

“Beautiful Little Feminist: Daisy’s Perspective in *The Great Gatsby*”

Joan Lauria  
State University of New York at New Paltz

**Abstract:**

“Beautiful Little Feminist: Daisy’s Perspective in *The Great Gatsby*” examines the backstory of Daisy Buchanan, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s famous character. The project has two parts: a creative short story and a supplemental research portion in which I researched the lives of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald, and Ginevra King. The short story acts as a prologue to the famous novel, taking place during the month of October 1917 when Daisy and Gatsby first met. I carefully picked specific details that paralleled with the lives of both Zelda and Ginevra in order to authentically represent their voices, while also crafting a distinct aura that would align with the fictionalized characteristics of Daisy Buchanan. This creative thesis project is a “herstory” of Daisy Buchanan’s adolescence, debunking her villainous name and suggesting a feminist background in a time of emerging activism.

**Keywords:**

English, Creative Writing, Women’s Gender, & Sexuality Studies, *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald, Ginevra King, The New Woman, Women’s History, Herstory, Feminism

## Part 1: Supplemental Research—Process and Methods

### Introduction

Just as Jay Gatsby obsesses over Daisy Buchanan, I've been in love with *The Great Gatsby* ever since first reading it in high school. Contrary to my feelings now, I remember absolutely hating Daisy at first. I was taught that her character was similar to a Daisy flower: white and innocent on the outside petals, but yellow and corrupt on the inside. It wasn't until I started studying at SUNY New Paltz that I reconsidered my perspective and realized that Daisy wasn't the villain after all. In fact, she was a feminist.

In the course Transnational Literature, I read *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood. Told from the perspective of Penelope in Homer's *The Odyssey*, this was the first "herstory" that I had encountered, and it transformed my lens on reading classic works. Many of the stories we study in English are written by men with a patriarchal, sexist perspective. However, the rise of feminism has allowed women's stories and voices to enter social discourse and infiltrate the literary canon, shedding light onto hegemonic systems that have historically oppressed marginalized bodies.

Daisy's categorization as a villain is widely recognized. Literary critics portray her as a malicious, tempting siren who lured the heroic Gatsby to his demise using her "voice full of money" (Settle 122). She has been referred to as a "Dark Destroyer" who is "vulgar and inhuman," suffering from "vicious emptiness" and a "monstrous moral indifference" (Person 250). These femme fatale characteristics reveal the striking patriarchal polarization between the Good Boy/Bad Girl stereotypes of male victims and their female predators. Gatsby perceived Daisy as an ideal—a desired object that he yearned to possess. His dreams of becoming wealthy

skewed his perceptions of romance, ultimately fabricating a false version of Daisy that readers love-to-hate in the novel. This dual illusion of idealized perfection and consequent villainous siren is strikingly different from who she actually is. As Person notes, “Daisy is victimized by a male tendency to project a self-satisfying, yet ultimately dehumanizing, image on woman” (257). Daisy’s voice is unheard and unfairly demonized, minimizing her backstory and personal experiences.

F. Scott Fitzgerald modeled the character of Daisy on his first two romantic interests, both from wealthy families: Ginevra King and Zelda Fitzgerald. Although he ended up marrying Zelda, he still harbored resentment and feelings of insecurity from their divide in socioeconomic status. His grudges and insecure resentment translated into the creation of Jay Gatsby: a man driven by the capitalist American Dream of being rich. Gatsby yearns for the “green light”, which symbolizes both Daisy and money as the same entity that will grant him desired wealth. This insight into Fitzgerald’s personal life offers an understanding of the creative decision behind Daisy’s villainous representation.

Ginevra King, Fitzgerald’s first girlfriend, strongly influenced the creation of *The Great Gatsby*. In fact, the entire plot of the novel is strikingly similar to a short story Ginevra had written to him, titled “The Perfect Hour” (West). Fitzgerald admitted her influence on the novel and the character of Daisy, saying Daisy’s origin was from, “My first girl 18-20 whom I’ve used over and over and never forgotten” (West 91). His harbored resentment toward her unattainability and social class turned into a creative drive and even after he wrote his female villain in *The Great Gatsby*, lingering feelings inspired him to write more stories with similar themes. He also used pages from both Ginevra and Zelda’s diaries and letters for inspiration,

drawing on them for plots and ideas for various pieces. The act of taking their words without consent was a way for Fitzgerald to exert superiority over their lives (West xvii). Even Daisy's inconsistent hair color, sometimes brunette sometimes blonde, reflects Fitzgerald's dual inspiration, as he described two different women as one entity (Korenman). As my research on Ginevra and Zelda progressed, I had a strong desire to portray their voices more authentically than Fitzgerald had done with his villainous attributes, and I intended to show a version of Daisy that would urge readers to reconsider the classic story.

My short story, "Beautiful Little Feminist: Daisy's Perspective in *The Great Gatsby*" acts as a prologue to the famous novel, taking place during the month of October 1917 when Daisy and Gatsby first met. *The Great Gatsby* tells us that Daisy and Gatsby met in October and only knew each other for that one month. Fitzgerald doesn't offer many details regarding this early relationship, other than that Gatsby was immediately entranced. I carefully picked specific details that paralleled with the lives of both Zelda and Ginevra in order to authentically represent their voices, while also crafting a distinct aura that would align with the fictionalized characteristics of Daisy Buchanan. This creative thesis project is a "herstory" of Daisy Buchanan's adolescence, debunking her villainous name and suggesting a feminist background in a time of emerging activism.

### **Historical Significance of Adolescent Girls in the Early Twentieth Century**

Researching the historical significance of the early twentieth century gave me a deeper understanding of the time period, mindsets, and general social discourse that Daisy would have been centered in while growing up. As we know from *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy would have

been eighteen years old when first meeting Jay Gatsby in the year 1917. In the time leading up to the turn of the century, there was a rise in the feminist suffrage movement and a heightened awareness and debate regarding women's roles in society. Daisy, Zelda, and Ginevra were growing up in these years, and their actions would have been a direct reflection of their environment and concerns in the growing activist movements.

