

## Portrayal of Women in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Castle of Otranto*

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### Abstract

Horace Walpole (1924) creates an interactive heuristic of the novel, which drastically changes the way readers are expected to perceive the novel until its end. The circumstances that he build was of great significance such as helmets falling from the sky and walking portraits as well as places where real people have performed allow reader to act in a real manner. F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925) wants to shed light on the story of a handsome and inscrutable millionaire Jay Gatsby and his quench about wealth and the obsession for the beautiful lady Daisy Buchanan. Fitzgerald's (1925) *The Great Gatsby* highlighted on the themes of social upheaval, decadence, resistance to change, creating a portrait of the Jazz age or the Roaring Twenties. This paper presents the portrayal of women by comparing and contrasting both novels, Fitzgerald's (1925) *The Great Gatsby* and Walpole's (1924) *The Castle of Otranto*, in those specific eras. Both positive and negative aspects, attitudes, behaviors of those women will be revealed throughout this analysis. Mostly hardships, torments, sufferings and pains inflicted by men towards women will be elaborated in this paper. The detail analysis of how women are exploited by their men and also their endurance towards this harsh treatment will be mentioned through the references from the novels. Barbaric, brutal and cruel nature of men will be disclosed with the events from the novel and how women become victims of their inflictions will also be illustrated.

*Key Words:* Walpole, Portrayal, Women, Subordination, Passive

## ***The Great Gatsby* ve *The Castle of Otranto*'da Kadınların Tasviri**

### Özet

Horace Walpole (1924) okuyucuların kitabın sonuna kadar anlamayı umdukları yöntemi kökten değiştiren, birbirini etkileyen bulgusal bir roman ortaya çıkarmıştır. Gerçek insanların performans sergilediği yerlerin yanı sıra, gökten düşen miğferler ve yürüyen portreler gibi kurguladığı önemli olaylar okuyucuya gerçek bir durumu yaşıyor imkanını tanır. F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925), yakışıklı ve esrarengiz bir milyoner olan Jay Gatsby ve onun bastırılmış zenginliği ile güzel leydi Daisy Buchanan'a olan saplantısının hikayesi üzerine ışık tutmak ister. Fitzgerald'ın (1925) *The Great Gatsby'si*, Jazz Devri ya da Hararetili Yirmilerin bir portresini çizen sosyal devrim, çöküş ve değişime direnme gibi konuların altını çizer. Bu çalışma, buldukları dönemlerdeki iki romanı, Fitzgerald'ın (1925) *The Great Gatsby'si* ve Walpole'un (1924) *The Castle of Otranto'sunu*, karşılaştırarak kadınların tasvirlerini sunmaktadır. Bu kadınların hem pozitif hem negatif görüşleri, tutumları ve davranışları bu analiz sayesinde açığa çıkarılacaktır. Çoğunlukla kadınlara karşı erkekler tarafından yüklenen zorlukların, işkencelerin, sefilliklerin ve acıların bu kağıtta üzerinde durulacaktır. Kadınların erkekler tarafından nasıl istismar edildiğinin ve onların bu sert muameleye karşı nasıl dayandıklarının detaylı analizi, romanlardan referanslarla dile getirilecektir. Erkeklerin barbarca, vahşi ve acımasız doğası romanlardaki olaylarla açığa çıkarılacak ve ayrıca kadınların nasıl onların eziyetlerinin kurbanı oldukları aydınlatılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Walpole, Tasvir, Kadınlar, Boyun Eğme, Pasif

### Introduction

Women have greatly influenced the English Literature and bestow their impacts either positively or negatively. But, they are portrayed in the wrong way in the society where they are treated harshly, feeble, corrupted by their surroundings and treated brutally by male characters. Mostly women are represented as being foolish and helpless as they are under the repression of men. If we talk about the Gothic literature, the women in this literature are found indecisive and submissive. The depiction of women is rapidly changing along with the morals and changes in the society. Women played pivotal and central role in their society but some they are bound by some external pressures to share their feelings and opinions and remained silent behind the curtain of the society. The external pressures that forbid them could be their husband, leader of the society or community or people in their business life. Their men misuse the innocence of women and they have to take consent of their men to express their ideas or to speak in front of others. Such was the miserable condition of the women of that era. The role of women changes due to variation from society to society and from time to time. This article analyzes the subordination of women, reaction of females over males and dominance of males by comparing and contrasting the two novels *The Castle of Otranto* (1924) by Horace Walpole and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by Scott Fitzgerald.

*The Castle of Otranto* is a gothic novel written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and female characters are viewed as ‘damsel in distress’, which shows that how much feeble and dependent they are on their males. Women do not have the same rights as the men possess. They always have to stand in the shadow of their husbands. They could not own property and widows could not remarry: “The wife and the daughter got unworthy inheritance, such as bible, books and households goods” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 71). As the novel shows the treatment towards women in the century the novel was written, women were used to breed heir for their families to continue their dynasties. It is stated in the beginning of the story: “Manfred, Prince of Otranto, had one son and one daughter; the latter a most beautiful virgin, age eighteen, was called Matilda” (Walpole, 1924, 15). It is obvious that Matilda’s father neglects her and it forecasts how girls were neglected in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, women in *The Great Gatsby* are subordinated in many respects, but not as much as in *The Castle of Otranto*. If we take a glance at Daisy’s character, she is also represented as an inferior and frail woman throughout the novel. She has denied the access of Gatsby from her world, but later she reenters his life once again due to the wealth and luxuries that he owns. She is considered as passive and it is only her sexuality and charm,

which is transferred into her melodious voice that creates a negative effect on her female personality as well as her femininity. Since she belongs to the upper class in the novel, she is ethically and financially passive in a world that has no other role for her. It is pretty clear when Nick points to Jordan Baker by using the pronoun 'you', "Dishonesty in a woman is anything you never blame deeply" (Fitzgerald, 1925, 40). It is a very strange statement pointing the ethical standards of women by the performance of all the women presented in the novel.

