**The Portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby***BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University  
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Summary

This thesis analyses the portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ of the roaring twenties in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. The analysis will additionally analyse the reasons behind *Gatsby*’s portrayal of its ‘flappers’ utilizing the novel’s author and narrator. In addition to this analysis, this thesis encloses a piece of creative writing. This creative writing serves to alter *Gatsby*’s representation of the ‘New Woman’ by including perspectives that were excluded in Fitzgerald’s version of the story. An exegetical statement at the end of this thesis will explain the choices that were made in the creative writing piece and link it to the findings of the analysis that precedes it. The importance of this thesis relates to the novel’s influence on our collective memory of the roaring twenties and its ‘flappers’.

1. Introduction

The roaring twenties, a decade that gave us a booming economy, new technologies, the automobile, jazz music but also one of the world’s most beloved American novels of all time; *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. The relationship between this novel and its era can be viewed as a two-way street. To many readers, the novel is what gave them the roaring twenties, it introduced them to this era and its ‘flappers’ through Fitzgerald’s writing. This is supported by Robert McParland who writes about *The Great Gatsby* as “the chief source of our popular images of the period he called “jazz age” and that these “cast images of the 1920s that became central to how the era is seen and interpreted” (ix). Matthew Bruccoli further 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). This strong interplay between the novel and its setting plays a vital role in the construction of a collective memory on the roaring twenties. Jerzy Jedlicki defines collective memory as “a complex of beliefs, shared by at least a part of the national community and relating to a given segment of the national history” (226). In the case of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald’s writing constructed a complex of beliefs on the roaring twenties and its ‘flappers’ that is now shared by a part of the community. The effect of this collective memory is described by Kirk Curnutt who writes about the novel’s author that he “epitomizes the youthful vim and vigor of the decade known as the Roaring Twenties” (4) and Roger Pearson defines Fitzgerald as “the self appointed spokesman for the "Jazz Age”” (638). On top of this, Batchelor’s idea of the “meta-*Gatsby*” describes how the novel “transcended its place as a Jazz Age novel to become a touchstone across American culture” as it is now “employed across mass media and in the collective public consciousness” (viii). This “meta-*Gatsby*” consists of images that can be linked to Fitzgerald’s novel, but also to any of the novel’s film adaptations and adaptations through other forms of media like radio, theatre and opera.Together, ‘meta-*Gatsby*’ and collective memory largely form our ideas of the ‘New Woman’ of the roaring twenties. Despite this general acknowledgment of Fitzgerald’s work functioning as a lyrical portrait of the American 1920s, not much attention is given to the question of accurate representation of the product of the contemporary feminization of American culture; the ‘flapper’.   
 This thesis sets out to answer the following thesis question: How is the ‘New Woman’ portrayed in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and what are the reasons behind this portrayal? In order to answer this question, I will start by providing background information on the ‘New Woman’ and her emerge in the roaring twenties. After this, I will examine the way that Fitzgerald portrays this ‘New Woman’ in his most famous novel. Additionally, I will provide information on Fitzgerald’s life to uncover the reasons behind his portrayal of the novel’s ‘flappers’. After that, I will use the novel’s narrator, Nick Carraway, to further explain the portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ in *Gatsby*.Lastly, I will try to construct a more inclusive and historically accurate image of the roaring twenties’ liberated females by voicing additional layers of contemporary American society in a piece of original creative writing, based on an excerpt of *The Great Gatsby*. This technique is used because through altering Fitzgerald’s writing to my own, the newly created story can help readers realize how fictional writing consciously and subconsciously affects images of periods and themes in human history, such as the ‘New Woman’. This realization is especially useful in the case of *The Great Gatsby*, since this fictional writing largely constitutes the present-day image of the roaring twenties and her ‘flappers’. This research is important because it reminds readers that novels, however representative of their age, do not necessarily paint an inclusive picture of that age. In its descriptions, a literary work might disregard important perspectives that did prevail in the era outside of the novel. Especially fiction works can hardly create an inclusive image of a whole decade, as history depends on the factors of time and space. The enormous aftermath of this in the case of *The Great Gatsby*, is that to this day, an incomplete image of the ‘New Woman’ of the roaring twenties prevails.

