

Representation of Major Female Characters as the Victim of Patriarchal Supremacy in F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby'

Sumargi Humagain, PhD¹

Lecturer of English
Makawanpur Multiple Campus, Hetauda

Corresponding Author

Sumargi Humagain

Email: tsumargi10s@gmail.com

To Cite this article: Humagain, S. (2026). Representation of major female characters as the victim of patriarchal supremacy in F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby'. *International Research Journal of MMC*, 7(3), 243-250. <https://doi.org/10.3126/irjmmc.v7i3.97206>

Submitted: 28 May 2026

Accepted: 10 June 2026

Published: 15 July 2026

Abstract

This study explores the position of the Female Characters in the patriarchal society of America in the 1920s through a subtle analysis of Francis Scott Fitzgerald's novel, "The Great Gatsby". The study primarily highlights major three female characters Daisy Buchanan, Myrtle Wilson and Jordan Baker, their status as the products of oppressive forces and objects rather than as thoughtful beings. The study is based on the qualitative research analysis and application of the feministic approach in order to interpret the aroused themes. The study thematically makes a rigorous and critical analysis of the novel's significant phrases and statements taken from the novel. Thematic analysis rivets on the secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles and critical books on 20th-century American literature. The theoretical framework is based on feminism which illuminates the female characters' leaning to marry well-off men and entangling them in morally wicked partners. The findings expose a shocking depiction of the women's entrapment, offering important insights into how the American Dream utilizes the women as the commodities. This study pinpoints the critical significance of questioning against the historical patriarchal prejudicial treatments and stresses on the need of a contemporary re-consideration of systemic gender biases.

Keywords: The Great Gatsby, female characters, feministic approach, patriarchal system

1. Introduction

The novel 'The Great Gatsby' (1925) relates the economic affluence of America subsequent to the First World War. The novel portrays the exuberant attitude, luxurious life style and ostentatious parties as the hallmarks of the American Society at that time. Susan Parr (1981) states that Americans have been chasing an inaccessible dream and considering America as the promised land of wealth and success by arguing that "the vision of America as a New Eden was always and only an illusion" (p. 673). Joyce Rowe (1988) comments the plot as "the most historically self-conscious consideration of American idealism and the social cost of its attempt to subdue the facts of history to the faith of myth" (p. 100). Ross Posnock (1984) studies the novel through the lens of the Marxist perspective which

disapproves of the materialism of the-then society and notes that the narrator states “the novel’s account of man’s relation to society ... profoundly agrees with Marx’s great discovery that it is social rather than individual consciousness that determines man’s existence” (p. 202). The critic, Jerome Mandel (1988) views that the author applied the fundamentals of medieval romance in shaping the novel. He comments, “We may never know the extent to which Fitzgerald conceived *The Great Gatsby* – either consciously or unconsciously – as the myth of America retold as medieval romance” (p. 555). Peter Slater (1973) criticizes the writer exposes the difference of ethnic communities in the American culture through the application of the racist attitudes, arguing “a heightened awareness of ethnic differences does constitute a significant element in the book” (p. 53).

Fitzgerald presents an actual depiction of the masculine dealing of women in the capitalist American society of the 1920s that worshipped money and material prosperity over spirituality. Rena Sanderson (2001) comments on Fitzgerald’s attitude towards the women: “In Fitzgerald’s mind, 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” (p. 143). Fitzgerald reflects the novel values that the American society attained in the 1920s and the impact of these assumptions upon the life of the women.

Feminists criticize the ill treatment of women to maintain patriarchal power and emphasize that women should receive equal opportunities to their male counterparts. This study reads Fitzgerald’s novel from a feminist perspective and examines the image of women as victims who are treated as objects in a patriarchal society. Many feminists consider the male writers as misogynists who make an effort to carry on the ill-treatment and subjugation of women through their writings. These feminists find women as susceptible to victimization in a patriarchal society that denies women their rights and treats them as inferior to men. Raymond Pfeiffer (1985) states, “I accept the charge widely made by feminist writers that there is a pervasive and significant sense in which women are oppressed in most societies throughout the world” (p. 217). The oppression of women aroused the confrontation of feminists who began to advocate that women should act reciprocally to confront the norms of patriarchy and perpetual abuses of women. The portrayal of women as victims suggests “a view of the self as a primarily passive object or product of constraining forces, conditions, and motivations” (Chang, 1989, p. 536). Norma Proffitt (1996) refers to the passivity and powerlessness of women in patriarchal society that presents “women not only as passive objects of abuse but as downtrodden and devoid of any ability to act on their own behalf” (p. 26). This implies that women can be viewed as a product of a hostile environment and unjust forces that victimize and oppress them.

