

The new woman of
the 1920's in 'winter
dreams' by f. scott
fitzgerald



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One of the main ideas that pulses throughout “ Winter Dreams” is the liberation of women, which, throughout history, has often been associated with the Roaring Twenties. Although the concept and title of The New Woman was first coined in the late nineteenth century, it truly began to spread nationwide and to all classes, in the 1920's. In this age, women won the right to vote, wore lighter clothing, and partied with their male counterparts until late in the night. Old conventions were broken and gradually left behind, along with the morals and ethics which both men and women abandoned for the gain of individual freedom. It was an age of recklessness, of living to the fullest and relinquishing inhibitions. Fitzgerald illustrated the wildness and rebellion of women in particular in this story through the ever so beautiful, yet heartbreaking character of Judy Jones.

Judy Jones, daughter of the wealthy Mr. Mortimer Jones, is introduced as a “ beautifully ugly” girl of eleven, who is “ destined” to grow up “ to be inexpressibly lovely and bring no end of misery to a great number of men”. Not surprisingly, the protagonist, Dexter Green, is destined to be one of these miserable men. The term “ beautifully ugly” can be perceived in varying ways; however, one such opinion is that the term reflects the fashion or trend of the era. Judy's attire may have given her the appearance of a rich girl, with her “ five small new golf clubs in a white canvas bag”, the items which she is decidedly the one to use but has a nurse to carry for her. Also, the arrogance she demonstrates through her bad temper; demanding a caddy when there are none available, and attempt to beat her nurse with a golf club, only helps to justify her spoiled and rich temperament. It is possible

that Judy's obvious wealth is what causes her to seem "beautiful" despite the ugliness of her age and crude manners.

Moreover, Judy possesses a "radiant" but "blatantly artificial" smile - one which Dexter finds "preposterous" and "absurd", yet strikes him as "convincing". It appears as though he loathes it - the smile - but what he truly reprimands is the power it has over him. This smile is consistently mentioned throughout the story. Fitzgerald emphasizes on its affectation, thereby shedding light on the fact that Judy's smile is also a result of fashion or trend, for she smiles in a way that "her lips twisted down at the corners" and later as a young woman this smile would be described as: "...less a smile than an invitation to kiss". Perhaps it was the trend to smile this way, perhaps she had seen it somewhere, and imitated it. Judy does not smile because she truly wants to, but because it is what women were doing at the time - thus this particular smile of hers is often "insincere".

Judy's confidence is evidently the work of her wealthy upbringing. On top of that, she has grown up in an era of liberation for women. In the twenties, women were eagerly and successfully doing the things they were barred from doing in the past. They achieved a kind of independence, thus drastically shifting the role of The New Woman from one that was originally regarded as merely eligible to higher degrees of knowledge such as achieving a PhD, to a New Woman that could participate in various male-dominated activities. The era was significantly more sophisticated, and in this sophisticated age, Judy Jones grows up watching women live to their hearts' content - especially the rich, as they indulge in extravagance.

When Dexter meets Judy years later at the same golf course, Lake Erminie, Judy's presence is clearly uncanny, as it is a predominantly male site. Her indifference to this shows that she is, in her own way, an activist by going against gender related conventions. When she accidentally hits Mr. Hedrick with a golf ball in the stomach, Mr. Hedrick cries, "...they ought to put some of these crazy women off the course. It's getting outrageous." These words convey his disapproval of women intruding upon this otherwise all-male sport.

Despite her audacity to display no hint of remorse, Mr. Sandwood, a man just over thirty who was playing golf with Dexter and Mr. Hedrick, remarked: "Gosh! She's good looking!" as though her beauty compensates for her distasteful behavior. Mr. Hedrick disparagingly argues that Judy is always "turning those big cow-eyes" in an attempt to seduce "every young calf in town". This comparison expresses his prejudiced opinion that Judy, a woman, is like a grown cow that lures all the "young", innocent men in town. His implication that all men maintained innocence and helplessness while she commits the shameless act of seduction proves his discrimination towards women.

Fitzgerald's purpose of this scene, where Judy is introduced for the second time by hitting a golf ball into Mr. Hedrick's abdomen, is to initiate the criticism which women of the time faced for going against social norms, by traditional people, like Mr. Hedrick, who is old and has lived most of his life before this era of freedom and abandoning of inhibitions. Furthermore, the twenties saw wildness in women which could not be tamed. Judy represents this, with her many beaux and ability to lure them into "playing her game"
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and not their own", as well as her brazenness to do whatever she wishes, such as driving a boat all by herself late at night. In the twenties, there were many women like Judy Jones; women who adopted a carelessness and smartness to outwit men - behavior which, prior to this time, was unacceptable theoretically and in actuality.

Overall, Fitzgerald's focus on the behavior and characteristics of women in the 1920's has made *Winter Dreams* a beautiful read. It has successfully depicted the extremity of women's freedom and the consequences individuals face on the birth of The New Woman.