I. INTRODUCTION

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway were the leading American novelists of the Lost Generation of the 1920s. These writers had experienced not only the sensation and exhilaration of the ‘Jazz Age’ but also the confusion and turmoil of the war period. The 1920s were seen as an age in which provincialism and Puritanism were wiped out. Variously known as the ‘Roaring Twenties,’ ‘The Gilded Age’ and ‘The Gay Twenties,’ it was an age when freedom manifested itself in drunken orgies, sexual liberties and outrageous public behaviour. Scott Fitzgerald, in “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” describes the 1920s as “an age of excess” (The Jazz Age 4) which witnessed “a whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure” (6). Then came the war with its harsh realities and influenced every aspect of life and these novelists were left bitter, cynical and disillusioned—a ‘lost generation’.

The poets, novelists, playwrights and critics of the 1910s and 1920s focussed on the profound changes that were taking place in a war-torn world. Dos Passos, who was also a member of the lost generation of American expatriates on the European continent, turned his literary inclination towards the social upheavals and political crises that the war period witnessed. Hemingway took up subjects like war and its far-reaching impact on the human race.
Fitzgerald was more concerned with giving artistic expression to his emotional experiences and the attitudinal changes that were taking place in that freewheeling age. He was hailed as the true representative of the Jazz Age, for he not only faithfully recorded its moral anarchy in his works but also lived a life of his times. Both Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, attracted public attention and also derision at times by indulging in a variety of unorthodox acts. Jumping into a public fountain or riding drunk atop their car certainly threw them into the limelight and the Fitzgeralds were well known for more reasons than one.

Fitzgerald made his mark on the American literary scene and won Zelda Sayre with the publication of This Side of Paradise in 1920. The novel deals with the American style of young life, particularly Princeton life-style, and is considered indispensable to a social historian. His second novel, The Beautiful and Damned, was published in 1922 and is based on the reckless life the Fitzgeralds used to lead during the decade-long Jazz Age.

As far as literary fame is concerned, Fitzgerald had to wait for the publication of The Great Gatsby in 1925 which established him as a serious literary writer. The novel attacks American materialism and highlights the story of Gatsby, a self-made young man whose dream of success personified in a beautiful young woman, turns out to be false and a nightmare. Tender is the Night was written in 1934 after Zelda and Fitzgerald had been disastrously dissipating their resources while living in Europe. This novel on
which Fitzgerald worked far too long and made far too many revisions is set in Europe. It traces the moral decline of a young American psychiatrist, Dick, whose personal energies are sapped and professional career corroded by his marriage to a rich American heiress.

Fitzgerald’s last three novels, *The Great Gatsby*, *Tender is the Night*, and *The Last Tycoon*, proved that he was more than a mere chronicler of the Jazz Age. These novels portray subtle and complex human relationships. By 1937, Fitzgerald was sick, alcoholic and unable to write. Just before he died in 1940, he tried to revive his career as a fiction writer and the result was an unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*. The novel was published posthumously in 1941 and is about Hollywood as an industry and a society. Besides these five novels, Fitzgerald wrote over a hundred and fifty short stories about men, women, marriage and money. There is also a collection of autobiographical pieces called *The Crack Up* and a comedy called *The Vegetable*. These autobiographical pieces written between 1931 and ’39, show Fitzgerald, as EL Doctorow puts it, “a chastened, mature man, sober, alone, with nothing to lose” (*The Jazz Age* vii).

Writing with clinical precision, Fitzgerald focused on the changing manners, morals and social dynamics of his time. Without lapsing into self-pity, he has summarized his position as a ‘Jazz Age kid’ in “Echoes of the Jazz Age”. He notes that the age “bore him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as
they did, that something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the war” (The Jazz Age 3).

The Jazz Age with its distinct social fabric provided themes for Fitzgerald. Since his works arise out of his own emotional experiences and his turbulent marriage with Zelda, it is not difficult to identify the themes that dominate his works. Scott Donaldson, in his biography Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald, writes, “love provided Fitzgerald with the emotional crisis of his life and the raw material for his fiction” (9). In The Crack Up, Fitzgerald notes: “All the stories that come to my head has a touch of disaster in them. The lonely young creatures in my novels went to ruin […] My millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Thomas Hardy’s peasants” (87).

