On the Confrontation Between Masculinism and Feminism in *The Great Gatsby**

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In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald depicts the conflicts and contradictions between men and women about society, family, love, and money, literally mirroring the patriarchal society constantly challenged by feminism in the 1920s of America. This paper intends to compare the features of masculinism and feminism in three aspects: gender, society, and morality. Different identifications of gender role between men and women lead to female protests against male superiority and pursuits of individual liberation. Meanwhile, male unshaken egotism and gradually expanded individualism of women enable them both in lack of sound moral standards. But compared with the female, male moral pride drives them with much more proper moral judge, which reflects Fitzgerald's support of the masculine society. Probing into the confrontation between masculinism and feminism, it is beneficial for further study on how to achieve equal coexistence and harmony between men and women.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*, confrontation, masculinism, feminism

Introduction

Francis Scott Fitzgerald is widely acknowledged as the spokesperson of the Lost Generation and Jazz Age in the 20th century of America. As a novelist, he paid great attention to his spiritual world and the inherent rule of society. He created a new realism storm in Lost Generation literature. His masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* earned him most reputation, which, as most of his works, was the epitome of the real American life and recorded the real jumbled situations of Americans during the post-war period. Fitzgerald criticized illusory American Dream of the young and their apolaustic attitude towards life. That was why most protagonists in his novel were always trapped into confusion and disappointment. At the same time, his painful and luxurious marriage had a large impact on his emotions and creations, paving a solid foundation for his understanding of women. He often mixed his own love experiences as materials to fulfil his novel. In *The Great Gatsby*, on one hand, Fitzgerald (2009) directly penetrates the emptiness and monotonousness of the upper class and their wrong views on money and love (pp. 168-174); on the other hand, he stresses more on the conflicts between men and women. Although the strong

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pressure of masculinism still occupies the mainstream of the society, female awareness inevitably germinates.

Masculinism and Feminism

Masculinism refers to a social system which is based on that men occupy the main social sources including economics, politics, family, and so on. Male culture and identities are treated as the only social rules and public acquiescent principles. In the sexual essence, female value is an appendix of man. Therefore, man also denies the social gender of a woman. Men have the utter power in every aspect of social activities, while women should be restricted in family. All activities cannot be determined without men no matter what kind of affair it is. Man represents the superior ruler of the family and society, even nations (WANG, 2008, p. 145). All in all, masculinism has three features: gender polarization, authoritarianism, and male egotism.

In the early period, American feminism was generated as a way of female movement. The first wave of American feminism began in the 1840s to 1920s, which stressed on female awareness. Until the 1960s, the second wave of feminism was coming, during which the female was more radical and they considered themselves as the center of the world, appealing to sexual revolution thoroughly. The third wave appeared from the 1980s to 1990s and racial feminism became the main point. More black women stood up to protect their own rights. After the 1990s, the female movements paid more attention to psychology (Madsen, 2004, pp. 1-10). In narrow sense, feminism means that women know their potential abilities as a human. Female consciousness was aroused and they needed to fulfil their spiritual destinies of humanity. Gender equality vividly rooted in their minds and they considered it was men that lay obstacles in their way of feminism. For another thing, in broad sense, feminists are endeavoured to realize liberalism from family and the oppression of men. In addition, feminism intends to present individualism. More and more women resorted to social activities, open sex, and so on to get liberation. To be brief, feminism in the 1920s shows three features: gender equality, liberalism, and individualism.

Gender Polarization Versus Gender Equality

It is the basic social faith, acknowledged as the foundation of social order, that man has inherent dominance in gender, or the society will be in chaos. By contrast, feminists extremely deny the unfair perceptions and value their own gender. They strongly support gender equality. Self-identification is an outstanding breakthrough of feminism. It induces women's potential masculine qualities to be external. In combination with the feminine qualities, female androgyny becomes a fashionable gender norm (SUN, 2010, p. 8).

Androcentrism Versus Female Self-identification in Gender Role Identity

Gender role identity refers to the developmental process of the human preference and identification, which is an important element of the gender role. Men and women recognize their own roles and abilities to meet the needs of their desire (Doyle & Paludi, 1991, p. 97). Androcentrism is a basic gender role of men and applied to all male characters in *The Great Gatsby*. It embodies patriarchal ideology, enforcing the feminine strength and male prejudice on women. However, female self-identification arouses their dignity. Women partly recognize that only if more women accurately understand their gender potential, it is possible for them to rectify male prejudice.