In 1904, psychologist G.S. Hall published *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*. This report functioned prominently in the social movement and era that became increasingly worried about the behavior of adolescent girls. Hall determined that young people, specifically adolescent girls, lacked moral compass, and embodied a "decided predilection to ruse and deception" (Simon 30). Much of his argument rose from the fear of women competing with men intellectually, and Hall exerted his presumed masculine superiority by equating womanliness with childishness. Drawing from Charles Darwin, Hall crossed America giving speeches and lectures to make the case that girls needed to fulfill their moral, biological, and cultural obligation as mothers to reproduce.

The concept of "race suicide," the extinction of the white race due to lack of reproduction, was prevalent in this historical time. Women's education was seen as a threat to the destruction of integrity and the "dominant" white race, and the push for race renewal resulted in the eugenics movement. The idealized, wealthy, white woman was to pass on her graceful, beautiful, and gentle traits to her white offspring. As Hall claimed, and many prominent voices echoed, "The body and soul of the girl in her middle twenties cries out for love of husband and children only" (Simon 43). The pressures of domestic oppression weighed heavily on women,

and those who desired knowledge and independence instead of embracing their “biological destiny” were questioned and viewed as “mannish” or lesbians.

Anxieties about motherhood were particularly intense in the early twentieth century, and young girls viewed maternity and motherhood as a type of degradation: “Society has put maternity out of fashion, and the nursery is, nine times out of ten, a place of punishment, not of pleasure, to the mother” (Simon 39). Girls witnessed their mothers exhausted by domestic chores and household responsibilities, and they saw the chilling toll that multiple pregnancies brought on a woman’s body. Instead of their mothers, young girls sought out positive models of productive independent women, like suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Alice Paul, and characters from their favorite Western films (44). Due to the looming pressures of motherhood in conjunction with the political climate of the women's suffrage movement and World War 1, many adolescent girls adopted mindsets of rebellion and change.

At the turn of the century, the New Woman was the hot topic. In response to the emerging feminist movement, the overarching patriarchy saw women’s independence as a regrettable result of educating girls, and the campaign for equality was thought to be “a temporary glitch in the status quo” (Simon 94). Fortunately, due to shifts in entertainment venues, adolescent girls were able to exert their independence and perform rebellion against hegemony by attending movie theatres and dance halls. Movie palaces became popular in 1910: the lavish carpeting and huge mirrors created a luxurious venue, and the lobbies became a place to meet friends and share gossip. In 1910, more than 7,500 picture houses and 2,500 vaudeville theatres attracted more than five million viewers daily in America, and most of them were

women (Mackrell 112). Westerns were very popular among young girls because they depicted adventurous women escaping danger through courageous and daring feats.

Additionally, there was an increase in fan magazines that showed off the lives and aspirations of actresses, giving the young women audiences a role model for careers outside of domesticity. The new forms of dancing for entertainment were also seen as a threat, and there was a strong opposition to the popular “animal dances”, like the bunny hug, grizzly bear, and turkey trot (Mackrell 123). The dances and parties of the 1920s were a staple of *The Great Gatsby*, and Daisy and Gatsby first met at a dance in Louisville. I incorporated dancing into Daisy’s prologue because Zelda and Ginevra flourished in social settings, which influenced their development as the most popular girls in their hometowns.

The emerging fashion trends and beauty standards during the early twentieth century would have influenced Daisy’s mindset and creation of identity. The beauty ideal of “arresting adolescence” became an obsession for women to remain looking youthful as “eternal dolls” (Simon 200). Fashion designers responded to women's growing desires by altering trends, ultimately leading to the typical flapper image by the 1920s. The number of American perfume and cosmetics manufacturers nearly doubled between 1909 and 1929, placing an emphasis on a woman’s outward appearance (Simon 197). Although the new film storylines rejected domestic life and offered an inspiration for adventure, the movie stars enlarged on the screen promoted the idea of a woman’s duty to perform beauty for the world. Therefore, girls began assessing themselves constantly.

Fashion dictated slimness, and the first trends of diet culture began in the early twentieth century. Social statisticians found that women were generally not the weight they wanted to be,

and the majority believed themselves to be too fat (Simon 204). To combat this, bathroom scales were made accessible, and dieting clubs like the Slim Club kept women on track with food suggestions and exercises that would produce a slender, hipless figure. Diet fads proliferated during this time, and many women began eating apart from their families because “the idea of a regular meal had become repulsive to them” (205). Popular books proclaimed that calorie counting was the only way to control weight, and different chewing gums assisted to suppress appetites. Smoking was advertised as “The Modern Way to Diet,” and slenderness began to signify a girl’s inner strength (206).

Correspondence through letter writing was a big part of dating practices in the early twentieth century. A girl’s popularity was measured by how many letters she received, and most evenings were taken up with letter writing. Girls would perform readings to their friends from letters they had received, and this was often the most exciting event of their day (West 27). Ginevra King and Fitzgerald’s relationship was primarily built on correspondence through letters; after they had first met, Fitzgerald immediately sent her a customary special delivery letter, a “special-dellie,” to show he intended to pursue her seriously (24).

Each one of Daisy’s friends in her social group, the “Big Four”, presents different branches of the New Woman. The character Ruth exemplifies diet trends and beauty obsessions. She cares too much about how others view her and strives to be an “eternal doll”. Pam is a New Woman intrigued by the growing feminist movement, seeking out opportunities in the work force; in 1910, the number of girls in the US workforce increased by more than 2 million compared with the number employed in 1900. Besides jobs that had always been associated with women’s work, like teaching, nursing and domestic employment, young women increasingly

worked in sales and in offices as clerks, copyists, stenographers, typists, bookkeepers, accountants, and telegraph and telephone operators (Simon 151).

Anna represents the woman who succumbed to the pressures of domestic life by accepting a marriage proposal and is thereby kicked out of the exclusive adolescent group that Daisy is highly passionate about. Her replacement, Jordan Baker, represents another type of woman who emerged during this time, one who engaged in athletic abilities and was prided on her achievements in sports. Each woman represents different sectors and desires of women in the early twentieth century, and their values and beliefs all contribute to the feminist Big Four mentality.

