III. FEMINIST READINGS OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

The preceding chapter traced the genesis of the feminist movement and explored the various feminist theories with an emphasis on the American brand of feminism. This chapter deals with the feminist writings on Scott Fitzgerald—the man and his works. It highlights the standpoints of critics like Fetterley, Hardwick, Cummings, Hartnett, Fryer, Khushu-Lahiri, Gallo, Prigozy, Petry, Aldridge, Overmeyer, Massa and McCay who have reassessed the works of Fitzgerald. These critics have been dealt with from a chronological point of view. This chapter has also taken into consideration the biographical information provided by Milford and Mayfield. However, discussions from a biographical angle do not form part of the chronology for the sake of coherence.

As mentioned in the introduction, feminist critics of Fitzgerald focus mainly on The Great Gatsby and Tender is the Night and to a lesser extent on his other novels. They have largely ignored his short stories. Significantly, the feminist critics and biographers do not take on the male critics directly and they do not refer to their viewpoints in their analyses and arguments. Barring a few, most critics do not counter the stand of the male critics of Fitzgerald. Instead, they highlight in a broad manner the patriarchal assumptions that went into the creation of, what they considered, deliberate and negative depiction of women. The methodology followed by the feminist critics is to comment on Fitzgerald and his woman characters
keeping in mind biographical norms, mainly his relationship with his wife Zelda.

All their readings and insights are based on Millet's theory of sexual politics and the inside story of the Fitzgeralda's life provided by Nancy Milford in her biography of Zelda. As far as literary analyses of his novels are concerned, Judith Fetterley was one of the first to challenge mainstream male readings of the novels of Fitzgerald. As one reads through feminist perspectives, one can easily perceive the influences of De Beauvoir, Freidan, Millet and Firestone. All these feminists have made strong and influential comments on love, marriage, mothering and work. The feminist critics of Fitzgerald have viewed the women characters in his works from these angles and have concluded that these women were victims of a patriarchal set-up and hence were forced to lead restricted lives.

Till 1970, male critics projected Zelda as a jealous woman who destroyed Fitzgerald and herself. Most of them had come to this conclusion based on Arthur Mizener's biography, The Far Side of Paradise, published in 1951. Mizener, based on the opinions of Fitzgerald's friends, came to the conclusion that "though she [Zelda] was in love with him, she did not, for all her yielding, commit herself as he did" (77). Hemingway, Fitzgerald's friend and one whom Zelda loathed, had commented on the relationship between Fitzgerald and Zelda in A Moveable Feast. He wrote:
Zelda was jealous of Scott's work [. . .] Scott would resolve not to go on all-night drinking parties [. . .] He would start to work and as soon as he was working well Zelda would begin complaining [. . .] and get him off on another drunken party [. . .] Then it would start all over again. (163)

This analysis made by someone close to Fitzgerald is often quoted by male critics to show how Zelda had doused Fitzgerald's creative fire in alcohol and her irresponsible behaviour.

In the 1970s, gynocritics put up a spirited defence on Zelda's behalf. Basing themselves on the stand that most of Fitzgerald’s women characters are largely based on Zelda, feminist critics, by championing Zelda’s cause and by way of extension wherein they have drawn parallels between Zelda and the women characters, defended the actions of the women in Fitzgerald’s works. Since there is a fusion between Zelda and Fitzgerald's women characters, it is worth considering the insights of the two feminist biographers of Fitzgerald.

Nancy Milford's biography, Zelda, appeared in 1970 and Sara Mayfield's Exiles from Paradise: Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald was published in 1971. While the other biographies of Fitzgerald focus on Fitzgerald, the man and the artist, Milford brings Zelda to the centre stage. She presents Zelda as the true product of her times and dwells at length on her literary achievements. She reveals that Zelda “loved doing things which were
considered improper and was impatient with the conventional behavior of girls of her age” (16). She portrays Zelda as a vibrant, typical Jazz Age belle who could dare to take on the world. All this was curtailed after marriage and Zelda, according to Milford, faced great injustice at the hands of her husband at the domestic, social and artistic levels.

Milford claims that Zelda’s literary career failed to take off under pressure from Fitzgerald. She writes, “her [Zelda’s] own work suffered by comparison. Unfortunately this stimulated one of the symptoms of her illness—competitiveness towards Fitzgerald” (196). Thus Zelda, who revelled in breaking accepted norms and was unable to conform, found it difficult to reconcile with domesticity and the responsibilities it entailed, and ended up as a mental wreck. Milford holds Fitzgerald responsible for the problems Zelda faced after her marriage.

