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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

DAISY BUCHANAN,
MAN'S OTHER IN THE HAPPY TWENTIES

CAROLINA PASCUAL VELASCO

Tutor: María José Carrera de la Red

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ABSTRACT

This BA Thesis looks at Daisy Buchanan, the main female character of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), from the standpoint provided by Simone de Beauvoir's landmark book *The Second Sex* (1949). Through the presentation of the socio-cultural period in which the women of *The Great Gatsby* are set, the exposition of the main thoughts of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, and a close study of F. Scott Fitzgerald's female character, it will be demonstrated that Daisy Buchanan embodies the type of woman that some decades later Simone de Beauvoir will struggle to eradicate in favor of an independent and free woman.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado se centra en Daisy Buchanan, el personaje femenino protagonista de la novela de F. Scott Fitzgerald titulada *The Great Gatsby* (1925), tomando como punto de partida el texto fundacional del feminismo contemporáneo: *The Second Sex*, de Simone de Beauvoir (1949). Por medio de la presentación del periodo sociocultural en el que se enmarcan los personajes femeninos de *The Great Gatsby*, la exposición de las ideas principales de Simone de Beauvoir en *The Second Sex* y un análisis detallado del personaje femenino de F. Scott Fitzgerald, se demostrará que Daisy Buchanan encarna el tipo de mujer que, unas décadas más tarde, Simone de Beauvoir luchará por erradicar en favor de una mujer independiente y libre.

Palabras clave: *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

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INTRODUCTION

This BA Thesis aims to demonstrate that Daisy Buchanan, the main female character of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), perfectly embodies the profile of woman that, some decades later, Simone de Beauvoir depicts in *The Second Sex* (1949) as being the female profile that best reflects the subordinated position of women in the masculine world.

Many things have already been said about *The Great Gatsby*. Its great relevance within the literary canon has turned this novel into an important object of study for literary criticism. It has been analyzed through the lens of Traditional criticism, Marxist criticism, Psychoanalytic criticism and New Historicism, among many others. But this BA Thesis will approach *The Great Gatsby* in the light of Feminist criticism.

An analysis of *The Great Gatsby* from the feminist perspective is made in LuoXiaoYan's Master Thesis *A Feminist Perspective of The Great Gatsby* (2006). The author argues that the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway, is a misogynist whose "patriarchal ideology is embedded in his narrative discourse" (24), and that the secondary role and negative characterization of the female characters "reveal the writer's feminist value and discomfort with women in the Jazz Age in the 1920s" (5). Along the same lines, in *Reading Daisy as the Oppressed Character in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby* (2014), Nim Zakiyah holds that Daisy is sharply oppressed by Tom Buchanan's authority. By using the Radical-Cultural feminist theory to analyze the character of Daisy, Zakiyah reaffirms her oppression and concludes that, although she does not react to her oppression through actions, she actually reacts mentally. But the study that comes closer to this BA Thesis is Masomeh Bozorgimoghaddam and Naser Moeen's *Representation of Women as the 'Second Sex' in The Great Gatsby* (2014). Basing their arguments on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, the authors aim to show that the three main female

characters—Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle—are represented as being inferior to their male counterparts.

While the previous examples have several points in common with this BA Thesis, there are many others from which they clearly differ. My purpose is not to show whether F. Scott Fitzgerald's vision of women in *The Great Gatsby* is positive or negative, but to prove that the novel's main female character, Daisy Buchanan, perfectly embodies one of the female profiles that, according to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, reflect the subjugation of women by the male environment. To achieve this general goal, I will pursue three more specific objectives: to provide a wide socio-cultural context wherein the specific situation of the women in the 1920s could be embedded and understood; to present and explain the main ideas conveyed by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*; and to prove that those same ideas are found in the description of Daisy Buchanan in the novel, and furthermore, that they can be used to explain Daisy's behavior and personality.

Each of the three objectives has been tackled with the methodology that best fits the purpose. First, the management of historical sources has been required for the purpose of providing a detailed socio-cultural context of the period in which *The Great Gatsby* is set. Then, a comprehensive reading of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* has been done, as well as a reworking of its primary ideas for the purpose of organizing and presenting them in coherent and clearly understandable groups. Eventually, a careful parallel reading of *The Second Sex* and *The Great Gatsby* has been done, with the aim of identifying the presence of the theory of *The Second Sex* within the female character of Daisy Buchanan.

In accordance with these three objectives, the structure of this BA Thesis is tripartite. Entitled "Socio-cultural context: The Happy Twenties", the first chapter provides a broad vision of the 1920s in America. This chapter starts with a presentation of the political moment that America was experiencing and the general attitude and morality that quickly spread during that decade. From this general view,

it moves towards the specific situation of the period's youth and, more specifically, towards women. This will help the reader to better understand the context in which Daisy Buchanan is set. In the second chapter, which is called "Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*", the principal ideas that Simone de Beauvoir develops in her book are organized into five primary groups and are explained in detail. This organization facilitates the reader's understanding of the feminist treatise and the relation it keeps with the ensuing analysis of Daisy Buchanan. This analysis is performed in the third chapter: "A Reading of Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*", which presents a close analysis of the character from the standpoint provided by the previous chapters.

A few concluding remarks and a short list of the bibliographical references will close a study that aims at keeping a close focus on the main feminine character of *The Great Gatsby*.

CHAPTER I

Socio-Cultural Context: The Happy Twenties

“Eat, drink and be merry” is the axiom that best describes the decade of the 1920s in America, when people wanted to forget the difficulties of the war and be happy. An era that was initiated with the end of the Democratic Party headed by the idealist president of the United States Woodrow Wilson, who had left the nation worn out by responsibilities, privations and disillusionments after a devastating First World War. The general displeasure with the Democrat ideals led to a rejection of Wilson’s policies in the election of 1920 in favor of the Republican candidate, Warren Gamaliel Harding, who established a conservative government with no progressive reforms. The political agenda of the new president promised a ‘Return to Normalcy’. This bright promise was Harding’s key to achieve the support of the North Americans, who greeted him with the hope of returning to the stability of the prewar time. This normalcy implied a return to big business, which was boosted by a tax and government deficit reduction. In the main, the presidency of Harding was distinguished by his resistance to cope with the responsibilities and problems of the nation. Besides, an absence of distinctive character in Warren facilitated the corruption and scandals.

However incredible it may seem, not only was this governmental inactivity accepted by the Americans, but it also revealed and reflected the general reaction of the population: carelessness. The freewheeling mood of the era was supported by a series of ‘happy escapes’ that helped Americans to avoid confronting their problems. Some of those escapes were the newest entertainments of the moment: movies, theaters, the radio, speakeasies, private parties and night clubs. In this way, the new president meant a drastic change in the basic attitude of the Americans. It was a time for a new and unsettled morality that went against the old moral certainties and that

left America unsure of itself between the past that it was leaving behind and the present that was still being built.

Instead of worries, the American population of the '20s sought excitement, which caused a general sense of frivolity, snobbishness and conformity, together with an anti-intellectualism that could be seen in most of the newspapers that gave more relevance to sports or scandals than to theater. Hollywood movies indeed promoted the idealized way of life and attitude towards success in which fantasy and exoticism took their place. Within this feverish atmosphere, Americans could do nothing but ignore the confusing and remote problems of the world, since, in a few words, they were living the so called Happy Twenties. In words written by Fitzgerald, "America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history." (quoted in Britten & Mathless 28).