2. The Roaring Twenties and the ‘New Woman’

I will now provide background information on the roaring twenties in order to establish where Gatsby’s ‘New Woman’ differs from her historical accounts. The roaring twenties was a decade of strong ambiguities and oppositions. This can be illustrated by the opposing words that were used to describe this decade, which are gathered in Mamie Meredith’s article on “*The 'Nifty Fifties,' the 'Flying Forties,' the 'Threadbare Thirties,' and the 'Roaring Twenties' of Twentieth-Century America*”. In a 1939 issue of the magazine *Newsweek* the twenties were named “golden”, *Fortune* described the years as the “gaudy twenties” and other terms praised the years as “easy twenties” and “bonanza 20s” (Meredith 227). On the other hand, these same years were called “boisterous” and “tempestuous”, the American magazine *Life* even recalled the “gangland killings of the bloody twenties” (Meredith 227). The use of these contradictory terms to describe the roaring twenties tells us that the perception of this decade differed greatly. The American 1920s was characterized by both positive and negative aspects, the definition of it thus depends on a person’s sentiment towards the period. Some of the major positive themes that characterize the roaring twenties are; sexual liberation, technological advancement, a booming economy and a growing entertainment industry. The gross national product almost doubled because of the thriving industrial production and thereby consumerism increased (Ogren 5). American culture blossomed, and this was enjoyed by predominantly the affluent Americans (Ogren 5). On the one hand these years were thus youthful, exuberant and roaring, and at the least a “return to normalcy” after World War I (Orgen 3). The roaring twenties were, on the other hand, also described very negatively. Ronald Berman, in his essay ‘*The Great Gatsby* and the twenties’ describes the roaring twenties as “monied, vulgar, noisy, chaotic and immoral” (81). Berman relates the reason behind his negative description of the decade to the contemporary “replacement of Victorian public conscience by modern subjectivity” (81). This replacement caused severe tensions between traditionalists and modernists which is described in the introduction of Paula Fass’ book *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920’s*. Shewrites that “historians have long recognized that (…) American culture was remade in the 1920’s”, and that this cultural innovation is tied to the decade’s “sharp social tensions and frequent head-on collisions between new forces and traditional but still obstinate forms” (3). These new forces were part of a large movement that emerged just before the roaring twenties; American modernism. After the horrors of the First World War, a revolutionary change in “manners and morals” emerged among American citizens who started to question the dominant ideas in society (Sanderson 145). Traditional values were challenged by the new generation of modernist Americans who consciously rejected their past. With this came the reinvention of traditional femininity into the “New Woman” (Samkanashvili 47). This ‘New Woman’ was at a youthful age famously known as the ‘flapper’ of the roaring twenties, celebrating their independence and rebelling against the older generation’s ideals in their straight dresses with bobbed hair. Estelle Freedman in her article: *The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s*, describes the ‘New Woman’ as having “shorter skirts, more comfortable undergarments, shorter hair, the use of cosmetics” (378). These changes in appearance are present in our collective memory of the ‘flapper’. Frederick Allen in his book *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920’s*, however, argues thatthe changes in fashion were merely a sign of “a real change in the American feminine ideal” (81). He explains that the ‘New Woman’ in the American 1920s “were slowly becoming emancipated from routine to “live their own lives”” (Allen 73). He goes on the explain that the ‘New Woman’ was finally able to take jobs and that with these jobs came “a feeling of comparative economic independence” (73-4). Allen further states that this newly gained independence in the ‘New Woman’ threatened husbandly and parental authority (74). Maia Samkanashvili accordingly writes that these women evoked a good deal of negative reaction from conservative members of society” who felt “that women’s rejection of any aspect of their traditional role inevitably would result in the destruction of the family and the moral decline of society as a whole” (47). Freedman adds to this argument by stating that the emancipation of women in the roaring twenties influenced family life, which she evidences by a decreasing birth rate and increasing divorce rate (381). The fearing traditionalists wanted to preserve the patriarchal society in which “women, like goods and signs, are commodities traded among men” (qtd. in Tyson 46). American society became divided by these clashing modernist and traditionalist values. In the same way, the opinion on th deconstruction of the traditional view of the woman differed depending on the values of the person. Rena Sanderson illustrates these mixed perspectives by writing about the flapper that “she and all she stood for were envied, desired, feared, and emulated throughout much of the Western world” (143). This shows that the description of ‘flappers’, being “a virtual emblem of American modernity”, depends on a someone’s personal view on American modernism and the changes it inhabited (Sanderson 143). The key things to have in mind of the roaring twenties are the product of American modernism; the ‘New Woman’ and the division between the traditionalist and moralist opinion of her. With this knowledge, we can identify how the ‘New Woman’ is portrayed in *The Great Gatsby* and where this portrayal lacks in historical accuracy. Lastly, knowledge of the twofold reactions to the ‘New Woman’ will help in explaining the motives behind Fitzgerald’s representation of the ‘New Woman’ in *Gatsby*.

3. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s view on the ‘New Woman’

*The Great Gatsby*, its author and the ‘flapper’ of the roaring twenties are indisputably and intentionally intertwined. In order to identify why Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ in *Gatsby* differs from her historical accounts, it is useful to learn more about this author and his relationship with the ‘New Woman’. The relevance of Fitzgerald’s life history is stressed by Judith Baughman, who writes that “everything F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote was a form of autobiography. His fiction is transmuted autobiography. Characters start as self-portraits and turn into fiction (…) Gatsby is pure invention and pure Fitzgerald” (xv). As the novel thus reflects the author, insights into Fitzgerald’s own life will help in understanding his creation of the ‘New Woman’. Gaining knowledge on his relationship with the American ‘flapper’ will help in understanding why this author chose to depict the females of the ‘jazz age’ in *The Great Gatsby* the way he did. I will first describe the depiction of the ‘New Woman’ in *The Great Gatsby.* Sanderson, in her article “*Women in Fitzgerald’s fiction*” describes and analyses Fitzgerald’s representation of flappers throughout his literary works. She states that “this young woman represented a new philosophy of romantic individualism, rebellion and liberation, and his earliest writings enthusiastically present her as an embodiment of these new values (143). Fitzgerald expresses his concerns on this “creation” of the flapper in a letter to Edmund Wilson in 1925 by writing “If I had anything to do with creating the manners of the contemporary American girl I certainly made a botch of the job” (qtd. in Sanderson 143). Sanderson explains that Fitzgerald doubted about his “creation” as he feared that rather than representing freedom, the flappers of the roaring twenties expressed “moral anarchy and a lack of direction” (143). In later works, Fitzgerald altered his portrayal of the flapper, “increasingly he used her as a symbol not only of a new order, but also of social disorder and conflict” (Sanderson 143). As a consequence, the large majority of literary critics now identify Fitzgerald’s works as “outright condemnations of women for their failure to live up to the male hero’s romantic dreams (Sanderson 144). Fitzgerald saw the ‘New Woman’ as flawed, he describes these flaws by saying that “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” (qtd. in Sanderson 152). His negative view of the ‘New Woman’ formed the de-romanticized version of the flapper in *The Great Gatsby*. Lois Tyson adds to the idea of Fitzgerald’s patriarchal view on women in *Gatsby* by stating that Daisy “fills all three roles” imposed on women in a patriarchal society (46). These roles are explained by Luce Irigay, who writes that women in a patriarchal society “have value only in that they serve the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men”, the social roles imposed on women are limited to mother, virgin, and prostitute (qtd. in Tyson 45-6). On top of that, Tyson states that “Tom considers Daisy his private property”, and for Gatsby she is merely “the key to his goal rather than the goal itself” (Tyson 46, 51). This goal is to “acquire the sign that he belongs to the same bright, spotless, airy, carefree world of the very rich that Daisy embodied for him when they first met” (Tyson 51). The vision of Daisy as an object is illustrated in the novel when Nick says about Gatsby that “It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy – it increased her value in his eyes” (Fitzgerald 121). To Gatsby, Daisy is thus an object whose value can be ranked in a social system. She is an epitome of wealth in the story and this wealth is what attracts Gatsby to her. This becomes evident in the novel when Nick says that “Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor.” (Fitzgerald 122). Berman accordingly writes that Gatsby “believes in his dream and in Daisy as its object (86). Fitzgerald’s traditional values thus shaped the ‘flapper’ in *The Great Gatsby* into a patriarchal image of a woman as an “object of exchange” (Preston 156). Fitzgerald’s traditional view on women is also illustrated in his relationship with his wife, Zelda. Joanna Stolarek’s, describes Fitzgerald’s artistic rivalry with Zelda in *“The Beautiful and the Damned”: The Influence of Zelda Fitzgerald on F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Life And Literary Output*”. She writes that “... Scott strived to prevent his spouse from writing and publishing her own novel (…) which she hoped to be a bestseller (…) her husband insisted he needed them as “inspiration” for future novels” (54-4). Fitzgerald’s discouraging behaviour to his wife illustrates his view of women. This is supported by Stolarek who writes that