The study applies the Marxist feminist approach to depict the pitiable condition of the female characters who become the victim of the patriarchal commodity in the American society of 1920s mainly focusing on the major three characters- Daisy Buchanan, Myrtle Wilson and Jordon Baker.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study applies a qualitative textual analysis research design to thoroughly scrutinize the issues of gender oppression within the narrative framework. The primary data for this research consists of purposively sampled precise phrases, clauses, and sentences taken from the text of Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. This textual proof presents the clear dynamics of patriarchal subjugation. The study employs a thorough data analysis method including thematic analysis and critical analysis. This approach pinpoints evaluation of persistent patterns of marginalization, resilience, and male dominance. This primary data is corroborated by diverse sources of secondary data, including peer-reviewed

journal articles, academic theses, and critical books focusing on 20th-century American literature and gender relations.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the feminist theory specifically Marxist feminist perspectives, which serves as an investigative lens to scrutinize the domineering misery undergone by women within the novel's socio-economic landscape. Through this theoretical framework, the study studies how characters like Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson function as victims of the rigid ideologies and behavioral expectations established by a patriarchal society. On the contrary, Tom Buchanan is analyzed as the primary agent of this structural subjugation, whose frequent authoritative acts demonstrate overriding patriarchal supremacy. In addition, the theory provides a framework to examine Jordan Baker as a modern female figure who actively exercises within these restraints to achieve a degree of autonomy, thereby redeeming herself from total suppression. Eventually, incorporation of these methodologies emphasizes the unjust exercise of male dominance and the deeply entrenched disparaging treatments intended for the female subjects.

3. Analysis of the Position of the Female Characters

Daisy Buchanan

Fitzgerald presents Daisy an affluent and aristocratic woman but stands as the victim of the moral downfall and belligerence of the upper-class society. Daisy prefers wealth to spiritual standard. So, she marries to the blinkered and brutal Tom Buchanan. The Buchanans live in a luxurious and fashionable palace in the East Egg which is regarded as a part of the town with natives of inherited possessions. The narrator, Nick Carraway, illustrates the castle of the Buchanans as a “Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 4). Daisy assumes that success and pleasure can be achieved through her marriage to a financially prosperous man, so she decides to live a conjugal life with the wealthy Tom. Nick overtly refers to the purposelessness of Daisy’s life and her reliance on marriage to forward her life:

Something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand. That force took shape in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan. There was a wholesome bulkiness about his person and his position, and Daisy was flattered. Doubtless there was a certain struggle and a certain relief (Fitzgerald, 2002, p.94).

It turns out to be correct to scrutinize Daisy as a superficial woman for choosing to marry Tom for wealth and social position. This fact makes it clear that marriage has become an option to assure steadiness in the conjugal life with spouses. Susan Parr (1981) points out, “Daisy subscribes to the version of the dream that applies to women, that marriage to a successful man is not the symbol of success but success itself” (p. 667). This reality indicates that Daisy decides to marry a wealthy man because she no longer wants to lose her social status. Even though Daisy gains economic protection and maintains her social status as an aristocratic woman, she becomes the victim of the callousness and unfaithfulness of Tom, as he involves in the extra-marital affairs. Daisy describes the cruelty of Tom by showing her bruised finger to her cousin Nick: “That’s what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great big hulking physical specimen of a –” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 8). Though Tom does not harm Daisy physically through the rest of the novel, this proves that he gets ready to use his physical power outrageously in front of others. This reality shows the obdurate nature of Tom that he never makes an apology to Daisy and feels regretful after hurting her knuckle.

The narrative emphasizes the moral decay of the American patriarchal society in the 1920s that denies women their humanity and treats them as commodities. Daisy tries to seduce her suitors through her physical beauty “was only to make people lean toward her” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 6). She confesses her submissive role in society by pulling the notice of men to her “low, thrilling voice” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 6), rather than her expressions and thoughts. Patriarchal society seems to represent women as sexual means regardless of their intellectual assets. They also get deprived of the same opportunities as their male company. Easton (2012) states, “female identity has been seen as inherently bodily and biological (and this view has been criticized as ‘essentialist’), as ideologically constructed, or as socially performed” (p. 101). It justifies that the appealing qualities of Daisy’s expression is a result of the awareness that her external beauty cannot be detachable from her female characteristics.

