

## Fitzgerald and Mahfouz's Lower Class and the New Woman



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**ABSTRACT:** In "Lower Class Women in Middaq Alley," Naguib Mahfouz examines the hardships and lives of underprivileged women in a Cairo working-class community. Mahfouz draws attention to the social, economic, and cultural obstacles these women encounter with her rich storytelling and evocative characterizations. The story explores issues of poverty, resilience, and gender inequity, demonstrating how social norms influence their identities and goals. By sharing their experiences, Mahfouz highlights the resilience and self-determination of these women, shedding light on their fight for respect and independence in a patriarchal culture. This piece is a celebration of the human spirit as well as a powerful indictment of social inequities.

**KEYWORDS:** comparative literature, feminism, women's oppression, patriarchy, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Naguib Mahfouz

### INTRODUCTION

Women in general and women writers in particular have always tried to change the profoundly ingrained patriarchal social framework in nations all over the world. The fight for women's rights grew in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Women themselves gained a fresh perspective on conventional notions about the opposing natures of men and women, the structure of the family, and their interactions with society and one another. A trustworthy indicator of women's roles and status in society is the representation of women in both Arabic and Western literature. According to the literature that is currently available, the notion of a modern woman in a modern society has become a very unique ideal for women in general to emulate. However, it also had an effect on the thoughts of women from lower social classes. Women who were impacted by the twentieth-century shifts in societal structure believed that having money would make them immune to harm.

The "Roaring Twenties" or "Jazz Age," the first ten years following World War I, saw profound transformations in every sphere of American life that had begun before to the conflict. A culture of consumerism emerged in the 1920s, as American households bought a wide range of materialistic goods like cars, cameras, sewing machines, and radios to communicate with other societies and became enamored with contemporary entertainment. Women began to rebel against patriarchal restraints and their customary duties.

Woman had always tried to transform the traditional patriarchal social structure across the globe. Portrayals of women in Arabic and Western Literature serve as a barometer by which we can measure that status and role of women in society. The following paper is an attempt at answering the question of how women of poor class can be deceived by the term of "New Woman" (Tyson 121) throughout the first part of the twentieth century where societies suffered the poverty and darkness alongside with the advent of the first world war and the new world that has come after.

Middaq Alley a novel by Naguib Mahfouz and The Great Gatsby a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald are here examples of women of the progressive era where they appear as 'women with short hair and short skirt' (Tyson 121) rejecting the idea of domestic works and reproduction children with their great lust for richness and what precious value they would pay for these demands. The reason of comparison of choosing Fitzgerald and Mahfouz is they mirror their historical background and write about characters that come from lower class and how they are influenced and deceived by the term of "New Woman" and modernism.

The current study aims to show how, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, women from lowerclass, impoverished households were drawn to the concept of a contemporary lady. The study also shows how, both during and long after World War I, impoverished nations endured pitiful conditions of neglected poverty. The two books under examination, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925) and Mahfouz's Zuqāq alMidaq (1947) [Midaq Alley (1966)], are instances of Modern Women of the Progressive Era (1890–1920) who seek to break free from traditional norms. Images of young ladies wearing short skirts and short hair can be found in these two novels.

### Mahfouz's Life

Born in December 1911 Cairo, Egypt. Egyptian novelist and screenplay writer. He spent his first years in al-Jamaliyya neighborhood and the sights and smell of this area permeate his early work as he proclaim "It is my favorite world" his use of the

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hara world (a small place usually is settled by lower class )as a setting for his novels and a medium to explain his opinion of man and society is clear increased in his old age specially from mid 1970 onwards .Mahfouz declared that Jamaliya was reflected in his work adding that even when he began with cultivated and symbolic nature ,he kept on going back to Jamaliya "a what really moves me is the hara world ". (El-Enany,Naguib Mahfouz the Pursuit of meaning , 1 ) The theme of personal and political freedom was also one he visited again and again in his literary work.

Mahfouz was one of the world's most renowned Arabic novelist. His work is mostly concerned with his native country of Egypt, and covers a wide range of topics there, from middle class and lower class life to the civilization's ancient history .He was deeply influenced by the 1919 Egyptian Revolution, which led him to adopt the nationalist ideals so present in much of his work.

