IV. "THE CALL OF THE SIREN': WOMEN IN 'THIS SIDE OF PARADISE,' 'THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED' AND 'THE GREAT GATSBY"

This chapter considers the first three novels of Fitzgerald, namely, *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned* and *The Great Gatsby* for analysis of the woman characters. These novels share the same sociological ambience and the women in them exhibit similar traits. The views of the feminist critics of Fitzgerald which were discussed in the preceding chapter are critiqued here by focussing on the texts.

**This Side of Paradise:** *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald’s first novel, brought him instant fame, wealth and status and he was heralded by Glenway Wescott as “the laureate of the Jazz Age [...] a kind of king of our American youth” (*The Moral of Scott Fitzgerald* 323). The novel was originally titled *The Romantic Egoist* and Fitzgerald put together material for the first draft in 1917, when he was in his final year at Princeton University. Rejected by Charles Scribner’s in 1918, it was accepted in the revised version under the title *This Side of Paradise* in 1919. Although the novel catapulted Fitzgerald into literary fame and also helped him get back Zelda Sayre, most critics have put it down as an immature work. Nevertheless, the novel was hugely popular.

K.G.W. Cross accounts for the popularity of *This Side of Paradise* in his book *Scott Fitzgerald*. Calling the novel “one of the most important
social documents of the Jazz Age” (21), Cross assigns three reasons for the massive following the novel received. Firstly, *This Side of Paradise* “was the first novel to tackle with any degree of seriousness the problems confronting youth in post-war America” (20). Its appeal was, therefore, immediate as it was addressed to the youth of the 1920s. Secondly, the novel went down very well with the youth because of “the glamour of its Princeton setting” (21). Needless to say it was frowned upon by the Academicians at Princeton as Fitzgerald presents a far from flattering picture of the great University. Thirdly, “the scandalous nature of its disclosure about the sexual mores of adolescents” (21) contributed to the success of the novel. The novel shocked the sensibilities of the Victorian mothers with its graphic accounts of the ‘petting parties’ of the 1920s.

Fitzgerald was just twenty-three when he wrote the novel and given his age, Andrew Hook considers the novel very much a *bildungsroman* as it charts Amory Blaine’s growth from a ‘personality’ to a ‘personage’. To him it is “one of the original campus novels” (23) as the major portion of the novel deals with Amory’s life at Princeton. Richard Lehan considers *This Side of Paradise* “a very immature novel” (76) for to him “Fitzgerald seems to have an idea but scarcely a story” (63). Critics have mostly looked at the novel from a biographical point of view and have tried to relate Fitzgerald’s life with the fictional characters and events in the novel. Lehan goes into the
making of the novel and comes up with three biographical evidences that shaped the novel.

Fitzgerald, writes Lehan, was "obsessed" (64) with three events in his life when he was putting together *This Side of Paradise*. These three events were "his failure to win the loves of Ginevra King and Zelda Sayre; his failure to get a Princeton degree; and his romantic fascination with the perils of war" (64). This accounts for the kind of women he portrayed in the novel.

Fitzgerald fused his experiences with Ginevra King, his first great love, and Zelda Sayre, the woman he later married, and his experience of rejection, loss and hurt finds expression in the novel. While he never got over his rejection by King, he never quite forgot the pain Zelda caused by breaking their engagement and then accepting him only after he established himself in the literary firmament with the publication of *This Side of Paradise*. Thus Isabelle, Rosalind and Eleanor are all based on Ginevra and Zelda. Amory's disappointments at Princeton are related to Fitzgerald's failure to pick up a degree at Princeton. The lengthy discussions on war, Socialism and poverty are all that Fitzgerald always wanted to put down on paper.

Till the publication of Milford's and Mayfield's biographies, critics focussed on the theme of youthful disappointment and disillusionment, viewing the novel as a portrait of the Jazz Age. With the 1970s critical attention began to shift to the presentation of women in the novel. Indeed,
the novel can be read as a portrait of the ladies of the 1920s. An observation by Fitzgerald towards the end of the novel has sparked off debate over the delineation of women in his very first novel. Fitzgerald wrote, “Isabelle, Clara, Rosalind, Eleanor were all removed by their very beauty, around which men had swarmed, from the possibility of contributing anything but a sick heart and a page of puzzled words to write” (This Side of Paradise 252). These lines have generated interest in Amory’s attitude towards women, beauty and sex. The sociological implications, which were the focus of the critics, were temporarily set aside and the battle of the sexes began.

Taking up the delineation of women from the feminist standpoint, Fryer observes with reference to This Side of Paradise as well as his later novels:

Fitzgerald inadvertently recorded the ambitions and frustrations of young women who were stranded between the oppressive traditions of the American patriarchy and haunting glimpses into a future that might afford greater equality of the sexes and with it greater freedom and happiness. (28)

In Fryer’s reading of the novel, the women come across as intellectually superior to Amory. She harps on the sanctions American patriarchy imposes on the women and this, she contends, forces them to turn to their men for financial and emotional security. She accuses Amory of
taking on a condescending attitude towards women especially when they exhibit a superior intelligence and questioning attitude.

A close reading of the text, however, reveals that far from being pushed to the periphery and being forced to submit to the patriarchal will, Isabelle, Rosalind, Clara and Eleanor come across as willful, self-centered women who play upon the emotions of men. In This Side of Paradise the author presents women who increasingly exhibit independence and in the struggle for dominance they are on the winning side.

Lindel Ryan, in “F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Battle of the Sexes,” remarks that although Fitzgerald's novels and most of his short stories centre on romantic love, the relationships end in failure because of the power struggle that goes on. In Ryan's assessment, Fitzgerald's “female characters have a highly developed instinct for self-preservation and are ruthless in selecting a partner” (84). This kind of behaviour, contends Ryan, is because of their “innate selfishness and cold manipulative natures, rather than to the logically developing consequences of their socialization in a patriarchal society” (84).

An analysis of the character of Beatrice Blaine, Amory's vain and shallow mother, reveals the dominance women enjoy over their men. To begin with, Amory is referred to as the “son of Beatrice” (13) and Stephen Blaine, his father, is relegated to the background. Beatrice takes complete charge of her son and the father's role is ineffectual. Making sure that the
father’s influence is negligible, Beatrice is overprotective towards Amory and smothers him with her misdirected love leaving him eventually insecure. Thomas Stavola points out that “Fitzgerald’s treatment of Amory’s parents reflects an important shift in American parental authority” (76). He considers Stephen and Amory to be “victims of momism” (76).

Beatrice goes to absurd lengths to fuss over Amory. When Amory has the scarlet fever, she makes sure that no less than fourteen doctors attend on him. When his appendix bursts en route Europe, we are told that “the great ship slowly wheeled around and returned to New York to deposit Amory at the pier” (17). All these are examples of indulgent mothering. Beatrice does not bother to upbraid Amory for any of his wrong doings and Stavola rightly comments that “Amory is a victim of intense affections of a neurotic mother” (79), and given the fact that he has a passive, unassertive father he is unable to “shift his basic identification from female to male” (79).

Beatrice looks forward to Mrs Gilbert, Gloria’s mother in The Beautiful and Damned. Gilbert too proves to be an unhealthy influence on her daughter. Beatrice makes a poor wife as well, for she married Stephen Blaine for the wrong reasons. She was in love with “a young Pagan from Ashville” (17) but after all the romancing “she decided to marry for background” (17). The man she once rejected went on to become the celebrated Monsignor Darcy. After feverish socializing and travelling
between America and Europe, Beatrice settled down with Stephen Blaine only because "she was a little bit weary" (13). Stephen provides her with the way of life she desires and she develops into a snob looking down on the American expatriates in Europe. So powerful is her hold over her son that when his father dies "quietly and inconspicuously" (104), Amory observes the funeral with "an amused tolerance" (104).

A look at Blaine’s financial position reveals that most of his income was frittered away by the extravagant life Beatrice led. She believed that "the lack of money to do the things one wants to makes one quite prosy and domestic" (106) and she is anything but domestic or home bound. Her self-centredness, snobbery and shallow thinking play havoc with young Amory’s emotions.

