



Spring 2014

# Of Love, Of Money, Of Unquestionable Practicality: The Choices of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Early Heroines

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# Of Love, Of Money, Of Unquestionable Practicality: The Choices of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Early Heroines

## **Abstract**

Between 1920-1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald explored the choices of young, affluent women, particularly in regards to marriage. His fascination with this topic began with Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*, and her practical yet immature decision. Through his early short stories, Fitzgerald explores different motives behind his heroines' decisions, varying points-of-view, and the consequences of his heroines' actions. Fitzgerald's fascination with these characters culminates in *The Great Gatsby* with his most complex characters and situations.

## **Keywords**

Fitzgerald, heroines, 1920s, literature

## **Disciplines**

English Language and Literature | History of Gender | Women's History

## **Comments**

English Honors Thesis

# Of Love, Of Money, Of Unquestionable Practicality:

The Choices of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Early Heroines

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Throughout the beginning of F. Scott Fitzgerald's career, he often focused on affluent young women and the choices they make about their lives, illuminating different possibilities and complexities that arise with the freedom such women of 1920s experienced. These heroines appear most prominently in his novels *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*, as well as in some of his early short stories. His female characters all make decisions about marriage, and through a range of different scenarios, Fitzgerald explores the motives of his heroines and the consequences of their actions.

Since Fitzgerald's work can be considered a reflection on his observations of his generation and biographical to some degree, it is appropriate to understand how his personal life developed during the beginning of his career. While this paper will examine Fitzgerald's work from 1920-1925, it is helpful to begin a brief look at his life in 1918, when his relationship with Zelda Sayre began. The two met in Montgomery, Alabama when Fitzgerald, an army lieutenant, was stationed at Camp Sheridan. They began a romance in the summer of 1918, disrupted for a month with Fitzgerald's almost-deployment to Europe in October. After leaving the army, Fitzgerald went to New York in February 1919, with plans to marry Zelda after making enough money to sustain her. Zelda, however, grew weary of waiting for Fitzgerald's prosperity, and broke the engagement in June 1919. Not long after, Fitzgerald left New York to live with his parents in St. Paul, Minnesota, and there rewrote his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. With the popular success of the novel, Zelda and Fitzgerald resumed their engagement and married on April 3, 1920 in New York. The early stages of their romance are suggested in a number of Fitzgerald's works, including the early courtship of Daisy and Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*, and the relationships of Rosalind and Amory in *This Side of Paradise* and Jonquil and George in "The Sensible Thing."

After their wedding, Zelda and Fitzgerald settled into a life of parties and alcohol in New York, which followed them to Westport, Connecticut, as represented in *The Beautiful and Damned*. Fitzgerald wrote and sold short stories to support their extravagance—neither kept close accounts of their finances and spent as soon as they earned—which culminated in his second book, *Flappers and Philosophers*, a short story collection, published in September 1920. In spring of 1921, the Fitzgeralds discovered that Zelda was pregnant with daughter Scottie, and the two took their first trip to Europe. Upon returning to the U.S., they settled in St. Paul, where Fitzgerald worked on *The Beautiful and Damned* and short stories throughout much of 1921 and 1922. In fall 1922 the family returned to New York and Fitzgerald suffered his first major failure in his career, the play *The Vegetable*, which was never produced. In April 1924, the Fitzgeralds left for the French Riviera, looking for a place where they could continue to live hedonistically without spending as much money. There, the couple experienced their first marital crisis when Zelda had an affair with a French naval officer, though the extent of the affair is still unknown. Though the affair did not destroy the marriage, it left Fitzgerald disillusioned. During this time, Fitzgerald was writing *The Great Gatsby*, and this disillusionment can perhaps be seen both in Nick Carraway's portrayal of Daisy in *Gatsby*, and in Dexter's realizations about Judy in "Winter Dreams." The period of Fitzgerald's life that is important to my thesis ends with the publication of *The Great Gatsby* in April 1925. Though Fitzgerald's heroines are not direct representations of his wife, there is a clear biographical influence in his fictional depiction of 1920s women (Brucoli 79-217).

Zelda Fitzgerald, along with the other women he knew, may have acted as models for Fitzgerald's representation of wealthy, young women in the 1920s. In *Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change*, Sarah Beebe Fryer discusses the heroines of Fitzgerald's five novels as

representations of the social change he witnessed amongst his generation, particularly his identification of “women’s ever-increasing assumption of jurisdiction over their own bodies before, during, and after marriage” (Fryer 3). Fryer goes on to argue that Fitzgerald’s young women married “for security, so they naturally predicate their selection of prospective husbands in part upon a man’s financial prospects,” and that they are “spirited, ambitious, and outspoken; they want many things” (Fryer 4, 6). However, Fryer largely ties the security they desire to their personal inability to seek jobs of their own:

As recipients of mixed messages regarding their rights and capabilities for developing autonomous selves, Fitzgerald’s female characters often have difficulty identifying who and what they really are. They see the intellectual and economic freedom a career would offer, but they lack the education and encouragement to identify and commit themselves to an appropriate field of work....Again and again they find that a personal declaration of rights—emotional, intellectual, social, or sexual—may require them to relinquish some security which they cannot yet replace through provisions of their own (Frye 17).

Frye believes Fitzgerald’s young women are uncertain about their future and somewhat trapped into their lives by a lack of education and career. In contrast, I think Fitzgerald’s depiction of young women of his generation is deeper than just the uncertainty of changing times. He recognizes in a range of characters—who do not all fit the characterization that Frye describes—that this generation of women had the ability to make decisions about their lives. For a lot of his female characters, that choice does depend largely on security, but Fitzgerald does not simplify their choice to the only thing available to women without education or careers. Throughout his early-1920s work, Fitzgerald explores the range of choice these women have and how it impacts their lives. He focuses on examining their choices, not the lack of choice that Frye describes.

Throughout his work, Fitzgerald develops specific characteristics for his heroines beyond their ability to make decisions, largely reflective of changing social dynamics. His young women are often bold in their actions, whether it be within their relationships with men, like Rosalind of *Paradise* or Judy of “Winter Dreams,” or their fantastic ways of life, like Ardita of “The Offshore Pirate” and Rags of “Rags Martin-Jones and the Prince of Wales.” These women exhibit some classically “flapper” characteristics, such as drinking and kissing multiple men without obligation to them. Most are described as particularly beautiful and more often than not blonde. Many believe they know what they want in their life and how best to lead it. Here lies their strongest common bond. While these women are not all the same and they do not all make the same choices, they share characteristics that drive them to make the decisions they believe to be the most practical. Fitzgerald, however, does not always simplify these choices into only practicality; he often examines the complexity of his heroine’s choices and the difficulties that arise when the women must make life-altering decisions. As Fitzgerald progresses through the early-1920s, these complexities develop as he explores the diversity in his 1920s women characters.

To begin with, Rosalind of *This Side of Paradise* experiences one of the more frequent decisions that Fitzgerald’s women make: whether to marry for love or for financial security. Fitzgerald depicts Rosalind at first as a frivolous and selfish young woman who does not take relationships with men very seriously. Her behavior quickly changes, however, upon meeting and mutually falling in love with Amory, the protagonist. Rosalind matures after beginning her relationship with Amory, as she becomes quite serious about him. Though the two plan to marry, Amory cannot support the luxuries and comfort that Rosalind is accustomed to. Having matured to a point of realistically considering marital options, Rosalind realizes that she should not marry

Amory. Instead, she chooses a life with a rich, safe man who will provide the security and stability she believes is what is most important to ensure her happiness. Through Rosalind's choice, Fitzgerald depicts a complex character who is mature enough to recognize her needs, yet still focuses on immature aspects of life.

In between *Paradise* and *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald developed his characteristic woman through his short stories. Sally Carrol Happer of "The Ice Palace" is strong-willed, and searches for a marriage outside of her beloved South because she feels somewhat trapped by it. Eventually, she chooses a life that fits her personality the best—like Rosalind—regardless of the effect it will have on her romantic relationships. Ardita and Rags, the heroines of "The Offshore Pirate" and "Rags Martin-Jones and the Prince of Wales" respectively, each search for men who can provide thrill and imagination in similarly fantastic tales. "The Jelly-Bean" is told from the perspective of Jim Powell, and through his experiences the reader gains some understanding of Nancy Lamar. Nancy's wild behavior as a drinker and gambler causes her to fall into major decisions, not necessarily happily. "Winter Dreams" is also told from the perspective of a man, Dexter Green, and focuses largely on his love for Judy Jones. Fitzgerald strongly emphasizes Judy's beauty as a defining characteristic, and the story focuses on how it affects Dexter's, not Judy's, life. Lastly, "The Sensible Thing" depicts the romance of George O'Kelly and Jonquil Cary. Jonquil, like Rosalind, makes decisions about marriage based on what seems most sensible, not necessarily on love. The heroines of these stories vary widely, but through each, Fitzgerald experiments with different characterizations of 1920s women; he depicts a range of motives behind his heroines' choices, adding complexity through male perspective and the addition of consequence to the women's decisions.



