

# The great gatsby through the lens of feminist criticism



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Feminist Criticism examines the ways in which literature has been shaped according to the issues of gender. It directs its attention to the cultural and economic disparities in a “ patriarchal” society that has hindered women from realizing their creative possibilities. Feminist critics argue that women are often identified as negative or passive “ Objects” while men are defined as dominating “ Subjects.” There are several assumptions and concepts held in common by most feminist critics:

- Our civilization is pervasively patriarchal.
- The concept of “ gender” is largely, if not entirely, a cultural construct that has resulted from the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization.
- This patriarchal ideology also pervades those writings that have been considered great literature.

Such works lack autonomous female role models and are implicitly addressed to a male reader, making the woman reader feel like an outsider or else asking her to identify against herself by assuming male values and ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting. Feminist criticism focuses on the power relationships between the genders. Using the lens of feminist criticism, we can examine the patterns of thought, behavior, values, and power in relations between the sexes. For example, we might notice the lack of strong or significant female characters in Huck Finn and Twain’s seemingly patronizing depiction of the female characters that do exist.

Writing Prompts When Daisy Buchanan learned that the child that she had just given birth to was a girl, she wept and then said, “ All right. I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool—that the best thing a girl can be in this

world, a beautiful little fool" (21). Explain what Daisy means by this. What is she saying about "this world"?

On page 67, Nick describes some of the regular attendees at Gatsby's parties: "Benny McClenahan arrived always with four girls. They were never quite the same ones in physical person but they were so identical one with another that it inevitably seemed they had been there before. I have forgotten their names—Jacqueline, I think, or else Consuela or Gloria or Judy or June, and their last names were either the melodious names of flowers and months or the sterner ones of the great American capitalists." What does this description suggest about the attitude of Mr. McClenahan and of Nick to women in general?

If you were in Gatsby's shoes, what would you have said to Daisy during that first meeting at Nick's bungalow to try to win her back? At this point, Gatsby is obviously still in love with Daisy. Do you think Daisy is still in love with him? Why or why not?

Other Possible Essay Prompts How did women's fashions change in the twenties? How do they reflect the new freedoms many women were enjoying at that time? How do the female characters in the novel represent these new freedoms? Explain and support your response.

The Nineteenth Amendment was made effective in 1920. Trace the history of the women's suffrage movement. What arguments were made for and against women's suffrage. Were any of these ideals or worries realized? Explain how these opinions are reflected in the novel.

Tom says, " I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out" (137). Later, he says about Daisy, " The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in her head and doesn't know what she's doing" (138). Explain the hypocritical and paternalistic attitudes behind these remarks.