That women take on a dominant role is evident in the manner in which the thirteen-year old, Myra St.Claire, treats the fifteen-year old Amory. Even at such a tender age, Myra puts on the manners of a coquette, clinging on to him and placing her head on his shoulders hoping for a romantic evening. It is she who forces Amory to kiss her and he is filled with "disgust, loathing for the whole incident" (24). Myra’s attitude is in keeping with the age and she liked indulging in what was "the great [. . .] American phenomenon, the ‘petting party’" (65).

Commenting on the age, Fitzgerald notes that "none of the Victorian mothers [. . .] had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to
be kissed" (65). Myra St.Claire, at thirteen, was well versed with the art of hoodwinking her mother as she did not have the faintest notion that her little one could engage herself with the practices of her times.

Isabelle, Rosalind and Eleanor come under the category of the "popular daughter" (65) and Fitzgerald lets us know that the popular Daughter "becomes engaged every six months between sixteen and twenty two" (65). These New Women had evolved from first being a "belle" to becoming a "flirt" and finally the "baby vamp" (66). These women make maximum use of their charms and the men become their willing dupes.

Fryer uses the language of Millet when she links sex with a power struggle and adds that the Fitzgerald women "who by virtue of their economic dependence are less free to assert their autonomous wishes predictably wind up the losers, emotionally if not physically" (11). However, a closer reading of the text reveals that it is the other way around. In all his encounters with women, it is Amory who ends up as a loser.

The very first meeting between Amory and Isabelle reveals the desire of the Fitzgerald women to dominate. When Amory tells Isabelle, "We're all coached for each other" (71), she is shocked. She is shocked not because it was impertinent on Amory's part but because "she felt as if a good speech had been taken from the star and given to a minor character [...] She mustn't lose the leadership a bit" (71). Isabelle had rehearsed her lines and knew when to turn on her charm and on whom. She hates being at a
disadvantage. It both annoys and excites her that Amory does not “dangle
on her favour” (70), for she is used to boys cutting in on her “every few feet”
(73). In Amory’s case, she has to make the first move as he keeps her
guessing about his intentions.

Fryer accuses Amory of taking on a “condescending attitude” (22)
towards Isabelle. Amory, in fact, does not have a condescending attitude
towards Isabelle; he simply does not humour the way her numerous vapid
admiring do. He questions her and refuses to be swayed by her practiced
mannerisms and their relationship is naturally abortive. Fryer attributes the
failure of their relationship to Amory’s “selfish attitude towards Isabelle as a
sex object” (22) and she contends that it is this attitude of his that hampers
any genuine feeling of love.

Isabelle revels in making an impact on men using her physical charm.
She has the reputation of being a “speed” (69) and we are told that “flirt
smiled from her black-brown eyes and shone through her intense physical
magnetism” (70). She looks forward to women like Gloria, Daisy and Nicole
who use their external charm to maximum advantage. Apart from their
extremely good looks, these women are remembered for their smiles and
distinctive alluring voices. Firestone refers to the women of the 1920s as
being victims of a “shallow sensuality” (25) and hence their way of
expressing themselves was not in a very responsible manner. Thus Isabelle
and company with their new found sexual freedom could express themselves
only through their looks, dress and numerous social engagements. Firestone, in particular, disapproves of the smile being used to advantage for to her it was not in the interest of women's liberation. She had declared, "My dream action for the women's liberation movement: a smile boycott" (90).

Isabelle's refusal to kiss Amory has drawn applause from Fryer. She holds up Isabelle as a model for her "strength of character new to women in the flapper era [...] refusing to be coerced into such behaviour at the whim of a sexist man" (22). Fryer contends that in refusing to give in to Amory, Isabelle asserts herself and thereby establishes her own identity. When the women refuse to give in to the demands of the men, gynocritics applaud their actions. But when they indulge in numerous affairs with wanton disregard for propriety, it is condoned as being part of the social climate. Ultimately, the identity that Isabelle establishes in society is that of being a "speed" (69).

That Isabelle is theatrical and shallow is brought out in the final meeting between her and Amory. When they kiss, Amory's shirt stud leaves a mark on her neck. Isabelle makes a big hue and cry over it and is annoyed that Amory is not impressed or moved by her tears. Amory finds her behaviour absurd and when the two argue, Isabelle comes out with the real reason for her discomfort with Amory. She blurts out, forgetting her poise for one crucial moment, "I have to think all the time I'm talking to you" (98). He realizes that "this was her high point, that no one else could ever make her
think” (99). Isabelle, like most Fitzgerald women, dislikes being up against men who can see through the facade.

Clara, Amory’s distant relative, is a little different from the teenage speeds. She, with her “ripply golden hair [. . .] steely blue eyes” (140) is a typical ‘Steel Engraving Lady’—a picture of serenity staring straight out of the magazines. Clara, a young window with two children, is a feminist’s nightmare, for she declares, “I’m really most humdrum and commonplace. One of those people who have no interest in anything but their children” (142). But Clara is not really a “humdrum” creature. We are told that she would invariably be found “entertaining a house full of men” (140) and in particular “one of the greatest libertines” (141) in Philadelphia. Clara, who had “not a care in the word,” would hold court entertaining her admirers making “fascinating and almost brilliant conversation out of the thinnest air” (141).

Exhibiting no sign of grief, Clara can take on the world and looks to no one for support. She keeps herself radiant throughout, for “she was wise enough never to stultify herself with such household acts as knitting and embroidery” (141). She rejects Amory’s proposal of marriage saying, “I’d never marry again. I’ve got my two children and I want myself for them” (147). Fryer takes up Clara’s decision not to remarry but delinks it from the reasons given by her to remain a widow. She holds that Clara’s “determination to remain single rather than compromise herself by
remarriage reflects her strength of character” (24). This echoes the radical feminists’ pronouncements denouncing marriage as “functionally defunct” (Firestone 222).

Amory’s brief association with Clara does not end with bitterness though he falls in love with her. Clara’s attitude towards him borders on the maternal and she advises him to get along in life adding that if it was not for her good looks and babies, she would be “a quiet nun in a convent” (148). When Amory leaves Clara for good, he looks ahead to the future and the night seems “a night of stars and singing and Clara’s bright soul” (149) gleams along the way.

Bert Bender, in “His Mind Aglow: The Biological Undercurrent of Fitzgerald’s Gatsby and Other Works,” talks of the process of “sexual selection” (410) that goes on in the works of Fitzgerald. This process is more pronounced in This Side of Paradise, for it is in this novel, according to Bender, that “Fitzgerald emphasized the female’s power to select the superior male and the male’s struggle to be selected” (410). Eventually the women, after discarding quite a few of their suitors, would settle for the one who offered them a glittering world with an endless promise of pleasure. This analysis is true of Rosalind Connage.

Rosalind, the nineteen year old debutante, is “one of those girls who need never make the slightest effort to have men fall in love with them” (166). Fitzgerald goes into great length to describe her beauty and without
doubt one can recognize Zelda in the description, when he adds, “it was a
delight to watch her move about a room, walk along a street, swing a golf
club, or turn a cartwheel” (167). The biographies of Zelda show that as a
child she loved to turn cartwheels much to the amazement of girls and boys
of her age. Fitzgerald calls Rosalind “once-in-a-century blend” (167) of
beauty, charm and athleticism. Stavola, however, is not enamoured by
Rosalind, for to him “she is fundamentally egocentric and without depth no
matter what kind of lyrical phrases Fitzgerald uses to describe and glorify
her” (97).

Rosalind is fully aware of what the New Women’s sexual freedom
means. Cecilia, her sister, who considers her “awfully spoiled” (165) tells
her, “You want life to be a chain of flirtations with a man for every link”
(168). Rosalind’s sister and brother, Alec, considers her “a sort of vampire”
(165) for she “treats men badly” (165). When Mrs. Connage, her mother,
warns her of the consequences of her wayward behaviour, she retorts,
“Mother it’s done—You can’t run everything now the way you did in the
early nineties” (173). Rosalind herself sums up the position of the flapper,
which indicates a reversal of gender roles. Referring to her age, she lectures
to one of her dejected and rejected suitors, “There used to be two kinds of
kisses: First when girls were kissed and deserted; second when they were
engaged. Now there’s a third kind, where the man is kissed and deserted”
(175). This declaration of Rosalind reinforces the concept of the New
Woman's prerogative to choose her man and of her emergence as a more independent being vis-a-vis her mother.