All these pleasures were strongly supported by an unprecedented economic boom that lasted until 1929, the moment in which The Wall Street Crash ended up with all this abundance and brought about a drastic change in the American lifestyle. The main causes of this massive economic boom were the advantageous position in which America had emerged from the First World War, and the fact that its society had hardly been damaged. This fact stimulated them to increase the consumer demands and thus, both the industry and the technological progress were intensively developed. As a consequence of this material and business growth, America became a consumption-oriented society whose main aspiration lay in a new faith: money. The Dollar turned into the major creed of the country and people felt that, as days went by, there were more possibilities to get rich.

Within this atmosphere, Americans were excited about the new bright chances that provided a paradise of social well-being: automobiles, that Americans could afford thanks to the new cheaper production line system; networks of chain stores that brought the housewife a wider and cheaper selection of products; new electrical goods and appliances—such as the washing machine, vacuum cleaner, electric bulb

light, radio, telephone, or the first electric refrigerator—which arrived to make life easier, and at the same time, accelerated the ‘modernity’. All these new improvements, that some years before were unthinkable, rapidly turned into a necessity for the citizens of the big cities largely because of the impact of advertising. The main consequence of this ‘American way of life’, based on consumerism, was the promotion of values like initiative, success and effort, as well as the refuge in the individual development and enrichment. Soon, this view of America was exported worldwide.

Over and above this excitement and joy, there were many hidden problems that would not disappear just because Americans were ignoring them. The fact is that an enormous amount of people—especially in rural areas and small communities—had never felt the euphoria and prosperity of the Happy Twenties. They never went to the theatre, never had a telephone, nor heard about the Charleston. This portion of society went on reading the Bible and working in the fields just as if life was continuing as usual. What is more, not everything in the garden was rosy and there was poverty—more than 60 per cent of the population—and racial discrimination, especially against African-Americans. The Republican government implemented a controlling emigration policy by means of laws such as The Immigration Act in 1924, which caused a strong resurgence of racism and the growth and establishment of ghettos all around the country.

The Celebration of Youth

Certainly, the part of the American society that most remarkably had suffered a change was the youth. The postwar revolt was firstly revealed by the discomfort among young people, who indeed were going to lead the First Youth Rebellion of America—a revolution in the morality that frightened the most conservative members of the older generations, since they felt that their authority was being trampled. But the youngest generations did not care about this; they just wanted to

be up with the latest fashion, smoke, go to night-clubs, sign up for dancing marathons, and have fun. In spite of the Prohibition Amendment Act (1920), by which the sale, manufacture and transportation of alcoholic liquors were banned, the tireless vitality of young people was especially supported by the increase of alcohol intake among both men and women. The Prohibition did not stop the alcoholic consumption but boosted both its production, also called 'bootlegging', and the spread of speakeasies in which the forbidden drink was illegally sold. The invention of 'tricks' to hide liquor without getting arrested, or even the self-production of booze at home, together with the private parties, were some of the most popular proceedings during Prohibition.

Together with drinking, promiscuity became fashionable among young people. Freud's theories arrived to America and were quickly propagated. But these were misinterpreted by an exalted youth that understood just what best interested them. The general idea extracted from Freud was the fact that there was a close relation between mental health and free sexual expression. Having this in mind, a general obsession with sex arose. Sex seemed to step out from darkness and was explicitly shown mainly through three new entertainments: confession magazines, dances and movies. The confession magazine was a new form of literature in which readers found the excitement that they were looking for. It was mainly written in first-person style, addressed young women readers, included sexual content and dealt with the disclosure of the inner life, experiences and motivations of the main character in the form of a diary. The new kinds of dances, Fox Trot and Charleston, were the greatest objects of condemnation for being scandalous and uncivilized. In these dances, people followed frantic rhythms and men moved so dangerously close to women that they overtly showed their sexual instincts. The church severely attacked this new entertainment describing it as being, in the words of a female evangelist, "[T]he first and easier step toward hell" (quoted in Britten & Mathless 35). But surely, girls became the main focus of criticism since their change of behavior was most radical.

Following with the same quote, “The first time a girl allows a man to swing her around the dance floor her instinct tells her she has lost something she should have treasured” (Ibidem). These words make it clear that dance was not only seen as an innocent enjoyment for women, but something that threatened their morality, or rather, the morality that the oldest generation expected them to care about. Finally, the most influential amusement in a time of celebrities were Hollywood movies and its stars. The sparkles that made all these ardent youth eventually burst were the explicit plots and the glamour of Hollywood movies, along with the attitude that the youth drew from the film stars. Anonymous before the `20s, they now became bright figures that moved fascinated masses across the country. From them, girls learned how to flirt, smile, release sensuality, or in other words, be attractive to men. In this sense, America’s Sweetheart Clara Bow quickly became the model for all girls. She was a languishing but sensual young actress that turned the naïve pronoun ‘it’ into a quality characterized by the self-confidence that was necessary to attract both sexes. To possess ‘it’—or an irresistible ‘sex-appeal’—quickly became the aim of most young people.

All this new reality, introduced by youngsters, was promptly absorbed by language; new words and expressions were coined and the meaning of already existing ones was changed. It goes without saying that these became extremely popular among all social strata, and were repeated *ad nauseam*. Some examples of these new terms and expressions are: Sheik and Sheba—a young man [or woman] with sex appeal—, Carry a torch—to suffer from unrequited love—, Flapper—a typical young girl of the `20s, usually with bobbed hair, short skirts and rolled stockings—, Horsefeathers—nonsense—, Neck—to caress intimately—, or Peppy—full of vitality—. Dealing with words, it is indispensable to mention the extraordinary talented writer who best wrote down the reality of the `20s, F. Scott Fitzgerald. He became famous when he was only 24, straight after the publication of his first novel *This Side of Paradise* in 1920, a novel in which he focused all his

attention on the youth. Fitzgerald was even described by his fellow writer Glenway Wescott as “a kind of king of our American youth” (213-17). The truth remains that a large part of the vision that has reached the present days had first passed through the ink of this author, who indeed is responsible for coining the term ‘The Roaring Twenties’:

The restlessness approached hysteria. The parties were bigger. The pace was faster, the shows were broader, the buildings were higher, the morals were looser, and the liquor was cheaper; but all these benefits did not really minister to much delight. Young people wore out early—they were hard and languid at twenty-one. (quoted in Britten & Mathless 41)

The New Reality of Women

Once a general context of the American society has been provided, the focus of attention should move towards the female figure in the ‘20s. During that decade, women will suffer a decisive change at home, at work, in education, and in politics that will transform the position that they were expected to occupy. There was a widespread attitude among women after the First World War: they wanted to enjoy life and not to return to the prewar rules. Obviously, this was not an immediate change but a slow, and sometimes difficult, transformation. In addition, it did not affect the whole female population but mainly women from the middle-upper classes with some possibilities to afford the new life that was making its way. It can be said that a ‘New Woman’ was born. The origin of the term ‘New Woman’ is commonly attributed to the well-known writer Henry James, in the late nineteenth century. It started to appear in Post-Victorian fiction, underscoring a woman’s profile that realized that marriage was a social convention in which woman was treated like an object. This female character became more individualistic and clever, as well as disappointed with the established role that they were given. In novels like *Daisy Miller* (1878) or *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), written by Henry James, one finds heroines that exemplify the features of this ‘New Woman’. These novels reflect a

society in which a woman with a new consciousness was emerging and that, with the turn of the century, will give rise to the female prototype that flourished in the '20s. In the early twentieth century, the term was used to designate the great growth of educated and independent women that started to progress and actively participate in social life. It refers to a Feminist ideal closely related to a change in gender roles that was taking place as a consequence of the control that women started to have over their own life. The limits of their world were expanding and they were presented with real new opportunities.