American materialism is dealt with reprovingly in the works of Fitzgerald. The Great Gatsby shows how the young Americans of the first quarter of the twentieth century were wrong in correlating spiritual and emotional satisfaction with material success. In showing how Gatsby tries to amass wealth in the shortest possible time through corrupt means, Fitzgerald shows how the American Dream turns into a nightmare. Themes of dissipation and waste, disillusionment and failure run through all his works.

The symbols of success in the Jazz Age were wealth, prestige and possession of a beautiful, popular girl. Fitzgerald’s novels and short stories show how the characters end their lives disastrously because of having these
three success symbols or because of pursuing them without any thinking or rationalization. Anthony Patch of *The Beautiful and Damned* has wealth, social status and a beautiful wife but his life is shattered and he ends up as an incoherent mental wreck. Gatsby has wealth and prestige but meets a violent end when he stubbornly pursues Daisy. Most of the male characters in Fitzgerald’s works end up as colossal failures.

In order to gain some insights into the personality of Fitzgerald, the man and writer, it is worthwhile exploring the Jazz Age—after all he epitomized it. His relationship with his wife, Zelda, and a greater understanding of the idea of the ‘New Woman’ would enable us to comprehend the female characters in his works in a better manner.

The 1920s in America have been celebrated and condemned and were variously labelled as the ‘Roaring Twenties,’ the age of ‘Fords, Flappers and Fanatics,’ the ‘Time of Tremendous Trifles’ and ‘Babitts and Bohemians’. The age witnessed the Great Depression, the devastation and horror of World War I. It challenged the old Horatio Alger formula of industry, thrift and morality as the American way to success and instead adopted any means to make fast money. The American Dream which everyone was in pursuit of was the result of the fast pace of industrialization. People believed that they could rise and become successful no matter how lowly their origins were. Andrew Hook, in his “Introduction” to *American Literature in Context III*, states that “the American was the self-reliant, self-
made man; America offered every man the opportunity to succeed, to improve his lot by his own hard work” (4).

Given the fact that America was a land of opportunity, the American Dream turned sour because the Americans believed that everything in life, including spiritual well-being, would accompany material success. In his short story, “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” Fitzgerald reinforces the idea that Americans viewed wealth as a major aspect of the American Dream. In his later years, Fitzgerald realized that the American Dream with its promise of success turned out to be a thing of the past. As the euphoria of the Jazz Age came to an end, he conceded that the American Dream turned out to be deceptive and the satisfaction of all desires became unattainable.

It has to be underlined that as Fitzgerald captured the fast life of his age in his works, he, in the opinion of Dorothy Brown, became “the voice of all the sad young men, yearning for a lost world of virtue and values” (18). Writing in 1931, Fitzgerald looked back at the Jazz Age with a shudder, for it is only then that he realized that he had frittered away his youth and talent and wrecked his career. He ended up eventually as a victim of his hedonistic era.

Almost all of Fitzgerald’s works close on a note of disillusionment and cynicism. He describes his generation in This Side of Paradise as “grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faith in man shaken” (253). In “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” he notes that although it was “an age of miracles
an age of art" (The Jazz Age 4), it was one in which "girls dramatized themselves as flappers, the generation that corrupted its elders and eventually overreached itself less through lack of morals than through lack of taste" (6).

The age, which witnessed tremendous change in manners and morals, was known for its petting parties and seldom would the young men and women leave the parties sober. Alcoholism, of which Fitzgerald himself was a victim, was fast becoming a major problem in American cities. In The Beautiful and Damned, the major point in the decline of Anthony and Gloria comes with the realization that hard-drinking had become a part of their life. Their downhill path in life was strewn with empty bottles.

The sexual revolution had an unnerving effect on the Victorian mothers. An uninhibited sex life was the order of the day and this created a crisis in morals and culture. The unprecedented advancements in science and technology added to the fast-paced life of the age. Frederick Lewis Allen observes, "if the decade was ill-mannered it was also unhappy. With the old order of things had gone a set of values which had given richness and meaning to life, and substitute values were not easily found" (qtd. in Brown 2).