Rosalind also confidently lays claim to the formerly male prerogative of sexual conquest without any emotional commitment in her treatment of Howard Gillespi. Gillespi was humoured by Rosalind for three weeks before being summarily rejected. Gillespi is bewildered but musters courage to ask, "I had an idea that after a girl was kissed she-was-won" (175). Rosalind coldly replies on the strength of her newfound power, "Those days are over. I have to be won all over again every time you see me" (175).

Rosalind is "quite unprincipled [. . .] She has that coarse streak [. . .] She is by no means a model character" (166). Like most of the women of her type, she avoids "dull men" who are "afraid of her cleverness" and "intelligent men" who are "usually afraid of her beauty" (166). Amory is completely swept off his feet and proposes marriage to her. Rosalind fancies herself to be strongly in love with Amory but five weeks later her materialistic self strongly re-surfaces. She breaks her engagement to Amory because he will never be able to afford her the kind of life she desires.

When Amory pleads with Rosalind reminding her of their love for each other, she puts him off with, "I cant be shut away from the trees, cooped up in a little flat, waiting for you" (188). She breaks through the ‘feminine mystique’ when she declares, "I dread responsibility. I don’t want to think about pots and kitchens and brooms. I want to worry whether my
legs will get slick and brown when I swim in the summer" (189). She tries to put off Amory with a justification, “You’d hate me in a narrow atmosphere, I’d make you hate me” (188). It is however obvious to the readers that she has singled out Dawson Ryder and his millions.

The reason which Rosalind gives for preferring Dawson over Amory is that “he’s so reliable. I almost feel that he’d be—a background” (187). She admits that she does not love him. At the same time she cannot wait for Amory to make it big. Fryer argues that Rosalind is always looking for a rich catch because “she has never been taught or expected to do anything else” (25). This is not really true, for Rosalind has a mind of her own and gets away with whatever she wants to do. But the novel clarifies that “she wants what she wants when she wants it and she is prone to make everyone around her pretty miserable when she doesn’t get it” (166).

McCay argues that Rosalind’s refusal to marry Amory is the best thing that happens to him, for, in her opinion, “Rosalind would certainly have destroyed any purpose he found in life” (315). Rosalind loves to lead a carefree, rich and indolent life and Amory, given his sensibilities, could not have humoured her whimsical nature for long. Fryer had argued that women were the losers in the patriarchal set up of Fitzgerald’s time. In the case of Amory, he ends up like Anthony, Gatsby and Dick on the losing side even as Fitzgerald himself could never get over the rejection by Ginevra King. Amory keeps Rosalind’s memory alive in himself.
Amory is hardly able to get over Rosalind when he comes across Eleanor. We are told that “Eleanor was [. . .] the last time evil crept close to Amory under the mask of beauty, the lost weird mystery that held him with wild fascination and pounded his soul to flakes” (213). Initially Eleanor is quite attractive to Amory. She is not only physically good looking, but has an agile mind and loves reading and reciting poetry just as Amory does.

Eleanor defines herself as “a romantic little materialist” (220). She had insisted on being a debutante at seventeen and had shocked the Baltimore community with her wild escapades leading “many innocents [. . .] into paths of bohemian naughtiness” (222). Amory is fascinated by her, but little does he know to what lengths she would go to display her streak of wildness.

Eleanor seems to be a perfect precursor to the radical feminists. In her final meeting with Amory, she launches into a tirade against her subordinate position in a male-dominated society. “Rotten, rotten world,” she declares, “what’s in store for me—I have to marry [. . .] I’m too bright for most men, and yet I have to descend to their level and let them patronage my intellect [. . .]” (222). Ryan refers to Eleanor as one of Fitzgerald’s “most independent and daring female characters” (89). She needs men only to satisfy her vanity; otherwise she is independent in her thinking and dares to challenge the world refusing to see herself in a subordinate position. Marriage is unlikely to offer Eleanor any intellectual and emotional gratification.
Eleanor is one of the most unpredictable of Fitzgerald’s women characters. She looks forward to Nicole and she too exhibits a suicidal streak. Shortly after her invective against the inequalities among males and females, she gets into an argument with Amory over the nature of God, priests and the church. When Amory upbraids her for what he considers blasphemy, she spurs her horse wildly towards the cliff, jumping off only at the last possible second. While the poor horse has to leap to its death, she gets off with bruises, and horrifies Amory with this wilful act. This marks the end of his relationship with her. It would have been a terrible fate for Amory if he had bound his life with a reckless and unpredictable woman such as Eleanor.

Fryer defends Eleanor’s attempt at suicide as an act of rebellion against American patriarchy. She contends that Eleanor’s overwhelming impulse towards self-destruction is a result of her “fear that she is doomed to waste her life in the company of men like Amory, who perpetually patronize her despite her superior intelligence” (88). Reciting Shelley, Poe and Byron is not a sign of superior intelligence; there are other dimensions to intelligence, which Eleanor lacks.

Eleanor has no control over her emotions and acts on impulses. Given her mental and emotional make up, it is ironical that she offers to be ‘Psyche’ to Amory. In Poe’s ballad, “Ulalume,” Psyche, the soul of the narrator, warns him of impending danger and entreats him to distrust the false appearance of Astarte. Eleanor, it has to be noted, is more nearly Astarte than
in the women in Fitzgerald's fiction. This is most true of *This Side of Paradise*. Donaldson, in his biography *Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald*, highlights the reason why Fitzgerald fused the real life characters of Zelda Sayre and Ginevra King. He notes that Fitzgerald did it because “he attempted to exorcise and paradoxically to keep alive that pain in story and novel” (51). Thus Isabelle, Rosalind and Eleanor, far from being a victim of their times, are really a deadly combination of the New Woman of the 1920s and the feminists of the 1970s.

**The Beautiful and Damned:** In her introductory note to *The Romantic Egoists*, Scottie, Fitzgerald's daughter, observes, “more than most authors, my father drew on his personal experience, both trivial and tragic for his fiction” (n.pag.). Indeed, the novel is prophetic of the star-crossed life Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, were to lead before their marriage disintegrated. Published in 1922, the novel is based on the roller-coaster life the Fitzgeralds used to lead. It is because of the autobiographical details, among other issues, that the novel was widely reviewed in the 1920s and this dimension kept the readers’ interests alive.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, critics focussed on the absence of aesthetic form in *The Beautiful and Damned* and debated over its theme. It was generally agreed that the novel dealt with failure and defeat but the reasons for the fates of the protagonists were inadequately explained. Autobiographical considerations were swept aside and universal themes like
the revolt of youth against authority and the meaninglessness of life were
written about. The feminist critics presented new readings and insights and
through their challenge of traditional male-oriented criticism the debate over
the presentation of characters hotted up.

While the novel is open to various interpretations, what cannot be
ignored is that it is undoubtedly about the damnation that awaits the beautiful
but narcissistic people in an ambience of failure. More particularly, the novel
highlights the breakdown of a connubial relationship. For various reasons,
interpersonal relationships fail to build up. The women have a lot to
contribute in the breakdown of ties. Autobiographical or otherwise, The
Beautiful, according to Sivaramakrishnan, "is a nightmarish picture of the
aftermath of romantic love" (16).

The plot revolves around Anthony and Gloria who are a typical
'smart-set' hedonistic couple of the 'Roaring Twenties'. Theirs is a life of
dissipation. They live too high, run into enormous debts and their eternal
partying leaves them with precious little time for introspection. As a result,
they plunge head on into disaster and their myopic, pleasure-seeking lifestyle
costs them their marital harmony. The novel traces the couple's increasingly
frustrating search for eternal happiness. Anthony and Gloria blame each
other for their failures. Their bitterness leads to open hostility and in the face
of impending doom Anthony is the first to crack up.
One of the oft-repeated charges levelled against *The Beautiful and Damned* is that Fitzgerald does not give convincing reasons for the couple’s endless misery and Anthony’s mental breakdown. For instance, Andrew Hook, in *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, implies that Fitzgerald was not quite sure whether he understood the characters he had created. He believes that “the truth may indeed be Fitzgerald was much better at registering, rendering and exploring experience than at explaining it” (87). His contention is that Fitzgerald makes his protagonists suffer because he does not know what else to do with them.