Within this female 'revolution', politics was probably the sphere in which women took most advantage. The consciousness that was already forging in the late nineteenth century, yielded results in 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was adopted, and women were finally given the voting right. Women realized that politics also affected their daily life and that, therefore, they should participate and be present on the political scene too. But the woman suffragette created much controversy, and its opponents loudly claimed that "women are not the equal of men mentally", and that their right to vote "would take them out of their proper sphere of life." (Benner 1). The most alarming consequence of the woman's right to vote was related to the 'separate spheres' paradigm, originated during the industrial revolution, by which men and women should occupy different areas. According to that ideology, women should remain in a private and domestic area (take care of home, children, and the basic necessities of the family), and men should be in the public arena (business, law, and politics). Thus, the 'perfect' and 'balanced' situation between men and women within society was certainly threatened by the women's right to vote. As well as political equality through the vote, during the '20s women reached major positions of responsibility in politics. In 1922, Mrs. Rebecca L. Felton of Georgia became the first female senator, and in 1925, Mrs. Nellie T. Ross was the first female governor elected in the United States. Despite the influence that

these women achieved when holding those prestigious political positions, the right to vote made little difference to the major part of the female population.

However, something was indeed changing within the women's sphere, and the changes reached education, home life, employment, marriage, and moral conduct as well. Education was, and it is nowadays, the essential base that women required to break the chains that kept them tied to the societal roles. Education could help the youngest generations to further the woman's cause with more strength. Educational opportunities were expanded during the '20s. Before that, by the later nineteenth century, the number of women entering educational institutions began to grow. The period from the 1890s to the 1920s is known in education as the 'Progressive Era', because the first generation of college women entered professions considered as male careers, such as law or medicine—although they were aware of the fact that their situation was extremely unique. The decade of the '20s saw the highest percentage of educated women hitherto, and by 1928, they were awarded with 39 per cent of the academic degrees. This educational improvement allowed women to be better prepared to face the world outside their homes.

Besides, electricity arrived to many American homes bringing along an easier life for housewives. The wide variety of electrical appliances could perform much of the work that before had to be done entirely by women. Thus, the house maker was free from a large part of the domestic work, had more leisure time to worry about her appearance, followed the latest scandals through the press, the newest magazines or the radio, and drove or frequented clubs.

Together with the increasing chances in education and the domestic improvements, the number of job opportunities for women became larger. In the previous century, women were mainly employed in farms, garment shops, and textile mills, and suffered from bad labor conditions and an exorbitant working time. This scenario gradually changed with the turn of the century, since they established Unions to fight against that wrongful situation. In this way, by the decade of the

twenties, women had access to a larger number of wage-earning jobs, such as teachers, secretaries, nurses, department stores attendants, social workers, and librarians, to name just a few. Besides, the number of working women increased by 25 per cent. Though the new jobs meant an important advance regarding the previous century, they still revealed many inequalities, such as lower paychecks for women—they earned from 54% to 60% less than men—or the only possibility to work in the typical ‘female works’ which were supposed to be suitable for them. Even if married women were being released from the great burden of household chores, it was still barely possible for them to obtain a job. The belief that women should not work for wages if their husband had a job was strongly rooted in the American society. Young unmarried women who had jobs outside their homes were, for their part, increasingly accepted by the general public. As a consequence, they started to emancipate from their families and live on their own, paying a rent that, thanks to their new jobs, they were able to afford.

At the same time that women could gain access to education and more wage-earning jobs than ever before, there was a contradictory increasing social pressure towards marriage. Young women were expected to eventually get married, and thus, the image of woman as the perfect housewife remained almost untouched. Advertisements and magazines were primarily responsible for conveying this ideal by encouraging women to believe that marriage was their greatest accomplishment, rather than their personal development through education and economic independence. Henry Ford perfectly showed this idea by stating that “I pay our women well so they can dress attractively and get married.” (quoted in Batchelor 50). To work was never considered as the final goal of women, and to become a wife was ‘marketed’ as being what guaranteed economic security and social status for women. Yet, the first effects of their new labor situation arose early. There could be more young unmarried working women or wives that aimed to work just as their husbands did. Some of the most direct consequences were the fact that women

married later in life, had fewer children, were more independent, the number of divorces increased, and their attitude and morals became more revolutionary.

The 1920s 'Flapper' is the image that best symbolizes this carefree behavior. It started to be originated during the First World War, when the rules controlling young women were eased, so by the '20s, these girls did not want to return to the restrictions of the prewar time. Beginning with a drastic change in their custom or 'de-feminization', they finally broke with their traditional image. Women abandoned the tightness of corsets and long dresses to wear looser and shorter dresses that did not accentuate their breasts, and wore trousers which were more comfortable than skirts. Young girls bobbed their hairs and wore a lot of makeup, drank alcohol, and smoked cigarettes together with men, drove cars, and were seen dancing in bars without supervision at dead of night, thus challenging the social norms regarding femininity.

This brand-new situation alarmed the most traditional sectors of the American society. It was seen as a serious risk for the traditional family which was needed to maintain the economic and moral structure of their patriarchal society. That is, men's power was rooted in their economic power within the family, and thus, the traditional gender role of women being a housewife and taking care of children at home was its major supporting pillar. If women were allowed new opportunities that brought them up to an economic independence, this entire patriarchal organization would end up.

The Double Vassal

It is not entirely truthful that these series of improvements provided women with a freer and fairer life, since there were several obstacles that women still had to face. Some of these impediments are brought to light by Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) in one of her most renowned works, *The Second Sex* (1949). Simone de Beauvoir was a French intellectual and writer considered as one of the most crucial figures

among those who were socially committed with the rights of women. Her book *The Second Sex* was indeed a theoretical point of departure for most Feminist movements. In it, she deals with the social condition of women, deeply analyzes the causes of their oppression, and firmly claims that women should stop being 'The Other'. Even though she developed her ideas and wrote *The Second Sex* in the middle of the twentieth century, almost thirty years after the decade that concerns this BA Thesis, they are equally applicable to the circumstances which the American women of the twenties were facing. And that is why we take advantage of them to round up our portrait of the American woman of the 1920s.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, "work alone can guarantee [a woman's] concrete freedom" (813). Economic freedom is the only thing that can make a woman autonomous and not the man's vassal. Through wage-earning jobs, women had access to an outer reality in which they will find a real project with which to fulfill themselves as a complete, and not subordinate, individual. But for de Beauvoir, the freedom that economic independence could offer women depended on many conditions that were not still accomplished: "However, one must not think that the simple juxtaposition of the right to vote and a job amounts to total liberation: work today is not freedom" (813). In this way, if a job was not a synonym of freedom during the 1940s, it surely was not during the 1920s either.

Although young women started to be integrated within the modern world of work, its social structure was not modified to suit them properly. As has already been said, women were only able to achieve the less valued and lowest working positions, with the highest positions of responsibility being reserved for men. Furthermore, if married, they must be in charge of the house-keeping. What can be drawn from this is that a woman that dared to work outside the limits of her home was probably going to become a double vassal, both at work and at home. This, together with the lack of moral and social benefits that these jobs provided them, led many women to devalue their jobs as being solely an 'extra' to the household

economy. This woman would never abandon the advantages of having a husband to rely on, and some even gave up their jobs to become a kept woman. For these main reasons, de Beauvoir considered that jobs during the first half of the century did not allow women to be independent from men, as they were always financially secure under the masculine shadow. Only a minority of privileged women achieved through their professions a social and economic status that led them to enter the world without the need of a man by their side.