it “shows Scott’s highly patronizing, all the more condescending attitude towards his wife and mirrors Zelda’s artistic imprisonment.” (55). Fitzgerald’s patriarchal values thus formed the ‘flapper’ in *The Great Gatsby*. The reason behind Fitzgerald’s bleak view on the ‘New Woman’, however, relates to more aspects of his personal life. In the following paragraphs I will provide additional information on Fitzgerald’s life and the relationship between this and his portrayal of ‘flappers’ in *The Great Gatsby* Baughman, in her book *A Life in Letters*, provides a detailed biography of Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda. Fitzgerald was born in Minnesota in 1896 to a middle-class family. He attended Princeton University where he wrote for the Princeton Triangle Club musicals, the *Princeton Tiger* magazine and the *Nassau Literary Magazine*. Before being able to finish his degree, the Great War began, and Fitzgerald joined the army in 1917. A year later, Fitzgerald fell in love with a beautiful woman of high social class who would later become his wife; Zelda Sayre. Despite Fitzgerald’s efforts to publish a successful novel and thereby gain money, his literary work got rejected twice by the publisher company *Scribners*. After the war, Fitzgerald moved to New York City in hope of great literary achievements and of to marry Zelda. However, Zelda proved impatient with Fitzgerald’s success and broke their engagement (Baughman xx). In March 1920, after his relatively small publications, Fitzgerald’s status rose enormously as *This Side of Paradise* was published and became an instant success. The now famous twenty-four-year-old married Zelda a week later in New York (Baughman xx). This was the start of a couple whose status would rise to those of celebrities, which simultaneously increased his writing’s influence on the nation. More and more novels were published, and in 1921 their first and only child named Frances Scott was born. Fitzgerald and his wife achieved professional success and wealth, however life would quickly turn around for the couple. Batchelor describes how, as quickly as Fitzgerald’s success came, everything he had so carefully constructed came crashing down in 1925. He quotes Fitzgerald saying to his daughter; “A whole lot of people have found life a whole lot of fun. I have not found it so. But, I had a hell of a lot of fun when I was in my twenties and thirties; and I feel that it is your duty to accept the sadness, the tragedy of the world we live in, with a certain espirit” (qtd. in Batchelor xi). The tragedies in his life were related to his bad health condition, alcoholism, writing challenges, mental problems of his wife and a lot of financial struggles. The hardships in Fitzgerald’s author’s life were especially severe during the time in his life when he wrote *The Great Gatsby*. This can be illustrated by Fitzgerald’s own words as he said that he dragged the book “out of the pit of (his) stomach in a time of misery” (qtd. in Sanderson 154). He wrote to his wife that there was “no one believing in me and no one to see except you + before the end your heart betraying me and then I was really alone with no one I liked” (qtd. in Sanderson 154). This mentioned betrayal relates to an affair that occurred over the course of the year 1924 which is described in Sanderson’s article. In brief, Zelda met a Frenchman, with whom she had a relationship of “unclear” nature, but Fitzgerald described the couple as “close together” (Sanderson 154). Later that year, Zelda attempted suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. Fitzgerald recalled that “that September 1924 I knew something had happened that could never be repaired” (qtd. in Sanderson 154). These difficulties in Fitzgerald’s life, which reached a peak while writing his novel in 1924, influenced Fitzgerald’s representation of the ‘New Woman’ in *Gatsby.* Sanderson adds to this argument by stating that “Fitzgerald’s literary depiction of women reflects a difficult period in his life and career” (156). Fitzgerald’s personal struggles during his life thus partially explains his portrayal of *Gatsby*’s ‘New Woman’. This chapter illustrated that *The Great Gatsby* portrays a patriarchal image of the ‘New Woman’ of the roaring twenties. Fitzgerald is acknowledged as a traditionalist whose fear for patriarchal destruction shaped the negative view and portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ in his most famous novel. On top of that, Fitzgerald dealt with serious issues in his life, which Sanderson summarizes as relating to “disappointments in Hollywood, changes in his marriage, Zelda’s deterioration and institutionalization, and his increasing self-consciousness and sense of failure as an artist” (156). These hardships in his life also influenced his portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ in *The Great Gatsby*.

