room, whereas Jordan and Daisy are light, silent, stationary, and are a non-affecting part of the room (12). As mentioned earlier the women are “floating” and “airy”. This contrast heightens the dynamic nature of

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<sup>4</sup> There are other moments where women are compared to precious metals, as mentioned in chapter 2, a comparison that also brings agency, but this is the only occurrence and reference to an idol.



the female characters of the novel, whereas Tom is static and unchanging. The women repeatedly say that they are unable to move but it is feeding into this contrast. The women in female spaces can move, they make statements that contradict that as mentioned in the earlier example in the living room scenes, and Daisy saying, “I’m p-paralyzed with happiness.” (13), but this doesn’t seem to be a true immobility, because their agency in this female space allows them freedoms and this contrast in female spaces to men further promotes and highlights this<sup>5</sup> dynamic found in the text.

Female space goes beyond the private, domestic, or physical. It is a rhetorical space as well, where the dialogue can be filled with unrestricted female discourse. How female characters speak to each other in female spaces of *The Great Gatsby* is important to look at and how that affects the text. Phillip Sipiora states about *The Great Gatsby* that, “The breakdown of gender relationships in the novel is only a symptom, however, of a more universal malaise, a total breakdown within society” (216). Sipiora is acknowledging that how male and female characters relate to each in the text is a source of tension in the text, but goes no further. By examining how woman speak to each other, how women are narrated about, and how they speak to men in a female space compared to a public or male space, we can begin to draw out the “universal malaise” of gender relationships that are found in this novel.

Female space as a rhetorical space can be understood as a space in which “women can exist as a whole”; thus they become “independent beings” (Cothran, 27). As a result, a feminine space can be free of the patriarchal gaze or it can be within it. This is a space where women speak freely and openly about what they

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<sup>5</sup> This can also be seen in the example of Daisy calling Tom hulking, which is discussed in chapter 2.

think and who they are. Moreover, I want to point out that this isn't strictly a space that is occupied by women. Instead, the space can operate with a "distinction contingent [of] positing her as inaccessible or unobservable..." (Theisen 530-31, 538), meaning it can be a space free of the male gaze and one which is interpreted by it. Hence there is a subversive and discreteness to this space that is unique. It sits outside of the linear, hierarchal, logical, quantifiable patriarchal space, but at times it still can be affected by patriarchy.

Understanding the subtle power of the female space means that it works within the confines of patriarchy and outside of it as well. There is a duality that goes beyond the simple binary understanding. Hence thinking and interpreting what happens in this space is malleable. This makes feminine space transformative of the female characters that speak in this space. Just such a public feminized space appears in the tea-garden scene at the Plaza Hotel where Nick and Jordan have tea. Fitzgerald permits Jordan to appropriate the narrative in the novel. By so doing, Fitzgerald turns the tea-room into a type of female space, one that dominates the male gaze of Nick and the possible interpretation that he would have on this space.

Jordan uses the opportunity to tell readers about Daisy's life story. It is important to note the shift in narrator; even more important, her narration concerns a moment that occurs in a female space. Jordan is describing the night before Daisy is set to marry Tom Buchanan and she is holding a letter from Gatsby. Jordan narrates she was, "...as drunk as a monkey. She had a bottle of sauterne in one hand and a letter in the other" (Fitzgerald 81). Intimate details are shared in a space that is attributed to women, narrated by a woman. This layering of narrator, rhetorical space, and substance of the utterance builds agency for women in this novel, creating the subversive feminist tone. Lest it seem as though Nick is

recasting what Jordan is saying, Fitzgerald uses formatting and parenthesis to let the reader know that Nick is not the one narrating: “(said Jordan Baker that afternoon...in the tea-garden at the Plaza Hotel)” (79). By switching narrators and having this occurring in a female space, it contributes to a pattern of women having power in this novel.