Unfortunately, concerning their purpose in life, women have an additional obstacle in relation to men, as we will study on detail in the following chapter; “[t]he advantage that man enjoys and which manifests itself from childhood onward is that his vocation as a human being in no way contradicts his destiny as a male” (815), as de Beauvoir puts it. Women, for their part, suffer a division between their personal vocation and the vocation that destiny has already set up for them since childhood: femininity. To assure success, women have to combine both vocations in a balanced way so that their position in the outside world, by means of a job, and their femininity, do not interfere with each other. The idea of femininity is not biological but socially constructed; it is primarily what society expects a woman to be for the sole reason of having been born a woman.

It can be concluded that, although the ‘Flapper’ women began to explore the limits of the, until that moment, so constrained female world, the first insights of the female independence in America were still waiting to mature. But conversely, it is necessary to value the strain of those women who took the first and difficult steps towards liberation. Let us now turn to one of the pioneering voices in this respect.

CHAPTER II

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Simone de Beauvoir's greatest contribution to feminism, *The Second Sex* (1949), must be placed within her existentialist belief that encourages individuals, particularly women, to achieve their personal freedom by defining themselves. According to the existentialist feminism, the central issue of feminism should not be women as a collectivity, but the individual experience of each of those women—the second volume of *The Second Sex* is indeed subtitled *Lived Experience*. This movement supports the idea that a woman has to focus on herself and define her own destiny, regardless of the external forces, the patriarchal society, and culture, all of which attempt to adjust her to an already established gender role. To achieve this goal, women should follow their personal desires and make their own decisions. But their interpersonal relationships, and thus the society that women belong to, limit and condition their choices since youth. In this chapter, the most relevant aspects of Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism as depicted in *The Second Sex* are going to be studied, as a necessary preliminary to our presentation of the prototypical flapper woman that is Daisy Buchanan.

Woman as the 'Other'

The main idea that revolves throughout *The Second Sex* is that woman has always been relegated to the role of the "Other" of man. Following the philosopher Hegel, according to whom reality shows a continuous interplay of opposing forces, each being needs the "Other"—the opposite—in order to define itself as an independent subject. This relationship follows the dichotomy subject/object by which one individual, when it becomes an object, allows another individual to define him/herself. Man as the self has always been the subject, whereas woman as the "Other" has been the object; or, in de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, "the incomplete man" (25). De Beauvoir encourages women to change this oppressive relationship and live their condition of woman as independent

human beings. She claims that women should become the subject that defines itself by taking an active role, that is, by taking the responsibilities that are necessary to achieve freedom, instead of relegating themselves to the passivity of being kept by a man. This situation normally arises in youth.

“In her eyes, man embodies the Other, as she does for man; but for her this Other appears in the essential mode, and she grasps herself as the inessential opposite him”, we read in *The Second Sex* (396). The search for the “Other” in order to affirm their own self is, therefore, common to both male and female, but there is an important difference between them. For her, man appears to be ‘essential’, and thus, she would be more likely to substitute her own being for her being his subordinate partner: “he is the liberator; he is also rich and powerful, he holds the keys to happiness” (395). This behavior responds to a cultural belief that she has been taught since childhood and by which girls are meant to be morally and physically inferior to boys. On the other hand, for men, women are just the ‘inessential’ partner which is not even considered as a free entity. The woman only completes him, but she is not in fact a complete self. Having this in mind, girls aspired to achieve happiness from their surrendering to the superior sex—the traditional destiny of marriage—, and in consequence, they finally become the “Others”.

“One is not born, but rather becomes, woman”

It is the specific culture and society, and not the biological condition, what leads women into their stereotypical role within society. Simone de Beauvoir’s most famous assertion “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (330) is a rejection of the wrong belief that women are born feminine; femininity is, for the French intellectual, the constructed ideal that society imposes on women, and not the way they are actually born. There is nothing in their biological condition that leads women to behave or aspire to the things that society expects them to do. Throughout the first section of Book II of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir traces the way in which women are educated from childhood to their first sexual experiences. Her aim is to show how women are ‘forced’ to progressively abandon their

personal development as free individuals in order to conform to the image of femininity, and eventually reach their imposed destiny. De Beauvoir firmly states that women, just like men, are born with an intrinsic freedom, but they are deprived of this freedom by a patriarchal society that hides the individuality of women under the wife and mother archetypes. The idea that women are born as free individuals is seen in the fact that their roles as wives and mothers lead them to live an isolated life of nonconformity that brings to light the deepest instincts of freedom inherent to women.

Woman is always conditioned by the disadvantages of her female body. From early youth, she will suffer processes like menstruation, which are lived as dreadful experiences because society reacts with hostility and shame. In addition, although she has always been under the male figure of her father, it is not until she gets married that she totally renounces her own independence. In her infancy, she enjoys some kind of freedom; since girls are “protected and justified by adults, they [are] autonomous individuals with a free future opening before them” (760). She still possesses a bright range of possibilities to choose from for her future, but soon her environment starts to teach her the set of feminine features that she should embody: “to show oneself as weak, futile, passive and docile” (402), reducing this way that wide range of choices. Besides, “The fundamental reason for [their] defeatism is that the adolescent girl does not consider herself responsible for her future” (402). A girl’s education is characterized by a lack of initiative. Nobody expects girls to struggle to achieve a self-sufficient future. On the contrary, “[t]he girl is required to stay at home; her outside activities are watched over: she is never encouraged to organize her own fun and pleasure.” (401). All this radically kills the girl’s spontaneity and makes her believe that women are indeed weaker than men. Despite the fact that girls do not consciously aim to lose their initial freedom, they start to dream with abstract and impossible loves in which man radically becomes her object of desire.

This process of ‘feminization’, in which mothers and elder sisters play an important part, ends when the girl faces her first sexual intercourse during the wedding night. As with most aspects of a woman’s life, sexuality is a simple issue for men, but not as easy for

women. For him, a sexual intercourse is the expression of a need that concludes with the pleasure of having felt completed and satisfied. Women, for their part, have discovered their sexuality with shame, and their first sexual intercourse is experienced as a brutal and unexpected activity that means “an abrupt rupture with the past [and] the beginning of a new cycle” (442). In this experience, the girl will realize that her imaginary love of infancy is solely the result of an exalted imagination, and that along her future she will experience more disillusion. In addition, the role of woman as an object is what confines her to the passivity that allows the male lover to feel that “the love act is conquest and victory” (444); meanwhile, women “become the prey of a male whose caresses move her, but whom she has no pleasure to look at or caress in return” (447). Once the woman has been introduced into marriage through this shocking experience, she is considered to have achieved the social status that traditionally defines her as being a ‘woman’.

Woman is Immanent vs. Man is Transcendent

Another important concept that Simone de Beauvoir uses to describe the situation of women is ‘immanence’. She maintains that in all human existence there should be an interaction between transcendence and immanence, but throughout history, men have denied the experience of transcendence to women. The fact that women are confined to an immanent role means that they should remain in a passive and interior state that does not allow them to affirm their independence as complete subjects. As de Beauvoir explains “[e]very time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into ‘in-itself’, of freedom into facticity” (37). Otherwise, men are ‘transcendent’, which implies an active and creative role that allows them to develop themselves and be part of the external world as free subjects.

Marriage is the key social element that leads women to that state of immanence since “she is *married, given* in marriage by her parents” (505). In such a way, marriage implies a passage from one owner to another. Through marriage, woman also “takes his name; she joined his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family,

she becomes his other *half*. [S]he is annexed to her husband's universe; she gives him her person" (506). On the other hand, in marriage men "seek an expansion, a confirmation of their existence but not the very right to exist; it is a charge they assume freely" (505). To sum up, for a man marriage is only one of the multiple layers of his life, whereas for a woman it is almost her unique destiny and goal in life, owing to the societal pressures that have nothing to do with her own nature. As women cannot assume marriage as a decision but as a duty, she confronts it with resignation rather than excitement, which explains the fact that most marriages are not based on love. Besides, for a woman, the very first aim of marriage is to give meaning to her life, without which she would be "a socially incomplete being" (507), and thus, she would not be able to be satisfactorily integrated in society. Although marriage demands a lot of sacrifice from women, it provides them with more benefits than men. For instance, women avoid the responsibilities and risks that have to be faced when encountering the problems of real world—as to find a job—or, if this is the case, she could benefit from the higher social class of her husband. For all that, women eventually relinquish their natural right to transcend in order to be confined to the passivity of the domestic area.