*The Great Gatsby* is one of Fitzgerald's last works that deals with the characterization of women of his generation. *Gatsby* focuses on the romance of Daisy Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. Daisy seems to be a development of Fitzgerald's work throughout his earlier books and stories, as she is more complex than most of his other heroines. Her decisions are likewise more complicated as the book depicts her two affairs with Gatsby, each resulting in Daisy making an excited decision. The complexity of Daisy and her choices demonstrates how *Gatsby* developed out of his more simplistic, sometimes less realistic heroines, whose differences and choices seemingly culminate in Daisy and *Gatsby*.

Overall, Fitzgerald's work during 1920-1925 illustrates his fascination with young, affluent women of his generation. Fitzgerald explores the characterization of these women through novels and stories beyond a point of simply their ability or inability to work, as Frye has described. He develops an array of young, sometimes wild, often intelligent and self-serving women who make life changing decisions for love, money, unquestionable practicality, or some combination of the three.

### **This Side of Paradise**

*This Side of Paradise*, as Fitzgerald's first novel, is one of his earliest explorations of the agency of young, affluent women in his generation. While the novel focuses on the coming-of-age of Amory Blaine, the brief section depicting his relationship with Rosalind Connage provides an example of Fitzgerald's early-1920s heroines. Though Fitzgerald first characterizes Rosalind superficially, he later complicates the character as she faces decisions about her life. Throughout her relationship with Amory, Rosalind develops from a selfish, spoiled girl, to a young woman in love, to a somewhat more mature woman making difficult decisions about her future. These developments demonstrate Fitzgerald's interest in the complexity of young women

and their choices. As in later works, Fitzgerald's heroines have significant decisions to be made about their futures, but the options available only prove to make their lives more difficult. Consequently, Fitzgerald's heroines pick the safest option when deciding their future; for Rosalind, this means being a somewhat "liberated" woman, especially in her relationships with men, but ultimately she must choose between her love for Amory and the comfort, wealth, and security of another man.

Fitzgerald establishes Rosalind's character and the likely outcome of her romance with Amory in her first appearance in *Paradise*. The section is written in dramatic form, and in the description of the setting, the first hint of Rosalind's personality is given in a stage direction: a voice in the background is referred to as "a girl's voice a very spoiled voice" (124). Fitzgerald continues this spoiled persona through direct description by her sister, Cecelia: "She's awfully spoiled" (125). Cecelia's disdain for her sister's behavior towards others is evident through her further description of Rosalind, as she tells her brother, "[S]he treats men terribly. She abuses them and cuts them and breaks dates with them and yawns in their faces...she's a sort of vampire, I think" (125). Though possibly jealous, Cecelia establishes Rosalind as self-centered. Their parents clearly focus on giving Rosalind what she wants, and since Cecelia criticizes her sister for being spoiled, it appears their parents' doting does not extend to Cecelia. Furthermore, Cecelia's explanation of Rosalind's behavior towards men perpetuates the characterization of Rosalind as self-centered. The stage directions describe Rosalind as "utterly Rosalind. She is one of those girls who need never make the slightest effort to have men fall in love with them" (125). This natural attraction causes men to flock to Rosalind, but as Cecelia says, she does not focus on their attention. Her dislike portrays Rosalind as narcissistic—caring solely for herself in courtships. Rosalind is one representation of the character that fascinates Fitzgerald, and as such,

many of her actions reflect back on her ability to make choices about her life. He pays particular attention to her spoiled nature because it characterizes not only her development throughout the story but also the motives behind her eventual decision.

Despite Cecelia's depiction of Rosalind, the stage directions introduce the character in a more gracious light. After she finally comes into the scene, the stage directions describe her seemingly egotistical ways, but with the addition of some merits:

If Rosalind could be spoiled the process would have been completed by this time, and as a matter of fact, her disposition is not all it should be; she wants what she wants when she wants it and she is prone to make everyone around her pretty miserable when she doesn't get it—but in the true sense she is not spoiled. Her fresh enthusiasm, her will to grow and learn, her endless faith in the inexhaustibility of romance, her courage and her fundamental honesty—these things are not spoiled. (126)

Here, we find a different definition of “spoiled” for Rosalind. Cecelia's use of spoiled and characterization of her sister demonstrates Rosalind's self-indulgence—which is confirmed in her need to have what she wants when she wants it. Fitzgerald, however, uses “spoiled” in terms of Rosalind being tainted, which the virtues presented in the stage direction prevent. Despite the narrator's attempts to show Rosalind in a more positive light than Cecelia's vampire-metaphor, the narrator, in fact, reaffirms the conclusions drawn prior to Rosalind's physical entrance into the play-like section. She is indeed spoiled in the sense that she gets everything she wants, and reacts rather badly if she does not. Her over-indulgence is clearly defined because it plays an important part in her courtship by Amory, just as the narrator's positive characterizations do: her “endless faith” in romance is what leads her to a romance by Amory, and her honesty plays a crucial role in the destruction of that courtship. The beginnings of this dramatic section,

therefore, display the aspects of Rosalind's character that influence her affair with Amory, and these character traits, mostly negative, hint at the way in which their romance will end.

When Rosalind finally meets Amory, there is an instant attraction between the two, leading to a kiss shortly after. Even in the early moments of their soon-to-be romance, Rosalind asserts her control over the courtship, as she explains her rules on kissing: "There used to be two kinds of kisses: First when girls were kissed and deserted; second, when they were engaged. Now there's a third kind, where the man is kissed and deserted" (134). Here, Rosalind speaks in a witty manner, but her rules on commitment after kissing can be considered seriously. Rosalind makes it clear to Amory that although she kissed him, she is not necessarily committed to him. Her statement depicts the treatment that Cecelia discussed—Rosalind's focus in a relationship is not on the happiness of the man, but on her happiness, since she has "to be won all over again every time" he sees her (134). In addition, her statements reflect the control Fitzgerald's heroines have over their courtships. This new kind of kissing demonstrates the additional freedom of women who are no longer bound to men if they enter into physical affairs. Through Rosalind, Fitzgerald depicts a change that allows women to take control of their kissing practices, and more significantly, their life. Again, while Rosalind's kissing practices are discussed in jest, they reflect the level control she has in her relationships. Rosalind setting the kissing rules in her romance with Amory demonstrates that she will make decisions about their courtship and her role in it.

As their jesting conversation continues, Rosalind further demonstrates the power she will have over their or any affair. In response to Rosalind's kissing rule, Amory wants to know why she "play[s] with men," to which she responds, "For that first moment, when he's interested. There is a moment—Oh, just before the first kiss, a whispered word—something that makes it

worth while...Then after that you make him talk about himself. Pretty soon he thinks of nothing but being alone with you—he sulks, he won't fight, he doesn't want to play—Victory!” (134).

The courtship process demonstrates Rosalind's selfishness that was hinted at previously. A romance to her is a game where her amusement—the “whispered word”—and her ultimate control over the situation—“Victory!”—are the most important aspects. Though her statements reflect her witty tone, they still demonstrate a significant aspect of her character. Taken literally, they show her as emotionally removed from romances, worrying first and foremost about her own enjoyment, and not the feelings of the men she plays with. More broadly, this conversation shows how Rosalind controls her courtship. Fitzgerald portrays her power and focus on her self-amusement. Through this playful interchange, Fitzgerald therefore establishes Amory's and Rosalind's affair as based on Rosalind's freedom to make decisions, particularly about her relationships with men.

After teasing Amory with kissing, Rosalind does fall in love with him, but there is still a hint of an unfortunate future. As they discuss the possibility of a love affair between them, Amory mentions how their personality traits would factor into it: ““If we did [the romance] would be very big...Because selfish people are in a way terribly capable of great loves”” (136). Here, Amory recognizes the characteristic of Rosalind that had been developed from her introduction, her self-centeredness, while also attributing it to himself. Although Amory thinks their egotism will lead to a great love, the previous examples of Rosalind's selfishness demonstrates that it will most likely not be a successful one, even if it is “big.” The foreshadowing of the failure of their relationship continues after the two announce their love for each other. Rosalind, prompted by Amory, admits her love, but with a twist at the end: ““I love you...I am very...happy, thank God, thank God—(*She pauses and then, in an odd burst of*

*prophecy, adds*) Poor Amory!” (137). Until this point, the failure of a relationship between Amory and Rosalind has only been hinted at: Rosalind’s narcissism generally and her cavalier attitude towards romances lead the reader to believe that Amory would most likely face the fate as the other men Rosalind has been courted by. With the stage direction “*burst of prophecy*” before “Poor Amory!,” Fitzgerald makes it clear that this affair will not have a happy ending, particularly for poor Amory. The repeated foreshadowing shows that however the relationship may develop, it will end in a way that hurts Amory.