Milford observes that Fitzgerald resented Zelda encroaching on his literary territory and as his own career took a plunge, he felt an increasing need to dominate her. Milford remarks that even before he had met Ginevra King and had fallen desperately in love with her, he “had begun to form the kind of heroine he would make famous, the romantic teen-age-fatal woman” (30). Commenting on the kind of women Fitzgerald has projected in his novels, Milford remarks, “He [Fitzgerald] grants his girls, for all their potential ability to promote ruin among their men, their right to do it. And
more than that he admires their destructive high handedness, for it is that female quality which attracts him” (30).

Making an analysis of Zelda’s short stories, Milford observes that the woman characters are “adventuresses: sleek but restless [. . .] exceptionally pretty [. . .] ambitious [. . .] imbued with a selfishness that is nearly total as their attractiveness” (151). Zelda continued working on her short stories despite Fitzgerald’s resentment. She used to read his stories every night and it was inevitable that she should model her work on his. “The social and emotional territory of their work,” notes Milford, “had always been strikingly similar” (181). Milford portrays Zelda as a creative writer in her own right but one who was forced to bow to her husband’s wishes and give in to societal pressures. Significantly, this stance becomes the basis for judging the women characters in Fitzgerald and they are seen as the victims of a patriarchal culture by the feminist critics.

Elizabeth Kaspar Aldrich, in *The Most Poetical Topic in the World: Women in the Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald,* accuses Fitzgerald of writing “with and from Zelda as text” (132) and believes that “her diaries and letters, essays and short fiction, even medical records relating to her found their way into his work” (132). Aldrich also contends that Fitzgerald being an “incessant brooder” was “not particularly good at rendering full or convincing women characters in his long fiction” (152). To her, Fitzgerald was neither a great artist nor a good husband.
Alice Hall-Petry, in “Women’s Work: The Case of Zelda Fitzgerald,” also takes up cudgels on behalf of Zelda. While she acknowledges that Fitzgerald encouraged Zelda to write and paint and even arranged an exhibition of her paintings and also took her to the best private asylum in the world for treatment, she emphatically declares that “Scott Fitzgerald was also the worst thing that ever happened to Zelda Sayre” (70). She adds, “it seems reasonable that her marriage to Scott must be regarded as a central factor in her mental difficulties” (81). She also considers Fitzgerald a man “so possessive that he named his own daughter after himself” (77) whereas Zelda desired to name her Patricia.

Sara Mayfield, Zelda’s childhood companion and confidante, in her biography titled Exiles from Paradise: Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald takes on a protective attitude towards Zelda. In the process, she justifies and exonerates virtually all of Zelda’s flaws. Fitzgerald’s and Zelda’s friends have commented on Zelda’s poor housekeeping and irregular lifestyle. But Mayfield and Milford hold this against Zelda’s friends contending that Zelda was not accustomed to housework as she was brought up as a ‘lady’.

Mayfield defends Zelda’s “apparent delight in shocking people” (89), as she was the personification of the glorious ‘Roaring Twenties’. She reveals that although Zelda had pledged her love to Fitzgerald, she continued to go on dates and write provocative letters just to arouse his jealousy. Mayfield finds nothing wrong in this and instead faults Fitzgerald for being
“unaware that it was customary for Southern Belles to have as many strings to their bow as they could string along” (47).

Milford and Mayfield believe that Fitzgerald tried to dominate his wife as his own literary career took a dip, and was indifferent, if not jealous, towards his wife pursuing her own creative instincts, be it her ballet lessons or her writing. Like Milford and Mayfield before her, Elizabeth Hardwick too champions Zelda’s case contending that she did not receive “any special dividends from motherhood” (Seduction and Betrayal: Women in Literature 95). Hardwick too puts down Fitzgerald’s concern for his wife and daughter as part of the patriarchal traditions. She finds this concern of Scott Fitzgerald oppressive and just another way of taking hold of his wife and daughter’s life.

On the contrary, Sheilah Graham, with whom Fitzgerald spent his last few years, considered him “a flame, warning, illuminating, burning [. . .]” (College of One 20). According to her, Fitzgerald did not try to put down women. On the contrary “he idealized” (147) them. As for the charges of neglecting Zelda and his daughter Scottie, Graham counters it by pointing out that Scott was always trying to make money in a hurry “to send cheques to Zelda [. . .] to her mother, to pay for Scottie’s school and clothes and for the cost of her visits to her mother and her friends” (125).