"The home has always been the material realization of the ideal of happiness" (534). At home, women feel like they are the mistresses, because it is the only place they are in charge of; the place in which they feel that they are performing an active role. The truth, however, is that women are locked in that tiny space that conforms their limited reality. "Woman is destined to maintain the species and care for the home, which is to say, to immanence" (506). At home, she becomes responsible for ensuring the perpetuation of the present, that is, for keeping the permanence of the home in the present by doing the household chores—an activity that has to be done each day in exactly the same way. Home requires an endless effort that does not provide any compensation, and which finally results in a frustrated and monotonous life. Household chores are not concrete projects but a medium towards nothingness that does not allow women to progress. By becoming the supporting pillar of the family, marriage only justifies "the exercise of the feminine

functions in their generality” (513), but it would never justify women as a free and complete being. Women, in this way, renounce their own personal development as human beings in order to become the immanent element that provides support for the rest of the family. Contrary to women, men within marriage “produce, fight, create, progress, go beyond [themselves] toward the totality of the universe and the infinite of the future” (533).

The Eternal Feminine

The oft-repeated concept of the ‘Eternal Feminine’ is the abstract patriarchal myth that has been used to simplify the female experience under an impossible ideal, in order to extract from women their right to possess an individual nature. The myth of the ‘Eternal Feminine’ is based upon the denial of the idea that “every concrete human being is always uniquely situated” (24), and that there is an individual situation for each type of woman. It proclaims that women as a collectivity should fit within the abstract and immutable essence of ‘femininity’. So, if a woman does not match the already established conception of ‘femininity’, she would not be considered feminine. De Beauvoir maintains that such ‘Eternal Feminine’ does not exist, in the same way that there is not an ‘Eternal Masculine’. Besides, each woman has the right to decide and construct her own life, as well as her subjective way of experiencing the fact of being a woman.

This myth is made up of different myths of women such as the virgin or the mother. They are intrinsically contradictory in themselves, producing an unrealizable expectation of what woman is. The myth of woman as the mother represents her both as the keeper of life and the origin of the inevitable death. This depiction responds to the anxiety that men feel and that is reflected on the mother’s figure. This way, women have to accept a contradictory existence of blame as a consequence of the male’s insecurities.

The feminine world is sometimes contrasted with the masculine universe, but it must be reiterated that women have never formed an autonomous and closed society; they are integrated into the group governed by males, where they occupy a subordinate position (724)

The 'feminine world' that women are forced to constitute is indeed immersed within a male universe in which women cannot be autonomous. As women have not shaped that universe, they are not responsible for it and are not able to actively participate. On the contrary, women are just relegated to a subordinate position that keeps them as 'an eternal child'. Motherhood is a very relevant process within the specific situation of women as the 'Eternal Feminine'. Pregnancy becomes the possibility of women to transcend their own existence, since creating life justifies their own lives. But the truth is that a child is not a justification in itself; since the child is born, he or she becomes an independent subject that leaves the mother in the same undefined state she enjoyed prior to pregnancy. The fact that women are absolutely aware of their inferior feminine condition, and that they feel disappointed about it, is clearly shown through the mother-daughter relationship: "Some women feel their femininity as an absolute curse: they wish or accept a daughter with the bitter pleasure of finding another victim: and at the same time they feel guilt at having brought her into the world" (638). The mother that has internalized and accepted her subordinate position in life sees her own reflection in her daughter.

Attitudes of Women that Support Subjugation

Although it cannot be said that the subordinate role of woman as the 'Other' is her fault, it cannot be said either that woman does not play a part in it. Throughout part three of Book II —'Justifications'—de Beauvoir assumes that there are some attitudes through which women, in an act of bad faith, consciously support their own subjugation. It is important to make clear that, for de Beauvoir, a woman's character is a reaction against an external and concrete situation that forces her to behave in such a way. These attitudes can be summarized in three major profiles: the narcissist, the woman in love, and the mystic. In all of them, women hide and deny their freedom by covering it with a prefabricated belief in themselves, the beloved and God, respectively.

The narcissist corresponds to a frustrated woman that "suffer[s] from [having been] swallowed up in generality: a wife, housewife, or one woman among millions of

others” (760). Because the narcissist cannot be fulfilled through real projects in the outer male world, “she attempts to grasp herself in the immanence” (756) by turning towards herself and becoming her absolute end. This way, instead of trying to show her singularity through free projects—like becoming a painter or actress—she creates an imaginary life to assuage her frustration, one in which she is the protagonist and has the exceptional faith that she actually believes she deserves. Most of the times, the narcissist will try to “attach ready-made values to their egos” (767) by annexing herself to an influential man.

The woman in love, on the other hand, abandons herself completely when she submerges her existence in the beloved. This is not the consequence of a natural force but the direct consequence of the situation of woman. Contrary to man, woman is doomed to be immanent—inessential—so she would not seek to transcend, nor be as ambitious as man. As “she is destined for the male from her earliest childhood” (774), she finds in love the way to merge with her beloved and become a superior being, as he is. To do so, women have to lose their soul and body, as well as forget their personality, that is, their individuality.

The mystic corresponds to a woman’s profile who, disappointed with her human love, attempts to seek instead the divine love of God. As “[l]ove has been assigned to woman as her supreme vocation” (802), she would not deny herself the possibility of devoting her life to love merely because earthly love had not gone well. In the same way that the woman in love aims to move towards transcendence, the mystic finds in God the path towards the absolute: “the mystic has to save her contingent existence by uniting with the Whole incarnated in a sovereign Person” (802). This ‘sovereign Person’ always incarnates a male figure that is in charge of her salvation, and is hence the essential figure.

In any case, neither the attitude of the narcissist, nor of the woman in love or the mystic will allow women to achieve an independent and authentic active life; they all hide behind the man’s supreme figure that only provides them with an imaginary salvation. Women have just one way to turn that salvation into something authentic: “to project it by a positive action into human society” (810). De Beauvoir states that this positive action must

be the incorporation of women into the economic sector. By engaging into income-earning activities, women would not only become independent—in different degrees, according to the kind of job—but active and productive. Thus, woman will regain her forbidden transcendence, and as a consequence, “[t]he system based on her dependence [will] collapse as soon as she ceases to be a parasite; there is no longer need for a masculine mediator between her and the universe” (813). As soon as each individual woman realizes that her economic independence assures her the probability of engaging in real projects through which she will be able to transcend, and that she is born with the same capacity for autonomous action as man, the patriarchal system will be compelled to change its rigid structure. In the moment in which women feel proud of being self-sufficient and have an active place in society, man will become her equal partner, and not just the window through which she passively observes reality.

CHAPTER III

A Reading of Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby is probably the literary document that best has captured the essence of the Happy Twenties. It was created by the hand of Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald and was published in 1925, just in the midst of the most feverish decade of America's history. Although *The Great Gatsby* has been mainly connected with the American dream and the exploration of the darkest side of this superficially glamorous period, the fact is that *The Great Gatsby* also focuses on the New Woman characteristic of the 1920s. Through its main female characters, this work shows how women adapted to the new situations that emerged from the rapid changes of 'The Jazz Age' and that defined the way in which that New Woman conducted herself.

