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**The Portrayal of the ‘New Women’ in F. Scott  
Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*: a not-very-  
bright flapper.**

Author

AINOA SERRANO GARCIA

Supervisor

MÓNICA CALVO PASCUAL

FACULTY OF ARTS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation will be the analysis of the role of the New Women (also known as The Flappers) of the Roaring Twenties in the United States in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. This analysis is conducted by focusing on one of the main female characters in the novel: Jordan Baker. In this study we will find a contrast between what we historically and conventionally know as a New Woman and the way Fitzgerald portrays them in his work through this female character: in a de-romanticized and flawed way. Through this analysis we will discover the author's innermost thoughts, which in turn represent the way in which the majority of the American population of the Roaring Twenties saw these women and their innovative lifestyle.

## **RESUMEN**

Este trabajo de fin de grado presenta el análisis de las *New Women*, también conocidas como *Flappers* de los felices años veinte estadounidenses dentro de la novela *El Gran Gatsby*, escrita por Francis Scott Fitzgerald. El análisis se ha realizado a través de la exploración e investigación de uno de los personajes femeninos de la novela, Jordan Baker. En este estudio encontraremos un contraste entre lo que históricamente conocemos como New Woman y la forma en que Fitzgerald las retrata en su obra a través de este personaje femenino: de una forma menos *romántica* e imperfecta. A través de este estudio descubriremos los pensamientos más internos del autor, que a su vez representan la forma en que la mayoría de la población americana de los felices años veinte veía a estas mujeres y su innovador estilo de vida.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation has as its purpose to conduct an analysis of the New Women in the Roaring Twenties in American Society through the character Jordan Baker in *The Great Gatsby*, firstly analyzing the role of women in the novel and then focusing the analysis on Jordan's role in the novel as the representation of the New Women and her relationship with Nick Carraway, a middle-class American white man.

From the many motivations behind the choice of the topic of this dissertation, the following are to be stressed: The New Women's struggle to stand out within a society historically ruled by men; their positive future influence on women; the significant importance of The Flappers in the 1920s society; and the fact that they were one of the first independent and forward-looking women in history. This dissertation will attempt to prove that The Flappers had a huge impact within American society, even though the depiction of them is not very positive in this novel.

Firstly, after a brief introduction to Fitzgerald and his novel, I will contextualize The Roaring Twenties in the United States, focusing on some elements of this period such as economy, society and culture. Secondly, I will focus on the contextualization of the New Women, writing about their role in American society in the 1920s, how they emerged and how they are perceived by the society. Later, I will focus on the role of the New Women in the novel *The Great Gatsby*. In this section we will find two subsections: the first one is dedicated to the female characters in the novel, focusing the analysis on Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson in order to see what they represent in the novel, in addition, this section will also show the way the author portrays the different type of American women from the Twenties. The following subsection is entirely dedicated Jordan Baker, an analysis of her features as the main representative of the New Woman in the novel, from her physical aspect to the role she plays, answering questions such as why is she considered a New Woman, what is her lifestyle like, what does she represents and how she represents it in the novel. As we will see, Jordan is an "abnormal" flapper since she represents some negative and unpleasant

values, depicted from a sexist and patriarchal view. Within Jordan's section, we will find an analysis of the relationship between Jordan and Nick, the way he sees her, his thoughts about her and their behavior towards each other. In general, by analyzing their relationship, we will get to know how the middle-class white American man sees this new concept of Woman.

The final section is on F. Scott Fitzgerald's view on the "New Woman". Through the exploration of the author's thoughts and world view, we will be aware of the reasons why the New Women are represented in decadent and negative way in the novel, through a sexist point of view.

Finally, in the conclusion we will find a brief summary of the main ideas of this dissertation, answering the key questions that has been set out in this paper.