Daisy attacks on her society that is ruled by patriarchy and points out the reality after giving birth to new baby girl “I hope she’ll be a fool – that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 11). Daisy is conscious of the constrained choice and scope for women in her patriarchal society and expects her daughter to succeed. She says that her child must play the role of “a beautiful little fool,” as she is undergoing the same with Tom. The information signifies that Daisy is not contented and points other issue in her marital life, mainly due to the several affairs of Tom and his betrayal. Daisy understands that the patriarchal society undervalues the women and their wisdom. Hence, Daisy expects her daughter alike her to depend on her material beauty rather than intellectual one to achieve success. In fact, Daisy does not regard her daughter as a human being, but rather as a pretty object, presenting her to the party guests as the showcase. After the daughter says to her mother, “I got dressed before luncheon” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 72), Daisy replies in an eager way, “That’s because your mother wanted to show you off” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 72). Fitzgerald criticizes the patriarchal ideology to treat the women as possession of well-to-do men. Judith Fetterley (1978) points out that the women are “symbolic of the power of moneyed men” (p. 83), and this could be seen in the novel as the women importance only desire for material affluence rather than intellectuality. Likewise, Lois Tyson (1994) argues that women are dealt as “commodities in a male-dominated market” (p. 50) as well as passive victims of patriarchy. Fitzgerald reflects the moral wretchedness of the patriarchy bound by no ethics and the new values that American society achieved after the First World War.

Tom and Gatsby try their level best to possess and make an impression on Daisy through their showy wealth, disregarding the emotions of Daisy as a human being. The profligate wedding of Daisy can be tagged as:

In June she married Tom Buchanan of Chicago with more splendor and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before. He came down with a hundred people in four private cars and hired a whole floor of the Seelbach Hotel, and the day before the wedding he gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 47).

Daisy seems to be encircled by men who try to uphold the patriarchal authority and the conventional gender roles. Veronica Makowsky (2011) suggests to America of the 1920s as a society dominated by the rules of patriarchy as she states, “autonomy was not really a practicable choice for an upper-class young woman of the 1920s” (p. 29). That’s why Daisy plays the part of a thoughtless woman and feels that secured to start the marital lifewith a well-off man.

Daisy becomes the victim of mal-treatment, insult and dishonor, moreover as an object because of her ignorance to the ethics and moral principles which are needed to direct

any relationship. Jerome Mandel (1988) regards love of Gatsby to Daisy as “ideal and spiritual” (p. 548). However, Gatsby does not justify himself better than the morally corrupt Tom through his steady attempts to objectify Daisy. Gatsby makes an effort to amaze Daisy by buying a mansion across a bay from her house and continuously organizing the highly extravagant parties in order to hope that she will “wander into one of his parties, some night” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 49). Gatsby feels triumphant when he invites Daisy to visit his mansion. She observes his closet full of costly shirts and starts crying bitterly, “suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily. ‘They’re such beautiful shirts,’ she sobbed, her voice muffled in thick folds. ‘It makes me sad because I’ve never seen such – such beautiful shirts before’” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 57). The poignant response of Daisy gets Gatsby to feel confident and victorious so that he can regain the lost love, Daisy through his excessive possessions. Gatsby begs Daisy to get rid of her love to Tom. Due to his perseverance, Daisy cries out to him, “Oh, you want too much” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 82). This suggests that Gatsby views Daisy as an inaccessible dream and a perfect example of beauty and affluence.

Regarding the role and attitude of the male characters in this novel, many feminists blame the patriarch men of underestimating the women and tagging them as inferior ones to expand their social status. Pfeiffer (1985) points out, “there have no doubt been some men who have consciously and actively sought to oppress women, and some who have done so in order to promote their own social positions” (p. 217). Donaldson (2012) indicates, “If the [man] could win the heart of the girl – especially the golden girl over whom hung an aura of money, beauty, and social position – surely that meant that he had arrived, that he belonged” (p. 43). Gatsby tries his level best to gather possessions to regain Daisy as he is aware that Daisy only prioritizes material wealth. So, he has got tremendous success in standing as a well-off person. Now, makes sure that his dream could be absolute with endearing Daisy. After the long passage of time, Gatsby appears as the nouveau riche. Tom patronizes Gatsby pointing to the social class and he rebukes him, “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 81), and hence shatters the mission of his rival. Both, Tom and Gatsby engage in the contention to win the heart of Daisy considering that Daisy yields to the material possessions.