Despite the ending foreshadowed, Amory and Rosalind quickly become very serious about their love affair. In the section directly after the “*burst of prophecy*,” there appears to be no trouble between the two: “Within two weeks Amory and Rosalind were deeply and passionately in love. The critical qualities which had spoiled for each of them a dozen romances were dulled by the great wave of emotion that washed over them” (137). Here, there seems to be a reversal of the prophecy. The “critical qualities” which “spoiled” so many previous romances—like Rosalind’s selfishness and joy in defeating men—does not impact theirs. The apparent success is demonstrated further, as Fitzgerald writes, “They were together constantly, for lunch, for dinner, and nearly every evening—always in a sort of breathless hush, as if they feared that any minutes the spell would break and drop them out of this paradise of rose and flame. But the spell became a trance, seemed to increase from day to day; they began to talk of marrying in July—in June” (137). While the preamble to the courtship appeared to confirm that the “spell” would not last, Rosalind and Amory’s transition into a “trance” seems to prove the opposite. The seriousness reflects a change in Rosalind herself; she no longer wants only “Victory!” in her relationship with Amory, but has matured to a point of wanting to marry. This change complicates her

character and her choices within courtships. Her love for Amory moves Rosalind beyond simple pleasure in a love affair to decisions about what can better sustain her for life: love or money.

As the romance matures with Rosalind, to the point of potential marriage, her outlook on their relationship begins to change. Her mother stirs these feelings, as she tells Rosalind, “You’ve already wasted over two months on a theoretical genius who hasn’t a penny to his name, but go ahead, waste your life on him” (141). Though Rosalind protests that Amory’s earning thirty-five dollars a week in addition to his family income, Mrs. Connage persists, saying, “And it [his income] wouldn’t buy your clothes” (141). To this, Rosalind has no reply. Her mother continues, telling her, “I have your best interests at heart when I tell you not to take a step you’ll spend your days regretting... You’d be dependent absolutely on a dreamer, a nice, well-born boy, but a dreamer—merely *clever*” (141). Mrs. Connage clearly does not think Amory will be financially and materially able to provide for Rosalind in the way she desires, seen in the references to Rosalind’s expensive taste in clothes. Rosalind does try to defend Amory to an extent, which she has done repeatedly, as the stage directions refer to it as “*a tiresome lesson*” (141). She does, however, recognize that her mother is right about Amory’s inability to provide for her material desires. By not responding in defense of Amory to her mother’s last statements, Rosalind, though most likely reluctantly, admits that Amory would probably not be prosperous enough to support the lavish life she is used to. These flaws in Amory—being a dreamer, a theoretical genius without a penny—must weigh, therefore, on Rosalind as well. Fitzgerald uses this conversation between Rosalind and her mother as a prelude to the coming interactions between Rosalind and Amory, but, more importantly, it demonstrates the external forces also driving her ultimate decision. As with later Fitzgerald heroines, Rosalind

must choose between the man she loves and a comfortable life, ultimately demonstrating what Fitzgerald sees as the divided priorities of the affluent young women of the 1920s.

Amory soon discovers Rosalind's difficult decision shortly after her conversation with her mother. In a brief meeting with Rosalind's family, Amory mentions his two dollar a week raise, which causes "[g]eneral collapse" by the Connages, signaling that two dollars makes no real difference to his income (141). Once alone with him, Rosalind has a brief burst of passion, but quickly dissolves into "*a tearless sobbing*" (142). After exclaims from Rosalind of "'Oh, we're so darned pitiful!'" and "'Oh, I want to die!,'" Amory divulges that their relationship has been rocky lately: "'Rosalind, another night of this and I'll go to pieces, You've been this way four days now.'" (142). After a quick hopeful comment about the two of them making "a start together," Amory, too, quickly devolves into unrest, making accusations about her and Dawson Ryder, a very rich man who has been pursuing her (142). Rosalind admits Dawson has been proposing to her, and further, says she likes him, but that Amory is "'the only man [she's] ever loved, ever will love'" (142). Despite this love, Rosalind quickly explains how his salary just is not enough for her, stating, "'Darling, I don't even do my own hair, usually,'" after Amory protests that they will have 275 dollars a month. Rosalind takes her argument a step further, explaining, "'The very qualities I love you for are the ones that will always make you a failure'" (143). This comment harkens back to what Mrs. Connage said about Amory being a dreamer. Here, Rosalind recognizes that though she loves him for it, her mother is right—he will never be able to fully support Rosalind the way she wants by being a dreamer, a quality in men the later Sally Carrol Happer also disliked. Her options are now clear, both to her and Amory. Rosalind has evolved from a girl playing with men, to one in love, and finally to a woman who must make



a mature decision about her life. She must be realistic about what she needs in a future, and her love for Amory, even the reasons she loves him, will not be enough.

Beyond Amory's poverty, Rosalind divulges other reasons for her retreat from the engagement, primarily Dawson Ryder. As Rosalind continues to move forward with her argument, she compares Amory to Dawson: "He's so reliable, I almost feel that he'd be a—a background'" (142). Here, Rosalind explicates what she really needs from a husband: someone whom she can count on, but who will not overshadow her. As a selfish dreamer quite similar to Rosalind, Amory most likely would be just as a big of a personality in their marriage as Rosalind. For someone who has clearly been the center of attention for most of her life, the idea of sharing that with Amory, especially since they would not be living up to her financial expectations for at least a few years, makes Rosalind recognize that their marriage would not work. She explains her reasoning to Amory further, stating: "I can't marry you and ruin both our lives....I can't be shut away from the trees and the flowers, cooped up in a little flat, waiting for you. You'd hate me in a narrow atmosphere. I'd make you hate me'" (144). Despite her love for him, Rosalind knows that she would destroy the marriage through her unhappiness over their cramped life. She prefers to leave Amory still in love, with good memories rather than in shambles (144). Amory protests her dismissal of their possible life, but Rosalind continues, "I'm just a little girl. I like sunshine and pretty things and cheerfulness—and I dread responsibility. I don't want to think about pots and kitchens and brooms. I want to worry whether my legs will get slick and brown when I swim in the summer'" (145). The importance of Dawson's reliability to Rosalind is obvious: Rosalind does not want the life of a poor housewife, but one where she focuses solely on the pretty things that make her happy. Though choosing the pretty things over love highlights Rosalind's spoiled immaturity, her ability to recognize what she needs

demonstrates that she has matured to some extent. The life she needs is what Dawson will provide for her. By being a background, he would allow her to be her carefree self, while his money will make sure she never has any responsibilities. She remains selfish in her desires, but her recognition of what she truly needs in a relationship demonstrates a maturing of her views on men. Having recognized the appropriate marriage for herself, Rosalind thus ends her engagement with Amory.

Rosalind acts rationally when making her decision to leave Amory for Dawson, a trend represented in many of Fitzgerald's works. Despite loving Amory deeply, Rosalind chooses her husband based on practicality: the man who will give her the life she knows will make her the most comfortable, no matter her lack of love for him. In *This Side of Paradise*, therefore, Rosalind chooses a spouse by her mind, not her heart. As described in the stage directions, Rosalind has virtues that prevent her from being wholly spoiled. These traits are what allow her to have a love affair with Amory, and to recognize what she really wants in life. They cause her to evolve throughout the play within the book, from the purely selfish girl who toyed with men, to someone deeply in love, to a more mature woman who, though still driven by selfish reasons, recognizes the important factors in a sustainable marriage. Her selfishness, therefore, cannot be the total cause of the relationship's failure, but rather a factor in Rosalind's decision. She recognizes that first and foremost, she must be completely happy for a relationship to work, and that entails financial security and being the primary focus of married life. As such, Rosalind typifies the choices of Fitzgerald's heroines, and the themes he explores through them. He depicts young, affluent women as people with the ability to choose their paths in life, and though this choice complicates their characters and their decisions, it ultimately results in similar endings. She decides that she likes being spoiled, a mature recognition of her own immaturity.

Rosalind, along with a great many Fitzgerald women, recognizes what is most important to her: security, money, comfort, and maybe love.

### Short Stories

Throughout the 1920s, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote an abundance of short stories, his primary source of income. These stories covered a range of topics and helped him develop his writing, like those that Matthew Buccoli calls “the *Great Gatsby* cluster stories,” in which Fitzgerald worked through his ideas for the novel. Although he wrote them purely for financial gain, certain themes continually reappear; most significantly, Fitzgerald often focuses on affluent young women in his early 1920s stories. In these pieces, he developed the female characters in different ways, but almost all focus in part on a prospective marriage for the leading woman. Though Fitzgerald discusses these potential and actual marriages differently, they reflect and build on the ideas presented in *This Side of Paradise* with Rosalind. The heroines of Fitzgerald’s stories are often strong-willed and affluent and have the ability to make choices about their lives. Through these stories, Fitzgerald developed his understanding of women of his generation and their choices, as he depicts them in *Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald’s characterization of privileged young women in the 1920s demonstrates an increase in personal choice, which does not always simplify the lives of his heroines. As the majority of his female characters face choices about marriage, Fitzgerald illustrates an understanding of the importance of the decision of whom to marry for affluent young women of his generation.

