

A Feminist Reading of Fitzgerald's *Winter Dreams**

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Abstract—*Winter Dreams*, one of F. S. Fitzgerald's short stories, tells about a young man's dream about a "golden Girl" Judy Jones. To read the story from a feminist perspective, it exposes misogyny in Fitzgerald's text. Judy's transformation from a beautiful flapper, a rebellious young girl, and a luring Circe, into a meek creature of "angel in the house", indicates that even in the 1920s of American society, women still have no ways out except to surrender to the dominant patriarchal ideology.

Index Terms s—men, women, misogyny, feminism

I. INTRODUCTION

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), is prestigious for his novels and short stories chronicling the excesses of America's "Jazz Age", or the Roaring Twenties. By the time of his death, he was discarded as a failed literary hope, a writer victimized by his own indulgences. But since 1940s his literary reputation has steadily risen. Today, he is universally acknowledged to be one of the major American prose writers of the 20th century (Stavola & Thomas, 1979). Fitzgerald was basically the man of the twenties, who was part of the era and eventually died with it. He was either a victim or a keen observer of its extravagance, gaudy, fancy dreams and its inevitable gloom and disillusionment as seen both in his personal life and his fictional world. From a genteelly prominent but financially declining background, Fitzgerald did never have a bit sense of security but was restless about climbing the social ladder for recognition throughout his lifetime. His hopeless love with the Southern belle Zelda Sayre compelled him to write in a rapid succession in order to live in a vanity fair of endless cocktail parties, grandeur and ostentatiousness. He was the highest paid short story writer of his time. His personal dream for the wealthy life of high society, therefore, was fulfilled. Called "the angels of the twenties", they became a pattern of youth, wealth and beauty. To a larger extent, his fictional world is autobiographical, for he interwove his personal life with the glittering debauchery of his contemporary society by epitomizing the American Dream—a dream all seen in a male protagonist's dream over a "golden girl".

American dream means that in America, the new world of opportunities, one might hope to satisfy every material desire and thereby achieve happiness. It is deceptive because it proposes the satisfaction of all desires as an attainable goal and identifies desire with material. Fitzgerald's literary achievement lies in the fact that he found intuitively in his personal experience the embodiment of that of the nation and created a myth out of American life in his days. Fitzgerald once said, "America's great promise is that something is going to happen, but it never does. America is the moon that never rose." (Stavola & Thomas, 1979, p. 90) In his stories, Fitzgerald dealt most with the American dream in terms of love and money. Whereas, in the process of dream accomplished a sense of loss and disillusionment comes with the failure embodied fully in the personal tragedy of a young man whose "incorruptible dream" got smashed into pieces by the relentless reality. Fitzgerald himself commented on this decade, "this is an age of miracle, this is an age of art, this is an age of big splendors, and also an age of satire." (Stavola & Thomas, 1979, p. 90) His masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* and many short stories like *Winter Dreams* follow a clear pattern: There is, at first, a dream, then a disenchantment, and finally a sense of failure and despair. Through these he described the emptiness and nothingness of American worship of wealth and the unending American Dream of love, splendor, and fulfilled desires.

Winter Dreams, a short story by Fitzgerald, shares the same themes with the author's most successful novel—*The Great Gatsby*: the disillusion of American Dream, the relationship between wealth and love, the way of dealing with true love and love in the illusion, by portraying the flashy surface of upper-class extravagance and the confusion, emptiness and selfishness in people's inner hearts in American society during the 1920s.

Dexter, a young man from middle-west America fell in love with Judy when he was a teenage caddie. However, Judy was a wealthy girl who always lived luxuriously in the upper class and would never be with any man without money. In order to make his American Dream come true, which is to win Judy's heart, Dexter made great efforts to become rich and finally succeeded. However, Judy married Lud Simms, a rich person who turned out to be a dissipated man, and her

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beauty faded soon with the unhappy marriage. Dexter ended up with a depressed and meaningless life, feeling grievous and regretful for Judy's tragedy.

Following the male writing tradition, F. S. Fitzgerald's stories are mainly narrated by a male protagonist, who has been passionately devoted to the Golden Girl, however, only to end up as disillusionment. Dream as the major storyline goes through to the end. His short story, *Winter Dreams*, with Dexter Green, the male protagonist as an omniscient narrator, tells about his dream about a woman, Judy Jones, which covers ten years plus, spanning from his early youth to adulthood.