One cannot ignore the 'flapper' of the 1920s. She was the alarming and even more troubling version of the New Woman. The New woman, as she was christened in the 1890s by Sarah Grand, a feminist, was considered an ideal of womanhood. Ellen Jordan, in "The Christening of the New
Woman: May 1894,” remarks that the New Woman was filled with “hostility to men, questioning of marriage, determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self-sufficient, single and yet fulfilling life” (19). This New Woman was derided for being ‘manly’ and Punch played a role in whipping up laughter at the physically strong and outdoor woman. The educated, marriage-hating, sport-playing woman of the 1890s became a model for the women of the modern times.

The continuing onslaught of industrialization and urbanization changed the very nature of womanhood. The ‘true woman’ with her virtues of submissiveness, domesticity and spirituality gave way to the Gibson girl. Brown, in Setting a Course: American Women in 1920’s, delineates the differences between ‘The Steel-Engraving Lady’ and the ‘Gibson Girl’. The Steel-engraving girl elegantly graced Magazines. She was pictured as one sitting peacefully and looking at the world through her window with dreamy eyes. She was a picture of domestic felicity. The Gibson girl, on the contrary, wore “a short skirt and heavy square-toed shoes, a mannish collar, cravat, and vest and a broad-brimmed felt hat tipped jauntily on one side” (Brown 30). While the Steel-Engraving Lady waited for her knight in shining armour, the Gibson girl played golf with her male partner. As the generation lamented the demise of the true woman, the flapper made her splash in the socio-cultural scene of the 1920s in America.
The flappers were distinct products of the Golden Twenties. Preston W Slosson presents a graphic description of the flapper:

Breezy, slangy and informal in manners; slim and boyish in form; covered with silk and fur [. . .] with carmined lips, plucked eyebrows and close-fitting helmet; gay, plucky and confident [. . .] she cared little for approval or disapproval and went about her act, whether it were a marathon dancing contest, driving an automobile at seventy miles an hour, a channel swim, a political campaign on a social service settlement. (qtd. in Brown 32)

The flapper flouted all social norms and was considered a leader in the complete emancipation of women from patriarchal standards. The feminine grace of the Jamesian heroine who exhibited an abundance of moral sense and ethical standards was considered stifling by the flappers of the freewheeling Jazz Age. Koula Hartnett, in Zelda Fitzgerald and the Failure of the American Dream for Women, writes, “as the fashions loosened, so did the morals of the New Woman of the new century” (94).

The flappers’ major concern was personal freedom and the pursuit of pleasure. Increased freedom and openness of sexual behaviour resulted in the creation of the foot-loose flapper of the Jazz Age. Under the puritan influence, the Americans had been repressed for long and Frederick J Hoffman, in “Philistine and Puritan in the 1920s,” noted “they decided that
any force was evil which stood in the way of a full, wholesome, primitive expression of natural impulses” (249). The Romantic Egoists carries a note by Zelda on the nature of the flappers. She wrote: “These women flirted because it was fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because they had a good figure [. . .] She refused to be bored because she was not boring [. . .] and she had mostly masculine friends” (78).

Zelda admired these women for their “courage, recklessness and spendthriftness” (The Romantic Egoists 79). To her, these unconventional traits were an integral part of self-expression. While Zelda extolled the character of these flappers, Eliot and Hemingway, among others, looked upon the New Woman as a sign of social disintegration. Fitzgerald himself was critical of the new breed of women. In Tender is the Night, he talks of the typical American woman as one “whose irrational temper [. . .] had broken the moral back of a race and made a nursery out of a continent” (251).

Despite his disapproval of the New Woman, Fitzgerald fell in love with a typical Jazz Age emancipated woman—Zelda Sayre. In order to win the most-sought-after girl, Fitzgerald had first to be a successful writer with a steady income. Zelda had broken her engagement to Fitzgerald in 1920 due to financial reasons. When he courted Zelda, Fitzgerald was an aspiring writer and was in no position to offer her the kind of life she yearned for. It was only after the publication of This Side of Paradise did the marriage take
place. Fitzgerald, deeply hurt by Zelda’s initial rejection, never really got over it; the bitterness remained in him and is reflected in his works.