While it is true that the couple’s highly unrealistic and warped ways of leading a life of ease and pleasure sets off the process of deterioration, Anthony’s eventual collapse is inextricably woven with the mounting tensions within his marriage. Anthony just does not have the energy to continually humor the whimsical Gloria. We are told that Anthony spends most of his time trying to manage Gloria’s temper for “it was in her angers with their attendant cruelties that her inordinate egotism chiefly displayed itself” (135). Quarrels arise over issues like who would drive or who would take out the laundry and Anthony eventually gives in because it is worse “to go through the increasingly unpleasant ordeal of a verbal battle with Gloria” (139).

Gloria’s unpredictable temper baffles, irritates and depresses Anthony. Fitzgerald writes about Gloria that “she is beautiful but—without
mercy" (93). Gloria unfailingly exploits Anthony’s patience. She keeps him guessing about her moods and thoughts and he is very often caught between the desire to hurt her and love her. We are told that “incessantly she puzzled him: one hour so intimate and charming [. . .] the next silent, cold, apparently unmoved by any considerations of their love” (113). Gloria, who has all along been used to having males worshipping her, hates being even mildly reproved by Anthony. She refuses to accept any fault of hers and has a showdown with him on almost every other issue. Within a year Anthony gets fed up with her tantrums and starts seeking out his old friends in a bar.

Fryer has done an exhaustive study of *The Beautiful and Damned*. Keeping in line with feminist ideology, she defines Gloria in glowing terms. To Fryer, “Gloria Gilbert distinguishes herself from other Fitzgerald women by her impressive degree of self-knowledge, dignity and fortitude” (29). McCay, on the other hand, defines Gloria as “a woman whose beauty hides her essential weakness; once her beauty is gone she sinks [. . .] into a kind of mental and moral decay” (316).

Gloria is unaware of what she really wants in life. Hers is a life devoid of any meaning. She does not engage herself in any purposeful activity. She drifts along and hates control of any sort. There is no question of either her father or Anthony imposing their will on her. She likes to wear herself out dancing all night. She wants to be in the thick of all social activities and yearns to be admired always. Fryer justifies Gloria’s hectic
partying saying that it could be “an effort to mask her depression and compensate for her feelings of emptiness” (29). As far as dignity is concerned, Gloria herself admits that she got a “streak of [. . .] cheapness [. . .] for gaudy vulgarity” (64). A little later, justifying her numerous affairs and her promises of engagement—even breaking two of them—she fancies herself as “a loving-cup that goes from hand to hand” (152).

Known as “coast-to-coast Gloria [. . .] with nation-wide notoriety” (54) because of her incorrigible flirtatious nature, this much-sought-after beauty has wild and uncontrollable ways. While Gloria’s father disapproves of her bohemian lifestyle, her indulgent mother, who echoes Zelda’s views on the flappers, thinks that Gloria is very much rooted in her generation. Condoning every act of her daughter, she declares, “Gloria has a very young soul-- irresponsible” (37). As a mother she feels she can give Gloria a free hand.

It is evident in Fitzgerald’s letter to his daughter, Scottie, that he had a very poor opinion of women who did not fulfill their roles as mothers. In a letter dated July 7, 1938, he writes, “I hated her mother [Zelda’s mother] for giving her [Zelda] nothing in the line of good habit—nothing but ‘getting by’ and conceit. I have never again wanted to see in this world women who were brought up as idlers [. . .]” (The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald 47).

Richard Caramel, Gloria’s cousin, also feels that she should be allowed a carefree life, for “a sense of responsibility will spoil her. She’s too
pretty” (37). Before she meets Anthony, Gloria has a string of affairs and repeatedly breaks her engagements. She is only too aware of the hold she has over her numerous male admirers and it gives her immense pleasure, besides boosting her female vanity, when the man she summarily rejects comes back to her like a “domestic animal” (70). Gloria is careful not to go out with intelligent men for they would see through her act. We are told that “she was disposed to like many men, preferably those who gave her frank homage and unfailing entertainment” (194). This fear of intelligent men is there in all the Fitzgeraldian women. Like Rosalind, Gloria too avoids men who would size her up.

On Gloria’s decision to marry Anthony despite the fact that she is totally opposed to marriage, Fryer comments that marriage, in Gloria’s opinion, is “an acceptance of the inevitable. Women of her day and class simply had no viable means of support apart from marriage” (33). If marriage is for sustenance alone then it is definitely loveless and joyless. Gloria did have choices—like the women of her days. She could have been an actress or a writer. It is difficult to believe that a defiant and independent girl such as Gloria is merely transferring her emotional and financial dependency from her father to her husband, as was the fate of many less privileged women. In any case, Gloria does not desire to have a husband in the conventional sense, as a man who would take care of her. She makes it clear to Anthony that she desires “a temporarily passionate lover with wisdom enough to realize when
it has flown” (123) and she assumes that Anthony is just this kind of a man. After marriage, she strongly disapproves of being called “wife”. “Wife,” she says, “is such an ugly word. Your permanent mistress is much more tangible and desirable” (123).

Yet another contentious issue that vitiates their relationship revolves around having children. Gloria is very unwilling to have children and the thought of motherhood appalls her, for, to her, “motherhood was also the privilege of the female baboon” (319). Gloria’s utterances on maternity, it has to be noted, are a precursor to Firestone’s pronouncements on motherhood. Firestone had declared that “pregnancy is barbaric” (198) and had vehemently opposed marriage and motherhood.

Thinking of motherhood, Gloria notes in her diary, “What a fate—to grow rotund and unseemly, to lose my self-love, to think in terms of milk, oatmeal, nurse, diapers [. . .]” (124). As Gloria nurses a private dream of becoming a star, she is worried that bearing children would only hamper her chances of becoming one. Totally devoid of maternal feelings, she loathes “the intolerable sentiment of child-bearing, the menace to her beauty” (319) for she desires to exist “only as a conscious flower, prolonging and preserving itself” (319).

Despite Anthony’s protests, Gloria seriously decides to enter filmdom ostensibly to supplement her husband’s income. Fryer argues that Gloria gives it up “in order to placate her husband” (9). This is not true, for Gloria
does not enter stardom simply because she fails the screen test. She is found
to be too old for the lead role and is instead offered a character role. What
shocks Gloria is not her rejection but the fact that she has grown old and
there are a few wrinkles on her face. Even the feminists would frown upon
her outburst, "Oh! My pretty face! Oh! I don't want to live without my pretty
face" (32). If Gloria was so bound by her husband and had no world of her
own, she would not have dared to venture out on the idea of making it into
films on her own. She ends up at the losing side because she has well
passed her prime. It is her looks, and not Anthony, that betray her.

Presenting her as a victim of ambivalent gender relationship, Fryer
argues that although the sexual revolution was sweeping across the nation
women were judged differently from men. This shifting attitude towards
women left them bewildered and hence their behavior struck everyone as odd
and irrational. And Fryer implies that Gloria can be let off the hook simply
because of the confusion she experienced as a woman.

Katha Pollitt, in *Reasonable Creatures: Essays on Women and Feminism*, remarks that "in the popular stereotype, a feminist is a woman
who wants power over men or to do without men or to be like men" (8). So
the feminists have nothing to complain about as far as Gloria is concerned
because she loves doing what she likes best and on her terms. It is
impossible to tame her or tie her down. Besides, "she had all her life been
associated either with her mental inferiors or with men, who, under the
almost hostile intimidation of her beauty, had not dared to contradict her” (141). She loves to have the upper hand and when Anthony is not prepared to fully endorse her reckless ways and questions her about her extravagant expenses, she bursts out, “I wont stand it! I wont be lectured to [. . .] You’re just a pitiful weakling and you always have been” (305).

All along Anthony had tried to humour Gloria because she was the woman he loved. But little did he realize the implications of his subservience to Gloria’s aggressiveness. The two constantly bicker and when old Adam Patch, who disapproves of their wild ways, disinherits them, they reach a point of no return. Gloria begins to despise Anthony for not having the courage to take on his grandfather and everything about him that had earlier charmed her now begins to irritate her.