II. NARRATIVE VOICE OF *WINTER DREAMS*

Winter Dreams speaks from the masculine standpoint. Dexter Green serves both as a narrator and a protagonist at the same time, thus establishing his dominant voice in this narrative piece. With his comment from time to time, the narrator Dexter makes sure that the readers' attention always falls on him, Dexter, the protagonist. What's more, Dexter's psychological life is in the foreground throughout the entire story, which further consolidates his authoritative narrative position. In contrast, Judy has been kept silent. Her psychological activities are missing in the narration; what she looks like and how she feels about everything, are all interpreted by the male. The history of gender oppression helps to account for her silence. For quite a long time woman is supposed to be a rib taken from man, born to be congenitally deficient; as a result, woman has traditionally an eternal object of literary representation, stereotyped, speechless, and soulless. In the landmark masterpiece of feminist movement, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have discoursed upon two stereotypical images that all too often appear in literature by male writers before the nineteenth century: "the angel in the house" and "the mad woman in the attic". The former is a pure and noble image, of beauty and frailness, who is supposed to realize that her physical and material comforts are gifts from her husband; the latter is a freakish monster, an enticing "adulteress", a malicious "shrew", or a domineering "bossy woman". These two women images fail to portray women as creative, rational people, but deliberately construct women images conceived in the imagination of males. Women are simply categorized at will, treated as "the other" and their images are distorted in every possible way. The distortion with the image of woman, reflects not only the superiority of Male chauvinism, but the trepidation in man facing women's overstepping of authority and challenging traditions. In *Winter Dreams*, the two major images of women have made their appearance, with Irene Scheerer and Judy Jones as the representatives respectively. It is worthy of attention that Judy Jones, the rebellious flapper, the extreme pole of Irene in personality, did eventually make compromises with traditions and did turn into a sacrificing "the angel in the house". Her transformation and the consequent tragic martial life clearly show that women still have to conform to the prescribed sex roles dictated by the 1920s' American society. Simultaneously, they uncover misogyny in Fitzgerald's text, a term Elaine Showalter uses to describe the male hatred of women. Throughout *Winter Dreams* comparison and contrast have been used to horizontally as well as vertically: the comparison before and after Judy's marriage, and the comparison between Judy and Irene as a young girl. They both take the survey and verdict of man's gaze, as Paris of Troy in Greek mythology makes his choice among the three beautiful goddesses. Man's gaze, rather than the magic mirror in *Snow White*, works ubiquitously to define and interpret women, both physically and internally.

Irene Scheerer is Dexter's fiancée, who has been presented as a lady of the upper class in both the portraying of the narrator, and the eyes of Dexter. Being easy-going, gentle and loyal, naive and kind, Irene is a symbol for the traditional virtues of women. As expressed in *Winter Dreams*, to Dexter, "Irene would be no more than a curtain spread behind him, a hand moving among gleaming tea-cups, a voice calling to children...". Here, Irene perfectly meets the social requirements for her internal side, "the angel-in the house" role she is supposed to play, instead of a living person to be herself; her internal emotional needs completely fade out. Women will get respect, especially respect from men, only when they are playing the supposed traditional of the society. Irene is of course quite popular. Through the narrator, Dexter expresses, "she was so sturdily popular, so intensely 'great'." Irene does her job well. She lives a life as the obedient daughter, the sacrificing lover and will be a gentle mother. Her goal of life is to please her husband, to attend to his every comfort, and to obey him. Through these selfless acts, she finds the utmost contentment by serving her fiancé.

Irene Scheerer is silent. Woman, as the object in literary works, has to be silent. They are characterized as symbols either for virtues and kindness, or for desire and evil. For the former, woman, like Terra Mater, reflects the ideal image; the latter, however, like the siren, seduces the seamen to dash into the rocks to death. In effect, in terms of Carl Jung's "archetypal theory", both images personify the female inner personalities that a male possesses. (Lu Yang, 1999) Jung maintains that in the unconscious of the male, there is an archetype, expressed as a female inner personality, called anima. Anima is the totality of the unconscious feminine psychological qualities that a male possesses. It is a symbol for dangerous temptation, embodied by a woman, which has its light and dark sides. Positively speaking, it is a life-giving and creative force. Negatively speaking it may cause petrification and physical death. In this sense Irene is the goddess of grace, the light side of anima, whereas Judy is the Circe, an enchanting witch figure, the destructive and self-destroying force.