## **2. *THE GREAT GATSBY*: A NOVEL OF THE ROARING TWENTIES**

*The Great Gatsby* is a novel written in 1925 by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. The beginning of this section is a brief biography about the author, based on some data collected from "A brief biography" (belonging to *A Historical Guide to F. Scott Fitzgerald* by Kurk Curnutt) written by Jackson R. Byrer, who is a Professor Emeritus of the University of Maryland's Department of English.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was an American writer born in Minnesota in 1896, belonging to a family of bourgeois class and Catholic beliefs. He studied in Catholic schools and later moved to Princeton University. However, in 1917 he dropped out in order to participate as a soldier in the First World War. He married Zelda Sayre, a young woman from Alabama known for being a novelist, a dancer, and a celebrity in American society in the 1920s. She was an icon for the women of society and was nicknamed "The First Flapper of America" by her own husband. After the success of his novel *This Side of Paradise* in 1920, they both became celebrities and he devoted all his time to literature. F. Scott Fitzgerald tended to make use of a direct and careful style, he also tended to satirically capture the interactions of individuals belonging to the well-to-do American society in the well-known decade, The Roaring Twenties in the United States, called by the author

himself "the jazz era". He was a member of the Lost Generation, a literary group that also included outstanding writers such as Ernest Hemingway or John Dos Passos. These writers intended a social breakdown, but at the same time made an apology for splendor as Fitzgerald did through his alter ego: Gatsby.

*The Great Gatsby* is the great novel of the so-called American Dream that emerged in the 1920s in the United States of America. The novel is written and set in 1920s soon after the end of World War One, exploring the relationships between some individuals who lived amongst the wealth and poverty of Long Island (New York). *The Great Gatsby* shows the eternal conflict between the repression of society and the passion of the individual while offering a devastating dissection of the Jazz Era. This novel is, at the same time, a seductive story of love and selfishness, of which the human being is equally capable. *The Great Gatsby* symbolizes the triumph, the perpetual youth and the dazzle that lead to tragedy, decay and fall, constants reflected with amazing precision in Fitzgerald's own life. This novel introduces its readers both to the Roaring Twenties and to the Flappers; Matthew Bruccoli explains that "it is one of those novels that so richly evoke the texture of their time that they become, in the fullness of time, more than literary classics; they become a supplementary or even substitute form of history" (6).

The book tells the story of Nick Carraway, the internal narrator, a young man who moved to West Egg, a very fashionable area on Long Island (New York) in the 1920s. Having just arrived at his new home, he meets Tom Buchanan, his cousin Daisy's husband, and Jordan Baker, a distinguished golf player. On one of Tom's trips to the city, he meets Myrtle Wilson, Tom's lover. In turn, Nick lives next to a large mansion that belongs to Gatsby, a mysterious character who organizes parties and is known to all of American society. It turns out that Gatsby and Daisy had an affair and he asks Nick to arrange a date with his cousin, with whom he remains deeply in love, or obsessed. The most important scene takes place in New York. Tom and Gatsby argue over who may

be with Daisy. Gatsby is revealed to be a smuggler (this novel takes place during the Prohibition era in the US) and Daisy cannot leave her husband. As the group drives to Long Island, Tom's mistress Myrtle is run over and killed by Gatsby's car, while Gatsby and Daisy drive. Gatsby tells Daisy that, although she was driving, he will take the blame. Meanwhile, Tom condemns Gatsby by telling George Wilson where he can find the man who killed his wife, Myrtle. George Wilson shoots Gatsby before committing suicide in Gatsby's garden. After this, Tom and Daisy move to New York leaving Nick and Gatsby behind. Nick ends his relationship with Jordan Baker in a somewhat abrupt way: at the end of the novel Jordan tells Nick that she is engaged to another man and that she could feel something for him. Nick decides to take care of Gatsby's funeral, which none of the regulars of his parties attend.

As Kenneth E. states, "*The Great Gatsby*, then, is in the right American line, in regard to conceptions, implied and stated, about what should constitute the great American novel. More directly, of course, *Gatsby*, despite its brevity, illuminates the American past and present, answers the challenge of getting within its pages something of the scope and variety and dynamics of American life, the light and dark of American experience, the underside and upperside of American society. Moreover, it does so within the larger framework of human experience, invariably moving readers to the dimensions of myth that convey meaning independent of time, place, and the particulars of experience" (2).