Gloria takes complete control the moment she realizes that the promised millions are about to slip out of her hands. Her way of hitting at Anthony is to keep increasing her demands on him. For instance, knowing fully well that they cannot even afford to pay a month’s rest, she insists that they maintain two houses—one in the city and the other in the country. She is not prepared to give up her expensive ways of socializing. It is as if she wants to get even with Anthony, for she feels cheated at being disinherited by his grandfather. Unlike Anthony, Gloria decides to fight the matter out in court. At that point of time Anthony exists for her not as a husband but as a link to the promised riches.
Eble asserts, "Gloria in marriage and out, has the outward characteristic that went with the flapper: a disdain for convention; a long list of admirers; a facile wit; a hard unwomanly beauty" (73). This is evident in the great sense of relief she feels when Anthony enlists and is away at a camp. She enjoys his absence from home for "without his continual drain upon her moral strength she found herself wonderfully revived [. . .] She returned to her normal state of mind strong, disdainful [. . .]" (301). She plunges into the social life around her with renewed vitality and resumes her old game of playing with the emotions of men to keep herself amused. If she were really hemmed in by societal pressures she would have waited eagerly expecting news from her husband. But Gloria does no such thing and certainly does not don the role of a conventional wife.

When Zelda was asked later in life to describe herself as a child, she replied that she was "independent—courageous—without thought for anyone else" (qtd. in Milford 8). Gloria is modelled almost entirely on Zelda. While she is considered to be the most colourful of Fitzgerald's feminine creations, she is also, according to Perosa, "a more dangerous incarnation of the debutante or flapper, both careless and fascinating" (38). Like Rosalind before her, Gloria is preoccupied with herself. She looks forward to Nicole for the world to these women is there only to serve them.

Gloria is repeatedly referred to as a beautiful, merciless woman who uses her charm to play on the emotions of men. She makes the most unlikely
partner for Anthony, who much to his secret amusement, is looked upon as “a rather romantic figure, a scholar, a refuse, a tower of erudition” (13).

Anthony, captivated by Gloria’s charm the moment he sets his eyes on her, is way off the mark in his optimistic and romantic assessment of her nature. He continually associates her with the sun and mistakes her radiance for warmth and love. She, in fact, associates herself with coldness and her first words are, “I am a solid block of ice” (51). Even in their first kiss, “no love was there [...] her beauty was cool as a damp breeze” (87).

Erich Fromm, in The Art of Loving, writes, “narcissism is the earliest stage in human development, and the person who in later life has returned to this narcissistic stage is incapable of love” (48). Gloria is so full of love for herself that she finds it difficult to reciprocate Anthony’s love.

It is typical of the women in the works of Fitzgerald to begin a relationship on a romantic note and then relapse into the scheming partner. Anthony, while indulging in a brief affair with Dorothy Raycroft, who is known as Dot in the novel, realizes that he has been wrong in his judgement of women. Feminist critics have been quick to point out that while Gloria remains faithful to Anthony he drifts into an adulterous relationship. It is true that Gloria does not physically involve herself with another man in Anthony’s absence, she merely indulges in wild flirtations. It is precisely to break free from her enervating company that Anthony enlists in the first place. Away from the naggings of Gloria, “he felt that for the first time in
four years he could express and interpret himself anew” (264). But he mistakes Dot to be a girl with promise and simplicity. For a brief moment, Anthony’s romantic disposition resurfaces as Dot lavishes her love on him. She does revive his drooping spirit for a while but soon she indulges in emotional blackmail which further debilitates Anthony.

Dot does not remain the adoring partner for long and demands that he marry her although Anthony had never deceived her about his marital position. Nevertheless to maintain her hold over him, she makes Anthony believe that she has suicidal tendencies and extracts promises from him. Anthony’s experience with her makes him distrust and shun human company and he even refuses to acknowledge Gloria’s presence. Filled with misery at his act of faithlessness, he suffers a total mental collapse when he sees Dot at his apartment in New York.

It is not as if Fitzgerald has presented an ideal man in Anthony. Anthony is there in flesh and blood with his weakness and failings, but he comes across as a warm human being. John Chambers, in The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, pointing out the link between Beauty and Evil concludes that “Anthony is completely overwhelmed by Beauty and is therefore dammed” (69). The ending of the novel is more like a powerful tableau. Anthony is confined to a wheelchair, a total wreck completely in the hands of Gloria. All that he can do is reminisce about “the mistakes of his youth” and he is convinced that “his very craving for romance had been punished”
Anthony is reduced to an incoherent wreck completely dependent on Gloria. By presenting women of the types of Gloria and Dorothy, Fitzgerald suggests that the typical young woman of the 1920s is a femme fatale.

It can emphatically be stated that Anthony’s eventual collapse is a result of Gloria’s excessive demands on him. Not only does she constantly challenge his position as a husband, “You are such an ass!” (235), she refuses to give in to a single wish of his. After every showdown, it is Anthony who has to pacify her for “arguments were fatal to Gloria’s disposition” (141). Anthony discovers early in their marriage that “she had no sense of justice” (141) but was instead filled with “an arrogant consciousness that she had never seen a girl as beautiful as herself” (135). She taunts him when he tries his hand at writing and heaps derision on him for not working and earning his living. She has little to contribute for the growth of their relationship. All the promise of youth and romance is burnt up in their riotous living, and the couple can only live like “two gold fish in a bowl from which all water has been drawn; they could not even swim across to each other” (226).

Gloria increasingly begins to despise Anthony who begins to sink into despair. While he hurtles into decline, she begins to grow strong. It is typical among Fitzgerald’s women to grow emotionally strong at the expense of the decline in the men. Gloria directs all her attention to the legal problems they face over the question of inheritance. But she is so preoccupied in winning the case that she fails to analyze her relationship with Anthony. It
hardly matters to her whether she is happy with him or not, on whether he
still cares for her. In fact, when Anthony is about to leave for the camp, she
indulges in “a senseless quarrel about the proper division of the income”
(253). She decides to stay in New York and follow the case instead of
accompanying him to the camp. After all her decision to marry Anthony in
the first place was based on the hope that more avenues for a glamorous and
adventurous life lay with the millions of his grandfather.

As is with the other woman characters of Fitzgerald, Gloria displays
“the most high-handed selfishness” (132) and “she always talked about
herself” (53). Fryer contends that the men try to crush Gloria’s streak of
independence. On the contrary, it is Gloria who, with her “inordinate
egotism” (135), lulls “Anthony’s mind to sleep” (152).

Fitzgerald’s choice of the title, *The Beautiful and Damned*, is an
interesting one. It is a deliberate distortion of the platonic concept of the
beautiful and good. In the *Dialogues of Plato*, in the section called “The
Symposium,” Socrates remarks, “Love is beautiful” and “the good is also the
beautiful [. . .] and in wanting the beautiful, love wants also the good” (205).
There is a perfect synthesis of love, beauty and goodness. But Fitzgerald’s
title shows how the beautiful women see beauty as an end in itself and are
consequently damned. We have seen how beauty gets equated with evil and
immorality in *This Side of Paradise*. The beautiful but narcissistic Gloria
leads Anthony on a steady path of decline. Fitzgerald and Zelda also shared
this quality and hence were referred to as the ‘romantic egoists’. It is not surprising, therefore, that they too, like the characters in Fitzgerald’s works, were damned.

The Great Gatsby: If *This Side of Paradise* won him the ‘top girl’ Zelda Sayre, *The Great Gatsby* is the novel on which Fitzgerald’s reputation as a literary artist rests. The novel, which is the shortest of the five written by him, has a tight construction and is considered artistically flawless. Written in 1925, it has been very often read as a period piece as it details the life and attitudes of men and women in the Jazz age. Ann Massa, in “F. Scott Fitzgerald,” considers *The Great Gatsby* to be “an aid and accurate picture of the modes and mores, the people and pleasures of the Jazz age” (146). Apart from the sociological insights, what gives the novel a universal and perennial interest is that it is a novel of romance in more ways than one.