### **Ginevra King**

According to biographies, Ginevra was intensely competitive, self-confident, and a big flirt; she also had a disobedient streak and was prone to rebellious action (West). Fitzgerald referred to her in letters as a “vamp”—a predatory female who represented women’s unleashed sexuality and rage (Simon 149). Ginevra liked this attribute, noting in a letter, “I know I am a flirt and I won’t stop it” (West 31). Boys were drawn to her, and she liked the attention. In my short story, I decided that Daisy would also like the moniker “vamp” because she is celebrated for her bold flirtatiousness, contributing to her popularity in Louisville.

Ginevra and three of her best friends declared themselves to be the “Big Four”, wearing identical rose gold pinky rings to signify their status as “the four most attractive and socially desirable young women in Chicago” (West 8). I chose to include the “Big Four” in Daisy’s prologue because it represents her values of exclusivity and solidarity, paralleling with ideals of

independence in the emerging feminist discourse. In the early twentieth century, the club movement among women grew to create bonds and unity for women of all ages on a plethora of social issues. Even for young girls, the Girl Scouts were founded in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Low; this organization responded to sexist discourse and spoke to wider opportunities of a girl's future (Simon 56).

Both Ginevra and Daisy's "Big Four" groups utilize rings as a way to signify their status. The symbol of rings is an important detail to my short story because it fights against the typical association of hegemonic hetero-patriarchal relationships and wearing rings for marriage; instead, Daisy and her friends choose to value friendship over marriage. Wedding rings symbolize promise, and the Big Four promises infinite solidarity of women. Additionally, the image of a perfect circle relays the idea that the fight for women's rights is cyclical and ongoing, relaying contemporary thoughts and feelings about women's power and independence now.

### **Zelda Fitzgerald**

Zelda Fitzgerald, the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald, was a wealthy Southern Belle from Montgomery, Alabama. Her mother, Minnie Sayre, was an artist. She had intentions of being an actress and writer, however, these plans were thwarted when she accepted her domestic fate through marriage and raising five children. Instead of acting, she channeled her creative energy into gardening. Zelda's bedroom had a perfect view of her mother's flowers, and Zelda had a particular love for magnolias; she noted in a diary entry that "beneath their surface beauty she saw an underlying fragmentation and despair" (Cline 35). Zelda's fixation on fragmentation reflects the depth of her understanding regarding a woman's domestic role; watching her mother

abandon her dreams fueled Zelda's desire for change and rebellion in her own life. I chose to incorporate the significance of magnolia flowers into Daisy's backstory because Zelda's metaphor reflected how women during this time period were struggling with mixed emotions regarding domesticity and other internal battles. I incorporated the "he loves me, he loves me not" practice of ripping flower petals into the story because I felt that it relayed Daisy's shifting internal confidence upon meeting Jay Gatsby. It reflects ideas on how nature is feminized and used to determine romance, but also how we destroy nature, and women, for social expectations.

Growing up with Southern values, Zelda and Daisy were taught to exhibit ladylike behavior, viewing domesticity as their most important role. Zelda's mother tried to instill the "No Ladies" Rules: a set of rules she created to educate her daughters on the proper way to behave. Some of these rules included: "No lady ever sat with her limbs crossed. Young ladies said limbs instead of legs. No lady left the house until the last button on her gloves was fastened. No lady ever let her bare feet touch the bare floor" (Cline 24). Zelda did not care about these rules at all, refusing to fall into an oppressive domestic trap, and her disobedient streak allowed her to avoid them at all costs.

Zelda's relationship with her father sheds further light onto her rebellious and disobedient nature. Her father was a racist Judge, of "severe and rather humorless discipline", who set hard and strict rules for his children (Cline 15). While her other siblings obeyed him, Zelda felt that it was her right to disobey his rules. Zelda felt stifled by the way Southern belles were pressed toward uniformity, and she knew from her mother's experiences that artistic women often lost that creative side through adherence to these social norms and expectations (39). In response to these social norms, Zelda chose to emphasize being unique, doing whatever she wanted, and not

caring about what people thought of her. In her adolescence, Zelda frequently went to Oakwood Confederate Cemetery, a place that she treated as a park to chat with the dead (Cline 26). She had an attachment to this practice, and I wanted to incorporate that into Daisy's story by organizing a seance to determine Jordan's eligibility into the Big Four.

Zelda was known for her flirtatiousness, and the onset of World War 1 assisted in deterring her mindset from exclusive commitment. Two army training camps were set up outside the town, and with them came shops, restaurants, and a new hotel. The young soldiers were far more sophisticated than her local beaux, and Zelda was extremely popular among them; she wrote in her journal, "There weren't enough girls to go around. We had a date with a different boy each night of the week!" (Cline 43). In this time, a Ford Model T car cost just \$440, and a significant number of teenagers had access to a comparable model. That access provided a hundred different options for an evening date, which I incorporated through Daisy's white roadster (Mackrell). For Zelda, the war intensified the feeling of life's fragility. Everything was changing, and she "couldn't afford to wait, for fear it would be gone forever" (Cline 42). She danced every night, but even at those dances she could not dismiss the sense of looming tragedy. This heavily influenced her spontaneous actions and offers a unique perspective into Daisy's mindset when she first met Jay Gatsby.

Zelda had just turned 18 when she first met Francis Scott Fitzgerald, a lieutenant with the 67th Infantry, at a country club dance (Cline). She was entranced by their conversation because he was very attentive and seemingly fascinated by every detail of her life. She admitted later to the "narcissistic pleasure" that she gained from their conversations, and this reinforced her desire for a sophisticated older man who truly listened to her (Cline 150). The desire to marry a

sophisticated older man was a common fantasy among adolescent girls, because they wanted to be treated like an intelligent person; the trope of a worldly older man seemed genuinely interested in what they were saying and thinking (Simon 157). Zelda became increasingly interested in Fitzgerald the more time they spent together. He told her all about his financial failures and obstacles in his life, which were similar to Jay Gatsby, and this set the bar between their social classes. Despite her growing feelings, she had no intention of making herself exclusive to one man. She enjoyed Fitzgerald's jealousy when she danced with another man or received letters from other soldiers. Fitzgerald was determined to "possess" Zelda, and this mimics Jay Gatsby's obsessive actions of chasing after Daisy (Cline 151).