Myrtle Wilson

The study presents that Tom deceives a lower-class woman, Myrtle Wilson to exploit her as he wishes. She succumbs to make her hi-fi life through the affair with Tom. The reality exhibits an example of the ruthlessness of the upper-class people and their maltreatment upon the poor. Tom pays no clue of veneration to Myrtle and regards her as a human being. Tom uses her merely for the physical needs like a means to complete his desires. Tom continuously belittles Myrtle and misbehaves her in front of the public. He strikes on her nose when Myrtle insists on asking his wife’s name at the boisterous party at their New York apartment. The aggression of Tom against Myrtle is regarded as follows, “Making a short deft movement Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor, and women’s voices scolding, and high over the confusion a long-broken wail of pain” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 23). Tom belittles the identity of the poor so that he feels shameful of having an affair with a working-class woman and maims Myrtle for daring to inquire him with Daisy’s name. So, he exploits cruelty to hinder her. Adam Meehan (2014) states Tom as “a willful and domineering man who gets what he wants with money and muscles” (p. 56). An underprivileged and powerless woman, Myrtle does not seem to have the power to object the abuse of Tom to her. Yet, the upper-class woman, Daisy objects to Tom through reiterating the word “hulking” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 8). This case reveals her bravery and self-respect. This situation justifies that Tom wants to show himself as the greater than the lower-class people.

Tom's deception makes innocent, Myrtle to trust that Tom will eventually separate from Daisy and liberate her from the miserable life with Wilson. She timidly believes in the made-up story of Tom about the improbable fact to split up with Daisy because "she's a Catholic" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 21). Tom is aware that the working-class woman will not create any threat to him and defame his social status. So, he does not feel ashamed to have cohabitation with the lower-class mistresses. He feels that they are not worthy of his admiration because they are socially inferior to him. Norma Profit (1996) remarks that "women's status as victims appears as essentially unchallengeable" (p. 26) due to the constant abuse and objectification of women. All the nature justifies that Tom wants to hold on with patriarchy through manipulating lower-class women in order to consume them as he desires.

The novel presents Myrtle as the prey who stands in dilemma between two aggressive classes – the upper one by Tom and the lower one by Wilson. Wilson restricts his wife in her room after discovering that she has an extra marital affair with another man. Wilson regards his wife as a possession and uses the right to exercise power over her unmindful of understanding humanity. "I have gotten my wife locked in up there," explained Wilson calmly. "She's going to stay there till the day after tomorrow, and then we're going to move away" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 85). Feminists attack the sadist men for oppressing the women because they want to hold on their powerful role in society. Lenora Ucko proves that ill-treated women "feel powerless against their mates' aggression and physical power and experience psychological defeat" (1991, p. 414). Myrtle protests her husband and dares to escape from the physical brutality of Wilson through rushing out in the road confusing Gatsby's yellow car for Tom's and if the car will stop for her. The narrator describes the vicious and pitiable death of Myrtle as follows, "Myrtle Wilson, her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick dark blood with the dust" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 86). Fitzgerald describes Myrtle as a prey of the fierce patriarchal system that undervalues women and seems to draw the sympathy of the readers to the heartrending destiny of a lower-class woman like Myrtle who loses her life looking for a better life. "In Fitzgerald's novel, women remain prisoners of patriarchy . . . commodities to be possessed and discarded by brutish louts" (Pelzer, 2003, p. 127). The novel represents the wretchedness of the lower-class women's status through the steady dominance of Tom over Myrtle.

Jordan Baker

The novel represents Jordan Baker as another female prey in Fitzgerald's narrative and a quintessence of the Jazz Age, an age in which women were in the quest of success through a life of cheerfulness. Fitzgerald represents Jordan as an expert golfer and an object of Nick's love, who tries to tempt men through her physical presence. The depiction of Jordan as untruthful and unethical character highlights the patriarchal philosophy that did not consider women seriously in 1920s America. Nick describes Jordan an "incurably dishonest" and that she "instinctively avoided clever shrewd men" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 36) after hearing a gossip about her deceiving in a golf tournament at Westchester. He disregards the rumor about Jordan's lack of uprightness with the sexist statement, "dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 36). This statement reflects Nick's prejudice as he makes out women as immature. Hence, they should not be held reliable and responsible for their actions.