### **Fitzgerald's Life**

September 24 , 1896 marks the birth date of F.Scott Fitzgerald ,a novelist and short story writer who is considered to be among the greatest twentieth-century writers. His fiction has become so closely associated with the writer and his time that it is hard sometimes to separate where fiction ended and the real life began. Fitzgerald's life and the lives of his characters echoed the national mood boldly romantic before 1920. "Fitzgerald lived into a reckless life-style of parties and decadence while desperately trying to please Zelda by writing to earn money"; (The Great Gatsby F .Scott Fitzgerald) so he was able to reflect the nuances and details of his surroundings onto the page with a skill few have matched. Readers and critics become fascinated with Fitzgerald's works since he could depict the American life and implicate what he had experienced in his fiction besides the corruption of the "American Dream" "He tries to know what is life and how to live in it " (John F. Callahan ,37,7) The Great Gatsby is one of his most dominant novels in "Jazz Age.

### **DISCUSSION**

The global distribution of literary and cultural creations is made possible and strengthened by comparative literature. Because the authors' fictitious works reflect the social circumstances of their day, which have an impact on young women, the current study employs theories from the American school of comparative literature. Consequently, the feminist theoretical approach will be employed within the appropriate framework of the American school of comparative literature. According to Henry Remak, the founder of the American School of Comparative Literature, comparative literature is an academic field that studies literature that goes beyond nationalistic boundaries.

According to Rene Wellek, a well-known literary critic of the American school of comparative literature, literary works should not be compared in a limited way but rather in their entirety (quoted in Shamsuddin & Abd Rahman, 2012, p. 2-3).According to Wellek, comparative literature studies that are comparable to literary studies must link "literary history," "literary theory," and "literary criticism" (quoted in Shamsuddin & Abd Rahman, 2012, p. 2-3). Furthermore, a more comprehensive viewpoint for comparative literary analysis would result from concentrating on the distinctions and parallels among various national traditions.

### **"Women in the late 19th and early twentieth century "**

During the end of nineteenth century women in all over the world suffered the patriarchal social structure and lack of education, they were legally and economically depend on their father, husband or mail relatives. The dawn of the twentieth century witness the sweeping of these old traditions and taboos in almost every aspect of life. The new woman was a feminist ideal who called for autonomy, woman's rights, education and career opportunities. The perception of woman as being open-minded and free saw a gradual progressive in societies.( A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism , M. Keith Booker )

Despite the delay in women's emancipation, it was clear that women have made some important advanced at the early decades of twentieth century which had attended great changes in women's role woman became part of the rebellious ethos that has prevailed the society as intellectual sound, attaining similarity with west. The challenge of the western modern woman come out clearly when European countries has colonized most of Arab homeland (Islam, women And Revolution in Twentieth –century , Arab thought ) Great Gatsby published in 1925 , in this novel Fitzgerald deals with love and freedom In the early twentieth century .It's world consist of rich and poor, educated and half-literate, men and women. Starting with Daisy who knows that life has more important things than love, she doesn't care much about love and prefers money when she accept to marry Tom Buchanan, although it is so true that became Gatsby's aim in life.

The main character of Mahfouz's Midaq Alley, a prostitute who challenges the normative patriarchal structures of her culture, is the primary subject of criticism. According to al-Qaisi (2004), Hamida represents Egyptian rights violated by the British invasion. A peculiar pimp named Ibrahim Faraj, who does not live in the alley, tries to entice Hamida with money, which is what turns her into a prostitute. According to al-Naqash (quoted in al-Qaisi, 2004, p. 131–134), Hamida represents Egypt and how it fell apart as a result of the British conquest.Bader, however, disputes al-Naqash's assertion, asserting that it would be more than simply comparing Egypt to a female character in a book. Some other critics study the main character as a profiteering character that follows her wants and desires. They neglect the hard circumstances that surrounded poor people which pushed them to break down local traditions

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### **METHODOLOGY**

Feminist narratology: "The study of narrative structures and strategies in the context of cultural constructions of gender" is how Warhol defines feminist narratology (Mezei, 1996, p. 21). In general, this has meant examining the common patterns and tactics used by female writers, either collectively or individually, particularly when these appear to have gone overlooked, misinterpreted, or devalued due to a tendency to view works written by males as the standard source. But feminist narrative theory can also help address gendered characteristics in texts, regardless of whether they were produced by men or women. For example, it can help analyze gendered narrative voices in homodiegetic narration. (Case, 2005, p. 312).