When Zelda graduated from high school, she desperately wanted to escape from her small, Southern Alabama town. She never considered college and grappled with the idea of marriage. Under Zelda's graduation photo run the lines: "Why should all life be work, when we can borrow. Let's think only of today, and not worry of tomorrow" (Cline 38). This line exemplified her mindset on life, and the desire to pursue her own happiness. I believe that this is a feminist mindset because Zelda desired independent thought and advocated for the rights over her destiny and place in society. Although she wasn't an activist in terms of the work force and suffrage movement, she understood that she deserved to live her life as a woman without systemic social constraints.

Despite Zelda's progressive attitudes and carefree lifestyle, she struggled with hereditary mental illnesses. Zelda's family had a history of severe anxiety, depression, and nervous breakdowns; however these illnesses went untreated and unrecognized due to lack of research and stigmatization of "hysteria" in women (Cline 27). In her later, married life, Zelda was

diagnosed with schizophrenia, spending many years confined in clinics and mental institutions. Most biographers and researchers today confer that she was misdiagnosed; her condition was probably bipolar disorder, a term unknown at the time. Zelda eventually died in a mental institution fire; she and nine other women were unable to be saved because of locked doors and heavy windows shackled with chains (Milford 383). Zelda's death and struggle with mental illness was especially tragic because of her adamant efforts in adolescence to live a happy and carefree life; work and study were irrelevant in her teenage years, and she would tell Fitzgerald: "I just want to be young and feel that my life is my own, to live and be happy and die in my own way to please myself" (149).

As my research progressed on Zelda, I determined that one of my primary goals for this project would be to emulate Zelda's voice and experiences through Daisy's character in order to give her the recognition and narration that she should have received from Fitzgerald. By primarily using Zelda's experiences for Daisy's story, I attempted to show readers the depth of her voice as more than just the stereotypical characterization of rich villain and "beautiful little fool". Although Zelda was unable to "die in her own way," her life continued on through Fitzgerald's character Daisy. "Beautiful Little Feminist" attempts to provide a more accurate portrayal and narration of Zelda's life.

## **Conclusion**

The backstory of Daisy Buchanan is something that I find very important to share at this moment in contemporary feminist activism. *The Great Gatsby* remains culturally relevant, and I think that it's time for a version of Daisy's story to be released, putting her in a more positive

light and giving voice and representation to both Zelda Fitzgerald and Ginevra King's lives, experiences, and stories.

This story is important to be told right now because many of the issues and experiences that women are experiencing in 2019 matches the activism that was going on in the early twentieth century. Similarly to Daisy's situation, we are about to embark into a new decade of the "twenties", and young adults in both time periods are experiencing a similar sense of impending doom. While in 1917 it was fear of the unknown future with the beginning of World War 1, 2019's dilemma it is the encompassing fear of climate crisis and political turmoil that leads many to question what the future will look like. In both instances, young adults, specifically women, are dealing with uncertainties in regard to their futures and rights. As Mackrell notes, "Flappers like Zelda grappled with the quintessentially contemporary conundrum: how to combine career and family, self-interest, marriage, and love" (501). These questions have been at the forefront of women's minds for decades, making the story particularly universal and of importance.

This story is especially pertinent because we are now in an era where women's stories are experiencing more visibility than ever before. One could argue that we are also experiencing pushback and oppression more than ever before as well, but I'd like to remain positive. In terms of pop culture, there has been a large increase in marginalized representation and a shift away from the typical hegemonic discourse that feeds patriarchal storylines and characters. Many of our pop culture icons are powerful women, and there is a general increase in conversation about not only women's rights, but intersectional identities as well. Due to this current activism and

acknowledgment of women's power, it is a perfect time to reexamine classic literary works and remodel them to critically think about the women's perspective, crafting an alternate "herstory".

## **Part 2: Creative Short Story—Daisy's Prologue**

"I love him."

Smiling with assurance, I tugged a white magnolia petal from its delicate, pink center. Following the curves of the wind, I envisioned his body guiding mine through our dance in the clouds. But then—the music stopped, his arms grew limp and dropped me. My security and trust breached, he left me crashing back down to Earth, alone. I yanked another petal, pursing my lips in distaste. "I love him not." His deep voice lingered in my mind as he whispered tales of our dreamy future. "Okay, fine," I complied, ripping another petal in agitation. "I love him."

Our large front lawn was the most sought after in all of Louisville. Mother's magnolias served as a reminder for her daughters to be pure, beautiful, and always uphold the *Ladies Rules for Proper Etiquette*. Her oppressive, arresting domestic role provided the credibility for authorship of the guidebook, and she raised her daughters with the very same values that mimicked her tragic life.

Doubling as a secret entrance to a magical garden, our wraparound porch dissolved into a flight of steps that led to bright patches of flowers and ivy vines looping through the trellis. My mother once had big dreams to become an artist—until she married my father and succumbed to the obligatory fate of raising five children. Instead, she'd channeled her creative energy into more practical domestic chores, like maintaining her fairytale garden. She frequently occupied the creaking wooden swing beside the front door, observing the wonders of her masterpiece in forlorn solitude.

“Daisy!” My older sister’s voice boomed accusingly, knocking me out of my daydreams. “What are you doing to that poor flower?”

I huffed in frustration, “You scared me, Aster.” Her eyes flashed disapprovingly between the strewn magnolia petals and the pile of letters nestled beside the tree trunk.

“I don’t think Mother would be pleased to find out that her magnolias were being mistreated, Daisy.” She slowly lowered herself down into a squat, one hand resting gently on her growing belly as the other collected the petals.