In one of his earlier short stories, “The Ice Palace,” Fitzgerald depicts some of the choices available to women of the 1920s through the story’s heroine, Sally Carrol Happer. Sally Carrol is a native of Tarleton, Georgia, a town Fitzgerald revisits multiple times in his short stories. Here, Sally Carrol finds no man suitable for marriage, as she explains that the eligible

young men of Tarleton are not “only money failures, but just sort of—of ineffectual and sad....because [they] like [Tarleton] and never want to change things or think or go ahead” (Brucoli, *Stories*, “The Ice Palace” 51)<sup>1</sup>. It is not only the men of Tarleton that she finds unsuitable, however, but the Tarleton-version of herself: “[T]ied down here I’d get restless. I’d feel I was—wastin’ myself. There’s two sides to me, you see. There’s the sleepy old side you love; an’ there’s a sort of energy—that feelin’ that makes me do wild things. That’s the part of me that may be useful somewhere, that’ll last when I’m not beautiful any more” (51). In this description of herself, Sally Carrol reveals the complexity of her character. Though some part of her connects with a lazy, Southern life in Tarleton, there is an adventurous part that seeks something greater, much like some of the other short story heroines discussed below. While this adventurousness is one aspect of Fitzgerald’s development of his heroines, it is also the fact that Sally Carrol makes the conscious decision to change her life. In this choice, Sally Carrol hopes to find a marriage that will last beyond her youth—a practical ideal—but will also be a new adventure in the North.

Sally Carrol makes this change through her engagement to Northerner Harry Bellamy, and her adjustment to his life in an unnamed northern city forms the bulk of the story’s plot. Sally Carroll goes north to get to know Harry’s family and throughout this visit, she discovers more and more about the North<sup>2</sup> that does not suit her. From the lack of flattery from men after her engagement, to the lack of affection from some of Harry’s family, especially his mother, from her simple inability to adjust to the cold, to Harry’s surprising and arrogant view of Southerners—he calls them “sort of degenerates” and “lazy and shiftless”—Sally Carrol’s

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent parenthetical citations in this section will be from Brucoli’s *Stories*.

<sup>2</sup> The “North” that Fitzgerald describes can probably be narrowed to the Midwest, for a number of reasons. Fitzgerald was raised in Minnesota and often wrote about his personal experiences. In addition, the “North” he depicts is rural, exceedingly cold in winter, and the Midwest is the coldest region of the U.S.

experience in the North does not fulfill the great new experience she hoped for (60-3). Despite the fact that she is “the sort of person who wants to be taken care of after a certain point,” and she feels sure Henry will take care of her, she ultimately does not last in the North. After getting lost in the labyrinth of the town’s ice palace at the town’s winter festival for two hours, Sally Carrol proclaims “I want to get out of here! I’m going back home. Take me home...tomorrow!” (68-9). The story ends with her back at her windowsill in Tarleton, just as the story began.

While Sally Carrol does not actually choose the marriage she finds most congenial, she does pick the life that is the most sensible for her. The North greatly conflicted with a large portion of Sally Carrol’s character, and as such, she could not live there. The South, though potentially a cause of restlessness, is actually the most practical and emotionally comforting choice for Sally Carrol’s life, because while she might have been taken care of by Harry, she would not have been herself in the North. “The Ice Palace,” therefore, strongly demonstrates the ability and need of a woman to make choices; for Sally Carrol, this means picking a life that will be more comfortable for her, even if her potential husbands are lazy southern men. Sally Carrol makes life-altering decisions twice in the story, both to leave the South and then to return for good, that indicate how much control she has over her life. Through Sally Carrol, Fitzgerald explores the amount of agency his characterization of a woman in the 1920s had in and outside marriage to choose the life most suitable for herself.

In “The Offshore Pirate” and “Rags Martin-Jones and the Prince of Wales,” Fitzgerald further explores the way women like Sally Carrol crave adventure. Each story is fantastic, humorous, and light-hearted, and the two stories have very similar plots. The heroines are Ardita Farnam and Rags Martin-Jones, respectively, and each leads a lavish life. In “The Offshore

Pirate,” Ardita spends her time on her uncle’s yacht, though she thoroughly enjoys disobeying her uncle and plans to run off to marry a man he does not approve of. Rags Martin-Jones, in comparison, has a vast amount of wealth at her disposal. The two women spend the majority of their stories as victims of extravagant ruses to win their affections. In “Offshore Pirate,” a man posing as a pirate named Curtis Carlyle hijacks Ardita’s yacht and leads her on an adventure she believes is his escape from the police. During their trip to an island, Ardita reveals details about her character that reflect Fitzgerald’s daring new woman. Ardita went ““from man to man, restless, impatient, month by month getting less acquiescent and more dissatisfied”” until she found “[c]ourage as a rule of life, and something to cling to always””(86-7). Ardita displays this courage by diving off a twenty foot cliff and going along with the pirate’s plan to evade the police. In fact, she goes so far as to fall in love with the “pirate” Curtis. In the end, we learn that Curtis is none other than Toby Moreland, the sensible man Ardita’s uncle wanted her to marry. The whole pirate getaway was a plan concocted by Toby to win Ardita’s heart, and because of the length he goes to and imagination he goes employs to woo her, Ardita agrees to marry him. Though she originally wanted no part of her uncle’s recommendation of Toby, Ardita recognizes through his elaborate lies that he can provide her with the imagination and adventure she desires.

Rags Martin-Jones’ story also follows a charade turned into a marriage. Rags returns to New York from five years abroad to find John M. Chestnut still waiting to marry her, and though she did return to see him, she tells him she cannot marry him: ““I want a man who’s capable of a gallant gesture...No Americans have any imagination.... as soon as I looked over the Americans on the boat, I knew I couldn’t marry one. I’d just hate you, John, and the only fun I’d have out of it would be the fun of breaking your heart”” (227). Here, Rags is similar to Rosalind in her assurance that a marriage to John, despite her affection for him, would end in her hating him.

John, however, gives Rags exactly what she wants: a gallant gesture. Like Toby, John creates an elaborate plot to win Rags. He takes her to a night club that he has entirely orchestrated, where (he says) the Prince of Wales will stop by. After introducing Rags to the “Prince,” John reveals he must leave immediately, since he has committed murder and the police are on their way. Rags secures a place for John and herself with the “Prince’s” car traveling to Canada. Just as the police raid the club and are about to take John into custody, he ends the charade. He reveals to Rags that it all was indeed an elaborate plot, one that went back to when she was in Europe. They marry the next day. Like Toby, John proves that he will provide not the sensibility and dullness Rags expects, but rather the fantasy she desires.

Both stories center on the elaborate plots made by men to win over their adventurous women. In these two stories, Fitzgerald explores the choice made by Ardita and Rags through that adventurousness. The two women desire independent lives—Ardita through defying her uncle and Rags through her traveling on her own. They may choose men who originally seem to offer predictability and practicality, but who in actuality will partake in the lives Rags and Ardita envision for themselves. Though these stories have a much less serious tone than others, they still typify Fitzgerald’s exploration of women of his generation. Through their boldness and desire for adventurous lives, Rags and Ardita act as two of the many characterizations of a woman’s choice. Like Fitzgerald’s other heroines, Rags and Ardita make decisions about marriage based on what they think best suit their lives. Though their choices may not be for financial or practical reasons as Rosalind’s were, they are significant because they illustrate the women’s power to act. Rags and Ardita, therefore, act as another type of young woman in Fitzgerald’s characterization of his generation.

In “The Jelly-Bean,” Fitzgerald further explores the idea of women ending up in an unplanned marriage, but not in the romantic way of “The Offshore Pirate” and “Rags Martin-Jones.” “The Jelly-Bean” returns to Tarleton, Georgia, with Jim Powell, the titular Jelly-bean—“one who spends his life conjugating the verb to idle in the first person singular” (143)—as the main character. As opposed to “Pirate” and “Rags,” the main female character in “Jelly-Bean” is not the focus of the story. Rather, Fitzgerald shows Nancy Lamar through the eyes of Jim as he admires and interacts with her, specifically during a 72-hour period preceding, during, and following a dance. Nancy, a friend of Sally Carrol, is as bold as Ardita and Rags. She had “left a trail of broken hearts from Atlanta to New Orleans,” gambled, and drunk: ““Oh, she’s a wild one. Shoots craps....[a]nd she do like her highballs,’... ‘she loses more than her daddy can afford to give her”” (146, 148). Her audacious behavior made her the “toast of a town” (148). Shortly into the story, the reader and Jim learn that she is engaged, which leaves Jim depressed at seeing the woman he has admired from afar “become the private property of an individual in white trousers—and all because white trousers’ father had made a better razor than his neighbor” (148). Seemingly, Nancy would marry the man, named Ogden Merritt, for his money, not necessarily for love, and Nancy’s indifference for the man is revealed as the story develops. However, the bitter tone here could come solely from Jim’s point of view; he would likely find some fault in any fiancé that was not himself.

At the dance, Nancy gets drunk on “gold old corn” moonshine, and gambles away most of her money, leaving Jim to step in to help her: “Jim understood—the ‘gold old corn’ he had given her—the ‘gold old corn’ she had taken since. He wished he dared interfere—a girl of that age and position would hardly have two bank accounts. When the clock struck two he contained himself no longer” (154). Jim successfully wins back all of Nancy’s lost money, but not long



after Nancy departs. The next day, Jim learns that later that night Nancy, Ogden, and two others had “got another bottle of corn, got tight and decided to shock the town—so Nancy and that fella Merritt were married in Rockville at seven o’clock this morning....Nancy sobered up and rushed back into town, crying and frightened to death—claimed it’d all been a mistake....I don’t guess Nancy cared a darn about him” (157-8). Despite Nancy’s regret about the marriage, her parents make her stay in the marriage.