Difference between women and men in a relational and not an oppositional way" is what Mills defines as "gender" (p. 14). The main focus of her book is the gender question and how style analysis might incorporate gender. According to Mills, feminist stylistics looks at how point of view, metaphor, transitivity, and agency are all obviously connected to gender issues in addition to analyzing sexism in a work. Her research is an effort to show how gender concepts are portrayed so that those representations might be questioned or reinterpreted. The book elaborates on how gender differences are portrayed in both words and pictures. Mills asserts that the female body's fragmentation is one particular language choice which seems to be gendered. As she argues fragmentation of the female body "tends to co-occur with male focalization" (p. 135).

Recently, the idea of female storytellers and fighters has been used to question the importance of patriarchy in battle. Although women were not given a voice in conventional gendered narratives of war and militarism, this dissertation argues that this exclusion is no longer justified in light of the current War on Terror. The tale of American female soldiers in the war is covered by the national media, and more and more women are enlisting in the military (p. 288). Thus, the female soldier of today both generates "a productive space for feminist theorizing" and poses a challenge to "national discourses of hegemonic military masculinity" (p. 297). Because feminist theorists study "disruptions in the dominant paradigm as a means to challenge patriarchal ideologies and unseat privilege," (p. 297). The study attempts at applying "the disruptive potential of media discourses around the figure of the female soldier" to challenge the existing partiality for masculinity in discourses about militarism and war (ibid.). The figure of the female soldier, as Baroffio-Bota writes, provides a space to resist or contest normative culture through critical examination of patriarchal ideologies (ibid).

The idea of filtered perception of the events in the story has been given many names by narrative theory, which has developed throughout the twentieth century. "Point of view" or "narrative perspective" is the most recent. Nonetheless, the terms "narrative situation," "narrative viewpoint," and "narrative manner" are occasionally used. More or less systematic typologies of narrative point of view have been developed. Each of these typologies has shown some degree of benefit (Bal, 2009, 3rd ed., p. 146). However, focalization appears to be the most commonly used and recognized term for what some of the most prominent narratologists have previously referred to as "point of view," "vision," or "narrative perspective." Focalization is one of the basic realizations. It provides crucial insights into the representation of consciousness in fiction (Horstkotte & Pedri, 2011, p. 330).

Both western and eastern women suffered a lot from patriarchy and its limitations up to the last decade of the nineteenth century. They were completely dependent on their fathers, husbands, brothers or son. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the sweeping away of existing old conventions and taboos which hindered all the spheres of women's lives. Modern woman started to raise her voice demanding her rights in education, work and autonomy. Modern women acquired a reputation for open-mindedness and original thinking which were considered as progression in society .

The Great Gatsby also reflects the image of the modern woman; Daisy, a young woman of high class, understands that there are many things in life that are more important than love, and as a result, she chooses money over love in an effort to realize her aspirations of being a wealthy woman. She consequently weds Tom Buchanan, a wealthy resident of East Egg. She agrees to be a possession in Tom's home merely to belong to the aristocratic class; Daisy is aware that Tom deceives her, but she is unable to support herself; she understands her place in society as a subservient woman, as evidenced by her repeated statements to Nick upon the birth of her daughter. She tells Nick how she was happy when she knew that she had given birth to a girl and hoped the girl would be a fool either, since "that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (The Great Gatsby p. 13).

### **LOWER CLASS UNDER CONTROL**

#### **Great Gatsby**

Great Gatsby a novel that depicts the "New Woman " from different classes .Myrtle Wilson is a version of "New Woman" in her appearance she tries to be fashionable with fair short hair ,her behavior is not like her mother or grandmother she likes parties and gets over her unhappiness with George by an illegal relation with Tom Buchanan. Myrtle is attracted to Tom because of his expensive modern clothes and money as when they meet she starts spending money on her looks ,she also enjoys Tom's generosity in buying her jewelry in case of relationship. Myrtle's desire for marrying Tom was to get rid of the garage life that she shares with her husband George for eleven years the same thing that Daisy did when she decide to leave Gatsby, in spite his true love and accept to Tom's "loveless marriage".