One of the early feminist reading of Fitzgerald from a literary point of view is Judith Fetterley’s The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to
American Fiction published in 1978. Among Fitzgerald's works, Fetterley focuses exclusively on The Great Gatsby. Fetterley, influenced by Millet's theory of sexual politics, reads The Great Gatsby as "a struggle for power" (118) and strongly believes that the story is "centered in hostility to women" (72). In her introduction to The Resisting Reader, Fetterley reads The Great Gatsby as "a quintessentially male drama of a poor boy becoming a rich boy," where "ownership of women is invoked as the index of power: he who possesses Daisy Fay is the most powerful boy" (xvi). She adds:

When the rich boy, fearing finally for his territory, repossesses the girl and, by asking "who is he", strips the poor boy of his presumed power, the resultant animus is directed not against the rich boy but against the girl, whose rejection of him exposes the poor boy's powerlessness. (xvi)

The epigraph to the novel, according to Fetterley, reveals the connection between romantic love and power and she contends that it is about "how to move one's self into a position of advantage" (83). She is not prepared to interpret the epigraph as one that throws light on the female attraction to wealth and status. Nor does she read the epigraph as one that contends that love can be bought and that the consumers are women.

Commenting on the great reunion of Gatsby and Daisy, Fetterley charges Gatsby of exhibiting his power when he spreads out before Daisy the wealth of his gorgeous silk shirts. He expects Daisy to be overwhelmed and
she is. This, Fetterley argues, was a deliberate move on Gatsby's part to "exact tribute" (76) from Daisy. If Gatsby has, in Fetterley's reading, power over Daisy because of his enormous wealth, then Daisy has "symbolic power precisely because she suggests that which cannot be possessed" (78). It is this quality of Daisy that heightens the desire in Gatsby to possess her. Fetterley does not deny the fact that Gatsby invests all his love in Daisy. She has, however, a different interpretation to offer:

When men invest women with the significance of ultimate possessions, they make them the prime counters in their power games with each other. Thus women, who have themselves no actual power, become symbolic of the power of moneyed men [...] It is the girl who becomes the repository for the animus of the disadvantaged male. (83)

Fetterley claims that Gatsby does not really want to meet Daisy but rather wishes that she saw what he has done for her sake. Hence his insistence on her meeting him at his impressive mansion. Fetterley interprets Gatsby's insistence as a "demand" (76). Her chapter on The Great Gatsby is subtitled "Fitzgerald's droit de seigneur" or the Lord's Right. To her, Gatsby, as the Lord, the richest man in East Egg, demands a tribute from his vassal, Daisy.

Fetterley also contends that "women are the object of the novel's moral indignation just as they are the object of its romanticism" (73). This
reaction is in response to Nick’s role as a narrator with moral values. Nick strongly disapproves of the behaviour of the two ‘ladies’—Daisy and her companion Jordan Baker. Fetterley claims that Fitzgerald deliberately builds up a negative response to Daisy through her inane utterances as in the case of her reaction to the birth of her baby girl.

Fetterley singles out the tete-a-tete Daisy has with Nick on the porch to show that Fitzgerald ensured that Daisy would have no claims on the readers’ sympathy and that she would make a very unreliable narrator. In this particular scene, Nick is in danger of being moved by Daisy’s account of her life with Tom and her sufferings. But at that precise amount he looks up to find the “absolute smirk on her lovely face” (The Great Gatsby 13) and realizes that it had all been a “trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion” (13) from him.

While Nick’s character was enveloped in moral standards by Fitzgerald, Daisy, according to Fetterley, was merely revealed as the “foul dust” (The Great Gatsby 4) that floated in the wake of Gatsby’s death. Jordan too, observes Fetterley, was deliberately defined as “one who uses the status and power for her own needs and pleasures, careless and indifferent to the existence of everyone else” (The Great Gatsby 89).

Instead of faulting Daisy for being an unreliable narrator, Fetterley claims that Nick should be upbraided for he “exemplifies the cultural double standard” (94) by judging men and women quite differently. She argues that
while Nick blames Jordan for “relatively minor dishonesties” (94), he nevertheless accepts “Gatsby’s massive dishonesties with understanding” (94). She concludes her assessment of Nick’s character commenting on “the absurdity and the dishonesty of Nick romanticizing Gatsby for his heroic though misguided romanticization of Daisy” (95).

Rejecting the traditional idea of women being the “castrating bitch” (xx), Fetterley contends that the works of Fitzgerald, Mailer and Hemingway in particular show “the emasculation of women by men” (xx). She exhorts the feminist critic “to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader [. . .] to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted” (xxi) in women readers.