Many critics of the 1920s and 1930s who considered Fitzgerald a commercial writer, dismissed the novel as inconsequential. H.L. Menken, in 1925, dismissed the novel as “no more than a glorified anecdote about a bounder who harbours a preposterous love” (89). Menken, however, was quick to add that “the story has a fine texture, a careful and brilliant finish” (89). In 1999, the Random House rated *The Great Gatsby* the second best novel of the twentieth-century.

In this novel, we come across a great romantic dreamer, Jay Gatsby, a man who builds his life upon a dream that turns out to be false. Daisy, the
beautiful, spoiled wife of a wealthy socialite, Tom Buchanan, is the woman around whom Gatsby weaves his fantasies. Five years ago, before she came to be Tom’s wife, Daisy had pledged her love to Gatsby and then tired of waiting for him had rejected him. After a patient wait Gatsby once again enters her life hoping to retrieve that lost love. In the end, he realizes, that Daisy, whom he had pursued with a singular devotion, does not really measure up to his concept of romantic love, and he ends up as a victim of his dreams. At the core of the novel is Gatsby’s unswerving, passionate and fatal devotion to a woman who has no qualms about throwing him over for a wealthy man—a man with a background.

Almost all of Fitzgerald’s novels are based on his own emotional experiences and The Great Gatsby is no exception. Kenneth Eble notes that “at the heart of The Great Gatsby are the love affairs of Scott Fitzgerald with Ginevra King and Zelda Sayre” (88). The treatment meted out to him by these two women finds expression in this novel.

Analyzing the Gatsby-Daisy relationship, we note that there are two phases in it with a gap of five years. Their early, passionate involvement and break is recounted by Nick, Jordan and later by Gatsby himself. Their reunion, five years later, is dealt with directly in the novel. The intervening years dramatically alter their circumstances and personality which in turn have serious repercussions on their relationship.
The meeting between Gatsby, the handsome but penniless young officer filled with “romantic readiness” (4) and the beautiful, rich, ebullient Daisy is a “colossal accident” (94). Gatsby is on the look out for the woman of his dreams while she looks for a man who will open a brand new glamorous world for her through marriage. Gatsby, contemptuous of the women he has known in the past, finds Daisy to be an exceptional one. To him, she is “excitingly desirable” and her elegant house holds an air of “breathless intensity and ripe mystery” (94). She is the most sought-after girl in town and all the young officers clamour for her attention. “The fact that so many men love Daisy only enhances her value in Gatsby’s eyes and he does not believe his luck when gets the ‘top-girl’. Daisy too is completely in love with Gatsby. How is it that their dreams end up in disillusionment? An analysis of Daisy’s character will give us the answers.

Although Daisy does pledge her love to Gatsby, she is not prepared to wait till he returns from the front nor is she prepared to wait till he strikes it rich. We are told by Jordan that while she waited for Gatsby “she began keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men” (96), and she wanted her life “shaped now immediately—and the decision must be made by some force—of love of money, of unquestionable practicality” (96). She is therefore flattered and relieved when Tom Buchanan presents himself with a proposal and a pearl necklace worth three hundred and fifty thousand dollars.
Daisy is taken in by the fact that her wedding had “more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before” (49).

Fryer, in Women: Harbingers of Change, has defended Daisy’s decision to marry Tom instead of waiting for Gatsby. Feminist critics argue that Daisy married Tom on the rebound and did what was the sensible thing. But the question of marrying on the rebound arises only when there is a rejection or betrayal on the part of either the man or the woman. Gatsby had not given Daisy any reason to feel that she should leave him for someone else. Fryer contends that Daisy’s sudden engagements, first to one man and then another, “reflects her sense of urgency to get on with her life [. . .] She was a victim of her need for stability” (50). She also justifies Daisy planning to marry Gatsby but choosing Tom over him, for, she claims, “her [Daisy’s] need was not for any particular person but simply for an attainable partner who could provide—through marriage—the sense of identity and stability she so desperately craved” (50).

It is obvious then that Daisy was not really in love with Gatsby but with the idea or thrill of falling in love for a brief while. Daisy, who is dictated by her whimsical nature and is unconcerned about societal pressures, has a string of affairs in Gatsby’s absence. In this, she is more in keeping with the flapper of the 1920s who enjoyed a wild social life while the fun lasted. It also recalls Zelda’s treatment of Fitzgerald during their courtship. Zelda would thrive on dates in Fitzgerald’s absence and her escapades were
defended by Mayfield who remarked that Fitzgerald could have been more patient and understanding for it was “customary for southern belles to have as many strings to their bow as they could string along” (47).

It is obvious that Daisy’s decision to marry Tom was dictated by considerations other than the need for stability. One of the needs was status and wealth to live up to it. The epigraph to the novel

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her,
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
Till she cry, “love, gold-hatted, high bouncing love,
I must have you”

clearly reveals the attitude of the women in family relationships. Wealth and money and love are inextricably linked. Charles Weir emphasizes, “Money could serve as a shield for vulgarity, treachery, and stupid arrogance, as we witness in most of the characters in The Great Gatsby” (141). McCay also notes, “Daisy hides behind her money [. . .] She is trapped in her need for money and comfort and in her failure to make something of her life” (312).

Fetterley interprets the epigraph from a feminist standpoint. To her, the epigraph “provides an image of the co-relation between the strictures of romantic love and the question of power” (83). She claims that the epigraph reveals the sexual politics whereby the man needs to control the woman of his desires with a show off his wealth. She is unwilling to concede that the women in Fitzgerald’s works can be swayed by a display of wealth.
The meeting—one can hardly call it a meeting—between Daisy and Gatsby after a lapse of five years in the latter’s mansion highlights the role money or materialism plays in the forming or continuing of relationships. The penniless officer whom Daisy rejected is now a millionaire and Daisy is predictably impressed and enthralled with the opulence of Gatsby’s house. She is moved to tears at the sight of his numerous silk shirts. While she takes delight in all the objects of the mansion, Gatsby revalues each article in his mansion depending on the spontaneous response it draws from Daisy. Fetterley, however, believes that the spreading of the gorgeous silk shirts in front of Daisy was a deliberate move on Gatsby’s part to “exact tribute” (76) from her. This, she emphasizes, is merely Gatsby’s way of exhibiting power over her. She goes on to accuse Gatsby of “luring” (74) Daisy to his mansion only to make her see what he has done for her, and not to see her as such.

This stance is untenable because it is made quite clear that Gatsby cannot win Daisy on the strength of his love alone. Neither he nor his love can capture the past. His material possessions are the most potent means of regaining Daisy and reliving the euphoric, romantic past. Fetterley argues that “Gatsby thinks of Daisy in relation to the objects that surround her” (74). The text tells us that Gatsby “revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes [. . .] He was consumed at the wonder at her presence” (59). While he is overwhelmed by
her presence she is overcome by his silk shirts. It is Daisy who reassesses Gatsby on the strength of the objects that surround him in his mansion.

Fryer wrote that Daisy's need was not for "any particular person" (50). It implies that Daisy's need is object-oriented, while Gatsby's is person-oriented. What makes the situation unbelievable is that Gatsby is not prepared to see any imperfection in Daisy's character. This is because he values Daisy for what she is and not what she stands for or by what she is surrounded. Marius Bewley, in "Scott Fitzgerald and the Collapse of the American Dream," sums up Daisy's relationship with Gatsby. He writes, "Daisy's significance in the story lies in her failure to constitute the objective correlative of Gatsby's vision" (279). Gatsby who wanted to "repeat the past" (70) realizes that Daisy "used to be able to understand" (70) but now she does not and conveniently so.

De Beauvoir wrote that women expect gifts from their lovers and are swept off their feet by their lover's munificence. But she interprets this as a sign of cupidity. It is a way to make "man pay [...] and change him into an instrument [...] The man may think he has her, but this sexual possession is an illusion, it is she who has him on the more substantial economic ground. Her pride is satisfied" (The Second Sex 568). This is the position Daisy trades for when she summarily dismisses Gatsby and settles for Tom. To her, it does not matter if it is a loveless match because it affords her the status she desired—something which Gatsby could not assure. Daisy is not
prepared to look for ideals. True that she was much in love with him that Gatsby felt “married to her” (94), but she did what most Fitzgerald women do—follow what the mind says and not the heart. Massa’s comment sums up Daisy’s character. She admits that Daisy is “undeniably fascinating” (150) but hastens to add that “she is as insubstantial as the ballooning white dress she wears, as shallow as her white powder” (159).

