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### The Great Gatsby, Gender, and Masculine Anxiety

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*The Great Gatsby*, Gender, and Masculine Anxiety

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Early in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tom Buchanan proclaims that “civilization’s going to pieces” (Fitzgerald 12). He bases this belief on a book he read which argued that the Nordic race is responsible for civilization and that, if not careful, will be “utterly submerged” by other races (Fitzgerald 13). Tom’s fears are representative of a larger cultural fear present in the 1920s. Nativism on the part of white Americans was prominent in this time period. It was caused by fears of overseas immigration and the migration of blacks from the South to Northern cities (Currell 23). Tom's expression of his fear of Nordic civilization being “submerged” clearly ties into these nativist beliefs and provides a framework for interesting discussions regarding Fitzgerald’s depiction of race and immigration. However, in examining both the specific actions of Tom, as well as their context throughout the novel, one finds further layers to his expression of fear. There is an underlying fear of the loss, not just of white civilization, but of patriarchal civilization. The 1920s saw distinct changes in the social and cultural impact of women in American society. New modes of behavior resulted in greater levels of freedom for young women. At the same time, industrialization and monopoly capitalism resulted in changing norms regarding the expression of masculinity. These factors all accumulated into a fear on the part of white men in American society. Thus, by being written during this time, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates masculine anxiety in a time of changing cultural norms that threaten a traditional society.

### **Historical Context and “Masculine Crisis”:**

To understand that way in which *The Great Gatsby* responds to its time, the novel must first be situated in its historic context. Paul V. Murphy begins his book, *The New Era: American Thought and Culture in the 1920s*, by saying that, “In the 1920s, Americans talked of their times as “modern,” which is to say, fundamentally different, in pace and texture, from what went

before— a new era” (Murphy 1). Many things went into the creation of this new “modern” era. Technological and industrial revolutions transformed both the home and the workplace (Murphy 1). These physical changes heralded changes in traditional social norms and customs as a new metropolitan value system emerged (Murphy 2-3). One of the social norms wrapped up in this changing dynamic were those of gender.

After years of campaigning for enfranchisement, women gained the right to vote in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Because of this enfranchisement, women were at a new height of political and cultural strength. The path to this cultural power was often predicated on the use of the politics of domesticity that argued for female enfranchisement based on their domestic and maternal instincts. Nevertheless, this was a time of great change regarding the role of women in American society (Murphy 24-5).

During the 1920s, there was a large-scale rejection of the Victorian norms for female behavior. Young women began to express themselves in more liberated ways through the cultivation of the “flapper” identity. This often involved participating in activities such as smoking and drinking as well as maintaining a degree of sexual freedom. Even in the domestic sphere women exerted a larger degree of power, particularly due to the advent of mass consumerism. The new consumer society and its ties to female dress and domestic habits created a culture where, “women controlled the nation’s pocketbooks” (Murphy 29). This equation of femininity with mass consumerism resulted in a backlash from those intent on preserving American culture. Many blamed feminist ideology for the breakdown of family values. Others saw the participation of women in American culture as crippling to its cultural value (Currell 28). Thus, despite greater social liberation for women in the 1920s, they were still dependent on a patriarchal structure that blamed them for the wrongs of American society.

Moreover, in his article, “F. Scott Fitzgerald, Modernist Studies, and the Fin-de-Siècle Crisis in Masculinity,” Greg Forter discusses the work of gender scholars that define the time period of 1890 to 1920 as significant in the emergence of modern gender norms. While *The Great Gatsby* was not published within this timeframe, it is a direct product of a writer whose opinion on gender was developed within this earlier time period. In fact, the consequences of these ideas were prevalent when *The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925. Forter references the scholars E. Anthony Rotundo and Michael Kimmel who argue that during the time period of 1890 to 1920 “masculinity was in crisis” (Forter, “F. Scott...” 296). The impetus for this was the introduction of a vigorous and industrial capitalist marketplace. In order to succeed and thus achieve manliness, one had to exhibit a level of masculine dominance. However, this self-made ideology became harder and harder to achieve as monopoly capitalism often made men dependents of a larger bureaucratic institution rather than the captains of their own ship. This dependence became associated with femininity and emasculation (Forter, “F. Scott...” 297). Thus, masculinity came to be defined more and more in opposition to femininity (Forter, “F. Scott...” 298) This new masculinity divorced itself from the softer virtues of compassion and emotional sensitivity that were previously a component of the male identity (Forter, “F. Scott...” 297). Instead, masculinity became associated exclusively with aggression and physical strength. This was an attempt to evoke a secure reality of manhood in the face of economic and social changes that threatened masculinity (Forter, “F. Scott...” 298). Thus, both male and female norms came into question before and during the time of the writing of *The Great Gatsby*, and this context affects the plot of the novel.