Although Zelda married Fitzgerald only after his literary career took off and he shot into fame, he never held her morally responsible for her initial rejection. The besotted writer even approved of her action and in his short stories such as “The Sensible Thing” and “Winter Dreams” endorses the motivations that make the rich heroines reject the poor men they love because those men could not guarantee a luxurious life for them.

The Fitzgeralds were eager to be a part of the glittering world of the rich Americans. But they both felt poor and frustrated. Fitzgerald had to struggle hard to satisfy Zelda’s whims. She was beautiful but spoiled, talented but demanding. She fired the romantic imagination of Fitzgerald, as she was refreshingly unconventional in her ways. Andre Le Vot, a Fitzgerald biographer, observes that she was notorious for her “wild escapades and contempt for convention” (63). Zelda, we are told, “craved action, the clash of rivalries, the heat of competition” (Le Vot 63). So powerful was her influence on him that there is often a fusion between the women in his works and Zelda. Marriage did not put an end to Zelda’s flirtatious and bohemian ways. She refused to conform and showed no interest in housekeeping or any other aspect of domestic life. Nancy Milford tells us that Zelda prided herself in being “a spirited young feminist who disliked women” (Zelda 92).
Disenchanted, Fitzgerald realized that he had not only frittered away his talents but also his life. Being in the thick of things, mixing with celebrities and thinking that fashion and good looks were important to keep pace with the heady age took its toll. Zelda and Fitzgerald never paid heed to their friends’ warnings and advice to lead a sober and steady life. The couple could not handle the pressures and disappointment life brought them. Greenfield observes that they ended up as a “tragically unhappy couple” (1).

In April 1930, Zelda suffered a mental breakdown and was hospitalized and Fitzgerald took to excessive drinking. That ended the romantic life they had built up over the preceding ten years. From then on, he had to battle against a pile of debt and a schizophrenic wife who wanted to strike out on her own and embark on a dancing and literary career of her own despite her unsound mental health. Notwithstanding her frail mental condition, Zelda was able to write and James Mellow, in his biography Invented Lives: F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, comments that “Fitzgerald and Zelda were able to use their fictional stories to send each other signals, warnings, provide excuses and justifications for their behaviour” (293). After a brief affair with Sheilah Graham during his days in Hollywood, Fitzgerald died in 1940 aged forty-four with the sad conviction that despite his intellectual ambitions he was a colossal failure.

Fitzgerald received much critical acclaim in the early part of his literary career but was almost forgotten in the 1940s. His short stories were
seen as material produced to meet his constant needs for a quick financial return. But his lost reputation was restored and carried to new heights in 1960s when a lot of critical interest was evinced in his works. Random House in 1999 declared *The Great Gatsby* to be the second best novel of the twentieth century, after James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

So how does one justify adding yet another item to the list of critical writings available on the novels and short stories of Fitzgerald? The answer is twofold: Firstly, the bulk of existing secondary material on Fitzgerald focuses on *The Great Gatsby* and to a lesser extent on *Tender is the Night*. The short stories find only passing references. Secondly, after the publication of Arthur Mizener’s biography, *The Far Side of Paradise*, in 1951, the biographical approach has been the critical norm. The characteristic feature of Fitzgerald criticism has been to link his novels with his life. While this approach has provided sustained public interest, it has hampered literary appreciation. Feminist critics in particular have exploited the biographical approach. They have taken excerpts from Fitzgerald’s writings and placed them alongside details from his real life to show the correspondence between his life and works. The stance adopted by the feminists has been hostile to Fitzgerald but favourable to Zelda. Here too interest has been limited to *The Beautiful and Damned* and *Tender is the Night*.

This study titled “Women in the Novels and Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald—A Critique of the Feminist Readings of His Works” takes into
consideration all the five novels and the major short stories of Fitzgerald. The researcher does not toe the line of gynocritics who champion the cause of the Fitzgeraldian women. The stance adopted by the researcher could be construed as a variety of feminist criticism, which, as Janet Kaplan puts it, is a personal response of women readers to women writers/critics.