Fryer justifies Daisy's need for staying married to Tom and at the same turn needing Gatsby’s love as well. She declares, “When Gatsby reappears Daisy still needs his love, yet she also needs the stability that Tom provides her” (52). This is an objectionable marital situation to be in—loving one but staying married to another. Granted that given a patriarchal society, Daisy did have economic considerations in deciding on marriage, but to argue that she needs love from one and economic status from another shows that her priorities are misplaced. Daisy is definitely doing injustice to the man she loves as well as the man she is married to.

What Gatsby fails to comprehend is that Daisy did not reject him five year ago merely because he lacked the means to offer her a life of pleasure but also because he could never measure up to her class. Tom and Daisy belong to a “distinguished secret society” (13) where people are born into wealth. When Tom exposes Gatsby’s underhand connection and the nefarious means with which he amassed his wealth, Daisy recoils from Gatsby in horror. She repeats the past and rejects Gatsby the second time around. She
now rejects his humble origin, which even his newly-made millions cannot wipe out. To her he is now an upstart and she retreats into her marriage with Tom.

Greer, in *The Female Eunuch*, writes, “the man who looks at his woman and says, ‘What could I do without you’ is already destroyed. His woman’s victory is complete” (157). Daisy’s victory is complete because Gatsby makes the mistake of flooding her with his love and adoration but gets precious little in return. Fetterley, who also reads sexual politics in the novel, adds that “Daisy has symbolic power precisely because she suggests that which cannot be possessed. At the same time she excites so intensely the desire to possess” (78).

Glenn Settle, in *Fitzgerald’s Daisy: The Siren’s Voice*, interprets the female in *Gatsby* as a classical siren and looks upon her as a “wrecker-temptress” (118). He also sees Daisy as a “flower fairy” (117), or an enchantress who lures Gatsby to his end.

The characterization is based on the artful handling of the quality of Daisy’s mesmerizing voice. Daisy has cultivated a way of talking in a “low, thrilling voice [. . .] a voice men who cared for her found difficult to forget” (8). Nick finds it an “indiscreet voice” and Gatsby’s word is final—“her voice is full of money,” the voice of “the golden girl” (76). That she plays her role as a seductress to the hilt is evident in the manner in which she flirts with Gatsby in the presence of her husband. It is obvious to Tom that his wife
loved Gatsby in the manner in which she spoke to him or looked at him. Daisy even sends Tom away to fix a drink only to use it as a pretext to kiss Gatsby. When Jordan calls her a "low, vulgar girl" Daisy retorts: "I don't care" (74).

When Daisy speaks of her past with Tom, Nick listens sympathetically. Just when he is about to believe her completely, "her voice broke off" and he could feel the "basic insincerity" of what she said as she has "an absolute smirk" (13) on her lovely face. Fetterley, however, dismisses the observation of Nick as a deliberate ploy on the part of Fitzgerald to ensure that the readers do not sympathize with Daisy.

The scene at the Plaza where Tom and Gatsby compete for the love of Daisy is the high point in the novel and gives the readers a clear understanding of Daisy's character. When the dramatic confrontation between the two men takes place, Daisy is flattered to find two men vying for her love and after a great deal of calculated wavering, takes side with Tom. To begin with, she asks, "How could I love him [Tom]" (84) and declares her love for Gatsby. When Tom protests, she replies, "I can't say I never loved Tom" (85). Just when Gatsby comes close to getting Daisy walk out of a loveless marriage, Tom reassures her of his love for her and repents his unfaithfulness. When Tom finds her wavering, he clinches the issue by raking up Gatsby's past as a bootlegger.
With every accusation Tom hurls at Gatsby, he finds her closer to his side. When Gatsby defends himself, it is too late for “with every word she was drawing further and further into herself” (86). It is then that Gatsby realizes that he had only a “dead dream” (86) in hand. The five years he had spent in the search for Daisy turns out to be nothing less than the quest for the Holy Grail in his case. In the end he realizes “what a grotesque thing a rose is” (103).

Fryer holds the view that Daisy’s indecisiveness is attributed to her being a victim of her times. “Daisy’s confusion over her relationship with the two principal men in her life,” notes Fryer, “reflects the gender confusion that was rampant during Fitzgerald’s era. Although she is disappointed in her marriage, she does not see any viable alternative to it” (57). Daisy at one point threatens to walk out of the marriage but later retracts and turns a blind eye to the fact that Tom keeps a mistress. This is certainly not because she has to bow to societal pressures and accept the fact that men had greater sexual freedom than women. She is basically hollow and lives like Tom in a state of inner vacuum. One of her earliest utterances with reference to the birth of her daughter is: “The best thing a girl can be in this world, is a beautiful little fool” (13). Surprisingly feminists have not reacted to this observation of Daisy, which, incidentally, was the observation made by Zelda at the birth of Scottie.
It has to be emphasized that Daisy is exceedingly beautiful, but is no fool. She knows that being emotional would get her nowhere in the cold world of the rich. She is scornful of Myrtle, Tom’s mistress, for she knows that his relationship with a lowly woman will not last long. She is the kind of woman who can coolly resume a relationship with Gatsby not only because it comes as a break from the monotony of her already dead marriage, but also to make Tom realize that she too can play the same game. With Myrtle and Gatsby dead in the end, Daisy and Tom can rework their relationship.

“The basic common denominator of most of the women in Fitzgerald’s stories,” notes Milton Hindus in F. Scott Fitzgerald: An Introduction and Interpretation, “is their intense self-centredness” (30). We have already seen this behaviour in Gloria and Rosalind, and Daisy is no exception. The gestures of these women reveal their self-love. Gloria admires herself in the mirror and the only thing that terrifies her is old age. Daisy’s action of taking “her face in her hands as if feeling its lovely shape” (13) reveals volumes of her absorption with herself. Like Gloria, she sees herself as a star performer. Her speech, her practiced smile, the turn of her head all suggest her need to use her charms to advantage. Fryer, however, defends Daisy’s mannerisms and actions, for she feels that “Daisy’s silly manner conceals a woman of feeling” and her final “irresponsibility towards Gatsby stems from an acute sense of responsibility towards himself” (43).
There are innumerable instances in the novel which show how Daisy lacks in feeling because if she is a woman capable of feelings she would not indulge in various acts of indiscretion and apathy. To begin with, she gives her word to Gatsby but marries another. She flirts with Nick in the presence of her husband and the lovesick Gatsby. She professes her love for Gatsby in front of her husband but retracts later. She is careful not to reveal her involvement in the accident which results in Myrtle’s death. She does not mind letting the man she claims to love face the music while she goes unpunished. Also, in what Glen Settle rightly calls an act of “ultimate social betrayal” (118) she deliberately stays away from Gatsby’s funeral.

All this hardly conceals a woman of feeling. It reveals, on the contrary, a woman of high-handed selfishness. Her treatment of Gatsby cannot be put down as irresponsibility. It is an act of betrayal and Daisy’s actions show her in poor light. It is hard to justify her callous treatment of a man who dedicates his life to her. Daisy is not worth the inviolable love Gatsby cherishes and nurtures.

Feminist critics have come down heavily on Nick for adopting a prejudiced stand. If the story were told from Daisy’s or Jordan’s point of view, it would probably have suited the feminists. In fact, it is Jordan who narrates the sequences leading up to Daisy’s marriage to Tom. It is she who lets us know that Daisy married Tom Buchanan “without so much as a shiver” (49). It is through Jordan that we get an insight into Daisy’s
rebellious nature before she settled down with Tom. Fetterley accuses Nick of double standards in judging Jordan and Gatsby differently. Nick, who believes in the moral codes of his forefathers, has a poor opinion of women in general. It is reflected in one of his casual remarks: “Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply” (38). This remark springs from his observation of Jordan’s character. Jordan, like Gloria, avoids clever men who could see through her hollowness, and Nick sizes her up as follows: “She was incurably dishonest [. . .] She wasn’t able to endure being at a disadvantage [. . .] She had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body” (38).

