

Gender in the great  
gatsby and cristina  
rossetti's poems  
essay sample



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Fitzgerald writes about gender roles in a conservative manner in the Great Gatsby; men work to earn money for the maintenance of the women. Men are dominant over women, especially in the case of Tom, who asserts his physical strength to subdue them. Women's passive roles in relationships are highlighted by Daisy and Myrtle, the main wives of the story, who stay home and look pretty. Jordan, the lone single woman introduced, fulfils what many single women end up doing: developing a career to support themselves. All three women use their looks and cunning promiscuity to entice men. This is a traditional feature of women, but particularly in America, this behaviour became commonplace in the 20's when women fought for greater rights. For example, in chapters 1 and 3, Jordan plays a hard-to-get with Nick at Daisy's house and then at Gatsby's party. The men on the other hand play a role of bringing home the money, although Tom has come from old money and he just spends frivolously. George Wilson, a " spiritless man", demonstrates a typical working class man struggling to make ends meet; we see this in chapter 2 when Tom and Nick stop by, and Nick describes it as " desolate" and " grotesque".

However, this descriptive language also presents a subversion of gender roles within the story, as Jordan becomes self reliant due to her lovers failed business and the " grey" lifestyle they lead. Gatsby's money is earned; although the entire book makes it difficult to understand exactly how, we presume he is a bootlegger. Nick works an honest job in the city as a bond man. The only hint of a role reversal is in the pair of Nick and Jordan; Jordan's androgynous name and calm, collected manner masculinises her. However, Nick does in the end exert his dominance over her by ending the

relationship. The women in the novel are not pure, and reflect the lively nature of the time. Myrtle is the most sensual, but the fact that Jordan and Daisy wear white dresses only highlights their corruption. Through the use of descriptive language and how he presents the characters, Fitzgerald demonstrates the traditional portrayal of gender roles within the Great Gatsby. However, subversion is also apparent shown through Jordan, who is more independent, perhaps due to Wilson, who fails to earn a comfortable living for himself and Jordan.

Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, on the other hand, mainly focuses on feminism, but similarly to the *Great Gatsby*, also the oppression of women by men. The first part of Rossetti's message is given through her thoughts on feminism, which is surely a major theme in this poem. For instance, the two main characters, Laura and Lizzie, reside free of any positive male interaction throughout the poem. Considering Rossetti's background as part of Victorian society, the poem suggests that Rossetti wanted a place where she could be free of men's rule. Even so, she understood the impossibility of any such reality. The poem illustrates this realization by including the Goblin men, who seem to haunt the female characters. The Goblin men's low-pitched cries follow the girls. Laura and Lizzie constantly hear the goblins in the forest: "Morning and evening... Maids heard the goblins cry". Even while the characters were alone or in the exclusive presence of women, the presence of the Goblin men existed as reminders that the presence of men is socially necessary. Also illustrating Rossetti's feminine ideal is the constancy of sisterhood between Laura and Lizzie.

Lizzie acts much as though she were Laura's mother as she feeds and bathes Laura during her "sickness". Rossetti here reinforces the point that women look out for other women, and men cannot be relied upon. The point illustrated here is that men cannot be trusted to care for the women that they cause to be "ill". The poem concentrates on situations in which men lure innocent women into forbidden or even dangerous places. The fact that the Goblin men are sexually taking advantage of the female characters is obviously implied by Rossetti, and they leave the sisters abandoned afterwards. An example of this is the character Jeanie, who has been taken advantage of by Goblin men and rendered "ill". This reader implies 'ill' as a synonym for "fallen", and this therefore represents the male oppression of women within Goblin Market. Therefore, although in both Great Gatsby and Goblin Market, female oppression is present, Goblin Market also presents feminism and sisterhood. So Goblin Market overall is a symbol of how one gender can rule another, but how sisterhood is stronger than anything that may taint it.