The study presents deception and dishonesty of Jordan, whereas Nick professes that he represents the voice of honesty and moral awareness. Nick supposes himself as "one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 37). Nick represents himself as critical in his view of women. This fact shows him not much special from the corrupt patriarchal world close to him. "It is tempting to defend Jordan by simply pointing out that

Nick, fearing commitment, may be looking for a rationale for his abrupt jilting of Jordan at the end of the novel” (Makowsky, 2011, p. 32). This situation justifies the wish of Nick to present Jordan as unfair could be a way not to admit her fondness and trust in a liaison with her. Nick overlooks the steady appeal of Jordan for commitment and steadiness. So, he breaks up her because he thinks that she does not act as trustworthy. Jordan accuses Nick of ruining the relationship with her and criticizes him as irresponsible, “nevertheless you did throw me over ... you threw me over on the telephone. I do not care about you now, but it was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 111). Nick represents the unfairness of the patriarchal system that refuses to recognize the full kindness and humanity for women.

4. Conclusion

The study centers on a factual depiction of suppression and maltreatment of women in America in 1920s following to the First World War. The study focuses unfairness and violence of the patriarchal system that deems women as possessions; treats them as low-grade and abuses them as the means to meet their desires. Female characters succumb themselves to dishonest and nasty men because they make sure that delight and security can be attained through their relationships with economically well-to-do men. The female characters endeavor to face up to the society which disregards to treat them as rational beings. Similarly, their identities are now away from their material beauty that they use for attracting affluent men. The study substantiates that the male characters assume women as the objects of fulfilling their desire and continuously dominate them through prosperity and physical strength. The novel depicts the moral dishonesty and wickedness of patriarchy that belittles women’s intellectuality to keep up the female gender roles. The major female characters have tried their best to be conscious of the patriarchal violence; fight for the aggression to some extent but appear as the feeble women to empower themselves. The future research could effectively scrutinize how women in 1920s stories underwent the biased unfair treatment because of their race, money, or gender, and how new stories today demonstrate the women who are stronger and more autonomous.

References

1. Chang, D. B. (1989). An abused spouse's self-saving process: A theory of identity transformation. *Sociological Perspectives*, 32(4), 535–550.
2. Donaldson, S. (2012). *Fool for love: F. Scott Fitzgerald*. University of Minnesota Press.
3. Easton, M. (2012). Feminism. *Studies in Iconography*, 33, 99–112.
4. Fetterley, J. (1978). *The resisting reader*. Indiana University Press.
5. Fitzgerald, F. S. (2002). *The great Gatsby*. York Press.
6. Makowsky, V. (2011). Bad driving: Jordan's tantalizing story in *The Great Gatsby*. *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, 9, 28–40.
7. Mandel, J. (1988). The grotesque rose: Medieval romance and *The Great Gatsby*. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 34(4), 541–558.
8. Meehan, A. (2014). Repetition, race, and desire in *The Great Gatsby*. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 37(2), 76–91.
9. Parr, S. R. (1981). Individual responsibility in *The Great Gatsby*. *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 57(4), 662–680.
10. Pelzer, L. C. (2003). Beautiful fools and hulking brutes: F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925). *Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender*, 127–129.
11. Pfeiffer, R. S. (1985). The responsibility of men for the oppression of women. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 2(2), 217–229.

12. Posnock, R. (1984). A new world material without being real: Fitzgerald's critique of capitalism in *The Great Gatsby*. In S. Donaldson (Ed.), *Critical essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby* (pp. 201–213). G. K. Hall.
13. Profitt, N. J. (1996). "Battered women" as "victims" and "survivors": Creating space for resistance. *Canadian Social Work Review/Revue Canadienne de Service Social*, 23–38.
14. Rowe, J. A. (1988). *Equivocal endings in classic American novels: The Scarlet Letter; Adventures of Huckleberry Finn; The Ambassadors; The Great Gatsby*. Cambridge University Press.
15. Sanderson, R. (2002). Women in Fitzgerald's fiction. In R. Prigozy (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald* (pp. 143–163). Cambridge University Press.
16. Slater, P. G. (1973). Ethnicity in *The Great Gatsby*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 19(1), 53–62.
17. Tyson, L. (1994). *Psychological politics of the American dream: The commodification of subjectivity in twentieth-century American literature*. Ohio State University Press.
18. Ucko, L. G. (1991). Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Confronting wife abuse through folk stories. *Social Work*, 36(5), 414–419.