Continuing her diatribe on patriarchy and its impact on American literature, Fetterley considers American literature to be “male” (xii) and argues that it “neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate” (xii). “America,” she declares, “is female; to be American is male; and the quintessential American experience is betrayal by women” (xiii).

She traces the pattern of what she calls “investment/disinvestment” and that of “advantaged/disadvantaged” (91) in the novel. This again is seen in the context of a power struggle. She argues, “if the investment/disinvestment of Daisy is the result of her relationship to male power, a woman who has no such relationship will not be subject to the same impulses” (91). But Myrtle, it has to be underlined, transcends this idea even
though she is powerless and disadvantaged. This is crucial to the understanding of the portrayal of “dark and white ladies” (91) in American literature, for “the mystique that often surrounds the dark lady derives from the fact that they constitute a class of social/sexual/economic outcasts whom men can afford to romanticize and ultimately idealize precisely because they are doomed” (*The Resisting Reader* 91).

The only feminist critic who has analyzed all the five novels of Fitzgerald is Sarah Beebe-Fryer. Focussing exclusively on the portrayal of women in the works of Fitzgerald, Fryer too finds his characterization of women uncharitable. She finds Fitzgerald’s woman characters “spirited, ambitious and outspoken” (*Fitzgerald’s New Women: Harbingers of Change* 6) who long for respect and love that constantly elude their grasp. Fryer contends that though Fitzgerald did portray women who have a genuine desire for earning a living, he actually frowned upon this option. To Fryer, Fitzgerald showed in his novels what happened to women who challenged their men and questioned their hold over them. These women, Gloria and company, who dare to “channel their energies into intellectual or professional rather than social or domestic pursuits do so at the risk of losing their femininity and suffer the consequences of loneliness and mental illness” (4).

Supporting the New Woman’s right to live as she pleased, Fryer realizes that society had been too harsh in condemning these forerunners of
feminism. To her, the women of the 1920s “try very hard to accept themselves for who they are and to enjoy their lives to the fullest as they proudly—even defiantly—struggle to develop and preserve their integrity” (4). The behavior of Fitzgerald's principal female characters is conditioned, she claims, by the “mixed message about their rights and roles in life” (5). The reason why Gloria, Daisy and Nicole behave “selfishly, impulsively and inconsistently” (5) is because of their “fundamental uncertainty about their purpose in life” (5).

Fryer highlights the desire of the Fitzgeraldian women to declare economic independence from their men. Most of them exhibit a down-to-earth practicality. Rosalind, in This Side of Paradise, cynically describes her social life as a business enterprise with marriage as a profitable deal. Clara is enormously relieved when she inherits sufficient wealth following the death of her husband; she is not obliged to remarry to keep herself going. Eleanor broods ever what she considers a misfortune of being a ‘girl’. In The Beautiful and Damned, Gloria sets her heart on becoming an actress but gives it up, as Fryer puts it, “to placate her husband” (9). In Tender is the Night, Nicole hopes to work as a translator despite being extremely wealthy. Rosemary is totally independent and her mother remarks, “she was brought up to work—not specially to marry” (Tender is the Night 98). Fryer makes a case for these women holding the men responsible for thwarting their ambitions. Because the possibility of a career of their own is snuffed out,
these women “actively engage in social and sexual activities undreamed of by their mothers” (10).

Fryer links up the inability of the women to pursue a career to sexual freedom. She believes that Daisy, Myrtle and Nicole have liaisons because they have lost out in the power struggle that goes on in their marital life. Being ill-equipped to declare economic independence they seek freedom in other ways. Fryer contends that the women in the works of Fitzgerald are victims of the ‘double standards’ of the Jazz age. While men were allowed to develop relationships and flit from one woman to another, women who did so were dubbed as ‘speed’ and snubbed by the so-called ‘respectable men’. She concludes that Fitzgerald’s women characters “suffer manipulation, betrayal, abandonment” and “endure the backlash of men who are confused in their own right about lives that have been altered irrevocably by world war” (17). Thus whatever security a girl wanted she had to get it from her husband. Fryer applauds Isabelle’s attitude towards kissing and holds her refusal to be coerced into any relationship not of her choice as a sign of independence and struggle.

