

Feminist Perspectives on the Portrayal of "Jordan Baker" in The Great Gatsby

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Abstract: *The Great Gatsby* is a middle-grade novel set in New York City and Long Island in the 1920s by American author Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, and this work established F. Scott Fitzgerald's place in modern American literary history. It is also one of the most prestigious works of literature in the United States, and its status in the American literary world is evident in the fact that it has been brought to the screen and stage many times. This paper analyzes the female figure of Jordan Baker from a feminist perspective and with the original text of the novel. People can get a glimpse of the development of feminism in the 1920s. All these are closely related to the social background of that time, and people can also find new insights from the "flapper girls" of that era, so that they can continue to carry forward the feminist theory in today's society.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*, Feminism, Character analysis, Flapper girls

1. Introduction

The Great Gatsby is the story of a young man named Gatsby, a member of the underclass, who struggled to make a living in an era of material abundance and spiritual clamor during the Jazz Age in the United States, and shows the spiritual, cultural, and economic and social development of the United States at that time from Gatsby's point of view. The story unfolds from Nick's first-person stand, interspersed with reminiscences and confessions from the main characters. *The Great Gatsby* explores themes of depravity, idealism, unwillingness to change, social upheaval, and indulgence, painting a vivid portrait of the American Dream and the Roaring Jazz Age. *The Great Gatsby*, as a prestigious and influential piece of American literature in the world, has characters that are deeply rooted in people's hearts. Among them, Jordan Baker, as one of the key characters and story drivers in *The Great Gatsby*, illustrates the characteristics of the new woman in the early 1920s and reveals the materialistic and hedonistic nature of the United States at that time [1]. The main focus of this paper is to analyze the characterization of Jordan Baker from a feminist perspective.

2. Feminism

Feminism was born out of the political wave of women's emancipation, and refers generally to all practical activities and theoretical ideas of those who work for the abolition of discrimination against women and for equality between men and women. The feminist movement has gone through several

waves, and in the course of its historical development, there have been schools of thought such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and radical feminism.

"Feminist theory is a thousand theories that boil down to one phrase: the realization of equality between men and women in all of humanity [2]." Early feminist movements, mainly socio-political movements, fought for women's equality of the sexes in law and in opportunity, such as equal access to education and employment opportunities with men in real life, the realization of economic equality, political equality and occupational equality, as well as for women's right to vote [3].

3. The Introduction of Jordan Baker

In the book *The Great Gatsby*, the unique characterization of Jordan profoundly reflects the spirit of the new women emerging in America in the 1920s.

In terms of appearance, unlike the sweet and lovely Daisy and the sexy and flirtatious Maltese, Jordan's appearance shows more masculine qualities. Jordan's rather masculine appearance subverts the male-dominated society's aesthetic standard of requiring women to be petite, soft-limbed, and elegant, and breaks the confinement of femininity that the male-dominated society imposes on women's bodies. As a new woman with a strong sense of subjectivity, Jordan frankly accepts her masculine appearance, refuses to deliberately change herself to meet male aesthetic expectations, refuses to become an object of male desire, and lives out her true self.

Contrary to Daisy's behavior of pleasing and pleasing men, Jordan always puts up a superior appearance to them, changing the sexual affiliation of male superiority and female inferiority. As a golfer, Jordan, who is competitive and competitive, is brave enough to challenge the male-dominated field. By virtue of her own athletic talent and unrelenting hard work, she becomes a golf champion known to everyone and fights for a place for women, breaking the phenomenon of women being marginalized. As a typical representative of the new wave of women emerging in the 1920s in the United States, Jordan, in contrast to the conservative image of traditional women as demure and virtuous, scrupulously observant of morals, and contented, passionately and boldly pursuing individuality emancipation and freedom.

In a patriarchal society, the ideal woman should be gentle, humble, weak and bound, but Jordan's arrogant, hard, strong and uninhibited character subverts the narrow perception of sexuality in a patriarchal society and deconstructs the essentialist view of femininity in a patriarchal society [4].

4. Analysis

American women in the 1920s were known as the "New Woman" or "New Feminists".