The following part of this section is an introduction to the Roaring Twenties, it is fully based on my reading and understanding of *What Were the Roaring Twenties?* by Michele Mortlock, a book in which the author explores and describes this wild decade of American history.

Just like Thomas Streissguth expresses in his work *The Roaring Twenties*, this period in the history of the United States, still continues to fascinate historians and students of North American history. (viii)

“The Roaring Twenties” is the label for the decade after the ending of the First World War when the United States was transformed into an economic giant prior to the war, the US was a debtor nation but afterwards it became a creditor nation, doubling its wealth from 1920 to 1929, when forces collided to produce the most explosive decade of the century. This prosperous era is often described and characterized by new freedoms in social and cultural aspects of life, by a blooming economy, new technologies, jazz music, pleasure seeking, a decade in which exciting new events happened in sports, entertainment, science, politics, communication and transportation. However, this decade is also known as the “Age of Excess”, as Scott Fitzgerald named it, in which not all Americans thrived, some were fortunate to do so, but others were not. It is marked by excess as people thought money was limitless and never thought the boom would end. As Roger Lewis mentions, the 1920s could be seen as a period in which there were two Americas: “the older, simpler, more naive and idealist America and the bewildering, disparate, rootless, cynical America of the present” (42). These two Americas are fully portrayed in *The Great Gatsby*. Nevertheless, the Roaring Twenties led up to the catastrophic economic collapse of the Thirties: the Great Depression.

Other relevant aspects to highlight within this period are superficiality and materialism, both elements largely observed in *The Great Gatsby*; Americans were able to buy automobiles, household items, vast quantities of jewelry or glassware, blurring thus the distinctions between rich and poor, just like Jay Gatsby in the novel. Still, all that glitters is not gold since, although many Americans enjoyed the prosperity of the time, many others reacted violently: with the arrival of the Roaring 20s, social consequences were looming such as the entry of women into the workplace, the breakdown of some traditional religious customs or the entry of immigrants into the country. As Kelly Boyer Sagert explains, many Americans reacted violently to this decade, a revival of the Ku Klux Klan appeared in 1915 when *Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith appeared on screens



nationwide (7), attacking mostly immigrants and the New Women, strongly opposing these new women.

As we already know, The Roaring Twenties was a time of tremendous social change in the United States, especially in the area of women's rights. Before the war, as Kelly Boyer Sagert describes in her work, the feminine ideal in the United States was the Gibson Girl, created by illustrator Charles Dana Gibson in the 19th century, which was defined as a slender but boasted a curvy woman who used to wear tight corsets, long skirts and high button boots (2). However, shortly after the end of the war, all these elements typical of women prior to the Roaring 20s were replaced by some very different ones. Just like Chatherine Gourley states: "the heavy corsets and long skirts of the 1910s were a thing of the past. Clingy fabrics, short skirts, and very revealing bathing costumes, put women of the 1920s into a weight-loss mode" (88).

Most concerning to some, not only their dress style changed but their behavior changed as well; women could now be in the company of men, smoking, drinking and partying in nightclubs and private parties. Even the new dances of the era expressed an attitude of free self-expression and unrestrained enjoyment. Without a single doubt, a "New Woman" had emerged. However, unfortunately she brought along with her a lot of negative sentiments from conservative members of society, both male and female, who equated the disappearance of the traditional woman with the moral decline of society.

According to Michael J. O'Neal, this "New Woman" was at a youthful age famously known as the "flapper" of the Roaring Twenties; with the arrival of this new decade full of changes and more liberating, women learned to value their individuality above the needs of others, they started to celebrate their independence, taking control of their own sexuality and rebelling against the old and retrograde ideals historically imposed on women, becoming much more of a part of public life than they had previously been. (23)

The term “New Woman” was used to describe the new role of women in society: as we already know, the place and role of women has been historically imposed in a patriarchal way, therefore there was a general feeling that a woman's place was the family home but already in the second decade of the 20th century in America, this conception changed dramatically, at least for some Americans. In this way, women's education began to expand and women took to the streets, they also occupied work places historically taken over by men and they began to live a much more active life even in the political field since in 1920 they already had the right to vote nationally. With the end of the war, women, like men, refused to return to these traditional pre-war social codes, therefore young women decided to break with the traditional value system. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a prominent and prolific feminist writer described them in her work *The Yellow Wall-paper and Other Stories*: “Here she comes, running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman” (654).