Among all the female characters of Fitzgerald, Fryer singles out Gloria Gilbert in The Beautiful and Damned for her “impressive degree of self-knowledge, dignity and fortitude” (29) and contends that it is a shame that such a character has to transfer “her dependency from her father to her husband, in the custom of the day” (35). Fryer attributes Gloria’s increasing
dependency on her husband, Anthony, because of the low self-esteem which she develops as a result of his “obsession with controlling her” (37). While appreciating Gloria’s role in “keeping her husband happy” (37), Fryer remarks that she comes out in flying colours as she reverses the traditional concept of a woman being taken care of by a man. In the end, it is Anthony who has to be taken care of by Gloria.

Analyzing the character of Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*, Fryer, like Fetterley, faults Nick for presenting only the superficial qualities of Daisy and thereby being a prejudiced narrator. Finding Daisy to be a “woman of feeling” (43), Fryer justifies her attitude towards Gatsby insisting that her actions stem from “an acute sense of responsibility towards herself” (43). On Daisy’s sudden decision to marry Tom despite pledging her love to Gatsby, Fryer comments that “she was a victim of her need for stability” (50) and hence desperately needed a partner who could “provide through marriage a sense of identity and stability” (50). On Daisy’s confusion over her relationship with Tom and Gatsby, Fryer attributes it to the “gender confusion” (50) prevalent during Fitzgerald’s time. Marriage, declares Fryer, was dictated more by “economic and social necessity than by reciprocal love and commitment” (49). Hence, Gloria, Daisy and Nicole did just what tradition demanded of them.

In defending Nicole in *Tender is the Night*, Fryer comes down heavily on Dick who perpetrates, in her view, “patriarchal apprehension” (71). She
holds that it is in this novel that Fitzgerald "captures the nature of the impact conventional male chauvinism could have on a woman of his era" (71). Nicole’s transference from her father, who had an incestuous relationship with her, to Dick who cures her, can be viewed, according to Fryer, as a "reflection of the New Woman’s tenuous social position in the face of patriarchal traditions" (71). Fryer repeatedly uses the word "revictimization" with Nicole to emphasize that she is first victimized by her father and then by "psychiatric malpractice" (74). She faults Dick for Nicole’s condition accusing him of failing to see “women as full and equal human beings with rights and dreams” (73) and instead considering them only as objects of his desire.

To Fryer, Dick epitomizes male chauvinism and remarks that he is "decidedly cruel to women who aspire to independence" (73). Nicole, to Fryer, is a trusting creature and her trust in the two men in her life—her father and her husband—is betrayed. Both take advantage of her need for love and hence their act is all the more culpable. Fryer even goes to the extent of questioning Fitzgerald’s diagnosis of Nicole’s illness. She claims that Nicole’s illness was wrongly diagnosed as schizophrenia when it was only a case of hysteria.

Fryer also questions Dick’s role as a doctor and as one who provides a therapeutic effect on Nicole and pulls him up for failing to maintain an appropriate detachment as a doctor and instead getting involved with his
patient. She accuses Dick of "figuratively "raping" (89) Nicole over and over again. She applauds Nicole's defiance and the manner in which she overwhelms Dick towards the end of the novel. In choosing Tommy Barban while still married to Dick, Nicole, Fryer observes, begins to declare her independence, thereby ensuring her survival. Nicole, seeking greater personal freedom, cannot stay married to Dick and play the role of a subordinate partner. Fryer finds nothing wrong in Nicole's quest for greater respect and personal freedom. She, in fact, claims that Nicole's act demonstrates her commitment "to the New Woman of her era" (91). Echoing the sentiments of the radical feminists, she insists that if the woman finds marriage oppressive, she should seek freedom outside it.

Taking up The Last Tycoon, Fitzgerald's last unfinished novel, Fryer remarks that the novel casts women in "subordinate—and often quite precarious roles, both within their relationships with men and within American Society as a whole" (92). She also objects to Fitzgerald's portrayal of Jane Maloney, a writer who makes "over a thousand a year" (207) and is one of the rare women characters who has achieved independent, financial security. Fitzgerald describes her as a character "without being an old maiden [. . .] was like most self made women, rather old maidish" (203). Thus he presents her as one devoid of any sexual or romantic appeal. This kind of a portrayal of a successful working woman lacking feminine charm is typical of a sexist attitude. Fryer contends that this only reaffirms Fitzgerald's deep-
rooted belief that successful career women invariably had to sacrifice their femininity in the quest for what were "supposedly 'masculine' forms of achievement" (98).

Calling Monroe Stahr "an archetypal patriarch" (99), Fryer is certainly not amused at his lack of interest in women, especially since he belongs to the glamorous world of Hollywood. Stahr is a workaholic and exhibits a marked lack of interest in women around him. According to Fryer, this attitude is representative of the American society at large that takes women for granted and turns to them only when the need arises.