### **Tom as an Expression of Masculine Anxiety:**

Embedded within the first dinner party in *The Great Gatsby*, where Tom proclaims his racism and xenophobia, is the reality of Daisy's dependence on a society that limits her agency and Tom's expression of masculine crisis. After Tom conveys his "scientific" views, Daisy whispers under her breath, "We've got to beat them down" (Fitzgerald 13). This seems to mock Tom's opinion on what needs to be done to contain the ambition of other races. However, the fact that Daisy whispers this comment and at the same time is "winking ferociously toward the sun" speaks to an underlying gender conflict within this conversation about race and immigration (Fitzgerald 13). Daisy's winking whisper defines her as someone who understands the reason for Tom's violent desire to "beat down" other races. As a woman who lives in a patriarchal society, Daisy understands what it is like to be part of a group that is abused by those in power. While her oppression is minimal compared to that of people of color and other oppressed groups, Daisy is nevertheless trapped in a society that restricts her.

Even so, during the dinner party exchange Daisy asserts a level of agency in the proceedings. The previous whispered remark is an example of Daisy forcing her voice into the conversation. Furthermore, after Tom first makes his proclamation about the decline of civilization, Daisy talks about him to Nick in a condescending manner. She says, "Tom's getting very profound...He reads deep books with long words in them" (Fitzgerald 13). Daisy is not directly commenting on the value of Tom's racist arguments. In fact, it may be easy to argue that Daisy would agree with his views, being a recipient of its privileges. However, Daisy recognizes Tom's need to prove himself to be knowledgeable and superior to those around him. She understands the anxieties Tom is exhibiting as well as the part he is attempting to play. Daisy's remark is her way of not letting him completely get away with it. Tom becomes characterized by Daisy as a brutish man attempting to satisfy himself about his own value in the face of perceived

threats. Her condescending interjections display a level of agency that proves her to be able to recognize Tom's fear regarding the lasting power of his white, masculine authority.

Furthermore, right before Tom interjects with his racist remarks, Nick says to Daisy, "You make me feel uncivilized" (Fitzgerald 12). Tom's exclamation is first incited by his reaction to the word "civilized." It brings to mind the book he just read by "this man Goddard" that exposed the dangers of other races submerging Nordic civilization. But when looked at more deeply, it can be revealed that the first instance of Tom's expression of these ideas is directly tied to Daisy. It is after Nick characterizes Daisy as civilized by making light of his own lack of civility that Tom feels the need to interject. This demonstrates the way in which Tom's beliefs about the fall of civilization also rest on ideas regarding gender. Tom has a problem with Nick's characterization of Daisy as civilized because he believes in the school of thought that sees femininity as a reason for cultural decline (Currell 28-9). In this instance Tom becomes an example of the gendered anxiety of 1920s America and its fears of the feminization and devaluing of American culture. Thus, he finds Nick's characterization of Daisy as a paragon of American civilization alarming and negates this by pointing to the decline of civilization.

Furthermore, in chapter two Nick attends a house party at Tom and Myrtle's New York apartment. Here Tom's reactionary fears are expressed more violently. Near the end of the party Tom and Myrtle argue over whether Myrtle can speak of Daisy. Myrtle shouts "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy! [...] I'll say it whenever I want to!" (Fitzgerald 37) which results in Tom hitting her in the face and breaking her nose. In this moment Myrtle attempts to assert a level of power over Tom, which he sees as threatening. In order to maintain his own dominance, he uses physical force to put Myrtle back in her place. This demonstrates the way in which Tom's masculine anxiety is not just represented through his expressions, but through his acts of physical dominance.