It is worth noting the fact that we are speaking of a large majority of white American women since minorities (African-Americans or Native Americans) still continued to face strong discrimination by the American population. Furthermore, although many millions of women could be called flappers, many others were still conservative and maintained their values and religion and did not accept the fact that flappers wanted to be part of the political or labor world, the "world of men". According to Catherine Gourley, the term “flapper” originated very negative connotations to some, even the Florida state legislature even considered banning the word. (11)

If we wanted to go back in time and analyze what is the most primitive origin of New Women and of the term itself, we should go back to the Victorian period when feminism turned out to be a revolution in freedom at the end of the 19th century. The roots of the New Woman could be said to be found in the organized feminist movements of the end of this century where women began to take an active part in political debates, in the media and in public life in general; according to Sally Alexander, “the Victorian women’s movement (from the 1850s), the Women’s Trade Union

League (1870-1920) and the Fabian Women's Group (1908-1952) took up the woman question and the 'sex-relation' and tried to build a political movement of women which would render them visible to men by releasing them from a confining and private domestic world, which would replace the image of women in me's mind with the economic reality of women's lives and which would secure political and economic equality with men" (xiv).

Of course, there is no doubt that this term is closely linked with feminism. Feminism questions issues of gender equality, challenges stereotypes and also positions of control and power in society and seeks to make women part of life at the same level as men, both in the social, economic and political sense. As David Bouchier exposes in his work "The Feminist Challenge" (1983), "the feminist movement includes any form of opposition to any form of social, personal or economic discrimination which women suffer because of their sexes" (2). Precisely these are the foundations of feminism and the aim of all those women called New Women: equality and freedom. In the United States, feminism turned out to be a revolution for freedom, becoming part of a revolt against formalism, trying to break with the most conservative part of society in order to achieve self-determination through growth and experience, giving rise to a new woman.

As for the term "New Woman", it was coined by Charles Reade in his novel *A Woman Hater* in 1877. As we can see, the term dates back too much earlier than the Roaring Twenties but it was the one that was used to refer to these American women who were looking for the same thing: freedom and a more visible place in American public life. Regarding the term "flapper", quoting Ellie Laubner: "the term flapper of the twenties refers to a specific kind of woman wearing skirts, cutting her hair to the male style, listening to jazz, and displaying a disdain for what they considered it was a misguided behavior" (78).

All these elements briefly exposed at this point, will be further developed in the following analysis.

### 3. WOMEN IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

#### 3.1 *Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson: the Femme Fatale and the Foolish*

Women in *The Great Gatsby* appear to be more liberated than the previous American female generations but they are not presented in a very flattering light. It is interesting to highlight that we learn about these three women from how they are described through the voices of the two main male characters: Nick and Gatsby; we do not hear from these women themselves. This could be interpreted as a symbol of women being still voiceless.

Despite the fact that F. Scott Fitzgerald was married to a New Woman himself, *The Great Gatsby* embodies the cultural discomfort with the post-World War One “New Woman”. We see this discomfort in the novel’s characterization of Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson, all white American women in their twenties who live in Long Island and, who despite their differences, it could be said that they are all versions of the New Woman and share some commonalities; their hair and clothing are modern, they do not behave modestly, and they all present some sort of modern independence. Only two of them are married but both marriages are a fiasco; Jordan is a professional golf player, even though it is a male-dominated sport. They all prefer the excitement of a luxurious life to their domestic duties. Daisy has a child, but she does not seem excited about being a mother. Finally, all the women violate patriarchal taboos, especially in the way Daisy and Myrtle are both involved in extramarital affairs. However and despite of all these “modern” actions, at the end of the novel the reader can easily realize that *The Great Gatsby* also manifests that women were still powerless in many ways and that most men were not ready for those new behaviors and lifestyles.