Narrated from the point of view of Nick Carraway, the story is centered on the Buchanans, a traditional high-class family living in the fashionable East Egg of Long Island (New York). The main female character is Daisy Buchanan, the cousin of Nick Carraway and the wife of Tom Buchanan. Tom is an extremely rich and arrogant character whose wealth and status come from his old aristocratic family. The mysterious character that gives name to the novel is Jay Gatsby. He is an incredibly wealthy newcomer from West Egg whose origins are unknown, but who has gradually made a name for himself due to the extravagant parties that he throws in his mansion. Along the story, the reader discovers that he actually belongs to a poor rural family from North Dakota, and that his fortune comes from bootlegging. Besides, the fabulous life that he has been constructing during his entire life has the sole motivation of recovering the woman whom he secretly loves: Daisy Buchanan.

This chapter will focus on the analysis of the fictional character of Daisy Buchanan from the standpoint provided by the ideas exposed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* that we have just analyzed in the previous chapter. Although there are two other female characters that play an important role within the novel—Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson—

they are not going to be tackled here; Daisy's character is complex enough to be the unique and central object of study in a short BA Thesis such as this one. Besides, she is the female character that best embodies the ideas of de Beauvoir. Through this analysis, we are going to reason about Daisy's behavior, always considering her actions and attitude as a response to her situation as a woman inserted within a man's world. We will discover that, as de Beauvoir claims, this patriarchal environment is what forces her towards certain stereotyped behaviors.

Daisy 'is not Born, but rather Becomes, Woman'

According to Simone de Beauvoir, during childhood women pass through a kind of preparatory stage—education—that eventually aims to transform the female child into what society expects a woman to be. In the case of Daisy, this preparatory stage took place in Louisville (Kentucky), where she grew up in the heart of a wealthy family. She is described as being “the most popular of all the girls in Louisville. She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster” (48). During her youth, she enjoyed the type of freedom that only the lack of a husband and responsibilities allow. We can presume that she sees herself as a transcendent subject that, being protected by her parents, actively develops her life in the present and observes a future full of possibilities. Daisy's world is indeed described as “an artificial world redolent of orchids and pleasant” (96). But “[s]he wanted her life shaped now, immediately” (96). And it is the feminine ideal established by the patriarchal society in which she lives that leads her to turn man into the agent in charge of shaping her future. The naïve young Daisy pours her desires and dreams on the figure of a man that will make her life resemble the fairy tale that she has envisaged since childhood. We can guess that she has probably never been told that she has to strive in order to achieve a self-sufficient future in which man would have only a secondary role. On the contrary, as a debutante of the upper class, she has been introduced in society just after reaching maturity as a possible candidate for marriage. This clearly shows to what extent the external social forces, and not

any biological condition, lead her to change an independent infancy for the subordination to a man.

Within this context, Daisy meets Jay Gatsby, one of the young Officers that demand her company. In an attempt to be worthy of her love, Gatsby lies to Daisy about his origins and pretends to belong to a wealthy family. They immediately fall in love and have a brief love affair, but he has to leave her to fight in the war. Although Daisy has promised to wait for him, she finally gets engaged to Tom, who fits the type that her environment expects Daisy to marry, since he ensures her economic security.

In accordance to de Beauvoir, women feel their great first deception in marriage when they realize that the so idealized man they had been waiting for does not fulfill their expectations. Man is no longer the object of desire and the salvation, but the person that has taken them away from their idyllic past. Daisy suffers from this deception and finds herself defined by an imperfect marriage that has nothing to do with what she has always dreamed about: “[t]hat’s what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen of a —” (10). On the other hand, Gatsby represents the easy-going girlhood love that is free from the posterior deception of marriage. For that reason, an adulterous affair with Gatsby would mean for Daisy the recovery of that lost past.

Daisy as the ‘Other’

Daisy and Tom explicitly represent the dichotomy Subject/Object that de Beauvoir uses to describe how women become the subordinated partners of men, starting with their descriptions: Tom is “a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes [...]. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body” (6). Tom symbolizes the superior male whose virility is connected to his authority, power, and economic status. He is described as a complete subject who possesses the strength necessary to do and say whatever he wants to. Conversely, Daisy is presented as a slender and languid woman whose voice “is full of money” as if she was “the king’s daughter, the golden girl...” (76). Daisy represents the typical image of the

“Flapper” woman, wearing bob hairstyle and a loose white dress. She symbolizes the feminine values of delicacy, beauty, weakness, and docility. This way, she embodies the passivity that is expected when a woman is kept and protected by a man that has provided her with the ‘white palace’ in which she rests.

As Daisy has not had the chance to define her own life and she, for her part, has given Tom her entire existence, Tom feels the right to dominate her. Besides, Tom is essential for Daisy, whereas she is just a part—although an important one—of Tom’s life. Tom actually lives such an interesting life, indifferent to his marriage, that “[o]nce in a while [he] go[es] off on a spree and make[s] a fool of [him]self” (84). But this behavior would never be acceptable in a woman, as Tom hypocritically claims about Daisy’s flirting with Gatsby: “I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that’s the idea you can count me out” (83). According to de Beauvoir, this could be explained by the fact that men expect to find in their wives the object that accentuates their male supremacy, and for that reason, he would require his wife to be entirely for himself, but he would not be the same for her. As the dominant subject, he claims certain freedoms that society itself supports, since infidelity is seen as a normal behavior in men, but unthinkable in women.

Daisy’s Immanence

As has already been said, marriage denies the woman’s transcendence, and relegates her to a passive and interior role. The only successful destiny in a woman’s life is marriage, since it is her only way to be a part of society. Although Daisy constantly suffers from Tom’s untruthfulness, she never considers the possibility of getting a divorce and starting a new life by herself. It would mean the loss of her social and economic status, as it all comes from the figure of Tom. Likewise, the only possible escape from her allegedly imperfect marriage that is mentioned in the novel is leaving her husband for Gatsby. In that case, it once again would involve her subordination to another man, and thus, it would not be the solution.

We must not make the mistake of treating Daisy as an innocent character. On the contrary, she consciously puts up with her passive and inferior state because of the benefits she obtains from it. When she talks about her future marriage, she says that “the decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—” (96), thus making it clear that marriage is more than simply love. Although she realizes that marriage is a social convention in which women are treated as objects, she does not attempt to avoid it. Unlike Daisy, and as we saw in the first chapter of this BA Thesis, the ‘New Women’ that emerged during that decade, being aware of that unfair situation, became active participators in society by engaging in wage-earning jobs or voting. But Daisy never set out to do that, since marriage actually prevents her from the problems of having to seek an employment, and provides her with an unparalleled social and economic status. De Beauvoir states that, as marriage is a societal duty, most marriages are not based on love but on interest, and this is exactly the case of Daisy and Tom, whose engagement seems to have been decided overnight: “There was a wholesome bulkiness about his person and his position, and Daisy was flattered” (76). Besides, Gatsby at a point says to Tom that “[Daisy] only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me” (83). Throughout the novel, there are several statements supporting that negative idea of marriage. Talking about Tom and Myrtle’s marriages, Catherine says that “[n]either of them can stand the person they’re married to” (23); or Myrtle herself claims that “[t]he only crazy I was when I married him” (24).