### **Masculinity, White Supremacy, and Cultural Decline:**

As demonstrated by his appreciation of Goddard's book, Tom's definition of civilization is one based on white supremacy, but this white supremacy also has gendered undertones. In "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Modernist Studies, and the Fin-de-Siècle Crisis in Masculinity," Greg Forter references another scholar, Gail Bederman. Bederman sees the identity of manhood as something that is actively shaped by individuals. She argues that by 1900, masculinity was being redefined in relation to ideas of white supremacy. One way this was done was by separating the manhood of whites from those of "lesser races" by emphasizing the domineering cultural and technological advancements of white men (Forter, "F. Scott" 299). This is exactly the kind of idea Tom expresses at the dinner party Nick attends. In speaking of the Nordic race to which he self-identifies, Tom says, "we've produced all the things that go to make civilization" (Fitzgerald 13). By expressing himself in such a manner Tom not only is making a statement founded on racism, but one founded on a rigid idea of masculinity. In including himself as a member of the Nordic race and distinguishing his race's accomplishments from that of "other races," Tom is also expressing his own self-identification with a vigorous and dominating masculinity. The fact that he feels like he needs to defend the Nordic race's achievements thus also relies on the assumption that Tom expresses anxieties about the power of male dominance.

Moreover, in a chapter from the book *A Portrait of the Lady in Modern American Literature: Poor Little Rich Girl*, titled "Submerging the 'Other Races': A Close Reading of Race, Class, and Gender in *The Great Gatsby*," Billy LoRusso argues that the "other races" Tom fears do not just imply a racial fear, but also a fear of womanhood and the lower classes. These groups are threats to the "dominant, patriarchal, white male" traditional social hierarchy and Tom fears that the dominant group he is a part of will be oppressed by these groups. (LoRusso,



108). LoRusso argues that because of the vagueness of Tom's reference to "other races" in his dinner party rant, it can be inferred that he fears many "races" including, "the black person, the woman, and the lower-class person" (LoRusso, 109). LoRusso also examines the initial dinner party as a site of the expression of Tom's anxieties. He points to Daisy's interjections and whispered remarks as usurping Tom's authority. He also brings Jordan into the argument, noticing how Tom shifts in his chair when she speaks, as if to take attention away from her and reassert his dominance over the conversation (LoRusso, 110). LoRusso even argues that when Daisy says, "We've got to beat them down," she could be talking to Jordan in an attempt to slyly express the desire for women to "beat down" men (LoRusso, 11). Thus, LoRusso's article provides a reading of the text that aligns with my argument. By focusing on the fears expressed by Tom, LoRusso argues that womanhood can be seen as the producer of male anxiety, as expressed through Tom Buchanan.

In chapter two of *The Great Gatsby* there exist more instances of Tom's gendered anxieties as it relates to race. In this chapter, Nick accompanies Tom and his mistress Myrtle into the city. On their way they come across a man selling, "puppies of an indeterminate breed" (Fitzgerald 27). Myrtle expresses a deep wish to have a puppy for herself and Tom purchases one for her. Myrtle asks the animal's gender, and the seller identifies it as a "boy." However, Tom quickly interjects with, "it's a bitch" (Fitzgerald 28). Tom automatically identifies the dog as female in a displeased and unpleasant manner. The uncertain breed of the dog seems to cause Tom anxiety. This anxiety can be tied to the threat of immigration and racial intermixing present in the 1920s. As previously expressed, Tom harbors xenophobic and racist opinions. However, the fact that Tom immediately connects the mixed breed of the dog to femininity is telling. It is another example of the way in which Tom exemplifies masculine anxiety regarding the

feminization and cultural decline of America. The dog's "indeterminate breed" becomes a symbol of the threats of racial mixing to the Nordic civilization Tom prizes and thus are coded feminine. Tom's anxiety over the threat to white civilization finds expression through his misogyny. Tom prizes the purity of aggressive masculinity over the threat of racial mixing and femininity and thus expresses anxiety over the vitality of his ideal civilization.