Furthermore, in the process of her narration, Jordan describes Daisy as being “found . . . lying on her bed as lovely as the June night in her flowered dress—” (81) Jordan compares Daisy’s loveliness to a “June night”. This comparison edifies the “loveliness” that Jordan wants us to see in Daisy; however, the more important element of this is that a June night can’t be owned. In this more private domestic space we see a comparison that is liberated of the patriarchal lens. She isn’t a couch, or a balloon, or a silver idol, but Daisy’s inherent loveliness is being compared to something that is more fluid and free. In the same vein that women are compared to floral and light elements through the novel, Fitzgerald is acknowledging that woman cannot be controlled or owned just as nature is its own force. For this reason, this is an example of how the discourse in more private spaces becomes filled with more of a feminist tone than compared to the living room scene. Just as a June night cannot be owned, neither can these women who are repeatedly showing the power that they possess in this novel.

Female space arises most easily when the female and the private converge. For example, the living room is a more public space within the domestic space of the home. The bedroom is a private space within the domestic sphere. The discourse that happens in this bedroom space is different because it lacks the patriarchal shroud that the living room examples possesses. The most dominant example of how power is harnessed and created in female spaces in this novel

happens in the hospital room after Daisy has given birth to her daughter. She has this reaction when finding out the gender of her newborn child,

[I...] asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. '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' (17).

It is important to note that Daisy is alone, with the nurse no longer in the room. And has given birth which is an act only women can engage in. Fitzgerald purposely puts Daisy alone in her hospital room when she first sees her daughter, because it is a pure moment void of male presence. She is the one narrating her story. She is telling the reader directly what she is thinking and feeling. When Daisy tells this to Nick, she is sitting in a female space, her living room.

Moreover, this quote shows that Daisy is fully aware of the gender divide. Daisy is given agency in this quote, because of her consciousness and her cognizance of what her and her daughter's prescribed role is as a woman. Likewise, she is mindful of how her daughter's life will be because of her gender. This again demonstrates how this novel continually has moments where women have agency over how they are perceived or constructed in the novel, which demonstrates the feminist tone of the novel. Women seem to be victims in this novel, yet if readers examine more closely moments like this one, where a female's words are directly quoted and she is in a space annulled of male presence and dominance, then the reader can discover that the women of this novel are aware of and resistant to societally prescribed roles about femininity. They may lack the full ability to move out of them, but the bold, subtle proclamation of awareness is what provides agency.

The hotel room scene in the novel is a more neutral space. It is a domestic space. It is presented to the reader without a prevailing discourse of male or female. We know this because Nick is narrating but he does something that he typically does not do and that is to first describe the outside world and the feelings found with in the room: “The room was large and stifling, and, though it was already four o’ clock, opening the windows admitted only a gust of hot shrubbery from the Park. Daisy went to the mirror and stood with her back to us fixing her hair” (133). We have the stifling hot room, the warm breeze that smells of nature, and Daisy coolly and aloofly staring into the mirror. The word choice, the inclusion of a perspective that embraces outside and inside, inner and outer climates, and the focus on Daisy are not Nick’s normal narrative mode. In fact, these few lines mimic more Jordan’s narrating style and description of Daisy than they do other moments when Nick describes her. Jordan might be appropriating the narrative again, converting the room into female space; at any rate, there is some ambiguity there. This ambiguity of narratorial control makes this space more neutral.

This narratorial ambiguity creates another neutral space and that is Gatsby’s car or “death car,” in which Daisy exposes her true agency when she intentionally kills Myrtle. Daisy’s intentional killing of Myrtle as she stood in the roadway is exposed in multiple examples. First is Michaelis’ second person point of view retelling and perspective to the accident. There is a page break on page 143 where Michaelis appropriates the novel. The same page break can be seen when Jordan appropriates the novel on page 79. So, the narrative being appropriated creates this phenomenon. Furthermore, Michaelis being a non-white male, Fitzgerald is once again changing the narrative to shift the power of the discourse that is being uttered, hence making the space neutral. Even though he is a man, this shift in

narration is changing the linear, more hegemonic understanding of how narration works, which in turn creates a neutral space. Michaelis says to the police, “The ‘death car’ as the newspapers called it, didn’t stop; it came out of the gathering darkness, wavered tragically for a moment and then disappeared around the next bend” (Fitzgerald 144). Michaelis’ unbiased recounting of how the car acted contrasts with what Gatsby says to Nick in the bushes outside of the Buchanan’s house. Michaelis is letting the reader know that the car never slowed, it did waiver (which is the only overlap between Gatsby’s retelling and Michaels’) and that the driver saw and hit the woman in the road.