In *The Great Gatsby*, most conflicts between men and women can get full explanations of patriarchal ideology. Nick, as the only narrator, seems to be the most subjective and righteous person in the novel, and truly has contempt for women. He feels disgusted of the immoral relationship between Daisy and Gatsby, while he

never blames Tom's extramarital affair. Although both Tom and Daisy have betrayed their marriage in the same way, Nick gives different standards to judge their morals. Moreover, deep traditional patriarchal ideology lays barriers to the female awareness. Women have been accustomed to the inferiority and trained the way of subsidiary thinking so as to neglect female potential (LUO, 2006, p. 17). However, unlike the past women suffering the patriarchal ideology blindly, the female in the 1920s thought more about what they can do. They were more independent and had jobs. Jordan Baker, a golf athlete, never uses male money and suffers the control of man (LI, 2013, p. 107). On feminist perspective, Jordan recognizes her necessary position in the society and understands her own strength.

In the patriarchal society, Nick thinks that women are not matched to participate in the public social life, such as developing career. Nick looks down upon Daisy, because of her betrayal of family. He finally breaks up with Jordan, because of her dishonesty. "It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply—I was casually sorry, and then I forget" (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 57). Because they are women, it is reasonable and acceptable to do these disgusting things. With respect to female dignity, the female began to refuse to meet male expectation. Catering to men had no longer been the only foremost task for women. Standing on Jordan's feet, she is really straightforward and open-minded. She can love Nick and suddenly date with another man without shame and sadness, when she finds Nick's prejudice against women. Her dignity does not allow her to give in to any man.

Men's Natural Hatred of Femininity Versus Female Androgyny in Gender Norms

Due to the profound influence of gender polarization, gender norms are gradually cultivated. "Men are admonished never to act in any way that may be interpreted as feminine" (Doyle & Paludi, 1991, p. 127). Men should be intellectual, cool, and rational. A man should oppose feminine quality, such as being sensitive and emotional, to ensure their male qualities in the ideal sense. That is why, in the patriarchal society, men with feminine qualities will be questioned and laughed. In *The Great Gatsby*, Mr. Wilson is a feminine man. As a husband, he bears Myrtle Wilson's betrayal and her discourteous contempt. As a business man, he never gets wealth and success. As a man, he is slighted by others. Tom comments him "Wilson? He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York. He's so dumb he doesn't know he's alive" (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 23).

Compared with male firm recognition of masculinity, female qualities develop into a strange direction, called female androgyny which refers to the female with masculine qualities. Unlike men's comprehensive denial of femininity, female androgyny admits the strength of femininity and appreciates masculinity. "It is not a real masculinity with full masculine power. It is only a display of mannish mode, and still has some femininity" (SUN, 2010, p. 11). Due to the excessive force of male androcentrism, women generate a wrong inclination that being masculine can get enough respect. The most typical new woman, Jordan Baker is "a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulder like a young cadet" (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 10). She has masculinity in her figure. Most women in *The Great Gatsby*, they drink, wear fashionable clothes and have frequent socialization, which ever exclusively belong to male quality (SUN, 2010, p. 8).

Social Authoritarianism Versus Female Liberalism

Besides the influence of gender role, society also exerts immense impact on the development of

masculinism and feminism. As the male are superior in gender roles, it is granted for them to have superiority in social status. Furthermore, due to male spiritual emptiness, seeking for physical or spiritual pleasure and happiness to a large extent takes up male life. On the contrary, to get liberation, the outbreak of female movements occupies female life.

Male Hedonism Versus Female Materialism in Social Values

The Great Gatsby was written in 1925, heading for the most severe American Great Depression in its history. The conflicts between money and love became unavoidable issues in it (D. Gross & M. J. Gross, 2007, pp. 149-150). Seemingly, hedonism here is supposed to mean the pleasure of wealth and love. Female social values, at that time, were distorted and materialism had been rooted in their minds. Compared with the female, men demanded more satisfaction from love.

Traditional American Dream, in essence, can be ascribed into two aspects: Everyone has rights to be rich, and individuals can rely on themselves to get wealth. In the novel, the meaning of American Dream is changed and every man has his own American Dream. For Gatsby, his dream is Daisy, also the core of American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*. To get Daisy, he illegally gets rich, and spends an extravagant life. Living in the house with lawn, garden, and a marble swimming pool opposite to Daisy's house, holding parties every week, and expressing generosity to Daisy's friend are all endeavoured. His pleasures, both physically and psychologically, are only from Daisy (XIA & WANG, 2013, pp. 56-57). For Tom, American Dream means Daisy as well, but not the same as Gatsby's sound love. However, the reason why Tom stays with Daisy is not so much out of love as out of need. He needs Daisy's protection to keep his family steady. Daisy's love with Gatsby is a shame on him, because of Gatsby's squalor in his past.