The most obvious reemergence of Tom's fear of civilization's decline comes in the explosive hotel fight scene. In chapter seven the odd group of Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Jordan, and Nick all drive to a hotel in the city on the hottest day of the year. In the tension filled room Tom begins to question Gatsby's intentions and truthfulness. This line of questioning eventually erupts into a fight that centers Tom and Gatsby in a battle over the ownership of Daisy. After calling Gatsby out on his affair with Daisy, Tom again relies upon evoking fear of cultural loss. He says, "people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white" (Fitzgerald 130). The "family values" Tom refers to is obviously a family structure of patriarchal dominance. It is Daisy who is usurping Tom's dominance over his family unit by having an affair with Gatsby. But Tom goes further to connect this subversion of norms by Daisy into a racial fear, associating Daisy and Gatsby's relationship with an interracial one. Here is another instance of masculine dominance being connected to white supremacy. Tom's male dominance is threatened by Daisy and Gatsby in this instance and thus he equates this subversion of gender norms to fears of racial threats to civilization. Nick even narrates that Tom stood alone, "on the last barrier of civilization" (Fitzgerald 130). Furthermore, Jordan's murmured response to Tom's outrage also hints at the underlying gendered quality to Tom's fears. She says, "We're all white here," alluding to the fact that Tom's equation of the situation before him to a racial concern is not a

rational assumption. Rather, it becomes a mask for Tom's true concern at the moment, Daisy's emasculation of him through her affair.

### **The Masculine Dichotomy of Tom and Gatsby:**

The masculine gender dynamic of the hotel scene is demonstrated through Frances Kerr's article, "'Half Feminine': Modernism and the Politics of Emotion in *The Great Gatsby*." In writing of Tom's reaction to Gatsby, Kerr says that, "A powerful man maintains his social position by denying his own emotional interior while penetrating the emotional secrets of other men. To lose control of one's woman or one's inner emotions in the presence of others is to risk losing one's masculinity" (Kerr 420). In the hotel scene, Tom's reaction to Gatsby penetrates so far as to make the latter lose his emotional rationality and control over Daisy. Kerr explains that, by calling out Gatsby on his illegal career and his lack of social standing, he emasculates him. He is a "Nobody" intent on his secret emotional longing and thus has no manhood (Kerr 421). Men such as Gatsby, who are focused on an emotional interiority and subservient to a female ideal, are threats to a patriarchal system that relies on hard-boiled masculinity. Tom's feminization of Gatsby becomes his way of reasserting the gender balance in his home.

Greg Forter also examines the gender dichotomy between Tom and Gatsby in his book *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism*. In the first chapter of the book, titled "Gender, melancholy, and the whiteness of impersonal form in *The Great Gatsby*," Forter examines the way Fitzgerald portrays Tom and Gatsby as two different ideals of masculinity. He defines Tom as representative of the "new style of manhood" embodied in the physically dominant, aggressive masculinity developed by the 1920s. This aggressive masculinity, in Forter's estimation, is co-opted by the wealthy, "owning-class men." They utilize the hardness of this emerging form of masculinity in order to guard against the feminine aspects of their leisure

life, such as their material consumption. Forter describes the way Tom utilizes a vigorous masculinity through his “cruel body” and “arrogant eyes” as a way in which to demonstrate his masculine dominance and shield himself from any feminine undertones (Forter, *Gender, Race* 28).

However, Alberto Lena, in his article, “Deceitful Traces of Power: An Analysis of the Decadence of Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*,” demonstrates the way in which Tom’s masculine posturing is ineffectual. Lena characterizes the civilization Tom desires to protect, that is American civilization, as intrinsically tied to “conquest, aggression, and destruction” (Lena 30). If this is believed to be true, it is understandable that a generation who feared the longevity of civilization would connect the vitality of their civilization to a vigorous masculinity. However, Lena demonstrates that Tom’s class identity, rather than making him a savior of civilization, identifies him as a representative of social decline. Tom embodies a traditional upper class built on the decadence of inherited wealth (Lena 20). Tom is a member of the leisure class, as exhibited through his identification with sports like football, polo, and horse racing (Lena 23). He also lacks experience of the world outside his class sphere, such as when he admits to Nick his lack of knowledge about the bond business (Lena 26). Tom is distanced from the true means of the production of wealth and thus he becomes the embodiment of a stagnated identity. In fact, Lena argues that Tom’s reliance on the facade of aggressive masculinity and his identification with the leisure class, “highlight his place as a handicap to the progress of society” (Lena 26). Thus, Tom becomes a representative of the decline of civilization he is attempting to avoid.