Another important point highlighted by de Beauvoir is that the domestic area, i.e. household chores, is where women from the lower and middle class find their sole distraction. But Daisy, as a member of the upper class, is free from that responsibility. Although household chores are not real projects through which women could develop as free individuals, they provide some sense of usefulness and concreteness. In that sense, as Daisy could not fill her existence with any duty, her life becomes even more abstract and nonsensical. Daisy seems to live immersed within the illusion and the abstraction which are mostly prevalent in her personality. Daisy’s dialogues are full of incoherent statements. To

provide just a few: at Gatsby's house, while gazing at the landscape through the window, Daisy says to him: "I'd like to just get one of those pink clouds and put you in it and push you around." (60); while they are having dinner at the Buchanan's house, Daisy suddenly claims: "I love to see you in my table, Nick. You remind me of a—of a rose, an absolute rose" (11).

As a consequence of this abstract life in which Daisy is immersed, it could also be said that her life is monotonous and pointless, as it can be inferred from the following quote: "Do you always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it? I always watch for the longest day of the year and miss it" (11). Her condition as woman does not allow her to access the male outer world, making her existence a meaningless repetition of days in which her immanent state is explicitly revealed: "I've been everywhere, I've seen everything and done every-thing" (13); "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon?" cried Daisy, "and the day after that, and the next thirty years?" (75).

Furthermore, her immanent role is clearly displayed in her relationship with Gatsby. She perfectly fits the woman's profile of a wife that, having an already determined future along with a husband that does not make her happy, looks for some form of evasion. In this case, Gatsby is the form of evasion that Daisy has found and that, at the same time, serves her to challenge her disloyal husband. But this is not a real act of liberation, since Daisy has never really meant to leave Tom. She would never go further:

She hesitated. Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realised at last what she was doing—as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. (84)

Through this, Daisy aims to affirm her singularity as an independent individual, denied by Tom, without attempting to lose him. She is merely satisfied with dreaming her imaginary destiny with Gatsby without worrying about whether she eventually hurts Gatsby's feelings. Her inaction to take a step forward in her plan with Gatsby shows the immanent role that is hidden within her. Tom indeed highlights this fact, since he never believes Daisy

to be able to take action, not even when Gatsby, arguing over Daisy, confesses to Tom that Daisy has never loved him, and Tom replies: “She does, though. The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in her head and doesn’t know what she is doing.” (84). In the same conversation, “Daisy’s leaving you [says Gatsby]. Nonsense [answers Tom].” (85)

Daisy as the Eternal Feminine

De Beauvoir differentiates between a masculine universe and a feminine world that is inserted within, but at the same time, foreign to the first. She claims that women’s friendships used to be based on the affirmation of their common feminine morality that is different from, and not understood by, their male counterparts. In Daisy’s relationship with Jordan—her only real friend—we find that both strengthen their common feminine world in opposition to the masculine one by raising a protective barrier. One of those moments in which Daisy and Jordan are completely concentrated on themselves is described from Nick’s male point of view as incoherent:

Sometimes she and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire. (10)

De Beauvoir states that, since the creation of the world has been done by men, women are not considered to be responsible for, nor able to contribute to, its development. Women’s thoughts are not real projects in the outer masculine world—since they are not allowed to participate in the highest masculine areas of knowledge—and thus, women are treated as if they knew nothing; as if they were naïve ‘children’. Within this intellectual male domination, Daisy decides to make Tom’s thoughts become hers, supporting him even in his most imperialistic ideas. During Nick’s first visit to the Buchanans, Tom was enthusiastically supporting some racist ideas on *The Rise of the Colored Empires*—a fictitious book supposedly written by ‘Goddard’—when Daisy claims: “Tom’s getting very profound. He reads deep books with long words in them” (10), and “[w]e’ve got to beat

them down” [referring to the colored empires] (11). Although Daisy’s statements are sarcastic, she represents the muted woman who does not possess, at least in public, mental autonomy. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir reflects about these ideas, and affirms that it is very common to find couples in which the man is the one determining what both should think and believe:

[S]he lets her husband think for her; it is he who will be the couple’s consciousness. Through timidity, awkwardness, or laziness, she leaves it up to the man to formulate their common opinions on all general and abstract subjects. (565)

Another instance of Daisy’s childish position is the fact that she is willing to let Gatsby take the blame for the murder of Tom’s mistress. Through this action she shows, as well as selfishness, the lack of responsibility she has had throughout her life, and that indeed corresponds with the general attitude and moral of America during the Happy Twenties: to enjoy life, laying the problems aside. Daisy’s main concerns in life are, actually, how to be up with the latest fashion and organizing social meetings.

Daisy’s relationship with her daughter—who is seldom mentioned in the novel—largely reflects her own view about her feminine condition. Being completely aware of her inferior and passive position as a woman in society, Daisy feels guilty for having brought to life another ‘victim’ of femininity:

It’ll show you how I’ve gotten to feel about—things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. ‘All right,’ I said, ‘I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.’ (13)

Daisy is aware of the fact that the patriarchal society does not value intelligence as a quality in a woman. Moreover, this quote brings to light Daisy’s defeatism and immanent state, the one that does not allow her to progress and change her situation. Instead of attempting to change her daughter’s fate, or even her own fate, she only hopes for her daughter to be a

‘beautiful little fool’. Besides, Daisy thinks that being foolish is the only way a woman could be happy in that oppressive world. The fact that she is conscious of all this demonstrates that she is not certainly the foolish woman she tries to pretend. If she had been foolish, she would, at least, be delusively happy, but she is not.

Daisy’s Narcissism

Narcissism is one of the attitudes through which de Beauvoir claims that women consciously support their own subordination. We can consider Daisy to be a trapped, frustrated woman who is lost in the generality of fitting within the typical profile of a high-class wife with no duties. This way, Daisy does not experience a singular existence or, in words of de Beauvoir, she feels that “[she is] one woman among millions of others” (760). Since the extensive male world is locked for Daisy, her response is to focus on herself—her immanence—as a way of fulfilling her existence. This way, she becomes the center and the end of her life and, for that reason, selfishness, materialism and superficiality arise as some of the most salient attributes of her personality. She even confesses to Nick that “[She has become] very cynical about everything” (13).

As de Beauvoir states, narcissists have the tendency to annex themselves to an influential man—as is the case of Tom—in order to gain from them the power and status that they think they deserve:

[Narcissists] do not aim for specific values through free projects; they want to attach ready-made values to their egos; they will thus turn—by becoming muses, inspiration, and stimulation—to those who hold influence and glory in the hope of being identified with them. (767)

In many cases, Daisy is able to get a great affection, particularly from Gatsby, and she even seems to feel love for him: “Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table” (75). But as a narcissist, Daisy would never be good at loving someone, because she loves herself too much. For that reason, she

prefers to keep her unhealthy marriage rather than starting a relationship with Gatsby and take the risk of losing her status as a member of an old rich family. Simultaneously, she uses Gatsby as a way of satiating her vanity. In some cases, Daisy shows her snobbery when she criticizes the newly rich that arose thanks to the economic boom of the 20`s. For instance, when they are at Gatsby`s party, and she talks about the guests in these terms: “[b]ut the rest offended her—and inarguably because it wasn’t a gesture but an emotion. She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented place that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village” (69).

Daisy`s superficiality can also be explained through de Beauvoir`s ideas. In *The Second Sex*, one can read that, since women cannot aspire to the elevated male`s world, they are just content with the superficial. Superficial things, thus, become for them the most important ones. This can be seen in Daisy`s conversations, which most of the times are shallow, empty of meaning, and centered on her own self, or on people`s possessions. To provide just an example, when she is at Gatsby`s house for the first time, and he shows her some photos of his youth, she only focuses on the superficial instead of being interested in that period of Gatsby`s life: “I adore it,” exclaimed Daisy. “The pompadour. You never told me you had a pompadour—or a yacht.” (60). Another aspect supporting Daisy`s narcissism is the fact that she is continuously described as attractive and seductive; she always aims to be the protagonist and to attract everybody`s attention: “I’ve heard it said that Daisy`s murmur was only to make people lean towards her” (8). This way, by possessing the most desired quality that a woman could have at that moment—`it` or `sex-appeal`—and being at the center of all situations, she fulfills her narcissistic condition.