4. Nick Carraway’s view on ‘New Woman’

The final aspect of *The Great Gatsby* that I will examine in my discussion of the novel’s portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ concerns to the story’s narrator; Nick Carraway. Many scholars acclaim the descriptions of the roaring twenties in *The Great Gatsby*. Among these is McParland, who specifies that Fitzgerald “offered the image that the ‘Roaring Twenties’ constituted a glamorous time of jazz, dancing flappers, and ecstatic spontaneity.” (ix). He writes that Gatsby’s lavish parties “make for intriguing imagery and symbols on the page.” (x). It is not every day that an author invites his reader to a party like Gatsby’s, and Nick’s descriptions of these uniquely glamorous and alluring parties grab the attention of many. In addition to the appeal of lavish parties, McParland explains that Fitzgerald’s description of this roaring decade is imbedded in our memory because the novel’s writing style is “youthful and energetic” (ix). Additionally, Giltrow and Stouck write that the novel is known for its “vividness with which it renders a historical era; perhaps more than by any other American novel written in the 1920s, we are convinced that we hear the voices of people speaking from that decade before the advent of talking motion pictures.” (476). The combination of the appeal that a party offers and Fitzgerald’s animated writing filled a collective memory of the roaring twenties with images the ‘New Woman’ living her vibrant life and attending Gatsby’s sensational parties. An archetype of this ‘New Woman’ within *Gatsby* is the golfer Jordan Baker, described by Nick as 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 11). However, as explained in the previous chapters, the innovations of the ‘New Woman’ are more than merely a change of appearance. The traits of this modern woman are focalized through the descriptions by the narrator of the book; Nick Carraway. The representation of the ‘New Woman’ in *Gatsby* is thus, besides being influenced by the story’s author, shaped by Nick. In other words, we see the females in the story through Nick’s eyes, and we are driven to judge them with his moral standards. Going deeper into his character will clarify the motivation behind Nick’s description the ‘New Woman’. On the first page of the novel, Nick describes himself as “inclined to reserve all judgements” because his father reminds him that “all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had” (Fitzgerald). On the same page, Nick says “Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point I don’t care what it’s founded on.” (Fitzgerald). According to Elizabeth Preston, this introduction “functions to establish the ethically superior qualities of our narrator (…) Nick plays the role of confidant with great success; his tolerance of a wide continuum of moral behaviour – from the “hard rock” to the “wet marshes” – establishes his role as moral guide” (146). The result of Fitzgerald’s establishment of Nick as an “embodiment of the proper moral vision” is that Nick’s experiences and judgements of other characters in the story are validated (Preston 146). Now it is clear that Nick’s descriptions in the story are established as legitimate to the reader, I will illustrate Nick’s view on the ‘New Woman’. Preston argues that the entire narrative in *Gatsby* inhabits a patriarchal tone (156). She explains this by stating that the women are objects in the life of men (156). Preston writes that “sexism remains consistent throughout *Gatsby*, in virtually all passages that deal with women” (158). She adds that “from Daisy to Jordan to Myrtle, (…) in both vision and voice, Nick, consistently, and in accord with Fitzgerald, reaffirms patriarchal ideology” (158). Nick’s patriarchal values become evident in the novel in his bias towards Gatsby. O’Rourke writes on Nick’s prejudice by stating that “Gatsby becomes his romantic hero by the end of the 1922 summer and is portrayed as such, sometimes to an embarrassing extent, throughout the course of Nick’s memoir” (58). On top of that, this