As for Daisy, she is considered the “Golden Girl” and the Femme Fatale of the novel. Daisy’s attitude is a bit conflicting throughout the whole novel. On the one hand, she has an irresponsible and selfish nature, which are proper values of a flapper and she also seems completely detached to her daughter, but, on the other hand, she preserves some traditional and old-

fashioned values and clearly manifests them when she gives up true love and chooses Tom over Gatsby because of the first one's wealth and also when she presents a pessimistic and sexist attitude towards women, whose role in the world, according to her, was to be beautiful and stupid as we can observe in her words: "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.'." (Fitzgerald 13).

This contradictory attitude is probably the reason some would not consider her a new woman, but I truly believe Fitzgerald wanted to represent those women in transition between the old and the new values throughout Daisy. Therefore, in some way, Daisy is another new woman of the era but not the main representative of them, she is in transition but still lacks too many of the Flappers' values.

Regarding Daisy's role and traits, she is probably the main female character and represents women who lack agency or voice, emphasizing the lack of power and voice, she also represents the inability of women to exceed their social standing: "that is the best thing a girl can be in the world". (Fitzgerald 17). Daisy is also afraid to speak up, just to avoid tension and remain docile. This girl also exposes the perceived superiority of men: "I am going to take better care of you from now on" (Fitzgerald 133). This is what Tom tells her when she tries to leave him. In this sentence we can see he treats her as a possession, a possession to take better care of; in the 1920s, the majority of women were treated as objects as we can clearly observe on Daisy and Myrtle. Another interesting point is her miserable and corrupt marriage.

Myrtle Wilson is Tom Buchanan's mistress and what makes her more different from the other female characters is the fact that she belongs to a low position on the social status ladder.

Myrtle is at the mercy of men and the mere object of Tom's desires; again, an object. Women were always seen as an object to men in the 1920s. She is described as a sensual woman and it seems to appear that the only thing of value she has is her sexuality. She escapes from her world by having an extramarital affair with Tom. She belongs to a lower socioeconomic status compared to Jordan and Daisy, and dreams of getting rich one day by marrying Tom, thus using him for his money and wealth. As for her main features as a character, we observe Myrtle is the archetype of marginalized individuals in the novel. She is a complex character: she embodies the popular fool woman by always expecting Tom to leave Daisy and dreaming of a luxurious life but she is also a selfish person who cheats on her husband and would risk everything in order to get a better position in the socioeconomic status, she thinks she deserves better than his husband does. Unfortunately, Myrtle's ending in the novel is tragic since she is abruptly hit by a car.

### ***3.2 A flawed New Woman: Jordan Baker***

However, the main focus of this paper is Jordan Baker. She clearly represents the role of the "New Woman" in *The Great Gatsby* and Fitzgerald proves it in some distinct ways but he does it in a de-romanticized approach; he does not portray a liberated feminist woman who fights for her rights and who tries to put a dent into the male-dominated world, he pictures a flawed woman instead. We will further discuss about F. Scott Fitzgerald's view on New Women in the final and last section in order to understand why Jordan Baker is depicted this way.

Jordan embodies the 1920s woman who is self-sufficient and self-made and her values are quite different from the traditional women's. Fitzgerald uses her to symbolize the change in the lifestyle of the American women of the time and she also represents the wealthy society of the Twenties and a balance between the rich life and the unhappy inner world. She is described as an androgynous woman and, according to Nick she is "'a slender, small-breasted girl with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet'"

(Fitzgerald 13), which totally fits the description of a flapper's appearance. Regarding her personality traits, she embodies a careless and apathetic character who was also very indicative of the time; flappers were said to be rebellious, careless and happy-go-lucky. Nick also describes her as having "impersonal eyes" (Fitzgerald 15) as if nothing could ever fully please her and her needs.