In our reading of Daisy Buchanan, it has been evidenced that it is the woman`s environment—the patriarchal society—that pushes her toward certain stereotyped profiles and behaviors that lead her to live a frustrated life in which her singularity is denied. This would clearly change if society stopped putting limits to a woman`s life and started providing her with the

same opportunities than man enjoys. It has been evidenced, indeed, that Daisy provides a complete picture of what Simone de Beauvoir, a few decades later, considers a subordinated woman to be.

CONCLUSIONS

Feminist literary criticism has periodically focused its lens on the analysis of *The Great Gatsby*. This is most likely caused by the social context in which this well-known novel has been written: one of the most crucial decades for the history of women in America. As a result, a great debate has been created surrounding the issues of gender within *The Great Gatsby*. The different feminist readings have directed their attention towards revealing whether or not the female characters are represented from a sexist point of view.

The point of departure of this BA Thesis is located within the same debate. Its main purpose was to demonstrate the hypothesis that *The Great Gatsby*'s main female character, Daisy Buchanan, actually embodies the profile of woman that, later on, Simone de Beauvoir will establish as one of the models of oppressed women in her work *The Second Sex* (1949). Through a deep analysis of Daisy Buchanan's character, one can observe that all the features that de Beauvoir criticizes as being responsible for the women's subordinated position are clearly reflected in this character. Thus, this BA Thesis aimed to prove that Daisy Buchanan embodies the woman depicted by Simone de Beauvoir in a work that opened the door to what has become known as the "Second Wave" of feminism.

For the purpose of evidencing this hypothesis, I have taken three main steps: the presentation of the main characteristics of the social context which this female character belongs to, the explanation of the most relevant points of de Beauvoir's ideas in *The Second Sex*, and finally, the verification of the existence of those points in Daisy Buchanan's character.

The New York of the 1920s is the place that gives rise to *The Great Gatsby* and gathers its characters and actions. The novel's main protagonist is the bustling city in which the inhabitants are moved by an untiring thirst for money. The economic boom is in its peak and the new freewheeling mood of the Americans can be seen in their refusal to face the problems and, simultaneously, their worrying just about their personal enrichment and pleasure. Night clubs, speakeasies, and private parties become the newest and most popular

meeting places. This general excitement is supported by a series of improvements, as the new and achievable automobiles, electrical goods, and networks of chain stores, which bring to this avid population the modern life-style that would become the model for the rest of the world. Within this change, youth, and especially women, become the real leaders, since they are the ones that most notably suffered a transformation. Beginning with a drastic change in their morality, which is completely opposed to the values of the old generations, young people are mostly seen frequenting clubs, drinking, driving at excessive speed, and explicitly showing their promiscuity when dancing the new dances. As it has just been said, the woman of the 20's was probably the figure whose change produced the biggest reaction, since their traditional roles were the pillar of this patriarchal society. Though women's attitude and position within society started to slightly move toward a freer and fairer one, this change only affected the middle-upper classes of society. The term 'New Woman' has been used to make reference to this new female profile whose interests and concerns moved out of the domestic area—mainly through politics, education, and employment. Those new women dared to initiate the origin of what was going to be a long path toward an independent future. But this 'New Woman' was not still a reality at the moment in which Simone de Beauvoir wrote what would be her most popular book, *The Second Sex*.

If one had to choose which are the most relevant ideas that can be extracted from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, they would probably be the following: that the woman position within the patriarchal society is the one of the 'Other'; the fact that one is not born but becomes a woman due to the societal forces; that woman is essentially immanent and wrongly embodies the myth of the eternal feminine; and that the woman herself, through different attitudes such as narcissism, love and mysticism, reinforces her dependent role. As the 'Other'—or the opposed force—of man, woman allows him to define his masculine being, thus falling into the role of the passive figure that necessarily requires man by her side to fulfill her existence. Those 'New Women', previously mentioned, were to some extent the first to realize—even thirty years before *The Second*

Sex is published—that an active role in society, whether through politics, education or employment, was the only path that could allow them to move away from their secondary role. De Beauvoir states that society is responsible for shaping women to make them fit within the already established gender roles. From early childhood, girls are educated to lose the individuality that all human beings are born with, in order to end up playing the expected wife and mother roles. Besides, girls are taught to remain in a passive and interior state which keeps them far from the external male world. This way, the immanence would be still part of the woman's personality in her adulthood, making her more likely to accept her confinement within the domestic area, but living a frustrated and monotonous life. Moreover, women are part of the masculine universe but they have no rights to actively participate in it, since they have not taken a part in its development. In fact, women have been relegated to a child position in which they are not considered to be able to act or think by themselves. Lastly, it is important to mention that women's inferior position is not only the result of a series of external patriarchal forces. Women actually promote their subordination by consciously hiding their freedom. Narcissism is the attitude that most interests this BA Thesis, since Daisy Buchanan embodies it at perfection. According to Simone de Beauvoir, the narcissist hides her freedom in the belief in herself. This profile corresponds to a frustrated woman who cannot fulfill herself in real projects, so she creates an imaginary life full of illusions in which she is the protagonist. A powerful husband would be the only thing that maintains the narcissist glad, since she annexes his values to her ego.

Daisy Buchanan, the indispensable element of this BA Thesis, can be considered as the character of *The Great Gatsby* that best embodies de Beauvoir's ideology regarding the woman's situation. Although in this character one can observe the main features of the 1920s—a light morality, blind faith in money, the flapper image—conversely, one cannot claim that Daisy Buchanan is representative of the 'New Woman' that was arising in the moment in which F. Scott Fitzgerald created her. Daisy, in the same way as the 'New Woman', was completely aware of her inferior condition and she probably knew, just as

well as them, what she has at her disposal to, at least, attempt to improve it. But F. Scott Fitzgerald shaped her to react to the situations in a way that can be explained by using the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir. Just through the description of the Buchanans, it becomes apparent that Tom embodies the subject or superior male that is essential to Daisy. She, for her part, embodies the passivity of a woman that, being completely dependent on the man's economy, has given her entire existence to her husband, and thus, Daisy becomes the 'Other' of Tom. Daisy's need to attach herself to a man who fulfills her existence does not come from her biological condition as woman, but from the societal rules that, since youth, have tied her to that destiny. Since the consumption society in which she lives has led her to marry her richest suitor, without taking love into account, she ends up being defined by an unhappy marriage in which her life, which lacks all duties, becomes monotonous and abstract. The reason why she does not dare to take an action, rather than using Gatsby as a way of evasion, lies in her immanent state. What is more, the intellectual male domination in which Daisy is immersed makes her turn Tom's opinions into her own with the sole aim of taking part in conversations at the males' level. This, together with her childish behavior, shows the fact that women are, in man's eyes, not able to think or act by themselves. Concerning Daisy's narcissistic attitude, she sticks to the influential figure of Tom to avail herself of his social and economic power. With Tom, she maintains the kind of life that her ego requires.

From here on, one possible reading of *The Great Gatsby* may be to unveil whether Daisy's character has been originated from the sexist perspective of F. Scott Fitzgerald, or whether she is a simple reflection of the kind of woman that the author met during the 1920s. It is especially relevant that Daisy's life is, in more than one aspect, parallel to that of F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda, from whom it is said that the author took inspiration. That would certainly open up another line of research that might provide new insights into this well-trodden novel.

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