bias becomes clear in his descriptions of different characters in the novel. Nick describes Gatsby as someone “who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn (1), “there was something gorgeous about him (1)”, and his smile “understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself (40). Nick only speaks about Gatsby in this praising way and in chapter eight he even compliments Gatsby, saying “They’re a rotten crowd (…) You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together” (126). Consequently, the reader, who trusts Nick’s judgements, perceives Daisy of lesser value than Gatsby. In addition to Nick’s prejudice towards Gatsby, this narrator proves to be sexist. Preston accordingly writes that “while the homodiegetic reporting tells us enough about Nick to charge him with chauvinism at best, the more autodiegetic moments in the narrative reveal him to be quite sexist” (157). This can be illustrated when Nick states that “dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply – I was casually sorry, and then I forgot” (Fitzgerald 49). Nick inhabits a patriarchal ideology that affects his portrayal of all female characters in the novel (Preston 158). The identification of Nick’s character as biased towards Gatsby and having traditionalist values is important because it adds to the explanation of the portrayal of the ‘New Woman’ in *The Great Gatsby*. All in all, the ‘New Woman’ in *The Great Gatsby* is shaped by not only its author, but also the story’s narrator. Fitzgerald created Nick so that the reader places its trust in his judgements. As a result, the reader’s image of the ‘New Woman’ in the story is affected by Nick’s prejudice towards Gatsby and his sexist, patriarchal values. *Gatsby*’s ‘New Woman’ thus lacks a modernist view, which I will include in my creative writing.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, one of the inevitable complications of a high-ranking, gold-hatted classic novel like *The Great Gatsby* is the ever-decreasing familiarity of the readers with the novel’s setting. As the novel is approaching its one-hundredth’s anniversary, the zeitgeist that this novel so famously inhabits becomes harder and harder to grasp. Readers rely on the novel’s author and narrator’s description where their own understanding of the era falls short. The novel, its author and narrator at least partially shaped the reader’s images of the roaring twenties and its coherent ‘New Woman’. This thesis set out to answer the question of how the ‘New Woman’ is portrayed in *The Great Gatsby*, and also examined the reasons behind this portrayal. In answering this question, I focussed on the decade’s major theme of American modernism and its clashing traditionalists and modernists. Fitzgerald’s version of the young female representative of the era, the ‘flapper’, was the one that “women imitated for more than four decades” (qtd. in Sandeson 143). The ‘flapper’ in *Gatsby* differed from the historical accounts of the period as it merely mirrored the traditional view on the ‘New Woman’. The ‘why’ behind this lack of representation is divided into two reasons. Firstly, *Gatsby*, asany literary work, is subject to its author’s conscious and subconscious attitudes towards the time in history that it embodies. Fitzgerald’s traditionalist’s fear of the woman and difficulties in his life shaped the negative portrayal of the ‘flapper’ in his famous novel. The ‘New Woman’ in the novel is thus not objective. Secondly, the ‘New Woman’ in *Gatsby* is seen through the eyes of narrator Nick, and his patriarchal values and bias towards Gatsby shaped her image. All in all, we should be reminded that the novel does not offer a historical accurate mirror of the decade and its ‘New Woman’. To help this questioning of our collective consciousness of the roaring 1920s and its ‘flappers’, my creative writing will include a modernist perspective of ‘New Woman’ Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. This inclusion of an additional perspective on the ‘New Woman’ adds to the historical accuracy of the original story.