Tom’s anxiety over his membership in the leisure class, and what this means for his masculinity and social status, can be seen when he attends Gatsby’s party. Gatsby takes Tom, Daisy, and Nick around the party and introduces them to groups of people. When introducing

Tom, Gatsby calls him “the polo player,” which Tom quickly objects to (Fitzgerald 105). Nevertheless, Gatsby continues to use the moniker throughout the evening. Tom later says that, “I’d a little rather not be the polo player...I’d rather look at all these famous people in - in oblivion” (Fitzgerald 105). The moniker of “polo player” directly aligns Tom to the leisure class he is a part of. However, at Gatsby’s party he is surrounded by people who have gotten their money through filmmaking and illegal activity. These people represent new money in comparison to Tom’s unearned generational wealth. Tom’s reluctance to be labeled with a title that identifies him with the leisure class is evidence of his anxiety about how that identity is seen by others. Tom would rather experience Gatsby’s party “in oblivion” without his connections to a generational wealth that some may characterize as detrimental to social progress. Tom cannot maintain his superior civilized identity within a context that subverts that reality. Gatsby’s parties are filled with women who drink and dance, men who make their fortunes in new money, and jazz music that is representative of a racial blending. Moreover, Gatsby is a man whose masculine expression is not the aggressive one of Tom’s. Thus, his condescending tone toward Tom is a threat. Gatsby’s party embodies the fears Tom expresses throughout the novel and thus Tom feels uncomfortable being reminded of social forces that threaten his traditional standing in society and remind him of his own part in that decline.

In turning to focus on Gatsby, Greg Forter characterizes the title character as representative of the “residual masculinity” of the past. This masculine ideal tempered the aggressive side of masculinity with a more feminine attention to personal emotion (Forter, *Gender, Race* 28). Gatsby is completely focused on attaining Daisy. He has a deep emotional interior that impacts his actions throughout the text. Because of this Gatsby is emotionally dependent on a woman and thus feminized. Gatsby’s feminization is also facilitated through

Daisy's "unmanning of Gatsby" (Forster, *Gender, Race* 38). Daisy is able to divorce herself from Gatsby through her wealth and social class. She betrays Gatsby in her desire for stability and thus exerts a masculine control, while he is feminized and subordinated. Nick characterizes this "unmanning" in a negative manner and thus exhibits a level of anxiety over Daisy's actions (Forster, *Gender, Race* 38). In this way, Daisy's agency is criticized due to its effect on a male character. Nick's affinity for Gatsby comes across as Fitzgerald's way of choosing Gatsby's more emotional masculinity instead of Tom's aggressive one. However, Forster demonstrates that Gatsby's masculinity is also not completely feminized. He identifies himself with Dan Cody which "signals his internalization of the competitive, entrepreneurial, and ruthless qualities" of masculinity (Forster, *Gender, Race* 34). His use of criminality to advance his competitive edge in the battle for wealth is also a sign of Fitzgerald's equation of Gatsby with a more hardened masculinity. Fitzgerald cannot completely divorce Gatsby from the idea of an aggressive and ruthless masculinity (Forster, *Gender, Race* 34). This represents a version of the "masculine crisis" of Fitzgerald's time and thus an anxiety about the consequences of certain expressions of masculinity.