Michaelis’ unbiased recounting of how the car acted contrasts with what Gatsby says to Nick in the bushes outside of the Buchanan’s house. Gatsby’s recounting portrays Daisy in a different light.

‘Yes’, [that Daisy was driving] he said after a moment, ‘but of course I’ll say I was...and this woman rushed out at us just as we were passing a car coming the other way. It all happened in a minute but it seemed to me that she wanted to speak with us, thought we were somebody she knew. Well, first Daisy turned away from the woman toward the other car, and then she lost her nerve and turned back (151).

By comparing the two narrations of the crash, we can see that Daisy knew who Myrtle was, the woman having an affair with her husband, and turned the car to kill her. Gatsby then proceeds to say, “I tried to make her stop but she couldn’t...” which shows that Daisy did not feel like it was an accident but knew what she was doing.

As Gatsby and Nick are standing in the bushes outside of the Buchanan home, Nick peers into their kitchen window where he sees Daisy and Tom sitting together and having a discussion. He says about their discussion that “there was an

unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together (153). We are not privy to the conversation that is being held between Daisy and Tom but it provides a glimpse into Daisy taking control over how her role in the crash is perceived and gives the reader a different interpretation about the crash. Furthermore, as has been shown in the previous chapter and this one, Daisy's ambiguous power lies within the domestic space. This moment, Daisy is speaking and the male gaze that is interpreting her cannot because there is this physical division between them, a wall and window, and the window becomes a metaphorical lens revealing the limits on the male gaze when gazing upon a domesticated space. Nick can not tell us what they are saying. Fitzgerald writes the word "conspiring" which allows for the reading of Daisy finally being able to harness and actualize her power over men in the novel. As Nick has already told us, Gatsby is going to take the fall for her, and now she is conspiring with Tom, so that he will protect her, and he does. After he had that kitchen discussion with Daisy, and after he points the enraged Wilson to where Gatsby lives, he tells Nick that, "He [Gatsby] ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car." And Nick says to himself, "There was nothing I could say, except the one unutterable fact that it wasn't true." (187).

Nick knows that Daisy is guilty, but he lets her manipulation stay undiscovered. He does not correct Tom's wife's retelling of what happened that night in front of Wilson's garage, because Nick and Tom are functioning together and using the patriarchal discourse of the novel, which Daisy manipulates to her advantage. It is only in the neutralized discourse that Michaelis provides do we see Daisy as Myrtle's killer. Tom's understanding of the crash is that Gatsby was behind it; before he talks with Daisy he stops at the accident and finds out that Myrtle has been killed and he is the one who tells the police the color of the

vehicle. As he is driving away from the scene with Nick, he says, “‘The God Damn coward!’ he whimpered. ‘He didn’t even stop his car’” (149). After he had that kitchen discussion with Daisy and points the deranged Wilson to where Gatsby lives, he tells Nick that “He [Gatsby] ran over Myrtle like you’d run over a dog and never even stopped his car.” And Nick says to himself, “There was nothing I could say, except the one unutterable fact that it wasn’t true” (187). By putting these examples together, it shows that Daisy intentionally kills Myrtle and uses the men in her life to get away with the murder. She is the instigator of both Myrtle’s and Gatsby’s death. She uses Gatsby to take the fall, allows her husband to assume that Gatsby was the one driving the car, which leads to his pointing Wilson in the direction of Gatsby and where he shoots him. The last line that is written about the crash and the aftermath of it is Nick saying that Tom’s version of it is not true, and earlier Nick discounts Gatsby’s retelling of the story while standing in the shadowy bushes outside the Buchanan mansion by saying, “and suddenly I guessed at the truth” (151). Nick knows that Daisy is the one who kills Myrtle. But Michaelis and Nick’s narrative both serve a different function: by having an appropriation occur in the narration, it creates a rhetorical space that is neutral. As mentioned previously it happens with Jordan and the narrator and as Michaelis as the narrator.