6. Creative Writing  
  
Paragraph in *The Great Gatsby* preceding my creative writing (Fitzgerald 126-7)

Up in the city I tried for a while to list the quotations on an interminable amount of stock, then I fell asleep in my swivel-chair. Just before noon the phone woke me, and I started up with sweat breaking out on my forehead. It was Jordan Baker; she often called me up at this hour because the uncertainty of her own movements between hotels and clubs and private houses made her hard to find in any other way. Usually her voice came over the wire as something fresh and cool as if a divot from a green golf links had come sailing in at the office window but this morning it seemed harsh and dry. ‘I’ve left Daisy’s house,’ she said. ‘I’m at Hempstead and I’m going down to Southampton this afternoon.’

Probably it had been tactful to leave Daisy’s house, but the act annoyed me and her next remark made me rigid. ‘You weren’t so nice to me last night.’ ‘How could it have mattered then?’ Silence for a moment. Then: ‘However—I want to see you.’ ‘I want to see you, too.’ ‘Suppose I don’t go to Southampton, and come into town this afternoon?’ ‘No, I don’t think this afternoon.’ ~~‘Very well.’~~

My Creative Writing

‘Suppose I don’t go to Southampton, and come into town this afternoon?’ ‘No—I don’t think this afternoon.’ ‘Well,’ she paused for a moment ‘there is something I ought to tell you.’ ‘Can’t you just tell me now?’ I met Jordan in a busy café on Thirty-first Street, as it turned out “no,” she could not just tell me over the phone. Peering through a crowd of important-looking people, I saw Jordan sitting at a tea-table in the corner. She wore a golden dress that matched her hair and when I walked over to her I noticed that the dress revealed most of her slender back. When you looked at the room from a distance, all the different fabrics that people wore formed a many-colored disarray which suddenly made me feel like I was in a millionaire’s walk-in closet. Jordan and I shared a hasty smile. I sat down on a dining chair covered in emerald green velvet and glanced at the menu, which Jordan must have noticed as she quickly noted ‘I ordered you a cherry blossom tea’. I guessed this was the type of tea gathering where the actual tea was of minor significance. When I looked up from the menu I saw Jordan’s eyes staring gravely into mine, I never expected to see her like this unless I was watching her play in a final match of some important golf m

‘Now, don’t ask me what to do with this, but I know that Daisy would want you to know’.  
Before I could ask what Jordan meant she shoved a blank envelope across the table towards me. The rest of the tea gathering went by in a haze as the transaction of the envelope was evidently the main purpose of it all. I could not keep my mind from wondering what was inside. After a short conversation in which mundane items such as the weather, an incident by a drunken man at Gatsby’s latest party and the current stuck prices came up, Jordan and I left the café, our teas barely touched. The sun just reached its highest point in the sky and as I stepped outside, the sunlight reflected on the clean, white envelope in my hand, which made my fingers linger above the envelope’s back. The only thing stopping me from opening it on the middle of the street was a feeling that I might have to sit down for whatever was inside. The street was as busy as any day in this district, the people, the cars, the trams, all were moving at once, nothing stood still. A row of black, green and different shades of blue cars were making their way along the street, a grey Ford in front of me had its windows fully open and through the front window hung a slim, delicate looking arm with a smoking cigarette between the fingertips. After waiting for the cars to pass, I crossed the street and headed towards the train station where I sat down on a bench and found the letter inside the envelope.

*It all went by in the blink of an eye, Oh how I wish I hadn’t stepped into that damned car! But I guess now everything is clear, and there is no use in dwelling in the past, is there?*

*It is almost four o’clock and I am writing this in my room, my bags were already packed, only my destination just changed.  
  
I should not have stepped behind the wheel, but I was upset, you see, the whole scene at the Plaza, and the heat, the relentless heat, you know, it all took its toll on me and I figured driving would offer a nice distraction. Then there was that poor woman, I did not see her until it was already too late, but I can still hear her scream, that won’t go away, I hope it ever does. After that I heard nothing at all. I was in shock. My body handled on its own, my right foot immediately stepped on the break and the car came to a sudden stop. My body turned towards the door to step out of the car and help the poor woman but I felt a strong arm pull me back into my seat. When I turned around I saw Gatsby, his eyes full of fear, I could barely recognize him! I tried to get out of his grip but there was no way, he was far stronger than I could ever be. It seemed like he possessed this strength that he had been holding up for a very long time, and it all came out at that moment. He yelled at me and told me to start the car, I couldn’t, and he pushed me over, grabbed the wheel and sped away.*

*To tell you the truth, I don’t know what shocked me most, the accident, or seeing Gatsby this way, but I had a moment of clarity in which something in me realized that in that crash, multiple lives were taken.*

*I refuse to run from one immoral man to another.   
  
I’m sure that you will cope with it all, and I wish you the very best in doing so.  
  