### **Fitzgerald and Nick: Masculinity and the Modernist Aesthetic:**

Anxiety over the dichotomy of masculinity can be seen in F. Scott Fitzgerald's own life. As previously mentioned in the article, "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Modernist Studies, and the Fin-de-Siècle Crisis in Masculinity," Greg Forster characterizes the time period leading up to the 1920s as a time of crisis in masculine identity. Later in his article he uses Fitzgerald as a case study of this phenomenon. Fitzgerald was raised by a father who embodied the ideal of old masculinity, specifically the ideal of the Southern gentleman. This masculinity was concerned with a genteel aura and emotional self-expression. However, as the century moved forward, and particularly

after the Civil War, this form of masculinity came to be seen as weak (Forster, “F. Scott Fitzgerald” 302). This was something that Fitzgerald internalized as a young man. He saw his father fail in his professional career and have to rely on his wife’s family for support. To Fitzgerald, this demonstrated the ineffectual nature of a more feminized masculinity (Forster, “F. Scott Fitzgerald 303). However, Fitzgerald’s internal conflict between the emotional masculinity of his father and the hardened masculinity of the new age was something he struggled with throughout his life. Fitzgerald grappled with feelings of subordination and emasculation at the hands of Zelda. He felt like he had to stoop to femininity through the selling of his stories for money to support her, rather than a more masculine expression of true art. (Forster, “F. Scott Fitzgerald” 314).

Forster also examines that way in which Fitzgerald connects masculinity to his own ideas regarding race. Referencing a personal letter from Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson after his first trip to Europe, Forster demonstrates the way that Fitzgerald combines racial and gendered anxieties. Forster writes that, “it seems as if Fitzgerald encountered in Europe a breakdown of social hierarchies and an aristocratic cultural decline that in his mind meant racial blackening” (Forster, “F. Scott Fitzgerald” 306). Forster demonstrates the way in which this is both anti-black and anti-feminine. This is because Fitzgerald’s language reflects the previously mentioned connection between white supremacy and masculinity. To Fitzgerald, cultural decline was feminized in that it was the masculine ability to dominate and take up, as Fitzgerald says in his letter, “the white man’s burden,” that could stop the fall of civilization (Forster, “F. Scott Fitzgerald” 306). Thus, Fitzgerald’s own fears about his masculinity as well as his tendency to connect civilized whiteness with masculinity make their way into *The Great Gatsby* through Tom’s expressions of racism and fears of changing gender norms.

Modernism itself attempted to understand these competing views of masculinity. Modernists sought for true creation and feared the influence of emotional self-expression on their work. They sought to distance themselves from popular fiction, something that was connected to the female influence on the cultural marketplace. Modernists were anxious about being too domestic and leisurely. In other words, they feared being too feminine (Kerr 408). Many saw the materialism and shallow cultural intellectualism of American life as a product of the influence of women on American society. They believed femininity had contributed to a cultural decline that modernists sought to rid the country of (Currell 28-9). Thus, modernism exemplified masculine anxiety. The modernist aesthetic attempted to escape the emasculating qualities of an industrial, monopoly capitalism through creative works. Frances Kerr writes that *The Great Gatsby* was F. Scott Fitzgerald's attempt to define himself in the more masculine modernist aesthetic. He desired to create a novel distinct from what some saw as the emotional sensibility of his previous works. It was an attempt to reassert his "artistic masculinity" (Kerr 409). However, as demonstrated through the dichotomy of masculinity expressed through Tom and Gatsby, Fitzgerald never truly lands on which mode of masculinity he prefers. While attempting to assert his own "artistic masculinity" he writes a novel which idealizes a feminized title character. Thus, this disjointed gender dynamic reflects Fitzgerald's own anxiety regarding his masculinity.

The narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway, mirrors Fitzgerald's own masculine crisis. Frances Kerr demonstrates the way Nick exemplifies masculine anxiety. Nick's social background ties him to a certain ideal of masculinity. This is perhaps not as aggressively masculine as the ideal Tom strives to embody, but it is a masculinity nevertheless tied to ideas of hard work and a distance from emotionality. However, throughout the novel Nick elevates Gatsby, a man who expresses a deep emotional interior. Nick thus expresses a level of



ambivalence toward the harder ideals of masculinity expressed by Tom and his peers.

Nevertheless, Nick also makes a point to demonstrate the ways in which Gatsby exemplifies the harder masculinity through his hard work and dedication to his goals. To Kerr, this inconsistency demonstrates Nick's split gender identity and his anxiety about his own masculinity (Kerr 422).