Moreover, the motif of light is utilized again and once again we see the power to which Daisy holds. After Myrtle’s demise, “Daisy’s bedroom light bloomed between the vines” (133), and the signal that Gatsby and she have worked out if she is in trouble with Tom is to turn the light on and off (135). Ultimately, Daisy has removed her rival; she has gobbled up the space Myrtle once occupied by extinguishing her light. Fitzgerald leaves this discourse ambiguous because it works with the subversive language that surrounds Daisy in



this novel. On the surface, her being confined by her marriage, her name, and her overly feminine affect work to make it seem that she is a “typical” female character, but on a deeper level of reading this text, she and Jordan both have agency in this novel, more than the men do. Daisy successfully kills Myrtle, and Gatsby is the one who suffers because of her choices. Gatsby is left with no choice because he functions within the constructs of the patriarchal discourse. The reasons why he wants Daisy are his undoing, her prestige, her money, and her desirability amongst other men. He has no choice because of the space that he occupies, the male/public, whereas Daisy does and uses it, in this instance to her advantage.

The novel is filled with examples of female power in female spaces. By examining how women speak to each other, how women are narrated, and how they speak to men in a female space compared to a public or male space, we can begin to draw out the dissatisfaction and discontent that women of this novel are experiencing. The feminine space allows the female characters to speak for themselves and appropriate the narrative.

#### CHAPTER 4: “A BEAUTIFUL LITTLE FOOL”: FEMINIST RHETORIC OF THE GREAT GATSBY AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE AMERICAN CLASSROOM

*“When we seem to have won or lost in terms of certainties, we must, as literature teachers in the classroom, remember such warnings -- let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open, and that it may be altogether salutary that it is so.” – Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*

The rhetorical space in which most readers first encounter and interact with this text is the classroom. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel that most, if not nearly all, American teens experience reading and discussing in their high school English class. As a result, how the novel is taught greatly affects the interpretation and perception of the discourse surrounding this novel. A deeper interpretation of these female characters has not translated into the rhetorical space of the classroom. No longer should students walk away with remembering only Gatsby’s strife or Nick’s cynicism. American students need to expose, discuss, challenge and cultivate a more complex, unbiased, and diverse reading and interpretation of this novel.

Currently, the novel is taught within the context of the traditional understanding that the women are to be discussed primarily in order to understand the male characters. Similarly, in this novel, on the surface, women are valued more when they increase the value of men that are around them. Hence the traditional view that is taught in classrooms of women emerges when looking at this novel with a patriarchal focus: women are commodities. In the teacher guide published by The National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) *The Big Read: The Great Gatsby*, there is an assumption made that Daisy and Jordan are secondary characters: They are grouped together with the nameless partygoers at Gatsby’s

mansion in the character list on the first few pages of the manual (4). The guide describes Daisy in the following terms: “Nick Carraway narrates the story, but it is Jay Gatsby who is the novel’s protagonist. Gatsby’s love affair with Daisy, her marriage to Tom, and Gatsby’s quest to regain Daisy’s affection provide the story’s narrative arc” (4). She is strictly limited to Gatsby’s love interest and Tom’s wife, with her purpose being directly tied to how she relates to these male characters. This type of assumption is exactly what hinders a diverse reading of the novel. This activity and brief character description might not directly call out women as commodity, but it quietly reinforces the idea that women are secondary in this novel and only need to be discussed when it relates to understanding a male character, hence making the women characters a commodity.

