



The Female Other: Feminist Existentialism and Crisis in *The Great Gatsby*



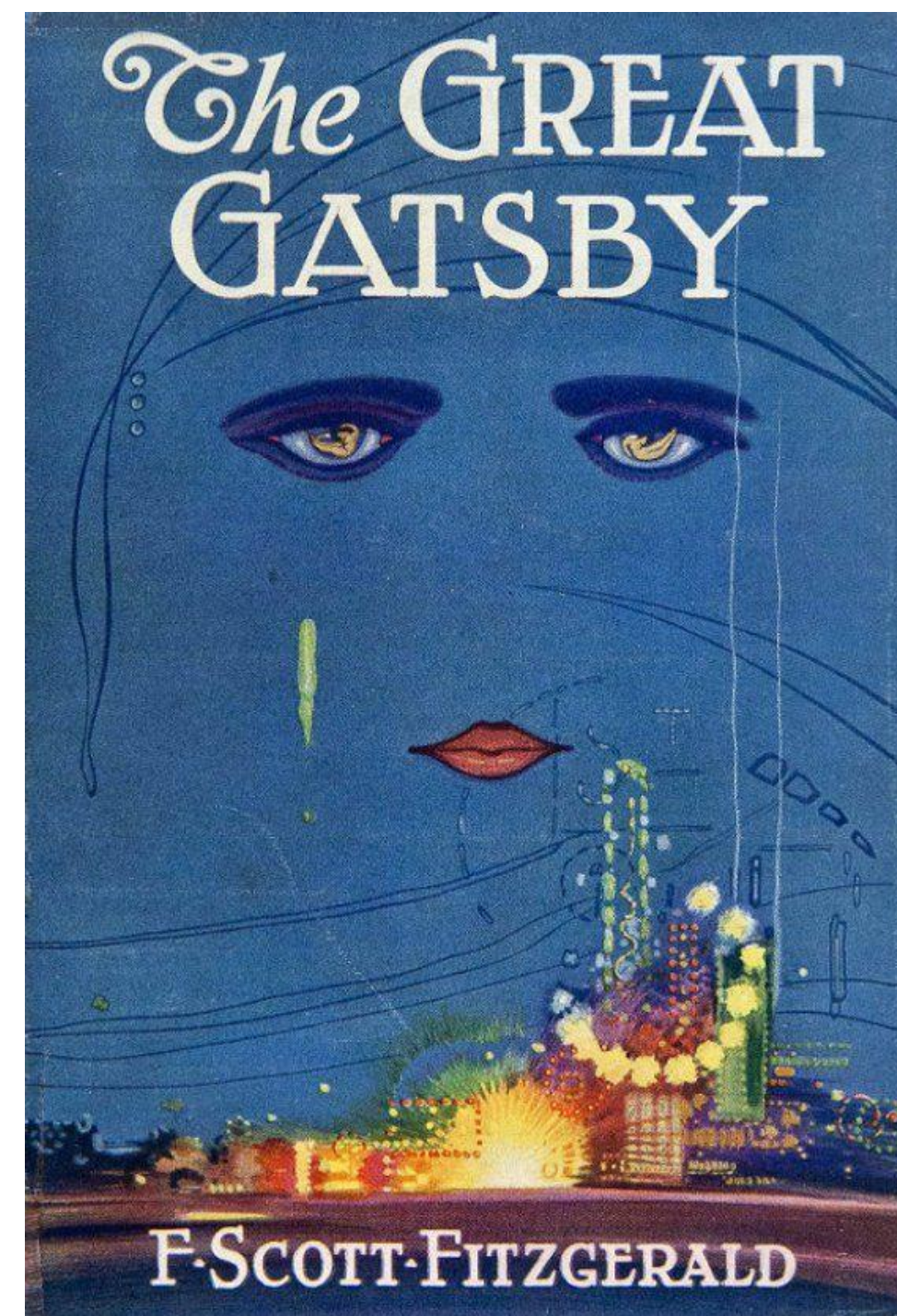
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Abstract

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald tells the story of several unsatisfied characters who try over and over to achieve happiness, which seems to be forever beyond their reach. In their cycles of dissatisfaction, many of the characters use romance, courtship, and sex as tools to create fulfilling lives for themselves, but all are unsuccessful. The principle female characters, who feel trapped and powerless in the lives they have ended up in, begin their love affairs out of an arguably deeper place of desperation than the male characters. When read through an existential lens (informed by the writings of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir), the women's affairs in *The Great Gatsby* can be interpreted as actions sparked by an intense existential dread. For Myrtle and Daisy, their respective affairs are a form of existential crisis.

Primary Texts

- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir
- "Existentialism Is a Humanism" by Jean-Paul Sartre



Conclusion

Daisy and Myrtle enter into extramarital affairs as existential crises sparked by frustration with their position as the "Other" in their marriages. However, neither finds the autonomy, security, relief, nor comfort that they seek from their lovers. In their affairs, the women find themselves thrust again into the role of the Other, and their flings crumble due to the disparity between the women's desires and the desires of their lovers. The existential crises have disastrous results. These ultimate tragedies are not the fault of the women and their existential crises, but rather the system that placed them in the position of Otherhood to begin with. Because of societal norms and culture, the women were never going to be capable of reaching the fulfillment and satisfaction that they so craved.

The Existential Lens: A Quick Overview

Jean-Paul Sartre:

- One must construct the life that they desire for themselves.
- People can create their own reality through their actions and thoughts. Through the many choices that a person makes each day, they create and alter their personality, which in turn alters their reality. Each choice that one makes has the potential to change their life.

Simone de Beauvoir:

- Through the disparity in social equality between women and men, women are consistently viewed as second to men. Women's main value and position in life are often assessed through their relationships with and value to the men in their life.
- This phenomenon is a major problem because it goes against the overarching tenants of existentialism, and it asserts that women cannot exist without men.

Key Quotes

- "I only know that whatever may be in my power to make it so, I shall do; beyond that, I can count upon nothing" (Sartre 10).
- "Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself" (Beauvoir 299).
- "How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment?" (Beauvoir 303).
- "...I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald 13).
- "[His illusion] had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion...." (Fitzgerald 95).

Additional References

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