In contrast, Myrtle Wilson and Daisy's dream is simpler. That is only money. For Myrtle Wilson, she is only willing to marry a rich man. Thus, she betrays Mr. Wilson and chooses to be a mistress, building her own golden life. For Daisy, after Gatsby leaving for the war, she accepts the arrangement of family to get married with Tom. Daisy has a great family background and pretty face. She cannot bear Tom's betrayal and moves out. Her loneliness makes her mistake Gatsby as her redemption. It is hard to be certain that she did not love Gatsby. But compared with love, wealth is more essential reason for her to accept his love (LIU, 2008, p. 83).

Men intend to marry the woman whom they love to get satisfaction, while wealth can be viewed as the first necessary principle to be a husband for a pretty woman. It seems that a wealthy man will get much more love and more girls want to marry him. So the poor man, George B. Wilson cheats his wife that he is rich. After knowing the truth, Myrtle Wilson never considers him as her husband. Mr. Wilson has to bear all her impertinence because of his poverty and deep love. Unlike him, Mrs Wilson stirs up more people to hatred. Casual sex is common to her. Ignoring her family and reputation, being mistress of Tom satisfies her own material needs and vanity. Wealth plays the only indispensable role in her marriage, rather than love. Besides, the most masculine man Tom marries Daisy, to a certain extent, owing to love. On the contrary, Daisy is married to his money. Because at the time they got married, Daisy still loved Gatsby.

Male Superiority Versus Female Protestations in Social Status

Male superiority in social status is the most obvious feature of social authoritarianism. The male should monopolize the social resources and ensure female inferiority. In feminist perceptions, after achieving "legal and

civil equality, in theory if not always in practice” (Walters, 2013, p. 86), it is urged to dig up more effective methods to realize feminism. In the novel, Tom has the dominance in family and always controls Daisy’s choices. His superiority is also reflected in his pride and arrogance to the poor. Unlikely, women are inclined to be more sympathetic and emotional; they treat other people with more tolerance. Other than that, feminists devoted themselves to improving female social status. They enlarged their activities in the public affairs, such as their rights to vote.

Tom has extramarital affair with Myrtle Wilson, which is seen as his pride to show off. He hates Daisy’s socialization, but he always stays with his lover in public. Tom interrupts Daisy’s words without permission and consideration. In his mind, Daisy has no rights to challenge him, but submits to him. Even though afterwards he does his best to retrieve Daisy, his purpose is only to maintain his reputation and dignity (Li, 2013, p. 106).

On the female part, feminists claim “There is no reason why woman should be limited to domesticity” (Walters, 2013, p. 42). In the novel, most women are free from family. Even Jordan ever abolishes and refuses to marry any man. Women enlarge their socialization a lot and sometimes accumulate together to talk. It somehow implies that women prefer to talk as an independent woman, instead of as a mother or a wife (Doyle & Paludi, 1991, p. 127).

On account of female materialism, most of female characters are far from tolerance to the poor men, but Jordan is an exception. She is impartial to the white from all classes. As a female athlete, she is not beautiful, but charming and many rich men chase her. Nevertheless, she refuses all of them and dates with Nick, a not rich white man. In her mind, Nick’s honesty and purity move her (LI, 2013, p. 107). It can be inferred that a part of new women at that time were radical enough to be impartial to the people, whereas those white men who are the same as Tom, reflect male inequality exists and is directed at women and the poor.

Male Egotism Versus Female Individualism

Egotism in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2008) is explained as “the belief that you are much better or more important than other people” (p. 504). In moral perceptions, the male are proud enough so as to neglect the female spiritual needs. They literally define their moral thoughts as a standard to order women. On the contrary, the Declaration’s assertion left out the real equality of women. To get more evident equality, women demanded more individual rights which were “mere rhetoric rather than reality” (ZHENG, 2010, p. 27). The female tends to call for more personal needs, especially the psychological satisfaction. Women are prone to neglect the social influence and perpetrate some immoral affairs.

Unshakeness of Egotism Versus Expansion of Individualism in Moral Status

Egotism, as a male self-identification for a long time, has a latent influence on male life. Men from various classes tend to own this, whether they are rich or not. The poor white, Mr. Wilson can pretend to be rich and marry his wife. Even though he knows what his wife really wants, his egotism can never let her go. It can be concluded that wealth, the most significant element of socialization, though, has no effect on male egotism. The rich white, Gatsby can oppress Daisy to love him and compete with Tom in wealth. Love in his mind is uppermost, so his egotism unilaterally defines his love with Daisy as true love no matter what the real emotion of Daisy is. Male egotism is unconsciously triggered off his ambition to regain Daisy. Most men have the same features—masculine egotism, regardless of their classes or wealth, which is hard to shake in patriarchal society.