Luce Irigaray states that women are time and time again used as commodities in the social market place. Using this concept to read *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald has his narrator Nick treat Daisy as an object that demonstrates a man’s wealth or social status. An example of this is found when she is described as, “gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor (157)”. In this quote, Nick uses words that juxtapose poor with wealthy in a way that makes wealth more desirable., and women that have that “wealth” are more desirable. Using words “silver,” “safe” and “proud” to describe Daisy leads her to be objectified and become a product of consumption for men, which is a very common rhetorical use of female characters in canonical works. However, as was discussed in chapter 1, the word silver can be read in multiple ways, and again, we see the ambiguity surrounding women: the power is there, but harnessed by patriarchal discourse. There is depth to this text that is missed in how the novel is taught. Instead of the multiplicity of the discourse, the activity provided tells students that Daisy and Jordan are secondary characters and class discussion

focuses on how these two women relate to other men, not the power that they possess solely on their own, which in turn creates a commoditized interpretation of these women.

The Big Read, which promotes the reading of a particular novel across America by the NEA, lesson guide has teachers instruct students to rewrite chapter 1 from Daisy's perspective. At first this seems like a promising activity that will end with a discussion about the wants, desires, and thoughts of Daisy. However, what the lesson provides is a question that has students focusing on how this exercise helps the students understand Nick's "trustworthiness as a narrator," which only brings the focus back to what this lesson guide considers the main characters: Nick and Gatsby. This activity would lend itself to a rich discussion about the female characters of this novel and the subtle agency that they possess in the narrative, but that is not what is happening. In the ways in which it is taught the novel functions in opposition to an unbiased reading and perpetuates a biased reading that favors the male characters. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev writes about feminist critical pedagogy in his essay, "Feminist Critical Pedagogy and Critical Theory Today," describing the way a text is taught needs to challenge "contemporary hegemonic educational ideologies". The novel does challenge these ideals, but that needs to be brought to the foreground in the classroom, if it is not done, then the novel does contribute to the rhetoric of the Western patriarchal tradition.

Examining further The Big Read campaign we see the focus on male characters instead of female characters throughout the pedagogical sequence. One handout in the lesson, entitled "Gatsby's Guide to Manhood," informs students about a section toward the end of the novel. In the story Gatsby had listed his "General Resolves" for each day (173). The handout is intended to provide a context for students, but what happens is the additional information provided in

the handout is too pointed in how it is presented, which in turn has influence over how the teacher and students will perceive the text and the women of the text. For example, “one poster provides a sample reading list to properly guide the young male mind. Similar posters assisted young girls in how to keep a good home, stay fit, and build a family” (12). This shows how the handout has students thinking about the female characters once again in terms of how they relate to men, by giving very static terms of how females were perceived during the 1920’s. It might seem that this is giving additional information that will help students understand the historical context of *Gatsby*, but what this additional information does is spread assumptions about the time period, gender relations, and perpetuate the idea that women are secondary characters of the novel. The discussion question that is suggested to ask students after reading this handout is, “Why do you think the author included Gatsby’s “General Resolves” as a child in the novel? What does this say about Gatsby’s motivations? (7)”. There is no discussion or challenge to the gender ideals that the historical posters promote for males and females. Hence, allowing gender to take a back seat in classroom discussion, and not allowing students to discover or give classroom time to the plight of women in this novel. These questions and handout ignore and reinforce prescribed traditional gender roles. This is an example of how the rhetoric used in classrooms reinforces a male focused reading, which, in turn, leads students to not hear the voices of the female characters and notice the ambiguous female power in the novel. Also, having a handout focusing on manhood instead of womanhood furthers the idea that the rhetoric of pedagogy used in classrooms promotes a patriarchal reading.