Fitzgerald portray Myrtle as a more sexual aggressiveness than Daisy and Jordan as she is low "social strata" (Tyson ,70) It is obvious that Tom wants her for his sexual lust ,she is not permitted to say or ask anything like other woman of the high strata",

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when she thought that she has the right to "mention Daisy's name " "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!" shouted Mrs. Wilson "I'll say it whenever I want to! "(Gatsby 41; ch.2) her punishment was break of her nose. Tom does not care for Myrtle's breaking nose it is just a punishment for a woman from low class by her illegal high class lover.

Tom deals with Myrtle as piece of his possession that can show off her in front of others, on the other hand, Myrtle accepts to be his possession as he takes her to fashionable restaurants and to be a mistress of a wealthy man who belongs to the world only by money ,the money that connects him to high class society. The money that enables him to "purchase" Myrtle Wilson and other women from the working-class like the chambermaid and the "common but pretty"(ib;id) young .Tom's exploitation of Myrtle's makes her think that he may marry her in the future. Myrtle's admission of Tom's mistreatment was just to escape from the poor life near the valley of ashes as to be a wife of a wealthy man leaving her husband. (Tyson; 64-71)

### **Lower Class Women in Middaq Alley by Naguib Mahfouz**

Middaq Alley a novel by Naguib Mahfouz contains different kinds of social class. Abas Hillo and Hamida love each other and Hamida tells him that she likes wearing fur , jewelry and to be modern just like women in high class. For this desire Abas decides to go and search for a work ,he finds work in a British factory .he works hard and in makes a lot of money, when he returns to his district he finds Hamida has left her home making a new love relation with a man called Faraj Ibrahiem , he is a rich man who tries to seduce the secondary school girls to make them work for him pretending that he loves them offering jewelries and modern style clothes in order to exploit their youth and beauty , eventually making them prostitutes for British soldiers, what makes Hamida to leave her fiancé Abas and goes with Faraj.

Hamida's dream of being "New Woman" helps Faraj who tell her that the domestic workhouse, children, motherhood will destroy her beauty and he will make her live the life she likes. Abas returns trying to rescue her from this corrupted life and the endless lust for money, but he fails to win her again in spite of his true love. When he tries to save her and returns her to " Middaq Alley" the district she lived in, she dies in the same place in the arms of British soldier paying her life as value to get what she dreamt.

### **Gratifying desire is not always a useful solution**

Changing that happened in the early twentieth century makes people accept any style or behavior as new modal , they start doing whatever they want under the cover of change. In 'The Great Gatsby' although Myrtle is married and her husband loves her spending his day working in the garage to her what she needs , we see her looking for another new thing under the influence of changing. She Knows that Tom has a wife but she continues her secret relation accepting to be a women who give only lust with a hope of being a wife of a rich man one day. She suffers her being guilty and the mistreatment by Tom. Her trial of finding an end to her suffering where she stops and face her end offering her life as a value and price for the changing she search.

The ideology of Jazz age also effected the growing countries in the Middle East we find Hamida as a woman of this area looks for change choosing her way leaving the religious beliefs, social habits and her fiancé, since she does not want to be as other women in her district, her dream led her to the to the world of deceptive and untrue relationship. She suffers of her being a sweetheart for one night at the same time she suffers the loss of her tradition and pure reputation in the district. She substitutes her loss of dignity and religion by following the modern lifestyle and the freedom she has got after leaving the district.

Both novels warn of losing faith, social tradition and lack of education which make people do everything and do whatever act they want. The two novels shout for loyalty for love a we see neither Hamida nor Myrtle choose love, they prefer money and modern look over love. Another issue the novel shout for is lack of faith, it is clear that the two characters suffers the spiritual emptiness. Myrtle tries to spend her time with Tom in parties and restaurants as well as Hamida she spends her day and nights with the British soldiers wearing expensive clothes and jewelry. Both characters try to justify their disloyalty by occupying themselves with these aimless relationships and parties.