In the end, Nancy does not seem to have much choice in her future, but Fitzgerald’s emphasis on choice for her is her bold actions. She chooses to drink and to gamble and to shock the town. She is bold, but more reckless than either Rags or Ardita. Unfortunately for Nancy, her choice in the marriage is not one born of love, but of her wildness. In “The Jelly-Bean,” therefore, Fitzgerald develops how the actions of his heroines do not always yield positive results. By doing so, he complicates the characterization presented in previous short stories. While women of his generation had the ability to make choices about love, those decisions did not always create the happy endings of “Ice Palace,” “Offshore Pirate,” and “Rags.” The dissatisfying fallout from Nancy’s choices adds dimension to Fitzgerald’s collection of heroines, by providing a more realistic understanding of these women, who cannot conceivably all have happy endings.

This added complexity continues in “Winter Dreams,” “The Sensible Thing,” and eventually in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald further develops his characterization of young women through the perspective of male characters in “Winter Dreams,” part of his *Gatsby*-cluster stories (Brucoli 217). In this story, Fitzgerald depicts Judy Jones, a character similar to Rosalind and the later Daisy, whom the reader learns about through Dexter Green. The story follows his affair with Judy and his eventual disillusionment with her. From Dexter’s eyes, Judy

is “arrestingly beautiful,” a quality which she used often with men: “She simply made men conscious to the highest degree of her physical loveliness....and under the magic of her physical splendor the strong as well as the brilliant played her game and not their own” (227). Her control over men extended beyond her beauty, as she “was not a girl who could be ‘won’” and is “entertained only by the gratification of her desires and by the direct exercise of her own charm” (227). Judy uses her choices in a different way than Nancy, Ardita, and Rags as her boldness is focused on her beauty and its effect on men. She uses this power to win the love of Dexter, but not him alone: he is “one of a varying dozen who circulated about her” (227). As she rapidly goes through men, Judy first leaves Dexter after no more than a summer together.

The second time Judy and Dexter come together in the story, when Dexter is engaged to someone else, Judy still focuses largely on her beauty: “‘I’m more beautiful than anybody else,’ she said brokenly, ‘why can’t I be happy?...I’d like to marry you if you’ll have me, Dexter. I suppose you think I’m not worth having, but I’ll be so beautiful for you’” (232). Here, Fitzgerald satirizes Judy’s narcissism; she does not seem genuinely in love with Dexter, but rather with her own beauty and the attention she receives from it. Though Dexter leaves his fiancée for Judy, her fickleness sweeps her away from him again, with this affair lasting only one month.

Seven years later he hears of Judy again. A business associate mentions Judy to Dexter by chance, and Dexter learns that she has greatly faded from the person she once was, or that he thought she was. She is married to a man who “‘treats her like the devil’” (“Winter Dreams” 234) Like Nancy, Judy’s choices regarding marriage do not end happily. Most strikingly, Dexter’s informer describes her as being “‘a pretty girl when she first came to Detroit’” but not as beautiful as Dexter believed (234). The news leaves Dexter devastated: “[H]e knew that he had just lost something more, as surely as if he had married Judy Jones and seen her fade before

his eyes. The dream was gone” (235). As the story closes, Fitzgerald focuses on Dexter’s disillusionment with his ideal of Judy. Dexter realizes that she may never have been the woman he desired, and in doing so, he loses the “dream” of the astoundingly beautiful and unattainable woman he once loved.

“Winter Dreams” portrays a specific version of Fitzgerald’s heroines, yet it follows the theme of other stories. Judy is characterized by her ability to exploit her beauty to make decisions regarding men. The focus on her beauty is similar to Fitzgerald’s focus on Nancy’s gambling, Ardita’s and Rags’ adventurousness, and Sally Carrol’s attempt to find a fulfilling life. These characteristics define the way these heroines make their choices as women of beauty and wealth. Like Nancy’s drinking and gambling, Judy’s narcissism results in an apparently unhappy marriage. Again, Fitzgerald explores the ways young women’s freedom does not always create satisfaction for his heroines. He provides a realistic depiction of choice demonstrating that it is not always the same as happiness.

Lastly, Fitzgerald’s “The Sensible Thing” continues the trend of Fitzgerald’s heroine making her own choices, but resembles Rosalind’s choices more than the other short story heroines. Like “Winter Dreams” and “The Jelly-Bean,” “The Sensible Thing” is told from the perspective of a man, George O’Kelly, in love with and planning on marrying Jonquil Cary. Though he starts as an architect in Jonquil’s town, he moved to New York “to look for something more immediately profitable” so he could support Jonquil and gain her parents’ approval of their engagement. The story begins with George’s trip to see Jonquil after quitting his job in New York out of unhappiness and an inability to be away from her, though he hides his unemployment from Jonquil and her family. George is quickly distraught by Jonquil’s association with other young men, and clearly worried about the state of their engagement, as he

asks “Do you mean you think I’ll never have enough money to marry you?” (293). Though Jonquil pacifies him by saying he is jumping to conclusions, his fears are soon realized.

When George pushes the subject of marriage with Jonquil on the morrow, she reveals her doubt about marrying George. In a very similar manner to Rosalind, Jonquil tells George that, though she loves him, she cannot marry him: “George, I love you with all my heart, and I don’t see how I can ever love any one else but you. If you’d been ready for me two months ago I’d have married you—now I can’t because it doesn’t seem to be the sensible thing” (295). Like Rosalind, Jonquil knows she can and will love only one man, but she also realizes that that love alone cannot sustain her in a marriage. George was not able to accumulate enough wealth when Jonquil would have married him—during the first flash of love when Rosalind too wanted to marry her poor man, Amory—and their impending marriage no longer seems sensible to her. Jonquil’s choice in this moment clearly demonstrates one of the primary ways Fitzgerald represents how women of his generations made decisions about their lives; like Rosalind before her and Daisy after her, Jonquil chooses a more sensible life over love, preferring a comfortable life with her parents over a potentially unstable life with George.

The story returns to Jonquil and George a year later, after George has had great financial success as an architect in Peru. He comes back to Tennessee to see if Jonquil is still available to and interested in marrying him. In the midst of George explaining his success, Jonquil delivers leading questions to get him to kiss her. When he realizes her intent and kisses her, the fate of the two seems sealed in a future marriage. For Jonquil, George is now the sensible choice. She loves him and he can now adequately provide for her. In the last sentences of the story, however, George reveals that waiting for practicality has dulled his love: “He might press her close now till the muscles knotted on his arms—she was something desirable and rare that he had fought for

and made his own—but never again an intangible whisper in the dusk, or on the breeze of night.... Well, let it pass, he thought; April is over, April is over. There are all kinds of love in the world, but never the same love twice” (301). By waiting until the marriage with George was practical, Jonquil changed their love. Like Dexter’s after-the-fact disillusionment with Judy, George has lost the passion he once had, and he realizes it could never be “the same love twice.” Through George’s final realization, Fitzgerald demonstrates that the choices of women have potentially unhappy consequences. Even though the two end up together, Jonquil has lost something in making a sensible decision. As will be discussed in greater detail with *The Great Gatsby*, ““The Sensible Thing”” briefly show Fitzgerald’s portrayal of young, affluent, 1920s women as having more choices. However, these choices do not necessarily make their lives any easier, particularly when it comes to choosing between love and “the sensible thing.”

Overall, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s short stories portray a vast range of characters, and no two of his heroines are quite the same. But these women do all share features that illustrate Fitzgerald’s exploration of the affluent young woman of the 1920s. These stories seemingly act as Fitzgerald’s way of developing the different traits of these women: wealth, boldness, beauty, pragmatism, and the ability to make decisions about their lives. These women are connected by their ability to choose though the satisfaction of their results varies. This feeling of choice and its consequences, whether positive or negative, connects Fitzgerald’s short story heroines to those of his novels, demonstrating his fascination with 1920s wealthy women’s power to choose. In the end, his short stories provide an outlet to develop these heroines and complicate the issue of choice for them.

## **The Great Gatsby**

*The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald's most recognized work. The novel centers on Jay Gatsby and his undying love for Daisy Buchanan. Throughout the present day and flashbacks of the novel, Daisy acts as one of Fitzgerald's archetypal 1920s women. As in most of his examination of young female characters, Fitzgerald explores the potentially new opportunities and choices young women of the 1920s had through Daisy's love affairs with Gatsby and her marriage to Tom Buchanan. Daisy faces a choice between potential spouses twice in the novel. First, when Daisy is eighteen, she falls in love with Gatsby, and though she originally plans to marry him, she is unwilling to wait for him to return from World War One, so she chooses Tom; second, five years later, Gatsby returns to Daisy's life with the wealth and presence he lacked in 1917, and Daisy must again choose between Tom and Gatsby, perhaps in a more difficult situation than the first time. Each time, Daisy bases her decision on love, on money, or on unquestionable practicality. While Daisy's choices are very similar to those of Fitzgerald's other characters, like Rosalind, her decisions illustrate in more detail the difficulty of her choice, the complexity of her decision and its relation to Gatsby's choices, and whether or not Daisy really has a good choice at all. Through the depiction of Daisy's choices, Fitzgerald comments on the ways in which wealthy, more socially liberated women of the 1920s have additional levels of choice in their lives, but, as a result, they face harder and more complicated decisions.