Love.*

7. Exegesis

The goal of this piece of creative writing is to alter the representation of the ‘flapper’ of the roaring twenties within the original *Gatsby* into a more historically accurate one. As the above research has shown, the roaring twenties was a tumultuous decade with many very different major themes linked to it. For this reason, I decided to focus on a single theme within the roaring twenties; the transformation from the traditional woman into the ‘New Woman’. Fitzgerald and Nick’s discomfort with this ‘New Woman’ is mirrored in the novel’s poor characterization of female characters. Daisy, for example, is depicted as a spoiled, self-centred wife who relies on her husband for financial and personal safety and on top of that she is a remorseless killer. I wanted to include a modernist view of the ‘New Woman’ and thereby change the reader’s perception of the era’s ‘New Woman’ by changing the way that Daisy acts and the way that she is perceived by the narrator. In order to voice this new perspective, I decided to literally voice Daisy through a letter. Through this letter, the reader comes in direct contact with Daisy, one that is not subject to Nick’s opinion and thus provides a uniquely reliable insight into her thoughts and actions. In line with the aim of my creative writing I figured it would be a suitable starting point to set up the connection between Fitzgerald and my writing at a moment in the story where a female character replies to a male’s “No” (Fitzgerald 127). In *Gatsby*, Jordan replied to Nick by saying “Very well”, which I changed into an answer that eventually forces Nick to attend the tea gathering, despite his initial unwillingness. The story continues with a brief description of the café and Jordan. I tried to follow the style of Fitzgerald in my description of the sceneries in this short story as my background research has not found any misrepresentation in the book of the people or scenery in the roaring twenties. I decided not to change the appearance of Jordan, to show that the females of the ‘Jazz Age’ transformed in more ways than in just their appearance, and that a more inclusive representation does not necessarily imply a change in fashion or physical appearance. In Fitzgerald’s novel you can find the world in a high-bouncing lover, a green light and a yellow car, this world is east versus west and a dream and also the foul dust floating in it, but they all refer to the same roaring decade. This avid usage of symbolism by Fitzgerald affected my choice of seemingly ordinary items in my creative writing. Firstly, the tea that Jordan ordered for Nick, cherry blossom tea, has a deeper meaning. Cherry blossom represents the fragility of life and new beginnings. The tea thus symbolizes the end of Gatsby’s and new beginning of Daisy’s life that Nick is soon to find out more about. The next use of symbolism in the colour of Jordan’s dress. Fitzgerald uses the colour gold as a symbol for money and the colour is famously used to describe Daisy, “the golden girl” (98). By dressing Jordan in gold, I wanted to take the focus off Daisy as the only golden girl, to prove that much of the opinion on Daisy’s character is heavenly influenced by Gatsby’s endlessly perfect image of Daisy. In chapter five, Nick describes this idealization of Daisy as follows “There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams - not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart” (79). As everything gains meaning in relation to each other, Daisy becomes less golden by making Jordan golden. This is how opposites work, they can only exist in relation to the other. For example, without the idea of ‘cold’ there would be no ‘hot’, without our idea of ‘darkness’, there would be no ‘light’, as without the opposite it would just be the ‘norm’. To mimic a genuine letter, I decided to use a lot of comma’s and full stops in Daisy’s text. Additionally, I looked at the quotes of Daisy in *Gatsby* and tried to incorporate her manner of speaking and usage of words. In the novel, Daisy uses a lot of indefinite pronouns in her descriptions. In the first chapter she states; “I’m pretty cynical about everything”, “You see I think everything’s terrible anyhow” and “Everybody thinks so – the most advanced people. And I *know*. I’ve been everywhere and seen everything and done everything” (Fitzgerald 16). In the letter I imitated her vague way of describing in the sentence “I’m sure that you will cope with it all”. In the novel, Daisy stated “I can’t help what’s past”, the letter carries this same sentiment as she wrote “there is no use in dwelling in the past, is there?” (Fitzgerald 108). The content of the letter proves the reader with insights that contradict Gatsby’s description of the accident earlier in chapter seven, showing to the reader the possibility of Gatsby as an imperfect, immoral man who is capable of aggressive behaviour and turns out to be a liar. During the accident Gatsby found his dream endangered and acted out of the fear to lose everything that took so many years to build. In the story that my creative writing adds, Daisy left all men in her life to pursue her own dreams and enjoy freedom. She left a note for Jordan who passed it through to Nick because she was the link between Gatsby and Daisy and in a way, this story was caused by her and that is why she felt guilty. In my creative writing, ‘New Woman’ Daisy is freed from the patriarchal system; she leaves both Gatsby and Tom in her interest for a better life.

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