She is also presented as an arrogant woman as well as dishonest and a cheater (she famously cheated on a golf tournament, seeking for a higher score). She also uses people in order to obtain whatever she wants, just like she seems to use Nick to suit her needs and does not care about the way he feels. It is interesting to highlight the fact that, unlike the other two women in the novel, Daisy and Myrtle, Jordan is not seeking for love, Jordan seems to have an unsentimental and apathetic view of romance, she shows a disinterested attitude towards relationships and love. She is also an independent girl unlike the other two females characters, Daisy and Myrtle.

It is interesting to note that her name is a male name, which could be taken as a symbol of her being as independent as men. Furthermore, her physical description (mentioned above) is quite far from a feminine description, defying the traditional idea of femininity and depicting the idea that if she wanted to fit in a male-dominated world, she had to look like a man (small breast, slender body, androgynous). She also has a career in the world of golf, a sport which had historically been dominated by men. Jordan also attends parties, smokes and drinks, which, again, used to be more of a masculine behavior. Not only her physical description but her personality, behavior, manners and actions prove that Jordan is, without a doubt, the quintessential flapper of *The Great Gatsby*.

As the title of this section indicates, Jordan Baker embodies the role of New Woman in the novel and although many traits of her personality or her physical appearance are consistent with what we know as a "flapper", she is not the ideal of flapper that the reader would expect due to our conventional knowledge of a Flapper. After learning the historical context, ambitions, goals and thoughts of the true New Women of the Roaring Twenties, the reader hopes to see a Jordan who represents that ambitious and positive side typical of the Flappers; a woman who truly represents

that ideal of a lively, wild and liberated woman who was seeking a radical change in the society of the Roaring Twenties, trying to take a more active part in life as a member of society and the workforce. For this reason, the title of the section is a flawed flapper, since Jordan represents the New Women but from a patriarchal and a sexist view (Nick's view and consequently the author's view). In the next subsection, there is an explanation on why Nick saw Jordan as a flawed woman.

### ***3.2.1 Nick Carraway: the key to our understanding of Jordan's de-romanticized characterization of the New Women.***

Nick Carraway, is, without a doubt, the key character and our reporter in the novel as he is both a homodiegetic and extradiegetic narrator. Therefore, we see the world through his eyes and, consequently, we see women through his eyes as well, through his moral standards. As I have mentioned before, the key to understand why Jordan represents a flawed woman, instead of representing the feminist and wild idea of a Flapper, lies in the way Nick sees her. The representation of the New Women in *The Great Gatsby* is totally influenced by the author's own thoughts on the New Women so it is fair to say that the author's view on them is represented through Nick.

The relationship between Nick and Jordan is very important because it is through it that the reader gets to know the view of the middle-class American white man about the New Woman and, in turn, the vision of F. Scott Fitzgerald about them too. In order to know what their vision was, we need to delve into their *romantic* relationship: their relationship is curious, as well as complicated. They date for much of the novel but end their romance in a very abruptly way at the end of the novel after Myrtle's death. However, he never got to catch strong feelings for her either.

From the very beginning of the novel, we realize Nick feels attracted by her in the way he describes her: "I looked at Miss Baker wondering what it was she 'got done.' I enjoyed looking at her" (Fitzgerald 14). However, shortly after complimenting her, we can observe how Nick suspects



that Jordan hides her true self behind a "perfect" public front as he begins to hint at those traits of Jordan's personality that we mentioned earlier like her carelessness and that ultimately turn out to be what Nick detests about her. We can observe her carelessness and disinterest in this quote: "at any rate Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly and then quickly tipped her head back again—the object she was balancing had obviously tottered a little and given her something of a fright. Again a sort of apology arose to my lips. Almost any exhibition of complete self sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me" (Fitzgerald 16).