The story of Daisy's and Gatsby's first love affair is conveyed to reader and the narrator, Nick Carraway, through a series of flashbacks that occur throughout the novel, told by Jordan Baker, Nick's girlfriend and Daisy's childhood friend, and by Gatsby himself. In the first depiction, Jordan begins by illustrating Daisy's position in Louisville:

The largest of the [red, white, and blue] banners and the largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay's house. She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the girls in Louisville. She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster, and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young officers from Camp Taylor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night. (74)

Jordan's description of Daisy illuminates her family's affluence. With the largest lawn, and presumably a correspondingly largest house, Daisy's family is among the rich of Louisville which affects Daisy's ability to make choices: the wealth and her beauty allow her to pick from any of the many gentlemen and young officers courting her. Like Rosalind, Daisy has many men "demand[ing]" to "monopoliz[e]" her time in hopes of marrying the most desirable young woman in Louisville. While her wealth allows her to meet and chose from all of these seemingly suitable men, it also hinders her choice in some way. The upper class upbringing of Rosalind and Daisy cause both to look for wealth as a factor in a potential spouse, as they each want to maintain the comfort during marriage. Fitzgerald begins Jordan's retelling of the love affair with the description of Daisy's wealth and attractiveness to show how these qualities will play a decisive role in any romance Daisy has. As such, Daisy, and Rosalind similarly, represent Fitzgerald's ideas about how affluent young women could make decisions about their lives: they seemingly have their pick of men, but in actuality, the pressures of wealth complicate their ability to choose.

After her description of Daisy, Jordan describes the first time she met Gatsby during his initial romance with Daisy. He and Daisy sat together in Daisy's car "so engrossed in each other that she didn't see Jordan until she was five feet away" (74). Once Daisy did see and greet her, Jordan was captivated by Gatsby's attention to Daisy: "The officer looked at Daisy while she

was speaking, in a way that every girl wants to be looked at some time, and because it seemed romantic to me I have remembered the incident ever since” (75). Gatsby’s focus on Daisy demonstrated his love for her, and Daisy’s care for him is shown through the “wild rumors” circulating about her in 1918: “how her mother had found her packing her bag one winter night to go to New York and say good-bye to a soldier who was going overseas”—presumably Gatsby (75). Here, Daisy’s choice of a husband appears firmly to be Gatsby. She has fallen in love with an army officer, who cares deeply for her, and though Gatsby must go overseas for the First World War, the two clearly plan to marry, shown through Gatsby’s account of the romance (148). But despite their mutual love, putting her life on hold for Gatsby proves to be too much of a sacrifice for Daisy.

Daisy expects Gatsby to return immediately after the Armistice so they can marry. When his return gets delayed, however, Daisy begins to waver: “She didn’t see why he wouldn’t come home. She was feeling the pressure of the world outside, and she wanted to see him and feel his presence beside her and be reassured she was doing the right thing after all” (151). Without Gatsby physically in her life, Daisy begins to succumb to outside pressure. She had a debut after the Armistice, a custom for wealthy young women at the time. For a woman of Daisy’s standing, marriage should presumably follow a debut closely (as is shown in Rosalind’s story), but without Gatsby, Daisy cannot fulfill these social expectations; she needs to “feel his presence beside her” so she is reassured that marrying him is the right choice. Despite her pleas, Gatsby is not able to return immediately, and Daisy slips back into the social life she conducted before meeting Gatsby: “[S]uddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men, and drowsing asleep at dawn with the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed” (151). Amongst her many dates, and perhaps because she



had already waited for one man once, Daisy “wanted her life shaped now, immediately—and the decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—that was close at hand. That force took shape in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan” (151). Here, the driving factors behinds Daisy’s decision are clear. Since she “wanted her life shaped now,” she allowed the forces of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality to lead her to a marriage with Tom. Since Gatsby is unable to begin a life with her immediately, Daisy picks a man who can provide immediate comfort, much like Rosalind’s desire to marry Dawson for security and the possibility of love one day. By choosing Tom, an extremely wealthy and well-established man, Daisy ensures her own status and comfort. Through Daisy’s decision, Fitzgerald demonstrates the choices of beautiful and genteel women of the 1920s. Since the man she loved was not able to start their life when she wanted, Daisy took control of her life and chose a man who would fulfill her immediate needs.

Though Daisy finds the force primarily of money and unquestionable practicality in Tom, and makes her own decision to marry him, her choice was not easy. In Jordan’s account to Nick about the affair between Daisy and Gatsby, she includes Daisy’s behavior the day before her wedding to Tom. Jordan found her, “drunk as a monkey,” clutching a bottle of alcohol in one hand and a letter in the other (76). After being asked what was the matter, Daisy “groped around in a waste-basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls [Tom gave her]. ‘Take ‘em down-stairs and give ‘em back to whoever they belong to. Tell ‘em all Daisy’s change’ her mine’” (76). Since the pearls were given to her as a prelude to their wedding, her desire to give them back signifies that the drunken Daisy has changed her mind about marrying Tom. The scene continues as she collapses into sobs, clutching the letter, releasing it only after Jordan and her mother’s maid have gotten her into a bath, and the water begins to dissolve the

letter. After Daisy is calmed down and sobered up, Jordan is able to get her to the bridal dinner, and the next day Daisy marries Tom as planned (76). Though she still marries Tom, this incident represents a moment of crisis in Daisy's life, when she clearly questions whether Tom was the right choice. The reader infers that the letter Daisy clutches so dearly is from Gatsby, and it caused her brief change of heart. Presumably, this letter makes some sort of last effort by Gatsby to prevent Daisy from marrying Tom—possibly word that he was returning to the United States. Her reaction, therefore, demonstrates how difficult it is for Daisy to choose between her first love and the practicality of an immediate start to married life, since she was still torn the day before she wed Tom. Through this brief glimpse into Daisy's struggle, Rosalind's emotion farewell to Amory, and the complicated relationships in his short stories, Fitzgerald demonstrates the consequences potentially facing some beautiful and affluent young women with the ability to make decisions. Though his heroines are largely not restricted in choice by outside forces, the internal struggle they face in choosing a husband proves to significantly complicate their lives.

Unlike Daisy's struggle between her two different choices, Gatsby does not seem to have much choice in at all; his love for her is an obsession, one that continues for five years after she informs him of her marriage to Tom. Jordan follows her account of the original romance between Daisy and Gatsby with Gatsby's request for Nick to invite Daisy over to tea so that he could see her again. His long-term devotion to Daisy becomes clear in this moment, as Nick realizes that "[h]e had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths—so that he could 'come over' some afternoon to a stranger's garden'" (78). Gatsby had planned his life around an opportunity to see Daisy again: buying a mansion across the bay from her, having large parties in hopes she would wander in, and befriending Nick so that could invite her over and happen upon Gatsby and his mansion (78-9). While his plan shows how Gatsby has not

given up on Daisy, Nick's observations during that first meeting demonstrates the extent of Gatsby's emotional attachment; his dreams of her "had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way.... I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be over-dreamed—that voice was a deathless song" (95-6). Here, Nick notes not only how dedicated Gatsby is to his dream of Daisy, but also the imaginative aspects of her that still captured him. Her voice is the most alluring characteristic of Daisy, one that fascinates even Nick. As a "deathless song," her voice gives some reason for Gatsby's obsession, and is something that he has latched on to that actually exists. His love for her has grown into an all-encompassing dream, one based in his imaginative representation of Daisy.

Finally, Gatsby's fixation on Daisy goes beyond his determination to see her again and his elaborate dream of her; he believes he can turn everything back to how it was the first time they met. When Nick cautions Gatsby not to "ask too much of her" because "[y]ou can't repeat the past," Gatsby replies, "Can't repeat the past?...Why of course you can!...I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before...She'll see" (110). Through this exclamation, Fitzgerald demonstrates that Gatsby's focus in life is to repeat the past, to "fix everything just the way it was before," and to be once again with Daisy. While he had the option of moving on, as Daisy did, it appears that Gatsby's devotion to her will not allow it. Instead, his love turned into an obsession to get her back. By giving him this obsession, Fitzgerald demonstrates that Gatsby does not really have a choice as Daisy does. He loves her much more fiercely, and, as a result, cannot move on. Fitzgerald draws a clear distinction between Daisy and Gatsby through their ability to choose: though the decision is hard for Daisy, she is able to put her emotions aside and

marry another man, for love (early in their marriage), money, and unquestionable practicality. In contrast, Gatsby is rather unpractical—he spends his post-war life building up the wealth to buy a mansion close to Daisy, to impress her, and to hopefully take her back. Through this contrast, Fitzgerald notes the differences between imaginative men and practical women. Tom and Nick do not love into obsession like Gatsby, largely because they do not appear to love at all. Taking Gatsby as an example of real love, it appears that to Fitzgerald, Daisy's ability to put love aside is markedly one of women, while Gatsby, as a man, cannot forget the women he loves. The extent of this contrast plays out further in the second affair between Gatsby and Daisy.