Unlike egotism's firm status, individualism has not been accepted by the female. But, with the continuous expansion of feminism, individualism expanded rapidly in female group. Myrtle Wilson and Jordan are two women from different classes and family background, but they are both open sexually and firmly pursue their needs. On the contrary, Daisy has been bearing Tom's snub for five years until Gatsby's appearance. Myrtle Wilson's smugness and Tom's self-pleasure from the betrayal of family rouse her anger and disappointment. Jordan's love with Nick enables her to admire, which enables her to consider more personal interests as a woman. Different individualism of Myrtle Wilson and Jordan expands to Daisy and to some degree, leads her to fall in love with Gatsby.

Male Moral Pride Versus Female Degenerated Morality in Moral Norms

Concerned with morality, both men and women can hardly be appreciated. Open sexuality brings many challenges to the traditional moral norms, but compared with the female, male moral pride deserves to praise. Moral pride restrains some men to avoid being involved in immoral things, such as Gatsby's loyal love and Nick's righteousness. While, in terms of female morality, it degenerates a lot. Overlooking the cultivation of inner-beauty and being exceedingly liable to mislead the real pleasure with the physical pleasure are common to the female. Even the most representative new woman, Jordan, has ever abolished as well and lacks the right recognition of feminism.

Male intrinsic pride is worth to be discussed. It can be divided into two aspects. First, male intrinsic pride directs men to comply with their consciousness, which has a vigorous effect on the morality. In *The Great Gatsby*, most men spend an immoral life at that time, while Gatsby differs from them. He is pure and positive. His inner beauty touches Nick's heart and he becomes the only man Nick remembered. His intrinsic pride cannot suffer the failure of love. No matter how terrible the process and experiences of his becoming rich are, his loyalty and single-minded thought to love should be glorified. The other is that men may resort to violence to preserve their intrinsic pride. Tom, who misleads Mr. Wilson to shoot Gatsby, indirectly murders Gatsby. His intrinsic pride pushes forward him using this extreme method to revenge and eternally destroy his enemy—Gatsby, who is the only successful man in achieving his wife's love.

Concerning female inner world, most women are apt to mediocrity and lacking of right assertion. Daisy's hesitation and cowardice indirectly murder Gatsby. No doubt Gatsby's death is related to his own blindness, whereas, if Daisy can be firmly loyal to her family as before, Gatsby may not have to die. Furthermore, Daisy symbolizes as money and her mind is full of money. She is attractive for her beautiful appearance, not her inner morality (LIU, 2008, p. 83). Her inside world is like a waste land and has rare precious qualities to be advocated. It is also a trend that women excessively run after the superficial and gorgeous beauty and have no consciousness of inner beauty. Nick Carraway is the moral spokesman in the novel. He is the cousin of Daisy, the neighbour of Gatsby and the lover of Jordan. He has more or less relations with the main characters so that he becomes the only witness of the story and his comments push forward the development of story. It reflected male arrogance in the moral norms. Men have prejudice on female not only in the social affairs, also in the morality. That is to say, existence of Nick is equal to forming a moral standard and according to him, characters' morality can be evaluated.

Female selfishness is treated as common ground for all female characters. Daisy's immoral hesitation

between Gatsby and Tom, Jordan's dishonesty to Nick and Wyrle Wilson's immoral sexuality with Tom are all basics of female individual pursuit, which is a reflection of feminism. In this case, their moral selfishness becomes reasonable and is backed by the female awareness. It is still in the early period of feminism, the female fail to catch the right moral standard.

With the confrontation between male arrogance and female selfishness, it suggests that the females are always hard to reach the proper moral standards provided by the male. Moreover, Fitzgerald establishes a man as the moral judge to reveal female immorality, which inferred that he is misogynist and supports the patriarchal system.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it reveals that all men and women in *The Great Gatsby* are the victims of masculinism and feminism. Fitzgerald precisely portrays men and women's jumbled choices in the society and morality. To protect men's superior social status and authority, they have to oppress more on women. Accordingly, feminists protest more intensively, blindly, and immorally. Men's pursuits of love are all dreams and can never be realized, because of women's improvident greed. Women are enthusiastic for love, but they much more prefer wealth. At last, people are all living in a complex and immoral society with their spiritual emptiness.

More important, on one hand, Fitzgerald vividly expresses his sympathy and concerns to the men. In this case, he criticizes women's greed and exaggeration. On the other hand, it can also enlighten people to contemplate on the harmonious coexistence between men and women. It is more effective to instruct people with the right identifications of social roles. It should ensure the real equality between two genders and women have the same opportunities to participate in the social affairs as men, instead of repressing the potentials of women and restraining them in the family. Moreover, men and women should set up a certain moral standard. Loyalty to their marriage and respect to others are the basis of morality. Getting rid of selfishness and exploring more intrinsic value are helpful to build a more harmonious society.

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