There are several examples of sexism in their relationship; on the one hand, Nick, who shows himself to be an honest man, is not since he keeps sending love letters to the Chicago girl while he is seeing Jordan. However, a man's dishonesty is not so important as woman's. Another clear example is found in chapter three when Nick recognizes that he feels flattered to be seen with her and also feels a tender curiosity: "At first I was flattered to go places with her because she was a golf champion and every one knew her name. Then it was something more. I wasn't actually in love, but I felt a sort of tender curiosity" (Fitzgerald 63). In this quote, Nick talks about Jordan as if she were an object, he is curious about her but he is not really in love and he feels flattered when others see him with her, as if Jordan were a trophy that he has won.

After an intense and close reading of the text, trying to analyze each of Nick's behaviors in order to understand their relationship and his view on her, I have come to the conclusion that his feelings for her were totally superficial and that he ends up finding in Jordan everything that he despises in the society of the Twenties: another socialite who only looks out for her own interests, someone who would do anything in order to maintain the power and who lives behind a facade. To Nick Jordan represents superficiality, excess, materialism, and with it, the decadence of society. It is essential to bare into mind that Nick somehow conveys the author's own thoughts, and as we will see in the next and last section (F. Scott Fitzgerald's View on the New Women), he still preserved traditional values, rejecting this new lifestyle of American women, rejecting change.

As mentioned earlier, Nick is a middle-class American white man who represents men on his same social status and the way they saw women. A vast majority of those men did not support this revolution that the New Women started in the Roaring Twenties, they did not agree with their liberated way of thinking, with their new dress sense or with the fact that they wanted to be an active part of political and social life, they saw them as flawed women who were only exploiting their dumbness, seeking for fun and wanting to marry men for money. All these traditional men feared the decay of North American society, they were afraid that women would leave their homes and consequently their customs and lives would change as well; they were not able to understand and assimilate that the New Women only sought equality between the sexes, a balance between men and women, they only pursued a dream, they wanted to have the same right as men to enjoy a full life and to feel useful outside of their households.

However, all those men were always surrounded by these women, enjoying their company and their dances, as it is clearly shown in Gatsby parties; here is one more example of sexism and hypocrisy in this novel.

#### **4. F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S VIEW ON THE NEW WOMEN**

As we already know, the way in which the New Women (and women in general) are portrayed and depicted in *The Great Gatsby* differs from what we know and recognize as "New Women" (liberated and feminist ...). In order to understand the reason for this de-romanticized and flawed vision of the Flappers, we must delve deeper into the author's life, thoughts and his own relationship with women.

For this section, I am going to rely on Rena Sanderson's analysis of the figure of women in Fitzgerald's works in her own work, "Women in Fitzgerald Fiction". Sanderson states that Fitzgerald did not believe that flappers represented freedom but rather that they represented "moral

anarchy and a lack of direction" (143) and describes them as flawed, Fitzgerald even got to say "our American women are leeches. They're an utterly useless fourth generation trading on the accomplishments of their pioneer great grandmothers. They simply dominate the American men"(Fitzgerald, quoted in Sanderson152).

Fitzgerald, despite being married to who he considered himself the first Flapper in the history of the United States, Zelda Sayre, maintained preserved some patriarchal values, which can be clearly illustrated in the way in which the author depicts women in his novel.

The fact that Fitzgerald preserved those values is due to several reasons but among the main ones, their personal experiences stand out; he and his wife achieved professional success but this soon changed for them. In addition, Fitzgerald suffered from health problems and alcoholism and his wife suffered from mental problems. And, precisely at the time when he wrote *The Great Gatsby*, the author was going through one of his worst personal moments since his wife Zelda had an alleged affair with another man and little after, she committed suicide, both facts altered Fitzgerald seriously: "that September 1924 I knew something had happened that could never be repaired"(Fitzgerald, quoted in Sanderson 154). Therefore, many critics and researchers, such as Sanderson in this case, truly support the idea that that the reason why Fitzgerald depicts New Women as flawed in his literary production reflects this difficult and hard period of his life.