Fryer regards Kathleen as the true New Woman who leads a life based on her own values and judgement. But she adds that Kathleen proves to be more liberated in "sexual matters than in economic matters" (101), for she depends on men to take care of her and does not seek employment.

Commenting on Fitzgerald's depiction of women characters, Fryer concludes: "Viewed singly or as a group, his five novels afford a compelling vision of the social, sexual, political and economic milestones hurdled by American women in their quest for emancipation from the control of patriarchal traditions following the first world war" (1).

Katherine Cummings takes up Tender is the Night for analysis in Telling Tales: The Hysteric's Seduction in Fiction and Theory. She focuses on the character of Dick Diver as a seducer and contends that the novel fails to establish "an adequate motivation or etiology for Dr Diver's decline"
(232). She also comes down heavily on Dick calling him a “victimizer—a potential villain” (249) and accuses him of playing on the age and innocence of Rosemary. She holds Dick responsible for the “seduction” (249) of first Nicole and then Rosemary. Cummings, as a feminist, looks at seduction as “sexual abuse” (1) and states that it is an act of “violence and disempowerment” (1). Thus she squarely holds Dick responsible for vitiating the relationship between himself and Nicole, and later Rosemary. After vehemently attacking Dick and the role he plays as a husband and lover, Cummings finally admits that Dick eventually ends up as the victim of the ones he had set out to victimize. But she attributes this to Fitzgerald's “artful story telling” (249), for she, like other feminists before her, claims that Fitzgerald deliberately puts down the women characters and shows his men in a softer light.

Ruth Prigozy in her analysis of Fitzgerald’s works finds him repetitive. In “Fitzgerald’s Short Stories and the Depression: An Artistic Critics,” she contends, “Fitzgerald had not found a replacement for a love story to serve as the center of a work [. . .] He could not create sympathetic and believable characters, only wooden stereotypes” (20). And she does not agree with Fitzgerald’s depiction of women in his works.

Koula Svokos Hartnett analyzes the Zelda-Fitzgerald relationship from a feminist standpoint and tires to prove that it was Fitzgerald who destroyed Zelda and not the other way round. She also holds Fitzgerald’s
Catholic upbringing responsible for the kind of women characters he created. As Fitzgerald was heavily influenced by the Victorian mores, he remained, she asserts in *Fitzgerald and the Failure of the American Dream for Women*, "inwardly puritanical in his own values" (17). Thus although he admired the bold, provocative streak in Zelda, he was unable to come to terms with it and yearned for a more conventional spouse. Zelda, writes Hartnett, refused to conform and consent to being a housewife. "Her role would be that of a glamorous, irresistible wife--a perpetual Southern Belle, whose only purpose would be to delight and entertain and whose fate was to be forever adored" (117).

Zelda, though she had such a talented mother in Minnie Sayre, failed to take herself and her own potential seriously enough to follow the path taken by her close friends. Her friends like Sara Mayfield, her biographer, Tallulah Bankhead who became an actress, and Sara Menken, a writer, were committed to pursuing and actualizing their dreams. Unlike her friends, Zelda, like most of the giddy-headed women of her times, was intent on acquiring a "prosperous and attractive husband, who would ensure a life time of social prominence and economic security" (*Zelda Fitzgerald and the Failure of the American Dream for Women* 12). Although Hartnett holds Fitzgerald mainly responsible for the misery in their marriage, it is evident that Zelda too had a role to play.
Rajashree Kushu-Lahiri draws on Millet’s theory of sexual politics and Milford’s biography to challenge mainstream criticism and interpretation of *Tender is the Night*. Holding Fitzgerald responsible for Zelda’s mental breakdown, Kushu-Lahiri extends this idea in holding Dick solely responsible for Nicole’s unstable mental health. She discusses the relationship between Dick and Nicole as one of sexual politics and contends that Nicole is an innocent victim of sexual aggression from a quarter she was completely powerless to resist.