In 1920, the United States Constitution was amended to adopt women's suffrage, and the 70-year feminist movement reached its peak. The New Woman advocated freedom, which was first manifested in the adoption of casual and lightweight clothing, going out to participate in a variety of such activities, and also cutting off long, flowing hair and keeping short, dry and fresh hair. The new women loved sports and there were many sports stars. In *The Great Gatsby*, Baker was shown with short hair, and she was also a famous golfer.

4.1. Example One

She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet [5].

This small description of Jordan's slim, upright form indirectly indicated Jordan's status as an athlete. As an athlete, she gave people a sharp, valiant feeling. The flapper girls of the 1920s were keen on fashion, preferring refreshing short hair, lean body and knee-length dresses, and became the representatives of fashion trends.

4.2. Example Two

'Now YOU' re started on the subject,' she answered with a wan smile.

'Well, —he told me once he was an Oxford man.' A dim background started to take shape behind him but at her next remark it faded away. 'However, I don't believe it.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know,' she insisted, 'I just don't think he went there.' [5]

Jordan's skepticism about Gatsby's education revealed her very keen intuition as a woman. In the 1920s, the educational level of the "new women" also improved considerably. At this time, primary and secondary education was basically universal, the level of education was improved, and the curriculum was enriched, especially the democratization of secondary education, which provided a good premise for a large number of women to receive secondary and higher education [6]. In this era when money represents everything, many people didn't have much doubt about Gatsby's educational background, because Gatsby was just a wealthy, mysterious image. But in such a big environment, Jordan still could keep awake and had self-judgment, also thanks to this era of improved education level.

4.3. Example Three

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever shrewd men and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage, and given this unwillingness I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard jaunty body [5].

This passage portrayed her upright posture as an athlete and her cold, haughty character traits. Jordan in the novel is dishonest "to the extreme", "skeptical of everything in the world", and "very careful to protect herself from her own due responsibilities, believing that 'responsibilities ' is someone else's business, and that only 'needs' are her own" [7]. Her egoism was also evident through storylines such as cheating in a race, driving a car that nearly cuts off a passerby, and drenching a borrowed car in the rain. In the 1920s, as society and the urban space evolved, the space in which women lived was transformed. Women began to appear in public spaces outside of the domestic space (especially in the workplace), but even so, women's status remained unrecognized and even stigmatized to a certain extent. Jordan, a professional golfer, was revealed in the novel to have cheated in a tournament, and the publication was later withdrawn by some means, so it was clear that women in the public space assumed a negative role in the novel. But from a feminist perspective, this was a sign of her independence.

4.4. Example Four

'You're a rotten driver,' I protested. 'Either you ought to be more careful or you oughtn't to drive at all.'

'I am careful.'

'No, you're not.'

'Well, other people are,' she said lightly.

'What's that got to do with it?'

'They'll keep out of my way,' she insisted. 'It takes two to make an accident.'

'Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself.'

'I hope I never will,' she answered. 'I hate careless people. That's why I like you.' [5]

From this conversation, people can see that Jordan's human nature is amazingly deformed and his soul is twisted. In love, she is pushy and extremely selfish. For Jordan, who only seeks to take and not to give, the sole criterion of self-interest determines her choices in all matters, including love. Stanley Cooperman once said that for Jordan Baker, her 'love' for Nick was just another in a long line of calculations [8]. This is a person who is "careless" in everything, who refuses to talk about morality and responsibility, and who frankly and comfortably facilitates Nick's arrangement for Gatsby and Daisy to see each other. She downplays the possibility of an affair with her married best friend by saying that Daisy deserves some comfort in her life. It seems that in her view, Daisy's cheating is a natural choice to deal with Tom's infidelity, without regard for the wife and mother Daisy's loyalty to the marriage and the family should be responsible for. But in another way, her "defense" of Daisy is also a reaction to Tom's infidelity.

4.5. Example Five

'About Gatsby! No, I haven't. I said I'd been making a small investigation of his past.'
'And you found he was an Oxford man,' said Jordan helpfully.
'An Oxford man!' He was incredulous. 'Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit.'
'Nevertheless he's an Oxford man.'
'Oxford, New Mexico,' snorted Tom contemptuously, 'or something like that.'
'Listen, Tom. If you're such a snob, why did you invite him to lunch?' demanded Jordan crossly.