III. THE IMAGE OF JUDY JONES IN *WINTER DREAMS*

Judy—a seductive Circe

The author spares no effort in depicting the beauty of Judy; he stresses this point quite many times from men's point of view. When Judy was only 11, her beauty already stood out, "...shining through her thin frame in a sort of glow"; at the age of 18, she grew to be stunningly beautiful: "She was arrestingly beautiful. The color in her cheeks was centered like the color in a picture—it was not a 'high' color, but a sort of fluctuating and feverish warmth, so shaded that it seemed at any moment it would recede and disappear." What's more, the story highlights her sensual beauty by lavishing words on her lips and smile: "Not only that, but he was treated to that absurd smile, that preposterous smile—the memory of which at least a dozen men were to carry into middle age... When the scarlet corners of her lips curved down, it was less a smile than an invitation to a kiss." Everything thing, every expression of Judy's is dangerously tempting to man. It is no wonder that Mr. Hedrick defines Judy as an enticing Circe, "'Good-looking!'" cried Mr. Hedrick contemptuously, 'she always looks as if she wanted to be kissed! Turning those big cow-eyes on every calf in town!'"

Alluring in appearance, Judy is none other than a fatal poison to the man. In her style of behavior, she walks away from the passive role tradition of women, actively gives free play to her physical charms, and gets quite many men to lose their mind. She plays with a dozen of rich men and makes them lose their head, and then abandons them. Particularly when Dexter finally loses hope in her and gets engaged with Irene, Judy goes back and snatches him away; but within only one month, she turns her eyes away to other men. Judy follows her heart and behaves as she likes; she employs her feminine charm as the weapon, fully controls her love. In this way, she is definitely a rebel against the social conventions and norms of her time, that is, before and after the First World War.

What's more, Judy breaks the social rules with her own style as "flapper", who chases after individual freedom and enjoys a life of pleasure and speed. "Flapper" is one important symbol of the 1920s — a young woman who discarded corsets, sported bobbed hair, the short skirt, heavy makeup, smoking and drinking, and dancing wildly. Having lost husbands, brothers, and boyfriends in the war, and parents in the influenza epidemic of 1919 to 1920, they exhibited a carefree wildness and independence that represented an entirely new version of the American woman. They had the vote and a strong sense of freedom that encouraged boldness never expressed before. (Robert V Remini, 2008) Flappers represented the youthful rebellion, carefree attitudes, and female independence. By 1921, the longer skirt, which was usually long and uneven at the bottom was out of date. The short skirt became very popular by 1925. The manufacturing of cosmetics was also started from this decade. The powder, the lipstick, the rouge, the eyebrow pencil, the eye shadow, and the colored nails, women had them all. Moreover, sex came to be discussed with a new frankness during the 1920s. Much of the talk was derived from a spreading awareness of Dr. Sigmund Freud. "By sheer force of violence," explained the *New York Times* in 1929, the flapper has "established the feminine right to equal representation in such hitherto masculine fields of endeavor as smoking and drinking, swearing, petting, and upsetting the community peace." (Gorge Brown Tindall, 2007, pp. 977-978)

As a pioneer to "flappers", Judy lives a similarly stunning life besides her dazzling love life: she is a frequent visitor to the golf club, where she competes with the men; she is good at swimming, which did not turn to be popular among middle class of Americans till 1950s; she takes the speed as a source for pleasure, and drives motorboats audaciously; she drives freely around different places; she defies the male classification as the other and claims herself as an existent and significant player in such spheres as sports, clubs, and arena of love, which used to be male-dominating. Accordingly, Judy is portrayed as a formidable woman, aggressive, self-motivated and self-asserted. She casts away all cliché taboos and is held in infamy by custodians of public morals. In the eyes of men it is not surprising that women like Judy are of destructive power.

In truth the story elaborately depicts Judy's "beauty" and the destructive consequences of her "beauty" in a very detailed way. When the "beauty" bursts, like Pandora's box in the Greek mythology, the disasters befall human beings one after another, with no place to hide. To Dexter and many other men, Judy is a beautiful dream, and a horrible nightmare as well. The lad Dexter fell in love with 11-year-old Judy at the first sight at the golf field, and immediately quit the well-paid job as a caddie, to plan his life in order to win the favor and heart of this beauty. This is the start of Dexter dream. At 23, he ascended to the upper class and ran into the even more charming Judy on the tender moonlight. After that, to Dexter, "The helpless ecstasy of losing himself in her was opiate rather than tonic." At the same time, his nightmare unveiled. Judy's passion did not stay stable and she acted quite on impulse; therefore, Dexter suffered a lot and finally went to his downfall. Only when he completely gave up Judy, did he get his new life: he went away to New York, and made his career and fame at 30.