“Fitzgerald,” she states, “not only reduced her identity to that of a mere sexual object but also unquestionably established her in an inferior, subordinate and powerless position” (“Sexual Politics in Life and Fiction: A Study of *Tender is the Night*” 173). She adds that this presentation of Nicole was an act of “wish-fulfillment” (173) on the part of Fitzgerald, as he could not tame Zelda’s independent, fearless and creative mind in real life. She accuses Dick of reducing Nicole and Rosemary to mere sexual objects and claims that he had pursued a relationship with them only to feed his male vanity. Ignoring the fact that Nicole is rushed into marriage with Tommy Barban and that he takes complete hold over her, Kushu-Lahiri sticks to her stand that “he [Tommy Barban] is undeniably an improvement over her first husband” (176). In drawing a connection between Fitzgerald-Zelda and Dick-Nicole, Kushu-Lahiri echoes Fetterley stating that “Fitzgerald towards the end of his life was haunted by feelings of guilt and remorse vis-a-vis
Zelda. By showing her fictional counterpart Nicole restored to health and sanity, he is trying to make reparations towards his wronged wife” (177).

An overwhelming majority of the feminist critics of Fitzgerald endorse the view that his woman characters are forced to lead constricted lives and are used by males. These critics also contend that since the women are usually perceived through the eyes of the male characters with strong sexist attitudes, they are presented as lacking in values. To these feminists, the Fitzgerald women are not troublemakers or disloyal or destructive as male critics have made them out to be. They are victims of the ‘American’ male and the age, and despite being surrounded by adverse circumstances make the best out of their lives.

A small group of women writers have rejected the idea that the Fitzgerald women are a subjugated lot. Writers like Rose Adrienne Gallo, Ann Massa, Mary A McCay and Janet Overmeyer show that the Fitzgerald women thrive at the cost of their men and that far from being a marginalized lot are actually the domineering types.

Rose Adrienne Gallo, in *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, considers Gloria, Daisy and Nicole as women unworthy of the attention they receive from their men. She finds the women in *This Side of Paradise* “insipid,” “mercenary” and “licentious” (22). She observes that Gloria “represents the ultimate debasement of love” (23) as she is too narcissistic. Daisy is dismissed by Gallo as “a vacuous creature whose self-identity is defined by externals”
(45). And she deplores the fact that "Nicole's strength accrues from the weakening of Dick's" (60). Gallo considers the Fitzgeraldian men to be victims of "disproportionate love" (67).

In a change from interpreting the text from a purely biographical standpoint and echoing feminist perspectives, Janet Overmeyer, in her piece "Great Gatsby's Character: Daisy Fay Buchanan—Murderer?" takes up the accident scene involving Daisy, Myrtle and Gatsby in The Great Gatsby. After reconstructing the accident, Overmeyer concludes that "Daisy did not hit Myrtle completely unintentionally" (15). She made use of the chance offered to her and took the opportunity to eliminate her rival. Hence it is important that Tom should not know that it was she who was at the wheel, lest he see a connection.

Overmeyer argues that while it is true that Daisy would not have deliberately tried to do away with her husband's mistress, she nevertheless does not pass a chance for a convenient accident. In a startling contrast to the feminist critics of Fitzgerald, Overmeyer concludes that Daisy not only ended Myrtle's life, but was responsible, by extension, for the death of Gatsby and Wilson. This would certainly not go down well with the host of feminist critics who have all along claimed that Gatsby took the blame on himself in a show of protective patriarchy. These critics do not discuss the accident per se, but instead dwell on Gatsby's act of trying to protect Daisy from blame.
Ann Massa, in her analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, comes down heavily on Daisy. While admitting that Daisy is “undeniably fascinating” ("F. Scott Fitzgerald" 150) she finds her lacking in “depth and passion” (151) which forces her to shy away from real life situations. Daisy’s basic flaw, Massa holds, is her inability “to imagine or will the radical re-creation of her life” (150). She considers Daisy “insubstantial as the balooning white dresses she wears, as shallow as her white powder” (15). While critics like Fetterley and Fryer condemn, among others, Gatsby for his corrupt ways of acquiring wealth, Massa argues that “in the context of a society of cruel, aimless, cynical and superficial people, such corruption seems relatively insignificant” (147). To her, Gatsby’s character is commendable for “Gatsby had stood out against artificial values and had lived for original ones; Gatsby had mixed passion and principle; Gatsby was an idealist” (153). It is Daisy, she observes, who could not live up to his dreams and vision.

Another notable critic of Fitzgerald is Mary McCay. McCay, like Fryer, has touched upon all the five novels of Fitzgerald in “Fitzgerald’s Women: Beyond Winter Dreams”. While commenting on the women in Fitzgerald’s works, McCay has also taken into account Fitzgerald’s relationship with his daughter Scottie and the love of his last few years, Sheilah Graham. Unlike the other feminist critics on Fitzgerald, McCay highlights the positive influence Scottie and Graham had on Fitzgerald and
she argues that Fitzgerald, far from trying to take hold of Scottie's life, was an encouraging parent.