Aster married her extraordinarily wealthy husband last summer, and she’d been living with us for the past few months while he was visiting some well-to-do town on business. Father was proud of his promising, growing family, and Mother was delighted to hear that she’d be getting another grandchild; my other sisters already had children, and they all seemed delighted to be in the business of procreation. I, on the other hand, saw no such vision for my future.

I snatched the stack of petals out of her hand. “Thank you for cleaning those up, Aster. I do so appreciate the help.”

She let out a flat sigh, reaching over to the pile of letters beside me.

“They’re from Tom Buchanan.” I admitted, speaking fast through closed lips as her face lit up in recognition of the name. I grabbed the pile out of her nosy hands. “I was confused about my feelings, so I was trying to figure it out. Now I’ll have to start all over again, since I was interrupted so rudely.”

“Well, I’m very glad that you’ve finally followed father’s wishes.” She smiled as if she’d won some kind of medal. “But was destroying Mother’s garden *really* the best way to figure out your feelings?”

“Yes.” I snapped. Having her live in the house again was like a never-ending lecture on How To Be Proper. “Since you seem to know everything, how would *you* figure it out?”

“Well, for starters, you’re supposed to ask if he loves *you*, not the other way around, dear.”

“*If* he loves me?” I laughed, shaking my head at her lack of appreciation for having such a popular little sister. “Oh, Aster, they all love me!” She crossed her arms and I smirked, twirling my finger around a lock of her thinning mouse-brown hair. “Those Camp Taylor boys always follow me around at the dances,” I drew in a breath and drawled out an overemphasized Southern twang, whispering in her ear, “like I’m the last slice of pecan pie in all of Kentucky.”

“Stop speaking like that, Daisy. That’s not funny.” She sputtered as I doubled over, cackling at her shock. “I’m your sister, not one of your flapper friends, or whatever you call yourselves. You need to learn your place as a wife and mother. Whether you like it or not, Tom Buchanan is a perfect match! That’s your moral obligation, and you might as well start accepting it.”

“I appreciate the concern, Aster, but I’ll be off now.” I smiled pertly, opening my palm and letting the petals fly in the breeze, scattering throughout the lawn.

...

For my seventeenth birthday, Father gave me my very own roadster. White and sleek, it’s completely transformed my life by giving me opportunities to whisk away my girlfriends throughout Louisville. And to impress the boys, of course. Today, however, it served a more practical, convenient, and patriotic cause: transportation to Red Cross meetings. The distance is close enough for a walk, but it’s much more fashionable to arrive in the roadster. Besides,

mud-stained shoes from the cobblestone walkways is not a Chanel-approved accessory. Every week, the girls and I dedicated a few noble hours to help make bandages. It really was the least I could do in return for all the pleasurable encounters I'd had dancing with Camp Taylor men.

We entered the war in April. Six months later, everyone was still on edge. Everything had changed with the establishment of Camp Taylor, and we couldn't afford to wait any longer for our dreams to come true. We chased our fantasies of adventure and excitement, in fear that they would be gone forever. Men came to town in swarms, and we had a date with a different guy each night of the week. There weren't enough girls to go around, and the soldiers would settle for just about anyone, but being the most popular and beautiful girl in all of Louisville, I fared pretty well. Letters and love notes filled my room from floor to ceiling, and men crowded the porch, desperately vying for my attention each afternoon. My trusty roadster's glove box served as a treasure chest filled with gold and silver insignia, which I collected as a means of undeniable proof that I was, indeed, the most sought-after Belle the South had ever known. My father, the senator, has been in a perpetually angry mood my entire life, but the war had crossed him over into a complete hellish demeanor. His nervous restlessness always reminds me of the tragedy looming over our heads, and despite my excitement over dances and calls from soldiers, I cannot escape the feeling of impending doom.

Despite such a small distance between my house and the Red Cross, I've always managed to see every single inhabitant of our small town on the way, which is why I'm always sure to look my absolute best. Mrs. Brown, a self-proclaimed avid birdwatcher, takes extensive notes of their incredibly interesting behaviors in her backyard, swaying on her porch swing long into the night to avoid her rotten drunkard husband. Majorie Anderson, gray and pale from lack

of sun, reprimands her children as they run around, completely unaware of their confinement and the troubles the world contains. Everyone does the same thing every day, and the entire town knows each other's business. With nosy neighbors, I've certainly made a name for myself. I want them to remember me when I get out of here—a Louisville Legend.

Just ahead, I spotted Ruth walking at a snail's pace. I screech over to the sidewalk, laughing as she drops her cigarette.

"Daisy!" She shrieked, "You owe me one now." She jumped into the car, and I pointed to my lighter. She took a long, slow drag as we veered back onto the road.

"Why didn't you leave me a message? I would've picked you up from your house." I said, stealing the cigarette out of her mouth.

"Oh, no, no." She shook her head, chirping, "I was listening in during my mother's Slim Club last night and they were condemning lack of daily exercise." I nodded gravely as she continued, "My scale said I gained three pounds, so for breakfast I ate a slice of toast and decided to walk."

"Good work, Ruthie. Maybe after we can stop and grab that fat-reducing gum from the drugstore."

Ruth, me, and our friends Pam and Anna are members of an elite club among the teenagers in Louisville. We call ourselves the Big Four, and we each wear a special silver ring on our pinky fingers to prove our highly sought-after status. We uphold standards of modern femininity, which we have defined as youth, beauty, adventure, and social awareness. Especially in a time like now, we pride ourselves on maintaining a charming appearance while also devoting ourselves to dire social causes. Being seventeen, we are in the most defining years of

our existence, but we strive to make all of our decisions with admirable poise; we can go with whomever we desire as beaux, and we crave excitement and adventure.

...

“I got a real juicy one today, girls.” Pam squealed as we settled into the back of the Red Cross room. She raised her eyebrows and twirled an invisible mustache, lowering her voice into a deep gruff: “Run away with me, Pamela. Your eyes loom in my dreams as I lie awake in longing for a touch of your golden skin.” I let out a snort as she continues, “A soldier wrote that, can you believe? Poor boy.”