Fetterley also declares that Nick does not make an objective narrator because it is obvious, she argues, that from the start he is on Gatsby’s side. She contends that “we have the absurdity and the dishonesty of Nick romanticizing Gatsby for his heroic though misguided romanticization of Daisy” (95). To the feminist critics, Nick deliberately gives the readers a captivating picture of Daisy when we first view her in a dreamy state in the beautiful interior of her mansion. At the end of the novel, we see her sitting in a conspiratorial manner with Tom with the deluded Gatsby keeping his futile vigil outside her window.

Sherine Upot, in “She–Centering The Great Gatsby: Fitzgerald, Bartheleme and the Gender Question,” also notes that Daisy is merely used
as a "decorative piece" (101) in the novel and that her intelligence and perceptiveness are glossed over. She believes that Daisy's characterization is the result of Fitzgerald's sexist ideology and she writes, "If Daisy's world is full of sham and deception [. . .] it could well be a result of the mode of fictional representation that the author has chosen to project her through, as also of the ideology of patriarchy that gets transmitted through the novel" (108).

Fetterley, one of the earliest feminist critics of Fitzgerald, remarks, "The Great Gatsby is spun out upon the twin emotional impulses of romanticism and moral indignation" and "the woman are the object of the novel's moral indignation just as they are the object of its romanticism" (73). If we consider Daisy's role in the accident, which killed Myrtle, we can understand why the women are the object of the novel's moral indignation. It is Daisy who runs over Myrtle, but cashes on the chivalrous devotion of Gatsby to emerge blameless. Gatsby's defense of Daisy is not a display of his patriarchal power as the feminists make it out but is a sign of his protective attitude towards the woman he loves. While Daisy retreats into the 'stability' of her marriage, Gatsby has to lose his life. In the end, while Daisy is unduly romanticized her actions are reprehensible.

Overmeyer, in "Daisy Fay Buchanan—Murderer?" has an interesting observation to make. While conceding that the accident could have been a tragic miscalculation, she does not rule out Daisy hitting Myrtle "completely
unintentionally” (15). Daisy knew that Tom was unfaithful and so she could have used this opportunity to get rid of her rival. After going into the details of how the accident occurred, Overmeyer concludes that Myrtle’s death could have been a “convenient accident” (15). Even Nick reflects that if Tom learns that Daisy had been at the wheel “he might think he saw a connection in it” (92). McCay also holds Daisy responsible for Gatsby’s death and she condemns her act of “completely compromising any feeling she had for Gatsby by letting him take the blame for Myrtle’s death” (317).

Consequently, Daisy is responsible for Myrtle’s death and by way of implication is also responsible for the death of Wilson and Gatsby. Given such a situation and Daisy’s handling of it, one cannot feel that she is a victim of a confused state of mind or that she merely bows to the dictates of Gatsby or Tom. Commenting on Daisy and Tom’s callousness, Nick concludes with shame and disgust, “They were careless people [. . .] They smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made” (114).

Daisy is not the only woman who draws flak. Myrtle, Jordan and Ella Kaye are the other women at whom the ‘moral indignation’ is directed. A.G. Dyson refers to Myrtle as “the quintessence of vulgarity” (114). But with Tom’s money and the fact that she is associated with a man of class, she looks down on her dull, plodding husband, “I thought he knew
something about breeding,” she declares with derision, “but he was not fit to lick my shoe” (23). Tom frowns upon Myrtle’s pretentious behaviour and even turns violent when she tries to ape Daisy.

Discussing Myrtle’s relationship with Tom, Fetterley notes that the crucial factor in understanding Myrtle’s position is her being “powerless and disadvantaged” (91). She is one of the ‘dark ladies’ in literature and these dark ladies “constitute a class of social/sexual/economic outcasts whom men can afford to romanticize and ultimately idealize precisely because they are doomed” (Fetterley 91). Tom is absolutely clear about his relationship with Myrtle. To him, she is a favoured mistress and cannot hope to be anything more. There is also no question of an emotional involvement with her. On the other hand, Myrtle needs Tom’s money to lead a comfortable life away from the Valley of Ashes. Catherine, Myrtle’s sister, expects Tom to walk out on Daisy and marry Myrtle.

There is one positive quality about Myrtle—her vitality. Dyson stresses that it is unfortunate that “her vitality should find expression in the waste land only as vulgarity and disloyalty” (115). It is Myrtle’s vitality that makes her seek happiness outside marriage. Dalma Heyn would definitely applaud Myrtle for, in The Erotic Silence of the American Wife, she defends adultery as “a revolutionary way for women to rise above the conventional” (11). Thus infidelity becomes a means of achieving women’s liberation and freedom from depending upon their husbands.
The fear of losing their women is quite evident in all Fitzgerald's male characters. It is this fear that rouses Wilson from his passivity and apathy and he locks Myrtle in their house in an effort to establish control over her wild and reckless ways. Myrtle challenges Wilson's authority, "Throw me down and beat me, you dirty little coward" (87) and rushes out in a burst of freedom only to meet a violent death under the wheels of Gatsby's car which Daisy was driving.

While Myrtle has a robust personality, Jordan shares the bored, cynical outlook of her friend, Daisy. Her general indifference shows that she is either incapable of having an emotional relationship with anyone, or is averse to it. Nick comments that her "bored haughty face that she turned to the world concealed something" (38) and was trying to conceal that.

Nick, with reference to Jordan, is attracted, and repelled in turns, unsure of his feelings for her. All that Jordan can offer him is an impersonal handshake and a cold, forced smile. But when the two get to know each other better--Daisy insists that they do--Jordan becomes domineering and possessive. She demands his constant attention although she is not in love with him, and upbraids him when she neglects her. It unsettles her when he does not give in and is instead openly critical of her. Jordan hates being at a disadvantage.

Given her nature, Jordan is unable to comprehend Nick's passion for a sober, orderly life. Living in the easy-going world of the Jazz Age, she
finds him very old-fashioned. Also, it hurts her female vanity that she is not indispensable to Nick. Even on the night of Myrtle’s fatal accident, she picks up a quarrel with him for neglecting her and parts company. She frowns upon him when he refuses to see her as he was supervising busy Gatsby’s funeral. “You did throw me over,” she shouts exaggerating the situation, “You threw me over on the telephone [. . .] It was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while” (113). In the original draft of the novel, Nick was to fall in love with Jordan and she was to throw him over as a kind of parallel to Daisy’s treatment of Gatsby. Daisy betrays Gatsby and Nick, her cousin, has the vicarious satisfaction of snubbing Jordan.

Kaye, Cody’s mistress, is yet another flawed character in The Great Gatsby. She is associated with the unexpected death of Gatsby’s benefactor, Cody. She also cheats Gatsby of the twenty five thousand dollars Cody had left him. Kaye made sure that Cody’s millions came to her. The mesmerizing effect women have over men in the novels of Fitzgerald is clearly visible in the hold Kaye has over Cody.

Bewley talked of the “viciousness of a monstrous moral indifference” (278) in the character of Daisy. The same holds good for Myrtle, Jordan and Kaye. Throughout the novel, Nick emphasizes the lack of character in these women. They are creatures living in a haze, their vision is blurred by the endless round of parties and empty relationships. John Henry Raleigh, in
F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby', severely indscts Tom, Daisy and Jordan. To him, “they are merely a higher form of animality living out its mundane existence” (102). The women in particular are the disquieting types.

“Like Keats,” writes John Kuehl, “Scott Fitzgerald struggled between ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’ and again like Keats, he was primarily a ‘subjective’ writer” (34). The Great Gatsby is born out of Fitzgerald's own experience and that is why he could write to Maxwell Perkins on December 20, 1924: “I know Gatsby better than I know my own child” (The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald 192). For all the biographical evidence the feminists dig up, what cannot be ignored is that Zelda did break her engagement with Scott in just the way Daisy did it with Gatsby. The pain with which it is narrated is because of, what D.S. Savage calls, “that disconcerting early experience with Zelda. It confirmed him in his belief in the sovereign power of wealth while arousing in him a moral revulsion against that power” (149). Thus it is evident that women play a vitiating role in the man-woman relationship in the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

While this chapter has analyzed the nature of women in the three early novels of Fitzgerald, the following chapter takes up the portrayal of women in his mature works, namely, Tender is the Night and The Last Tycoon.