It is the researcher’s contention that a close look at the texts reveals that far from being neglected, victimized or oppressed, the Fitzgeraldian women hold centre stage, take complete hold of the men in their lives and then leave them in shambles. Being prescriptive and suspicious by nature, they do not give their men any kind of freedom to enable them to achieve in their lives. The high-living, hard drinking New Women are unsupportive and selfishly place their interests before others.

Gynocritics, drawing upon Kate Millet’s theory of sexual politics which refers to the “power structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled a by another” (Sexual Politics 21), have made out a case for the women characters in the works of Fitzgerald. Nancy Milford’s biography, Zelda, which appeared in 1970, sparked off a renewed interest in the works of Fitzgerald from a feminist standpoint. Feminist critics contend that Gloria, Daisy, Nicole and the rest of the women characters are victims of male supremacy and are emotionally and intellectually neglected and marginalized. Keeping the Fitzgerallds’ turbulent marriage in mind, they also contend that Fitzgerald himself felt threatened by
the talent and independent nature of his wife and hence to get even with her presented his fictional women in a negative light. This kind of a stance is reductive and hence needs to be critically reviewed.

Feminists of the sixties attacked ‘sexist ideology’ and the task of feminist criticism, according to Ruthven, was “to expose sexism in one work of literature after another” (Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction 74). Marriage was seen as an explosive power struggle wherein women were victims of patriarchal traditions. Millet emphatically declared that “patriarchy has God on its side” (51). Thus the onus rested on the feminists to take up the cause of women. But it needs to be emphasized that the women in Fitzgerald’s works drift into marriage only after a long and hectic social life; they marry for the wrong reasons.

Radical feminists see men as enemies, and look upon motherhood and family as oppressors of women and sexual surrender as betrayal of self. Stepped in such attitudes, critics like Judith Fetterley, Elizabeth Hardwick, Sarah Fryer, Koula Hartnett and Sarah Mayfield justify the women in the works of Fitzgerald and exonerate their numerous flaws. They hold them up as symbols of self-sacrifice in the face of societal pressures. Similarly, all the feminists rallied behind Zelda believing her to be a victim of Fitzgerald’s patriarchal attitudes. But a close look at their marital life shows that it was Fitzgerald who suffered at the hands of the whimsical Zelda.
The view of most women writers is summed up in the stance taken by Fryer who wrote, “the women in all of Fitzgerald’s novels consistently have to do battles in order to get the men to take them seriously. The many battles take their toll—socially, intellectually, emotionally and psychologically” (Fitzgerald’s New Women: Harbingers of Change 11). It has to be emphasized that the Fitzgeraldian women do not like to be taken seriously—it bores them. They are quite happy being admired as glamorous sex objects. Their only fear is getting old and losing their good looks. In This Side of Paradise, the changing terms for young women imply degeneration. The “belle” becomes the “flirt,” the “flirt” becomes the “baby vamp” (61).

Thus the women in Fitzgerald’s works become associated with the gaudy and distasteful in life. Romantic love, domestic fulfillment and motherhood are denounced and Gloria and company shudder to take on responsibilities. They do not grow emotionally, intellectually and psychologically. Almost all the women think like Rosalind, who is one of the flappers in This Side of Paradise. Rosalind declares that she does not want “to think of pots, kitchens and brooms,” but wants to worry whether her legs get “slick and brown when she swims in summer” (178).

It is true that Fitzgerald’s association of women and art is highly complex. He was looking for ‘the’ woman who existed in his romantic imagination—someone who could make his life emotionally richer and more exciting, but this remained an unattainable dream. His desire to create a
woman of substance is manifested in the ‘College of One’ he had set up for Sheilah Graham. He also used to flood his daughter Scottie with letters advising her on her education at Vassar. But this has been considered by the feminists as an interference on the part of Fitzgerald.