Their second affair begins with the tea Nick arranged for Gatsby, during which Daisy's persisting feelings for Gatsby become clear. Though both Gatsby and Daisy are embarrassed at the start of their meeting, their love for each other is evident. As Gatsby "literally glowed," Daisy's emotion is evident through her voice: "Her throat, full of aching, grieving beauty, told only of her unexpected joy" (89). Though she does not glow, Daisy aches with happiness over being reunited with Gatsby. Their reunion continues with a visit to Gatsby's house, presumably to impress Daisy with his wealth. There, Gatsby highlights all the extravagancies, including his absurdly large collection of shirts. Daisy has a peculiar reaction to this display: "Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily" (92). Presumably, Daisy is not crying over the amount of shirts Gatsby owns, but rather over Gatsby's extravagant love for her, the metaphorical meaning by the display of shirts. Though there is no direct explanation of her crying in the book, it can be assumed that the tears stem from being overcome with emotion, from both seeing her lost love again, and having her remaining love for him ignited. Her later actions support this explanation for her crying, as not long afterwards, Gatsby admits to Nick that "Daisy comes over quite often—in the afternoons" (114). With that

statement, it is clear to the reader the Daisy and Gatsby have reignited their romance. The emotions from their first affair remain for both of them after five years, and it takes only a few encounters before they begin their second affair.

Daisy, however, again is in a situation where she will have to make a choice between Gatsby and Tom. Gatsby plans for this decision to be simple for her, wanting nothing more than for Daisy to “go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago” (109). Gatsby believes that her decision is simply to say those four words, and the two of them can then move forward—or rather, backwards five years—to eventual marriage. Here, Gatsby’s obsession with re-living the past is evident, but he also clearly misunderstands the complexity of Daisy’s decision. Though Gatsby believes that it is as simple as she loves him, so she could never have loved Tom, Daisy chose Tom for money and practicality, and grows to love him in the first year of their marriage. Through Gatsby’s simplistic view of Daisy’s choice, Fitzgerald again highlights the differences between the two lovers, both as individuals and, more largely, as man and woman. Gatsby’s overwhelming love for Daisy causes him to view the situation differently than she does. While he can believe that love is the only thing that matters, Daisy must consider the practicality of a romance which does not make the situation simple for her. As with the different styles of love exhibited earlier, their two different perspectives on Daisy’s choice demonstrates how a woman with more choice may be more liberated, but also has more difficulty in making decisions, and as a result, necessarily must be more calculating.

As the summer of 1922 continues, Daisy's and Gatsby's affair culminates in an afternoon spent between the lovers, Tom, Nick, and Jordan. During this visit, another consideration of Daisy's decision is revealed, one that was not a part of her choice five years previously: the inclusion of her daughter, Pammy. Briefly mentioned before but without much emotion, Daisy brings her daughter out to the company of Gatsby and Nick to, as Daisy says, show her off (117). The inclusion of Pammy is specifically focused on Gatsby, and Daisy asks her, "How do you like mother's friends?" Daisy turned her around so that she faced Gatsby. "Do you think they're pretty?" (117). Here, Daisy openly attempts to get her daughter's approval of Gatsby, as he could theoretically one day be her step-father. Though she does it in a way to play to the mind of a toddler—focusing on how "pretty" Gatsby is—Daisy makes a point in her question that she, at that moment, hopes for a life with Pammy and Gatsby. When Pammy mentions "Daddy," Daisy quickly shifts to defending Pammy's similarities to herself, not Tom: "She doesn't look like her father.... She looks like me. She's got my hair and shape of the face" (117). Daisy attempts to distance the child from Tom, largely for Gatsby's sake. By referring to Tom as "her father," Daisy removes him from the situation, reducing him to a nameless parentage. Furthermore, by detailing how the child looks like her, Daisy not only separates her further from Tom, but also assures Gatsby that the girl will only be a reflection of Daisy, not of her marriage with Tom. Certainly, however, the product of Daisy and Tom's marriage would be difficult for Gatsby to adjust to, as he believes she never loved Tom. Indeed, Nick notes, "he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before" (117). In his dream of Daisy, Gatsby reassured himself that Daisy could never love Tom, and as a result, could not have believed in a child, a product of that love. The introduction of Pammy therefore serves to complicate the decision further. Gatsby faces the very real evidence of Daisy's

marriage to Tom—Pammy—whom he could not escape in his hopes of moving backwards; though nurses clearly do the majority of raising Pammy and Daisy treats her more like a pretty doll than her child, she still must play a role in Daisy's decision, even if it is just getting Pammy and Gatsby to accept each other. This second affair, therefore, is more complicated than the first, as Daisy's marriage must be dealt with. Likewise, Daisy's choices have more weighing on them, as they decide not only her future, but that of her daughter.

Daisy's decision between Tom and Gatsby occurs as the visit between the Buchanans, Gatsby, Nick, and Jordan progresses, during which Daisy seems to seriously consider each option. Not long after her daughter exits, Daisy, "on the verge of tears," suggests going to New York City to escape the heat and because "everything's so confused" (118). At this point, Daisy is obviously unsure about which man to choose. She is given little time before confronting her choices, however, as her statement to Gatsby—"You always look so cool"—coupled with a forced break of eye contact with him "had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw" (119). Shocked by this revelation, Tom encouraged the trip to the city, where the situation explodes. Shortly after the group arrives at the Plaza, Tom confronts Gatsby about the now obvious affair. Daisy tries desperately to end the discussion in an attempt to delay any decision making that this confrontation will inevitably lead to (129). Gatsby, in contrast, is relieved at the opportunity to tell Tom the truth: "Your wife doesn't love you...She's never loved you. She loves me" (130). It is not until after Tom and Gatsby fight over this claim that Daisy finally joins the conversation, largely because of Tom's admission to going on "a spree" (131). His acknowledgement of his affairs causes Daisy's disgusted remark that "filled the room with thrilling scorn": "You're revolting" (131). Here, Daisy makes her strong distaste for her husband's actions throughout their marriage known. By having this be Daisy's first comment in

the argument over her affair, Fitzgerald emphasizes the importance of Tom's infidelity on her decision. Clearly, his affairs have created an emotional separation between the couple, one that largely influences Daisy's potential choice in Gatsby. The intensity of Gatsby's love and devotion for Daisy would surely prevent another marriage of humiliation that Tom has caused with his scandalous affairs. This contrast between Tom and Gatsby thus adds another dimension to Daisy's choice: between her husband and his many affairs, and her own affair.

Once Daisy actively participates in the confrontation, Gatsby and Tom virtually force a decision from Daisy. When Gatsby prompts her to "[j]ust tell him the truth—that you never loved him—and it's all wiped out forever" (demonstrating his continual dedication to return to their past, before Tom), she struggles to say those words (132). After saying, "Why—how could I love him—possibly?" Daisy hesitates. In that moment, "she realized at last what she was doing—and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late" (132). Despite all the positive signs in Gatsby's favor—the introduction of Pammy, her revulsion from Tom, the affair itself—and the fact that this confrontation to some extent was expected since it was Daisy, after all, who invited Gatsby over, it appears that Daisy never really meant to alter her life drastically. While the choice between the two men was there from the moment she reconnected with Gatsby, Daisy is only now actually forced to face those decisions. Through Daisy's reluctance to make a decision, Fitzgerald notes a rather self-centered aspect of her character. Despite the affair and Gatsby's obvious intentions, Daisy does not truly consider altering her life for the man she loves. This lack of consideration suggests that she focuses primarily on her in-the-moment happiness with Gatsby and not the possible ramifications. Furthermore, it also implies that her affair could have been meant as a parallel to Tom's affairs: a way for Daisy to receive the attention clearly lacking from Tom and possibly



seek revenge for his affairs. Though not stated out-right, this revelation of Daisy's lack of consideration of a life with Gatsby reflects a somewhat critical view of her by Fitzgerald. The build up to this moment through the Daisy-Gatsby affair appears now possibly to have been a show, as Daisy's intentions were never to leave Tom. Though her original decision demonstrates the complexity of her life, this lack of consideration simplifies her character, and hints at not only her ultimate decision, but also Fitzgerald's ending opinion of her character.

Despite her hesitation and lack of forethought, Daisy does momentarily give in to Gatsby's demand to abolish her life with Tom, saying "I never loved him" (132). It briefly appears that Gatsby's pressure has forced a decision out of her, in his favor, but the "husky tenderness" that Tom employs to remind her of their love causes her quickly to retract. Shortly after saying she never loved Tom, she exclaims to Gatsby, "Oh, you want too much!...I love you now—isn't that enough? I can't help what's past.' She began to sob helplessly. 'I did love him once—but I loved you too'" (132). Here, Fitzgerald illuminates the complexity of her decision: Daisy has and possibly still does love both men, and Gatsby's demands serve only to pressure her. He continues to insist that he and Daisy will be together, and Daisy actually confirms that she is leaving Tom for Gatsby, albeit with "a visible effort." (132). Tom reacts by calling Gatsby a "common swindler" (132). The argument quickly turns to Gatsby's questionable businesses and as it intensifies, Nick notes that Daisy "was staring terrified between Gatsby and her Husband" (134). Daisy's clear discomfort with the situation has mounted from hesitation to terror. Tom's accusations and the fight between the men seemingly put additional stress on Daisy's decision, and ultimately cause her definitive choice.