The creation of the "damsel in distress" (Wodehouse, 1919, 19) highlights the feminized form in *The Castle of Otranto*, which clearly illustrates the dominance of men over women during the time. If we take a glance at Wodehouse's argument in which he states "women could only form true friendship if this friendship conformed to conventional heterosexual roles and women are passive, competitive, untrusting" (Wodehouse 12). This implies that it is clear from Walpole's novel when Hippolita never interferes in Manfred's life and she accepts divorce willingly. One can say that women in that era were afraid of her men or obeyed them for the sake of honor and respect. Females in *The Castle of Otranto* have devoted themselves to their husbands or fathers physically, economically, psychologically and mentally. The idea "a bad husband is better than no husband" (Walpole, 1924, 40) is clearly explained in the conservative perception of the novel. They are controlled by their husbands or they wish to have bad husband rather than being unmarried. It also depicts the culture of their society that pressurized or compelled them in their personal life's issues. Both Matilda and Hippolita are loyal, respected, trustworthy and submissive type of women. For instance, Hippolita accepts to divorce Manfred for the sake of kingdom and she declares: "I will go and offer myself to this divorce-it boots not what becomes of me. I will withdraw into the neighboring monastery and the remainder of life in prayers and tears for my child and – the Prince" (Walpole, 1924, 90-91). This shows how pious, obedient and disciplined she is and she follows the order of Manfred no matter how bad her circumstance is. She does not give any excuse to defend herself and followed her husband' desires.

On the contrary, women's lives in *The Great Gatsby* are not the same as in *The Castle of Otranto*. Fitzgerald (1925) describes the new modern and deliverance of sex enjoyed by women in the novel by giving the example lives of Daisy, Jordan Baker and Myrtle. They are not so much obedient and respectful women when compared to the women in *The Castle of Otranto*. The women in *The Great Gatsby* use their sexuality, charm, and beauty to entice and attract men. If we examine Daisy Buchanan when she begs "Oh. Let's have fun"

(Fitzgerald, 1925, 95), she is trying to express what most of the young women of those days desire and want to please themselves. It demonstrates that Daisy is desperate and attached to materialistic life, which is also what other women desire to enjoy the excess. Thus, they are represented as the core of sexual interest. However, Myrtle's life is completely different from Daisy's. Myrtle's vivacity and challenges in her marital life are revealed when she is harshly treated by her husband in the garage, she shouts, "Beat me! [...] Throw me down and beat me, you dirty little coward!" (109). Here, Winston behaves very ruthlessly and ridiculously towards her wife. Myrtle has energetic language skills and she is good at dominating people by the exposure of her attractive interaction.

In *The Castle of Otranto*, the dominance of men is observed in the case of Hippolita where she is extremely bounded to the will of her husband and also tries to suggest such subordination to Matilda and Isabella: "It is not ours to make election for ourselves; heaven, our father and husband must decide for us" (Walpole, 1924, 82). This indicates how Hippolita gives superiority and priority to the males in her life. Her lack of free will proves her inferiority. She also tries to make Matilda and Isabella dependent and subservient on their husbands or fathers. As far as men in *The Great Gatsby* are concerned, they work to earn money for the maintenance and fulfillment of the women. Therefore, they are dominant over women especially in the case of Tom, who proclaims his physical strength to defeat them. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the time of economical crises and great depression in America when women were restricted by some political and legal rights. There was a law called "English Common Law" which enacted the complete subordination of married women to their husbands. (Wilson and Defeis, 1978, 64).

Divorces were hardly granted to wives and they were compelled to run away from their husband. This shows how men dominated their women in that era and they had to encounter such a miserable and hard situation due to their men. All their social, political and economical rights were cramped. In *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby strives hard to make his dream come true. For instance, Gatsby has dominated Daisy by his richness, lavish parties, handsomeness and so on. Men in *The Great Gatsby* have created physical dominance over women. If we scrutinize Tom's role in the novel, he uses his physical, financial and social dominance to abuse and utilize Myrtle and Daisy "the best thing a girl can be in his world a beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald, 1925, 17). It means that men are the only ones that achieve success and status. Women do not need to work hard mentally and physically; on the contrary, it is better if they play the fool with their femininity: "Once, the American

Revolution was over, women were no longer needed by male politicians to boycott or protest” (164). This reflects that men don’t pay heed to encourage women in any political activity. Men use women when their necessity is felt in any occasions.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, most of the women in the two novels *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Great Gatsby* are portrayed as passive and victims. Some of them go astray due to their lust of money and material life, while some are deluded by their environment and society. They play a very significant and remarkable role in the development of the society they belong to. Women are controlled by their men in *The Castle of Otranto* and even they have to ask for the consent to breathe or to perform any action. In the same way, women are totally depended upon males in *The Great Gatsby* and entice men by their sexuality, beauty, attractive speech and so on. Those who stand on their own and show courage to defend them in a positive way are remembered as heroines while those who cannot rise their voice against their own exploitation and lack bravery became the prey of men’s torture and assault. It is pretty obvious that if women muster some courage and confidence, then they can tackle all sorts of problematic issues that occur in their life.

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