To sum up, F. Scott Fitzgerald feared the loss of the traditional values that had always sustained the society in which he lived and feared the degradation and corrosion of Americans. In addition, according to him, these women corrupted and perverted men, they only wanted their wealth and they were willing to do anything to get whatever they wanted, just as Jordan is capable of lying, manipulating or cheating in the novel in order to be the winner and keep her power to the letter.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Firstly, I would like to begin this conclusion by exposing the reasons of the title's choice: "Portrayal of the New Women in *The Great Gatsby*: a very-not-bright flapper." The fact that this novel is written from a sexist and patriarchal perspective is quite clear after a close reading of my dissertation, and from this fact, I have tried to approach a feminist critique of it.

As explained in the contextualization of the New Women, the Flappers were women who brought with them a radical change, they sought the modernization of American society and wanted to value their individuality above the needs of others, they wanted to gain independence, to be an active part of society, to rebel against the old and retrograde ideas that historically had been imposed on the figure of women. Also, they were described as lively, rebellious, feminist, wild. However, when we analyze the figure of Jordan, we find a contradiction: Jordan is considered the quintessential flapper of the novel since she represents many aspects of the Flappers (both the clothing and the physical aspect or some traits of her personality) but to the time is pictured in a rather negative and sexist way: she is depicted as a liar, a cheater and a manipulative woman who is capable of doing whatever it takes to be keep the power. In addition, many negative elements are attributed to her such as cynicism, laziness, carelessness, apathy, disinterest.... This is the reason I have chosen this title, since the figure of the New Woman fairly lacks light in this novel, she is characterized in a very obscure and hostile way.

Secondly, another of my intentions was to make it clear that Jordan is pictured in this way because it is the way in which the author of the novel, F. Scott Fitzgerald, saw the New Women; as I mentioned before, they were leeches of the society according to him. The author exposes his actual thoughts on them through the novel: Nick Carraway is Fitzgerald's voice.

Although at first glance and without following a deep and close reading of the text, Jordan does not appear to be an essential character in the novel (since normally readers focus their attention

more on Daisy and Gatsby, hence there are many studies and research on these two characters) but she really is, especially if the investigator's reading approaches a more feminist perspective.

Thirdly, I would also like to comment on the way the other two women are portrayed in the text. Both Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson are doomed, they sadly are stuck in unsuccessful marriages, both are presented as objects to men and both use men as objects as well. As I mentioned in Daisy's analysis, this woman represents the woman in transition between the traditional woman and the New Woman, however she remains a failure whose fatal destiny is marked. As for Myrtle, she is the most doomed and unlucky character in the novel because no matter how hard she tries, she is unable to climb the social ladder and will never be able to fulfill her dreams. In general terms, the novel expresses a negative feeling toward women and finds freedom unacceptable in women as is made clear in the unsympathetic portrayal and punishment of all three women since they remain prisoners of the patriarchy.

These three women do carry away by their own desires: Daisy is carried away by her desires for the two men of her life, Jay and Tom, which leads her to kill Myrtle although it is accidental and, Myrtle by her desires for Tom, making herself run out in front of the car. And, finally, Jordan is carried away by the lifestyle she enjoys which makes her cheat in a tournament thus satisfying her own desires as she always does.

From my point of view, the vision of the "New Woman" in *The Great Gatsby* totally lacks a modernist vision and differs a lot from the historical accounts of this period, since the way the story is told and the way the Jordan represents these women, has a potentially patriarchal and sexist tone. In this novel, women are mere objects of men and their desires. The author's discomfort towards the New Women is reflected in the miserable characterization of the female figures in this novel.

The main intention or aim of this thesis has been to successfully answer the question of how the New Women are represented in *The Great Gatsby*, also examining the reasons why their

portrayal is the way it is and why it differs so much from the historical accounts that we have about the Flappers.

Finally, I would like to briefly emphasize that although New Women are represented in a miserable and sexist way in this book, those women initiated a struggle and a radical change in society that has allowed subsequent generations access to political and social life. Today, women have many rights thanks to all those who fought for them. The New Women, without a doubt, were a great social revolution and marked a great step in the history of both the United States and the world.

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