The women in the works of Fitzgerald come across as domineering and self-centered, for they are the glamorous and irresponsible flappers of the ‘Roaring Twenties’. Gloria in The Beautiful and Damned, Daisy in The Great Gatsby and Nicole in Tender is the Night are shallow and can boast of only their youth and beauty. Gloria, considered the most interesting feminine creation of Fitzgerald, is known as “coast-to-coast Gloria” (The Beautiful and Damned 53) because of her incorrigible flirtatious nature. She has wild, uncontrollable ways and detests reforms of any sort. She demands total subservience from Anthony. Nicole insists that her psychiatrist husband Dick be tied down to her whims. She makes it clear that “she wants to own him [. . .] to make him stand still for ever” (Tender is the Night 183). She effectively destroys Dick’s professional, physical and mental equilibrium. Almost all the Fitzgeraldian women display the same characteristics. In the short stories, we have Yanci Bowman, Ailie Calhoun, Alicia Dare, Nancy Lamar who are all veritable man-eaters.

The idea of women abandoning their men is common to most of the stories of Fitzgerald. Relationships break over the issue of wealth, money being a precondition for marriage. In “Winter Dreams,” Judy Jones, the
spoilt rich girl, candidly asks the man she is interested in: "Let us start right [. . .] Who are you? Are you poor?" (The Collected Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald 373). It is only when he replies that he has a sizable income does she condescend to kiss him. Later she marries a millionaire and though she is unhappy with him, she is happy with her newfound status and wealth.

Notwithstanding the hollowness ingrained in each of these women, the men are inexorably drawn towards their charming, elegant exterior. They fail to recognize or blind themselves to the speciousness in the character of these women and are reduced to shadows of their former exuberant selves because of them. Anthony in The Beautiful and Damned, Gatsby in The Great Gatsby and Dick in Tender is the Night pursue with tremendous energy an illusion of being in love and being loved. But they end up experiencing sheer frustration, loneliness and alienation. A stubborn pursuit of ideals and dreams makes them ill suited to the demands of real life. The men in Fitzgerald are incorrigible dreamers while the women are insensitive to their dreams. Incompatibility at the mental level leads to a crisis situation. In the face of crisis, the men, instead of showing resilience, crack up.

The men in Fitzgerald’s works lack the animal magnetism of the Lawrentian heroes. Instead they are the more introspective, soulful kinds who yearn for a family life. The women are reckless; deceitfulness and moral complacency are ingrained in them. The Fitzgeraldian women consider eternal love and indissoluble marriage an old-fashioned and sentimental
concept. So bored is Daisy within five years of marriage to Tom—though she was in love with Gatsby—that one of her early utterances is “the best thing a girl can be in this world is a beautiful little fool” (The Great Gatsby 10).

Being mercenary, the Fitzgeraldian women are nourished by wealth and are careless, while the men, who are relatively lowly placed, weave romantic notions of love and eternal happiness around them. The women get tired of the ardent devotion of the men towards them and hence love, in its romantic sense of fruition, is markedly missing in the works of Fitzgerald. Lehan, in F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction, observes, “Fitzgerald was fascinated by La Belle Dame Sans Merci [Fitzgerald’s first choice of title for The Beautiful and Damned], the fair maiden who leads the hero to his destructive end” (175). The novels abound with such women and hence a fruitful relationship of mutual love and understanding proves to be illusory.

Fitzgerald’s fears about the dangers of male-female relationship and the relationship between women and art is illustrated in his short story “O Russet Witch!” Leland S Person contends that “as early as 1921 Fitzgerald recognized a destructive potential in the creative process and associated such danger with male-female relationship. Both could deplete intellectual, emotional, even sexual energy” (444). The men find the women to be faithless and yet indispensable. On the other hand, the women find the men to be dependable and yet dispensable. Thus the Fitzgeraldian women are a far cry from the women in the fiction of Henry James—an author whom
Fitzgerald admired. The Jamesian heroines come across Diana figures—chaste and morally irreproachable exhuding freshness and innocence. But “the American woman as she emerges from Fitzgerald’s page,” comments Milton Hindus, “is a badly battered ideal” (3).

This thesis aims at exploring and critiquing the feminist readings of the novels and short stories of Fitzgerald. To achieve this end, an extensive study of feminist theories, particularly those of the American feminists, has been undertaken. Analyses offered by gynocritics like Ellmann, Friedan, Millet, Fetterley and Stimpson have been extensively discussed, as these are the feminists who have influenced the critics of Fitzgerald.