This anxiety is extended if Nick's relationship with Jordan is examined. Jordan is identified with masculine traits. From her career as a self-sufficient professional golfer to the way in which Nick defines her physically. Nick notices her athletic, hard exterior and the way she lifts her shoulders, "like a young cadet" (Fitzgerald 11). This language connects Jordan with masculine features. Jordan is representative of the new modern women, pushing the boundaries of conventional gender norms both professionally and physically, much more so than Daisy. Nick is initially drawn to her character, at one point, saying "I thought I loved her" (Fitzgerald 58). If Nick is drawn to Gatsby because he subverts norms of masculinity perhaps he is initially drawn to Jordan for the same reason. Nick seems to identify with the more feminine, emotional masculinity of Gatsby. Perhaps he sees in Jordan a sort of stand-in for his own conventional masculine deficiencies. However, by the end of the novel Nick feels differently about Jordan. His disgust for the carelessness of Daisy and Tom and the social class they represent translate to Jordan. Nevertheless, Nick's change in opinion may also have a gendered dynamic. By connecting Jordan to Daisy and Tom, he connects her to the larger patriarchal society they protect. But when he leaves, he is still "half in love with her," demonstrating his fractured gender identity (Fitzgerald 177). Fitzgerald himself was drawn to a woman who exhibited aspects of a new feminine freedom and it caused him to question his own masculinity (Forster, "F. Scott Fitzgerald 311). This is mirrored in the way Jordan's portrayal of masculine traits causes Nick to question his own masculinity and thus demonstrate his own masculine anxiety.

### Where Does This Leave Us?

Lastly, let us examine where the novel leaves off. The novel ends with Gatsby and Daisy killing Myrtle Wilson in a car accident. After this, Daisy returns to Tom and they both escape the fallout of the accident. In *So We Read On: How The Great Gatsby Came to Be and Why It Endures*, Maureen Corrigan demonstrates the gendered layers within this car crash. She connects the novel to later film noirs, specifically with its interest in women drivers. She writes that, “to be behind the wheel is to be in control, and for a woman to occupy that place is...upsetting to...conventional hierarchies” (Corrigan 145). The fact that Daisy is the one driving when the accident takes place demonstrates Fitzgerald’s fear of female agency. Moreover, the victim of the car crash, Myrtle, is another woman who upsets gender norms through her sexual liberation. A woman in control is detrimental to other women. But she is also detrimental to men, seeing as Gatsby is killed due to the accident that Daisy committed.

In reading deeper into the ending of the novel, connections to larger ideas of masculinity can be seen. By providing Daisy with a way to escape the fallout of the accident, Tom reasserts the fractured gender dynamic in his home. Furthermore, by leading George Wilson to Gatsby, Tom exerts his harder masculinity over Gatsby’s more feminine one. The last scene that Tom is in finds Nick running into him on the streets of New York. Tom is frowning “into the window of a jewelry store” (Fitzgerald 178). It is almost as if he is contemplating how he can continue to assert his masculine dominance in his family dynamic by placating Daisy with ornamentation. In this scene Tom also hints at a more emotional masculinity when he says that upon returning to the apartment he shared with Myrtle he “cried like a baby” (Fitzgerald 179). However, this revelation only comes as a means to placate Nick’s disgust of him. An admittance to a more emotional masculinity is only useful to justify his actions and assert his moral superiority. It is

not a form of masculinity that Tom believes is worthy of being expressed on a regular basis. Therefore, by the end of the novel the crisis of masculinity is seemingly concluded with the hard masculinity of Tom proving victorious, but the underlying anxiety remains as Tom weaponizes emotional masculinity to deflect from any hint of his own feminine qualities.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, in writing *The Great Gatsby*, was steeped in an American society that had developed a new ideal for masculine expression and was dealing with emerging ideas regarding gender that led to changes in the place of women in society. These accumulated into a larger fear of the decline of civilization through the feminizing effect of consumer and popular culture. This fear was merged with a racial fear, but nevertheless was an important part of the context of the early twentieth century. Throughout *The Great Gatsby* this anxiety regarding masculinity is prevalent. It is seen in the ways in which characters portray gender identity, particularly Tom's hardened masculinity and Gatsby's more emotional masculinity. Thus, the novel grapples with the anxiety of cultural change as expressed through the norms of masculinity. It is an anxiety that is not settled by the novel's end, in the same way it is not settled in the present day.

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