From Jordan's scoffing and exasperation at Tom's behavior of inviting Gatsby to lunch with him when he clearly hates Gatsby so much in his heart. Also in this conversation, people can see that Jordan is on Gatsby's side and it is evident that Jordan is disgusted with Tom for cheating on her. One of the characteristics of the new woman is that she dares to love and hate, and also has a strong sense of entitlement. This is also true of Jordan when it comes to relationships. In the breakup with Nick, used to take the initiative, in the advantage of her angry at Nick first dumped her, rather than she abandoned him, because this result puts her in a passive and unfavorable. At the same time, in order to change the unfavorable into favorable, she threw out their usual trick of deception, lying and another person engaged, want to use this to make themselves can become the winner in the love field [9]. However, it was not until Nick got up to say goodbye that Jordan stated that it was Nick who took the initiative to dump her, but she no longer cared about him, although she had been giddy for a while. This is also very different from the traditional image of women as the weaker sex and their subordinate status, and embodies the bravery and openness of the new women who can afford to let go of their feelings [10].

Throughout the novel, "Jordan Baker", as one of the important characters in *The Great Gatsby*, interpreted the characteristics of the new woman in the early 1920s, and also revealed the phenomenon of materialistic and hedonistic supremacy in the United States at that time. After World War I, the U.S. economy was growing rapidly, and women in the United States were experiencing unprecedented changes: women were able to improve their economic status, gain the right to vote, begin to receive more education, and enter more professional fields of work. They could drive cars, participate in recreational activities, sports programs, and outdoor activities [11]. Many women were energetic and challenging, seeking fashion and pleasure, and were known as "Flappers" [12]. "Jordan Baker was a representative of these new women. They pursued freedom and liberation, and hoped to get the same status and rights as men. The term flapper girl has become synonymous with them.

The name "Jordan Baker" was associated with the social context of the time. "Jordan Playboy" was a well-known and popular car brand at that time, and "Baker Fastex Velvet" was a car interior brand at that time. Fitzgerald combined the two into the name Jordan Baker (Jordan Baker), which was characteristic of the era and alluded to the pursuit of material enjoyment [13]. As a golfer, Jordan

won national tournaments, often participated in major competitions, had an independent career and financial resources, and was a new woman unlike women of the past.

5. Discussion

In real life, Baker was like a young cadet in a military school; she liked to hold her head high and always kept a cold and arrogant smile in dealing with people. Such character traits were the symbols of masculinity, through the construction of the character, Fitzgerald hoped to show an independent female individual, so as to make some innovations in the image of women and form a sharp contrast with the traditional housewife. Moreover, the author also challenged male power in the arrangement of her work. The profession of golfer is a typical male profession, and Jordan's profession represented a challenge to male power to a certain extent. At the same time, in the way to solve things also showed a strong masculine characteristic. In a major tournament, in order to get a better ranking, she violated the rules of the ball position, so was published in the newspaper. But in order to quell this farce, she used unusual means to calm down the incident, withdrew from the publication of the newspaper. This was the fierce exchange of male and female rights, but also the beginning of the awakening of feminist thinking performance. Until she finally broke up with Nick, she was also trying her best to protect her dignity, even though she was very hurt at that time. She still acted as if she didn't care, although she showed hypocrisy and dishonesty in the whole behavior. But her protection of her dignity still comprehensively embodied the awakening of feminist ideology [14].

6. Conclusion

As people know from the above, Jordan is a typical "flapper girl".

Flapper girls like Jordan sought not only independence and liberation, but also to express their unique personalities. They no longer followed the traditional constraints, but tried to show another kind of female form by breaking the rules. They presented unprecedented independence, autonomy and courage, breaking the old constraints and showing the charm and power of women in the new era. The image of flapper girl became the spiritual symbol of women in that era and left a deep impression on people.

The flapper girls dared to think, dared to act, and bravely moved forward, conveying to people the unique personality and courage they expressed.

The author believes that in the near future, more women will be able to show their unique charms and bring more beauty and progress to the world.

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