While McCay agrees with Fetterley and others that Fitzgerald was highly critical towards his women, she questions Fetterley's reading and analysis of Fitzgerald's women characters. McCay claims that in Fitzgerald's characterization of women there is "an implicit criticism of their values, their way of life—not just their wealth or their seductive games, but finally what they think is important" (311). She observes that this brand of criticism is evident in Fitzgerald's treatment of his male characters as well even though the norms for judging them are different. Fitzgerald's men come across as failed romantics and there is "a sense of misplaced dreams and ideals of struggling mightily for the wrong goal—or perhaps for the wrong women" (311) about them. The women in Fitzgerald's works are "stripped to core" (311) and are found lacking in enduring ways. McCay states that Fitzgerald is "hard on them [the women] than he is on his men" (311) and adds that "he judges them more severely" (311).

McCay, however, departs from mainstream feminist criticism of Fitzgerald when she strongly disagrees that his women characters are subordinate, victimized creatures. On the contrary, she remarks that "weakness masking itself as beauty and drawing brave young men to wreck like sirens—those women are Fitzgerald's tormentors" (316). McCay in particular singles out Fetterley's analysis of Fitzgerald's women. To her,
“Fetterley’s criticism dismisses [...] his honest attempt to find and maintain an enduring creative relationship with a woman in a world that was largely based on sham” (312). Fetterley, in her assessment of *The Great Gatsby*, had argued that Nick Carraway, the narrator, “plucks Daisy Buchanan until there is nothing left but a denuded centre” (77). McCay observes that such an analysis is “faulty” (312), for it implies that “Daisy and other Fitzgerald women have no function of their own but rather are objects either of quest or criticism” (312). Disagreeing with such an evaluation, she concludes that the Fitzgerald women “are not passive; their energy is abundant but unfortunately misdirected” (312). According to her, Zelda too belongs to this category--she had no goals in life and realized only too late the dignity of work.

McCay also suggests that it is important to see Fitzgerald’s fictional women in the light of two crucial relationships in his life: his relationship with his daughter and with Graham. She contends that the influence Zelda wielded over Fitzgerald was “negative” (313) whereas Graham was the one who kept him going when he was on the verge of a physical and emotional collapse. According to her, Fitzgerald saw Graham as “someone who had the power to save him” (322) and hence she became the model for Kathleen in *The Last Tycoon*. As far as Scottie is concerned, Fitzgerald took great pride in her achievements at Vassar and she represented to him “the world of work” (313) which he admired. While Rosemary, in *Tender is the Night*,
has a goal and is committed to the idea of 'work,' Isabelle, Rosalind and a host of them turn out to be idlers. "Workers," emphasizes McCay, "survive the rigor of life, whereas idlers and 'speeds' succumb just as Zelda did" (316).

McCay condemns Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* for letting Gatsby take the blame for Myrtle's death. In her assessment, Daisy "is trapped in her need for money and comfort and in her failure to make something of her life" (317). She is severely critical of Nicole in *Tender is the Night* and views her as "the weak beauty who selfishly drains him [Dick] of his energy" (319). Isabelle, Gloria and the rest are "the women who live meaningless lives" (318) and hence can never understand or share the dreams and aspirations of their men. It can be safely concluded from McCay's analysis that it is not patriarchy which impedes the emotional and intellectual development of the Fitzgerald women but their inability to think for themselves and have a vision in life.

As discussed earlier, the majority of the feminist critics fault Fitzgerald for being sexist in his portrayal of women. They contend that Fitzgerald was trying to show that the rightful place of women was their home and that any lapse in character and duty would end in disaster. They have expressed the view that Fitzgerald was most unwilling to grant his women characters the freedom to live life as they desired and instead tried to shackle them with Victorian morality. These critics have also objected to
women being assessed only from the male point of view, for it deliberately shows them in a poor light. Critics like McCay and others who depart from this kind of interpretation hold the women responsible for vitiating relationships. They claim that it is not patriarchy that impedes the emotional and intellectual development of the Fitzgeraldian women but their inability to think for themselves and have a vision in life. It is not the male point that portrays them in a poor light. On the contrary, what lets them down is what they think of themselves and what they choose to be.

While this chapter has collated and discussed the feminist readings of Scott Fitzgerald's works, especially his women characters, the next chapter offers a critique of the feminist readings with reference to *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned* and *The Great Gatsby*. 