Another example from NEA’s *The Big Read* has students discussing and looking at Daisy and Jordan with the use of the following questions: “Discuss

some of the other potent symbols in the story. How are these interpretive keys to the novel's meaning? How might the "two young women ...buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon" symbolize the women of this generation?" (6). In the first and second chapters of my thesis, I point out how this quote about the women being buoyed is very empowering to the women of the novel. However, the questions that surround this quote are so singular in how they are asked and what they are asking students to focus on, they limit students in how they are encouraged to think, discuss, and write about this quote from the novel. It is encouraging that this quote is pulled out to be discussed, but it does not provide significant footing for students to engage with the gender motifs and female power of this novel, but leads them toward a discussion on how women are viewed in relationship with men, which in turn is reductive of the female characters in a limiting manner in how they are discussed and interpreted.

Within the same lesson plan, the following activity is attached to extend the discussion about the female characters as symbols in the novel: "Gatsby looks for Daisy in the green light at the end of her dock. Does anyone in the story truly know Daisy? Does the light become a symbol for something else?" Asking the question of about truly knowing Daisy is provocative and is in the vein of questioning that would help reframe and push the discussion of this novel into an unbiased direction. However, the question that follows and where students are ending is landing back toward how Daisy helps the reader understand Gatsby and not her. This repeated pattern is what leads many high school students to walk away with a limited understanding of Daisy and Jordan, and leaving the subtle agency of these women unturned.

In the last section of the same lesson plan about symbolism, the guide suggests having students engage in the following writing activity: "Nick describes

that Gatsby had created an illusion of “colossal vitality.” Write three paragraphs from Nick’s point of view considering what Daisy has come to represent. Why has Gatsby created such a “colossal” illusion? How does Nick feel about the elevation of Daisy to almost epic status?” (6). This activity is asking students to discuss Daisy in terms of Nick’s perspective and how she is the root of Gatsby’s “illusion,” which does two things: first, it perpetuates the discussion of looking at women via the gaze of the men in this novel and second, it once again has students thinking about Daisy in strict terms of how she relates and foils Gatsby’s character. As a result it limits a very rich character and discussion about the ambiguous power that her and other females possess in this novel.

In one of the last activities in *The Big Read’s* lesson manual, a suggested activity is “Rewrite the novel’s ending as if Gatsby and Daisy reunite. Would the novel be as powerful? Why or why not? What might make this new plot successful?”(8). This activity shows that when women are discussed it is in a more frivolous manner. This activity has students focusing on the love story instead of the social implications of Daisy and Gatsby together. Additionally, it does not focus on what it means for Daisy to be in a relationship with Gatsby or if Daisy even wants to end up with Gatsby. There is no reflection or discussion about her perspective, just the continuation of how she either relates to Tom or Gatsby. Once again, she is analyzed in the high school classroom in terms of her relationship with the men in this novel. None of these questions prompt an analysis or discussion about what agency she or Jordan might possess.

There are many examples to be found to demonstrate the male focused reading of *The Great Gatsby*. An example can be found from a lesson published in 2012 from Discovery Education by Ken Zelasko. He poses the following task to students, “Compare and contrast the characters of Tom and Gatsby.” Another

task is “In the story, Tom and Nick are a part of the established upper class, while Gatsby is part of the class known as the nouveau riche. Decide which social group you would want to belong to and explain why.” Once again these types of questions ask students to reflect only on male characters, and on the novel with a more patriarchal focus. There is no offering of how the women are dealt with in the novel. Zelasko does not provide any questions that allow students to discuss, evaluate, or infer about the females of *Gatsby*. Most of the instructional guides discuss the theme of the American Dream and disillusionment. The female characters can still be examined and discussed while still looking at these themes. In reality it would help explore these themes even more by acknowledging how the females are dealt with in this text and what effects that has on the disillusioned American Dream.

Lynn Safarik discusses how the Feminist movement has influenced higher education in the last few decades, and it is Feminism and other current literary criticisms that will help promote a new teaching of canonical works. She also points out that many teachers who are earning their teaching credential are taught in a program that contributes to the white male normative, and they are not exposed to potential different readings (1722). This same concept applies to the teacher resource materials that are used in the instruction of canonical works like *The Great Gatsby*. As pointed out in all the above referenced examples, each have students maintaining and staying in a white male perspective. There might be some turns toward discussing the perspectives of the female characters of this novel their agency, but students are quickly turned back to thinking about the novel in terms of a patriarchal lens.