“Anna, what’s your letter say?” Ruth asked, noticing her silence.

“Oh, it’s just from John.” Anna blushed as we prodded her to share. “Just the same old stuff, really. Nothing new.” Anna’s boyfriend, John, came from a wealthy family in Maryland. They met through her cousin shortly after the start of the war, and they’ve been writing every day since then. Anna’s gentle and shy, but absolutely gorgeous. Like a doll, she is quiet about her life, and her painted smile prevents me from ever cracking her true emotions. We all know John wants marriage, and I can’t tell if she is pleased or nervous. It’s true that we are at a crossroads in our lives, heading onward to adulthood and ultimately marriage, but it all seems to be going quite fast. Pammy just received a position as a telephone clerk—she’s fully content on choosing the workforce and fulfilling her obligation as a New Woman, which is admirable. She still dangles her men along, as we all do, pretending like she has a choice to pick whomever we please, when we all know we can’t in the long run. Ruthie wants absolutely nothing to do with work and has no desire to date multiple men. The emerging beauty revolution is where she earns

her place as a member of the Big Four, despite her obsessive attachment to the marriage tradition.

I do what I please, when I please. Father wants me to marry a man from an established family named Tom Buchanan, a polo player from Yale. Tom had sent a few incredibly well-written devotional letters, but I refused to answer, to my father's distaste. When I think of marriage, I think of the emptiness in my mother and the forcefulness of my sisters. Maybe one day that is what I'd want, but right now I have far too many men to show affection to. Besides, all I've known are Louisville boys. Only now am I being exposed to real men, and it's exciting. I want happiness, excitement, and adventure...if you can give me a man who will do just that, then I'd gladly accept a marriage proposal.

"How about you Daisy? What's your letter say?"

"Which one?" I giggled, my face twisting into an approving smirk. "Peter the aviator requests my attendance at the dance tonight. Shall we, ladies?" We clapped and cheered, excited about new prospects and a new night.

...

After being dipped, twirled and shimmied on the dance floor all night, I finally had a moment to rest with the girls as the event came to a close.

"Where's Anna?" I took the last sip from Ruthie's flask.

"Oh, the poor dear. She went home early. Says she has something important to do in the morning."

"Important? Morning? Those are my least favorite words."

Pam nudged me in the ribs as we began to walk home. “So, Daisy. Any update on Peter the aviator?” She winked, lighting a cigarette. I groaned and snatched it out of her hand just before it reached her lips, taking a long drag myself.

“He’s tall and a surprisingly good dancer.” I shrugged.

“You’ve known that for weeks, Daisy.” Pam crossed her arms and shook her head.

“C’mon, Dai.” Ruth pouted.

I paused to build anticipation before blurting out: “And a fine kisser.”

“Oh, Daisy!” Ruthie squealed. “How romantic!”

“Daisy is an expert level vamp.” Pam conferred.

“Queen Vamp.” Ruthie echoed, bowing down in front of me.

“Okay, okay, girls.” I paused, gathering my skirt lace in my hands. “There was actually another man, too.”

“Oh my.” Pam sarcastically rolled her eyes in feigned shock of my escapades. “Another man? Daisy, do tell.”

“It was different this time, Pam, honestly! He was staring at me from across the room all night.”

“Sounds kind of creepy.” Pam interjected.

“It wasn’t.” I rolled my eyes. “It was more calming, like a strange beacon of light pulling me in. His eyes were only on me, and he had a warm, gentle smile, as if I’d known him for years. Just as I was going to accept his outstretched hand to dance, Peter reappeared, whirling me back into the crowd. His name was Jay Gatsby.”

“Jay Gatsby? I’ve never heard of him. Is he new?” Pam asked with insurgence, suddenly intrigued at a new prospect.

“He’s a quiet type. Not one to go to the dances.”

“Huh. So, what did you do about Peter?”

“Well, I danced with him. I couldn’t refuse a dance, and besides, Peter has stuck out in my list of beaux for quite a while now. Why give it all up just for some new guy? I thought, If Lieutenant Jay Gatsby truly wanted to dance with me, he’ll find a way. Plus, what girl doesn’t want two men fighting over her? It’s fashionable.”

Ruthie begged us to stop because her legs were tired, so we sat on the side of the road, passing the empty gin flask back and forth.

“Just as I was beginning to think he’d forgotten, he appeared again, his electric eyes bright with wonder. We left the dance and walked down the street away, him silent and me jabbering on about a variety of random nonsense, testing his patience. Usually other men get scared when I go on about ghosts and the war, and I like that. But not Jay. He was attentive, and even inserted his own opinions when I stopped to take breaths.”

Ruth had begun nodding off now, and Pam stared off in the distance, no longer interested in my same old galivants. But Jay really wasn’t like the others. He held himself with an air of sophistication. He treated me like an intelligent person, and I’m certain that his age contributes to that worldly, oh, what’s the word? Ah, yes. ‘Coolness’. My other beaux had been just boys: callow, awkward, sloppy. Jay seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say, and it was refreshing.

“I’m very happy for you, Daisy.” Pam yawned, helping Ruth to her feet. “I’ll walk Ruthie home. We’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yes. Goodnight girls.”

“Goodnight, Queen Vamp.” Ruth whispered in my ear, her words slurred and sleepy.

Walking home, I couldn't stop thinking about Jay. As I reached my lawn, I plucked a magnolia flower. I whispered my story into the petals, in fear that if I kept it in my thoughts, there would be no one to believe me:

“The only one who saw us kiss was the moon. My heart was beating so quickly—it had never experienced that rhythm before, never before with any other boy. It must have been a soul’s connection. You know what it feels like, when you’ve been kissing so many boys, but never feeling anything? It’s part of being a vamp, I suppose. You wouldn’t understand because you’re just a flower, but it was meant to be.”

My heart wrenched as I second guessed my confidence. For the first time, I was nervous about assuming his feelings. Against my better judgment, I took Aster’s advice, and asked the flowers if he loves *me* this time.

“He loves me.” I pulled a petal, sucking in a breath. “He loves me not.”