It is safe to conclude that in her maidenhood Judy is a seductive "new woman": tempting young men first and then abandoning them ruthlessly. She represented the attitude about sex for the quite open-minded flappers. She played love as a game, and as the rule-setter, she was up high and of great influence. She was the one to give the demand. When she met with Dexter on the moon night, she spoke first as a commander, since the author used the verb "demand"; at the banquet to cater her lovers, she replaced her father as the host, symbolizing her deprivation the male of their authority; after getting fed up with others, when she met again Dexter at the club, she was still taking the upper hand in their communication. "She turned and he followed her." "She was not a girl who could be 'won' in the kinetic sense... She was entertained only by the gratification of her desires and by the direct exercise of her own charm." It is no exaggeration that Judy the girl is a sexy femme fatale for men to woo and fight for; she was not "owned" by any of

them; instead, she played with them.

Judy—"The angel in the house"

But that does not mean Judy does not want to have the marriage, or, she has to have the marriage. The First World War did a lot of contribution to raising the social status of women, with more new women going out of the family for economic independence; still, a large number of these new women were forced to get into the marriage decided by their parents, especially among the upper class. Judy started playing golf at a quite early age, but she did not grow into a professional player like Jordan Baker in *The Great Gatsby* and became independent financially; instead, she followed the arrangement of her parents, and married a guy who loved her at a suitable moment; after that, she was fully devoted to her family life; unfortunately, under the torturing of her cruel and abusive husband, her beauty faded away surprisingly fast. At that moment, Judy, no longer decisive and licentious, turned to resign herself to her fate. According to the Detroit businessman, Lud Simms fell in love with Judy in a crazy way. The relation between them turned to another direction surprisingly after they got married: Lud Simms abused Judy and racketed about. As a matter of fact, this is exactly the characteristic of the patriarchal society. Simone de Beauvoir said "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him" (1986, p. 23). In the patriarchal society marriage for so long has been seen as man's possession of woman (Gao Xiaokang, 1996, pp. 143-144). For the woman, this act of being possessed will ruin her aspiration and creativity since she has to perform her duty as a docile wife and caring mother rather than as a self-assertive significant person in her own right; while for the man, his act of possession will bore him soon, since woman is "used as his extension", "a device for showing him off" (Jane Tompkins, 1989, p. 2). To Lud Simms, he has been subjected to his desires all the time; in a traditional society, man is the conqueror, and woman is only the trophy for his victory, and attachment to life; when he "owned" Judy, he was bored and destined to chase after other women. Judy, though she used to follow her own heart and personality, used to love herself only, and used to pay attention only to her own value and needs, once getting into the marriage, she had to give up herself, change herself from a Circe into "the Angel in the house" (Gao Xiaokang, 1996, p. 155), play the role of a virtuous wife with this marriage-oriented attitude, even at the cost of her individual happiness; she had to destroy the self of her youth time once for all, get accustomed to feeling of belonging brought to her by marriage, focus on the economic security, the internal peace and stillness rather than motion.

At the level of narration, Judy is represented from the male perspective as the Circe first, and the angel later. The story tells about how Judy got love and marriage, with her beauty; and as a matter of fact, it ignores the real needs of women. Many men fell in love with Judy because of her beauty, longed to "own" her and failed to do it. Even for Dexter, Judy is a tempting body, mindless and helpless; when the body was no longer charming, his dream ended forever. When Dexter heard about what happened to Judy later, he murmured to himself, "Long ago," "long ago, there was something in me, but now that thing is gone. Now that thing is gone, that thing is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more." Others took Judy as a toy, a Circe, which displayed the misogyny to some degree. "The symptom of misogyny in literature is that women's struggle for their own rights is always depicted as horrible disasters, and rebellious women are distorted into dragon ladies, like demons" (Kang Zhengguo, 1994, p. 48). This is well displayed by the relation between Judy and Dexter. Mr. Hedrick refers women as "crazy women", condemning Judy being too voluptuous and outrageous; and even the narrator says that Judy is too unscrupulous in personality.

IV. CONCLUSION

Judy's misfortune, just as Mr. Hedrick commented on the next tee, was doomed in that patriarchal society. "That Judy Jones!" "All she needs is to be turned up and spanked for six months and then to be married off to an old-fashioned cavalry captain." Judy has to get married one day and it indicates that she will be shackled and will be possessed and dominated by her husband. The only thing that Judy can do is to try to postpone this moment. It arouses sympathy of course when Judy was busy crowding through and was open to rumors before getting married and became a devoted wife and mother later. The society says that beautiful women must bear patiently their suffering and accept the fact that they are victims of the circumstances of life. Men have suppressed the female, by not giving voice and value to women's opinions and responses. In a man-dominating society, woman becomes the sacrifice for love due to her subordinate status, and is elevated to a noble mother. Through the narration of Dexter's dream over Judy, Fitzgerald reveals the falseness of American dream of wealth and pleasure in the Jazz Age. Dexter's failure to hold Judy firm predicts to a great extent the end of the American dream.

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