The Modern Language Association’s (MLA) teaching guide, *Approaches to Teaching Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby*, asserts its purpose as it giving,



“instructors of *The Great Gatsby* multiple tools and strategies for teaching the novel and for introducing students to the culture of the 1920s” (xiii). The purpose of the instruction manual becomes important because it puts the emphasis on the cultural context of the novel that it was written in and the social implications both inside and outside of the text. This is not the focus of the above-mentioned teaching resources that have been previously referenced. By shifting the perspective and purpose of the instructional goal and discussion surrounding the novel, this teaching guide, unlike the others, puts the concentration of students on the social implications of the text rather than on plot and characters. This teaching guide also addresses gender in the novel, “Teaching *The Great Gatsby* through Examining Gender Roles” by Mary Elkins (181). However, this is intended for college level students, and not the K-12 classroom. The gender issues of this novel can and should be discussed in the high school classroom as well as the college classroom. This lesson guide does do a wonderful job of getting readers to discuss and explore how the expectations and position of women are different, and is the most effective in broadening the discussion that surrounds this novel, but it still leaves you with an understanding of Daisy in relation to Gatsby and Jordan in relation to Nick. This teaching guide does move us in the direction of a more diverse and open-ended way of teaching canonical works.

This is not the only novel that illustrates this problem of focusing on text specific, male focused, and limited student exploration outside the prescribed topics in the teaching manuals, but I do believe examining how we teach novels and the language that we use when we teach them will help contribute to the conversation surrounding the deconstruction of canonical works. Heather Bruce and Emma Walker gives a definition of what a deconstructive pedagogy is and

how this differs from a more traditional or commonly accepted pedagogy in American classrooms:

The postmodern problematization of categories such as male and female, African American and European American, heterosexual and homosexual results in the rejection of constructions of gender, race and sex that depend on binary opposition. Deconstruction is one of her primary pedagogical tools.

Deconstruction is the effort to critique all language as unstable and indeterminate in its meanings. Deconstruction is a strategy that aims to reverse power hierarchies in order to displace the systems that keep asymmetrical relations in place.

Deconstruction is a tool that can be used to unsettle the logic of binary thinking, to consider the multiplicity of possibilities that range among binary oppositions, and to learn to accept difference.

This is an example of what teachers need to do now. We know where we have come from and Bruce and Walker give us the rhetorical lens, which works best now when teaching an American novel in high school English classes. In addition to this, deconstructive reading encourages a constant reflective reading that makes it dynamic and not static of the text. It establishes and roots the pedagogical shift in thinking of a text as static objects that only allow a few readings. Literary critics have made this paradigm shift decades ago and now the K-12 classroom needs to do the same.

In their article, "Feminist Rhetorical Practices: In Search of Excellence," Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline J. Royster explain what feminist readers do,

These reflective and reflexive practices have predisposed us to understand the inevitability that, more than likely, there will be factors and dimensions of scenes and situations that we may not notice, and especially so if we fail to

exercise a direct and specific commitment to look and look again, listen and listen again, think and think again recursively (652).

This quote sums up the differences that an unbiased reading provides versus a traditional reading, and is what should be the driving force behind pedagogically practices of teachers teaching canonical works in their classrooms. It is vital that we constantly revisit a text to analyze our own bias. In order to discover what a text can richly give, like I have tried to show that *The Great Gatsby* gives, a text that does portray female power, requires recursive thinking and reading of this text.

This novel is an example of how the canon is not inclusive of women and the need to bring different readings of text to light in the high school classroom. Moreover the shift to a multiplicity of readings needs to happen in the rhetorical space of the classroom. An unbiased and deconstructive approach to teaching literature is what needs to take place. This is one of the ways that will promote a rereading of canonical text that include not only women, but different ethnicities, cultures, and religious groups. *The Great Gatsby* is a story known by many, but the women of *The Great Gatsby* are not know through a non-patriarchal lens.

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