I stayed outside for another hour before slipping in the front door, the boards squeaking and groaning in their usual fashion as I headed up the stairs. For once, Father wasn’t up waiting for me to return, and I was able to fall asleep in a mixture of both happiness and confusion, clutching the final petal: “He loves me.”

...

The next afternoon, the Big Four decided to skip Red Cross and meet at the theatre instead.

“Daisy!” Pammy shrieked as I arrived. “Any calls from a Mr. Jay Gatsby today?” She squeezed my hand in knowing excitement.

“Nothing yet.” The petal weighed heavily in my skirt pocket. “He’s not really my type anyway.”

“Not your type? Daisy, I’ve never seen you more smitten in my life.”

Pam and Ruthie giggled as Anna approached, her arms crossed tightly over her chest.

“Hi, Anna-darling.” Ruthie rubbed her back. “We missed you last night.”

“Yeah, Ann, you missed Daisy’s new guy. Why’d you leave early?”

“I actually have some big news.” Anna blurted, stifling our laughter. Ruth, always the empathetic one, noticed her apprehension.

“What’s wrong, Ann? Did something happen?”

She inhaled sharply, thrusting her hand into view. A large diamond sparkled on her ring finger. “John proposed this morning, and he wants me to leave with him. Tomorrow.”

We stood in silence, both in awe of the jewel and this unpredicted news. Her huge doll eyes stared at me, desperately seeking the approval that she knew I wouldn’t give. A *proposal*?

Pam broke the tense silence, “I’m very happy for you, Ann. Congratulations!”

“Yes, congratulations, dear!” Ruth hugged her. “What a beautiful ring!”

“Daisy?” Anna hesitantly nudged my arm, “Aren’t you going to wish me congratulations?”

“I have to admit, Anna, this comes as a shock. A big shock. How long have you known about this for? I mean, you never share what your letters say, so how are we supposed to know when something big like this is coming?” I glanced down at her hand once more. “What does this mean for us, for the Big Four? You’re not wearing our ring.”

“John said that no respectable, soon-to-be-married woman wears a friendship ring.”

“It is *not* a friendship ring!” I gasped. “You’re not listening to that nonsense, are you, Anna?”

“Well, I—I agree with him, actually.” She paused, watching our faces curve into disapproving frowns. “Oh, come on, girls. Did you really believe we could parade around Louisville for the rest of our lives, wearing silly rings and dancing with soldiers at midnight?”

“That is exactly my plan, actually.” I contested.

“She has a point, Daisy.” Ruthie said gently. “We’ve all dreamt of this moment.”

“Sometimes I feel like none of you really understand the point of the Big Four.” My voice surged with emotion as anger flooded my veins. “We are the four most desirable ladies in Louisville! We do what we want, when we want to! We’re socially aware, fashionable, and perpetually young. If there was ever a time to have no regrets and truly *live*, it would be now! Don’t you want excitement and adventure? Marriage takes that all away!”

The girls refused to accept my outburst, instead staring down at their feet in silence.

“We’re not schoolgirls anymore, Daisy.” Anna said gravely, a frown re-molding her perfectly painted doll expression. “It’s time to grow up. If you want to spend your life chasing adventure, go right ahead. I’d rather take my chances on being secure as a wife. If you ever decide you want more than silly adventures, you know how to find me.”

I held out my hand, my sweaty palms revealing my full-fledged disbelief that she had the audacity to talk back to me. *Me*, the one who founded the Big Four. “You never deserved to wear that ring at all.”

She dug into her pockets, holding the silver band to her chest before placing it firmly in my hand. “Good luck, Daisy. I hope you find your adventure.” She turned her back to me, hugging Ruth and Pam goodbye. “Come by for tea in the morning. I’d love to see you both once more before I go.”

My vision grew cloudy as Ruth and Pam followed Anna out of the theatre, no longer wanting to see the new feature. I sat alone, watching a new film about a crime-solving cowgirl in the West. *That’s* what I want, I thought to myself, *not* marriage. But yet, if I was so set on living an adventure as an independent New Woman, why did I feel so jealous about Anna’s engagement?

I left before the film ended, surged with the need to clear my head. I entered the woods behind the cemetery, walking along a trail that led to the river. Much of my childhood was spent playing here, riding my new bike and playing games in the water. My feet dangled into the muddy water, warping my reflection as I stared into the past. At once, a hand grasped my shoulder, knocking me out of my nostalgia. Alarmed, I screamed and spun in the direction of the attacker, grabbing hold of their arm and pulling them lower. It wasn’t until he tumbled face forward into the muddy river that I recognized the familiar uniform and glowing eyes.

“I deserved that.” Jay Gatsby said, gasping as he wiping his face free of the mud.

“Why are you here? How did you find me?” I sputtered, my mind trying to untangle this odd interaction. “Wait. Did you follow me?” His silence told me ‘yes’ as he accepted his muddy fate. “God, Jay, that’s so creepy.”

But why was my heart telling me otherwise?

“I’m not sorry you fell.” I said, waiting for him to explain himself. “If you have nothing to say, then I’ll be leaving now. Goodbye Mr. Gatsby.” I stomped away, heading back home.

“Please!” He called from behind me. “I want to get to know you, Daisy. Just give me a chance.”

...

Soon, we arrived back at my house. Jay marveled at the lawn, and I smiled at his foolish ignorance. Wanting to avoid any interaction with my family, we sat in the roadster, parked in front of my house. Jay reached a hand a hand to my hair, tucking back a loose flyaway behind my ear.

Before I could be sucked into his deep gaze, I noticed a figure approaching the car, my brain registering the fashionable plaid skirt wearer as Jordan Baker. Just two years younger than me, she was sweet, and something like a sports prodigy. I waved her over, a terrific idea entering my mind.

“Hello, Jordan.” I called. She seemed surprised that I noticed her, and she answered shyly. I smiled at her desire to please me. “Are you going to the dance tonight?” I asked.

“Yes. I am.” She stammered insistently.