Education is also one of the issues that the novels emphasis.IN all societies education in the lower class is missing, darkness of mind is the dominant phenomenon which leads our characters to search for trivial objects following a ghost called modernity which desiccate their senses, if they have learned they would use their knowledge to alight the before them. Even society does not help women who have low degree of education where we see the high class trace the "It was the willingness of the heart" (Short Stories512)Tom Buchanan and Faraj Ibrahim were rich descending from a high social class, but they are racist with no conscience, not moral they are true only to themselves. They walk the way their heart goes. The case is similar with Myrtle and Hamida they are uneducated, deceived by false values with no rational principle, doing only what their hearts tell thinking it is their true happiness. "Money might be a dead tongue in other places, but in Middaq Alley it was very alive tongue"

(Mona Takieddine-Amyuni Images of Arab Women in Middaq Alley by Naguib Mahfouz, and Season of Migration to theNorth by Tayeb Salih ',P. 137 ')

When people live in poverty and rawness their only wish becomes to imitate those who have their chance in life and get whatever they need and desire as we see Hamida's wish is to be like the women who take advantage of war-time and start to work in factories which are outside Middaq she starts to compare herself with them as she sees herself she is more beautiful and attractive than them,

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they have freedom money and looked modern and pretty. The sight is the same with Myrtle when she tries to imitate Daisy and other rich women who always meet at Gatsby's parties and they even do not know the names of each other.

The simple prose of the two novels that deals with the educated world as a high class and literate world as low class depicts the everyday trivial actions and feelings that people have in Middaq Alley and the Alley of Ashes, they expose the inner power that lurk tremendous evil intentions towards each other. The nature of the two area with their details concentrating the images of the uneducated women of different age who do not have children, dislike domestic house work they just run after the modern style and richness.

### CONCLUSION

Historically women appeared in literature in different roles, reflecting the portrait of the age they represent. The early decades of the twentieth century is considered an area of progression and women's new life-style, these new features make them far and far from the domestic and traditional role that women had in previous centuries. Participating freedom in society bore some risks which make uneducated women specially whom they are from lower class to pay a precious value. "great social evil" Judith R. Walkowitz,13) represent the powerful and controlled class, according to Marxism capitalists are the domain power that control the society, they understand man as a means used for growing up their fortune, the victims in this process are women. The notion of not being mothers or obeyed wives starts its control over minds, makes them not think of their rights as part of life, but they see this freedom as a chance that comes once and they have to catch it to fill-up their desires.

Poverty and unawareness help the capitalists to exploit women as Naguib Mahfouz and Fitzgerald portrait the two characters of Hamida a girl of the twentieth who wants to be modern and rich and Myrtle the married woman whose ambition is to be a wife of a rich man to gratify her wishes. The two writers produce their characters as uneducated and lower class women, the case is different if they give the characters a role of participating in science and technology. 20<sup>th</sup> century progression brings the purview for women to be more rational and intellectual, women should arm themselves with science and knowledge to be strong to face the patriarchal societies and overpass the traditional and cruel habits of abuse and obsession that men practice against women.

Women have been included in literature over ages in various roles that vividly depict the times in which they have lived. The first years of the twentieth century is often referred to as the era of rapid progression. It was a period in which images of the modern woman and new life-style emerged. The hue of modern life made females move very far from their traditional, social and religious roles that they had previously experienced. The path women, particularly uneducated from a lower class, took towards freedom and modernity bore serious risks which forced them to pay a heavy price.

Considered as the major societal evil, women's exploitation has always been carried out by the privileged and dominating elite. According to Marxist Feminism, capitalists control over the larger domain of society, they view men as the vehicle that maximizes their wealth, while women are the victims within the capitalist system. The idea that emancipated women should not be mothers or submissive wives exerts its effect over the women's minds. This notion also renders women unable to rationally think of their natural rights as humans and citizens. However, women view freedom as a one-time opportunity which they have to seize to fulfill their wishes.

As Fitzgerald and Mahfouz show, ignorance and poverty make women easy targets for the capitalists. Hamida who is twenty years old whose ambition is to be rich and liberated, Myrtle is a married woman who endeavors to marry a wealthy man who can satisfy her desires, while Daisy and Sanya Afify are offered the security by their society. The characters in both novels are mainly poor, poorly educated and from a lower class, and the case had been different if they would have been given technical and scientific roles or the opportunity to participate in any social role. The advancement in the early twentieth century provided an opportunity for females to prove their rationality and intellectuality.

Equipped with scientific knowledge and logical thinking, women grew stronger to challenge patriarchal limitations and repressive institutions and to reject the ill-traditions and capitalist exploitative policies directed against them. For further research, the post-colonial studies can be suggested. Both authors reflect how people, both the colonizers and the colonized suffer the pain of war and self-deterioration. The psychoanalytical studies can be also proposed as the novels portray the inner motivations of the individuals and how they affect and are affected by the society.

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