Immediately after Nick sees a startling look on Gatsby's face, "as if he had 'killed a man,'" Daisy makes her decision, though not aloud. Gatsby realizes that Daisy is slipping away, so:

he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself. So he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, toward that lost voice across the room. (134)

While this section of Nick's narration does not definitively state that Daisy has chosen to stay with Tom, the implication is clear. As Daisy draws "further and further into herself," she moves away from Gatsby and their affair. The fight between Tom and Gatsby, especially in the escalation to defaming Gatsby, has complicated Daisy's situation beyond simply loving Gatsby and wanting to hurt Tom, as her remarks about his affairs suggest. Furthermore, "the dead dream"—of Daisy and Gatsby being together—continued as Gatsby fought, but by classifying the dream as dead and saying it was "no longer tangible," Nick makes it clear that Daisy will not leave Tom for Gatsby. The confrontation seems to have confirmed Daisy's lack of serious commitment to leaving Tom that she displayed early in this section. Her affair with Gatsby has become increasingly complicated—from his pressure to say she never loved Tom, to Tom's reminders of the life they have made together, and finally to Gatsby's questionable business practices. Her affair is no longer unquestionably practical, and the situation only gets increasingly complicated after Gatsby and Daisy flee the hotel.

In the flight from the hotel to East Egg, Daisy, driving Gatsby's car, accidentally strikes and kills Tom's mistress, Myrtle; Nick, Tom, and Jordan experience the aftermath of the

accident during their return to East Egg. Daisy's decision between Gatsby and Tom is solidified after they return. Nick, who "had enough of them all for one day," refuses to enter Tom's home when they arrive (143). While he waits for a taxi, he encounters Gatsby in the bushes, who plans to wait as long as possible to see if Daisy is safe with Tom. He still hopes that Daisy will leave Tom. When Nick goes to check how they are doing in the house, he witnesses the couple's reaction to the day:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table....He was talking intently across the table at her, and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own....They weren't happy...and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together. (145)

Nick's observation illuminates Daisy's ultimate choice. The "unmistakable air of natural intimacy" demonstrates that, despite their problems and affairs, their marriage has created a strong connection between the two. While what the couple may be "conspiring together" about is unknown, they at some point decide to leave East Egg and the mess of the affair and accident behind them. Though Gatsby would take the fall for the accident, Myrtle's death removed really any form of security Daisy could have had in their relationship; if prosecuted for the accident, Gatsby's own freedom could be threatened, as would Daisy's reputation by association. Daisy and Tom's conspiracy, therefore, could possibly be about returning to a life of money, and unquestionable practicality. They are again in a situation that has threatened their marriage, and to secure it they must flee the problems created that day—exactly what they do within days of the accident. Overall, the day has proven that leaving Tom would not provide Daisy with what

she needs in a marriage, and she will only retain her life if she stays with Tom and flees East Egg.

Daisy's final decision—not only to choose Tom, but also to leave Gatsby—demonstrates Fitzgerald's ultimate view of the women of the 1920s. As the culmination of Fitzgerald's exploration of young, affluent women's choices, Daisy represents not only the complexity of the choices his heroines faced, but also the potential consequences of their decisions. For Daisy, her difficult decisions end up being based on what will provide her the comfortable life she needs. Her second decision is also one of love, of money, or of unquestionable practicality, like her original choice to marry Tom. When she chooses Tom again, it is only because of the unquestionable practicality he provides, since Gatsby offers both intense love and immense wealth. Ultimately, she narrows her decision because of the increased complexity in her second affair with Gatsby. The intensity of the hotel fight as well as the car accident propels Daisy into the only viable choice for maintaining her way of living: the practicality of Tom.

In the final pages of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's view of Daisy and these choices becomes clear through Nick's narration of the results of Daisy and Tom's departure. Beyond simply leaving, Tom plays a significant role in Gatsby's murder, and Daisy never returns for Gatsby's funeral or even contacts Nick about it. Both omissions are repugnant to Nick, who describes the couple: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (179). His classification of them as careless shows the two disapprovingly; this perception increases with Nick's obvious dislike of Tom when he at first refuses to shake Tom's hand when they meet after Gatsby's death. To him, and likely to Fitzgerald, their actions are unfeeling, and focused on

their money or “whatever it was that kept them together.” This interpretation of their actions not only confirms Fitzgerald’s beliefs about how Daisy made her choices, but also demonstrates that he does not necessarily approve of them.

### **Conclusion**

Fitzgerald’s fiction from 1920-1925 illuminates a specific fascination of his: the marital choices of young, affluent women, whether for love, money, and/or unquestionable practicality, and the consequences of their decisions. *The Great Gatsby* largely marks the end of Fitzgerald’s fascination with this heroine. He does not return to the topic again until 1929, with “The Last of the Belles.” The last of Fitzgerald’s Tarleton stories, “Belles” is narrated by Andy, who recounts his friendship with Ailie Calhoun fifteen years earlier. Andy meets Ailie during his training at a World War One army camp in Tarleton, and while the camp does not appear in Fitzgerald’s other two Tarleton stories, it likely is based on the camp Fitzgerald trained at outside of Montgomery, as is the one in *Gatsby*. Throughout the story, Andy recalls the different suitors Ailie entertains and, like many other Fitzgerald heroines, she must decide whom to marry. Her own hesitation prevents any marriage during Andy’s stay at the camp, though some of the courtships came close.

Andy leaves Georgia as the First World War ends, and returns six years later hoping to reconnect with Ailie. Fitzgerald’s own nostalgia towards heroines like Ailie is shown in Andy’s depiction of his return. He finds profound change in Ailie: “The modulations of pride, the vocal hints that she knew the secrets of a brighter, finer ante-bellum day, were gone from her voice; there was no time for them now as it rambled on in the half-laughing, half-desperate banter of the newer South” (460). Though she “was the nervous, glowing center” of a young married couple’s party, Andy pointedly remarks that “[a]fter all, she wasn’t eighteen anymore” (460). Through

Andy's descriptions of Ailie, Fitzgerald reflects on the early heroines that she represents. By the late 1920s, the young, wealthy women he focused on early in his career have become somewhat obsolete in his writing. Ailie is not the same as when Andy first knew her, mirroring the way the women of his early work are no longer as relevant to Fitzgerald.

Nevertheless, "Belles" also highlights Fitzgerald's attachment to his early heroines and writing. During Andy's last visit to Ailie, he realizes he is in love with her: "I realized what was the matter, what had always been the matter—I was deeply and incurably in love with her. In spite of every incompatibility, she was still, she would always be to me, the most attractive girl I had ever known" (461). Though Ailie rejects his marriage proposal because she only has platonic feelings for him, Andy's proclamation of love reflects Fitzgerald's sentimental attachment to his early heroines; a lot of Andy's reflection can be seen as Fitzgerald's own remembrance of his early work, and as such, Andy's realization that he will always love Ailie can be interpreted as Fitzgerald's remaining fascination with his early heroines. This attachment is shown further in Fitzgerald's nostalgic tone in the story. After Ailie rejects the proposal, Andy takes her in search of the camp, long since dismantled. Here, he "look[s] for my youth in a clapboard or a strip of roofing or a rusty tomato can" (462). Like Andy's search for his past in the camp, Fitzgerald uses "Belles" as a retrospective of the themes of his early work. Though he returns to the young, wealthy, beautiful "Belles" that captivated him in the early Twenties, Fitzgerald nostalgically recognizes the need to move on from these characters, as Ailie is indeed the "Last" of his "Belles."

By the time Fitzgerald wrote "Belles," his personal life had changed greatly from when he wrote *Gatsby*. He had become disillusioned in his marriage, losing his early marital bliss after Zelda's affair. His marriage was further complicated by Zelda's declining mental health; by the

time “Belles” was published, Zelda became overly strained from writing and intensive ballet lessons. She was hospitalized in 1930 and diagnosed with schizophrenia (Brucoli, *Epic Grandeur*, 223-305). These developments caused a maturation in Fitzgerald that led him away from his early heroines. Andy’s last sentence in “Belles” demonstrates Fitzgerald’s position on his early-1920s female characters: “All I could be sure of was this place that had once been so full of life and effort was gone, as if it had never existed, and that in another month Ailie would be gone, and the South would be empty for me forever” (463). The connection Fitzgerald had to characters like Ailie has been lost in time and his own maturation. “Belles” appears to be a last return to them, as part of what Matthew Buccoli calls Fitzgerald’s “retrospective and reassessing stories...at the end of the Twenties” (449). Like the South for Andy, the choices of young, wealthy women as a fascination proves “empty” to Fitzgerald “forever.”

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