The ultimate aim of the thesis is to show that the stance adopted by the feminist critics of Fitzgerald justifying the actions of the Fitzgeraldian women keeping in mind biographical considerations alone is far-fetched. While it is true that women the world over are not given their due and are an oppressed lot, one need not go overboard with radical feminist theories in analyzing literary characters especially drawing parallels between fiction and fact.

The thesis, firmly basing itself on the texts of Fitzgerald, aims to show that the labelling of his male characters as sexist is a distortion of facts and that male supremacy is not the reality as far as his novels and short stories are concerned. In short, the researcher aims at highlighting in this thesis the skewed analysis of Fitzgerald’s women characters by feminist critics. At this
point the researcher would like to state that she is not against the objectives of the feminists but is only objecting to an overreading of Fitzgerald’s texts from a feminist standpoint which anchors itself in biographical concerns alone.

Although Fitzgerald was no moralist and his novels and short stories are no dissertations on idealistic love, they do have a message to convey. Josephine Perry, in “Josephine: A Woman with a Past,” learns that “one mustn’t run through people, and, for the sake of a romantic half-hour, trade a possibility that might develop—quite seriously—later, at the proper time” (The Collected Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald 518). However, Elizabeth Aldrich, in “The Most Poetical Topic in the World: Women in the Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald,” is vehement in dismissing the works of Fitzgerald as purely autobiographical claiming that he had “only one story to write” (133), and brushes aside his novels as mere records of social history. According to her, all Fitzgerald’s works are variations of a single theme—the poor boy being jilted by the rich girl. It is also unfair to Fitzgerald to argue that his art was based purely on his enchantment with the Jazz Age. This is certainly a lop-sided view.

Although Fitzgerald’s life was fascinating, that is not the only reason for the overwhelming response his works have received since the 1950s. The interest in his works is not only due to his ability to capture the ethos of his times. It is because, as Kenneth Eble clarifies, of his ability to see man “as
capable not only of choice but of a vision superior to what he himself may be" (158). Thus despite the pessimism which runs through his works, there is a great deal of moral awareness. And it is worthwhile exploring what Fitzgerald wanted to convey to the readers through the study of his feminine creations.

The thesis comprises seven chapters including the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter II titled “Feminism—An Overview” traces the history of feminism, particularly the American brand of feminism, because most of the feminist critics of Fitzgerald, besides being American have been invariably influenced by American feminists like Friedan, Millet and Firestone, to name a few. The chapter deals with the various schools of feminism and highlights the common ground and also the differences between the various schools. Chapter III titled “Feminist Readings of F. Scott Fitzgerald” presents the views of feminist critics on Fitzgerald. The feminist perspective is a departure from the mainstream criticism of Fitzgerald which has largely been male-oriented. As the feminist critics have taken into account the biography of the Fitzgeralds, their perspectives on the Zelda-Fitzgerald relationship has also been incorporated. The methodology most feminist critics follow is to see a direct relationship between biographical details and the various incidents in the novels.

Chapters IV and V titled “‘The Call of the Siren’: Women in This Side of Paradise, The Beautiful and Damned and The Great Gatsby” and
“Dream and Disillusionment: Women in Tender is the Night and The Last Tycoon” respectively offer a critique of the feminist readings of the novels of Fitzgerald. Chapter IV takes into consideration the early works of Fitzgerald. The first three novels namely, This Side of Paradise, The Beautiful and Damned and The Great Gatsby, have been analyzed. Chapter V includes his later and mature works—Tender is the Night and The Last Tycoon. Chapter VI, titled “The Beautiful and Bold: Women in the Short Stories of Fitzgerald,” deals with the delineation of women in the major short stories of Fitzgerald and has analyzed individual texts in a chronological order. The last chapter forms the conclusion and sums up the major issues dealt with in the preceding chapters.

The researcher has made an in-depth study of the texts to support her thesis that the women in Fitzgerald’s works are not subjugated by men. In fact, there is a reversal of roles, for the women take the upper hand and the men end up as victims. If the feminist critics argue that the women characters are victims of patriarchal tendencies, the texts on the contrary show that these women are domineering and manipulative and are not innocent victims of society. Thus the thesis aims to be a critique of the feminist readings of the women in the novels and short stories of Fitzgerald.