“Well then, would you like to join me and the girls beforehand?” I felt Jay’s gaze staring at me as I made plans with Jordan, and a gradual blush took over my face. As she walked away, I shared my genius idea with excitement:

“Jordan Baker! How have I not thought about it before?” I exclaimed, “She would make the most perfect addition to the Big Four, now that Anna’s left us.” Jay’s face never faltered from his giant smile, and I couldn’t help but connect my grand idea with his presence. Jordan was very well known as a trendsetting girl. At only sixteen, she was already making headlines for her golf skills, and was incredibly humble of her achievements. She would ensure that the Big Four lives onward through younger generations.

In my excitement, I had hardly noticed Aster approach the roadster, an envelope in hand. She scanned Jay up and down in distaste, her face hardening in disgust.

“Another letter from Tom Buchanan arrived for you, Daisy.” I motioned for her to stop talking as Jay’s eyes dimmed. “I know how important his letters are to you, so I wanted to let you know straight away!” She deposited the envelope into Jay’s hand, “Would you mind passing that to Daisy?”

Jay gingerly held the letter as Aster shuffled back across the lawn. I could’ve killed her. Snatching it from his grip, I jumped out of my seat. “Excuse me, Jay, but I have to go deal with my sister. I’ll see you tonight?” I sprung out of the car without waiting for an answer. As soon as I reached the door, I telephoned Ruth and Pam about the idea of inducting Jordan, and they loved the idea.

“Jordan Baker, what a pleasant idea!”

...

As night approached, I was feeling apprehensive about the dance—something I had never experienced before. The letter from Tom had thrown me for a loop. He said that he would be arriving at the end of the week and staying with our family until next month on business. His letters were always so eloquent and well-mannered, and his entire life was already put together. The thought of being with him excited me, but the connection I felt with Jay was something otherworldly. Despite all of this, I had to remind myself that I'm not looking for a relationship right now, anyway. I'm not ready to give up my life as a vamp and member of the Big Four. Even if I *did* want commitment, the practical side of my brain reminded me that Jay would not be the most suitable match, anyway—he doesn't have a penny to his name.

I knocked my head against the wall, erasing that thought. That *shouldn't* matter to me. I hate everything about the way that my family is run, and I know it would be a slap in the face to my father if I married a man that wasn't approved of. Tom Buchanan, a perfect match in my father's eyes, would be able to amply provide for me and my future. Is there really something terribly wrong with wanting to stay rich? If I wasn't, I wouldn't be able to embark on adventures, which is what makes me happiest. Money shouldn't matter, so why is it plaguing my mind?

I met with Ruthie and Pam outside the country club, preparing for Jordan's induction. Jay was inevitably there waiting, and my heart and mind resumed their battle. I needed more time to sort out my feelings, but there he was, hovering. He slid his arm around my waist, trapping me.

"What do you have there?" Jay asked, nodding to the board in Ruth's arms.

"Have you never heard of Ouija?" Ruth gasped. "The talking spirit board?"

“Jordan has to ask the spirits if she’s eligible to become a member of the Big Four.” I explained dispassionately, shimmying out of his grip as Ruth nodded along. “It’s important to seek answers from the spirits in these uncertain times.”

Jay seemed unconvinced, but I knew he wouldn’t dare question me. I had found the Ouija board a few months back. Displayed in the front of the hobby store, its strangeness called out to all those who sought comfort in the midst of the war.

“Did you bring the ring, Daisy?” Pam asked.

“Of course.” How could I forget?

“So, what’s your plan for this ‘induction’ ceremony?” Jay questioned, amused yet concerned at our seriousness.

“Jordan knows to meet us here at the dance. From there we’ll lead her blindfolded to the cemetery.” He raised an eyebrow as I continued, “There’s an old shed where we’ve held other seances before, and we’ll have the whole thing set up with candles to create the perfect environment for the spirits.”

After sorting out our plan, we entered the dance. Music blasted as couples spun and twirled in every possible corner, and even though men had seen me enter with Jay, I was bombarded with requests to dance. I loved every second of it, despite Jay sulking and growing jealous. I accepted a dance from John McCormick, an old childhood neighbor who Jay had never seen before. Jealous rage took over his face and he snapped, grabbing my hand and pushing John out of the way.

“Is *that* Tom Buchanan?” His face grew red as he gripped my wrist.

I shoved him away in distaste. “I can dance with whoever I want to dance with, Jay.” I grabbed John’s hand. “We need some space tonight.”

I ran off in search of the girls, watching as Jay sunk into the crowd. He sat against the wall alone, waiting for me to return like an obedient dog.

Ruthie’s hand slipped into mine as I found the girls again. We found Jordan, guiding her out the back door into the dark night.

“Hello, Jordan, dear.” I said, fastening the blindfold around her eyes. “Just trust us, and soon you’ll be welcomed to the Big Four!”

## Works Cited

- Churchwell, Sarah. *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem, and the Invention of The Great Gatsby*. The Penguin Press, 2014.
- Cline, Sally. *Zelda Fitzgerald: Her Voice in Paradise*. Arcade Publishing, 2002.
- Collins, Gail. *America's Women*. HarperCollins, 2003.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Edited by Matthew Bruccoli. Scribner, 1992.
- Korenman, Joan. "Only Her Hairdresser...: Another Look at Daisy Buchanan." *American Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 1975, pp. 574-578. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2924582>. Accessed 17 June 2019.
- Mackrell, Judith. *Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.
- Milford, Nancy. *Zelda: A Biography*. Harper & Row, 1970.
- Person, Leland. "Herstory and Daisy Buchanan." *American Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1978, pp. 250-257. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2925105>. Accessed 17 June 2019.
- Schneider, Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider. *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*. Facts on File, 1993.
- Settle, Glenn. "Fitzgerald's Daisy: The Siren Voice." *American Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 1985, pp. 115-124. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2926317>. Accessed 17 June 2019.
- Simon, Linda. *Lost Girls*. Reaktion Books, 2017.
- West, James L. W. *The Perfect Hour: The Romance of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ginevra King, His First Love*. Random House, 2005.