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An Instance of Apparent Plagiarism

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Literary Explorations II

An Instance of Apparent Plagiarism

To the men whose lives were forever altered by them, Marian Forrester and Daisy Buchanan were always just out of reach. Be it age or water that separated them from their prizes, Niel Herbert and Jay Gatsby yearned for their remarkably similar objects of fascination. They were so similar that F. Scott Fitzgerald, the author of *The Great Gatsby*, wrote to Willa Cather, the author of *A Lost Lady*, to explain the apparent plagiarism of her character. Mrs. Forrester and Daisy Buchanan resemble each other in almost every aspect of their character.

All who knew Mrs. Forrester thought of her as a “very special kind of person” (Cather 12). Her presence could brighten any situation, and her smile would cheer up even the gloomiest of men. Mrs. Forrester’s presence was a delight in itself, and Niel Herbert saw that. From the moment he first met her, he was enslaved to her every whim, even far past the time when he began to think of her as despicable. In the same way, Jay Gatsby was captivated by Daisy Buchanan. Her ethereal qualities entranced him from his early days as a soldier, and from that point forward all of his actions were orchestrated to win Daisy. When Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, sees his cousin for the first time in years he remarks that she seemed to be “promising that there was no one else in the world that she so much wanted to see. That was a way she had” (Fitzgerald 9). Both Daisy and Marian were enwrapped by an aura that caused all who saw them to love them.

Fitzgerald and Cather describe their characters as having mysterious qualities that make them both entrancing and seemingly unattainable. Less emphasis was placed on their physical beauty. Both Mrs. Forrester and Daisy were pretty, but it was their personality that made them

truly beautiful. Therefore, Marian almost instantly lost her beauty following the death of her husband when she seemed to lose that effervescence. Mr. Forrester brought out the best in Marian. Without him, she became flighty and unpredictable.

Both Daisy and Marian completely depended upon their husbands. Marian deferred to Captain Forrester in all matters of judgment or decision, while Daisy could not bring herself to leave Tom despite her love for Gatsby. When Gatsby asks her to leave, she says that “Even alone I can’t say I never loved Tom...It wouldn’t be true” (Fitzgerald, 133). Knowledge of Tom’s own affair does nothing to sway her mind. To Daisy and Marian, loving another man is not inherently wrong as long as one maintains a semblance of loyalty towards one’s husband. As Daisy loved Jay Gatsby, Marian Forrester loved Frank Ellinger. Originally, the reader is led to believe that Marian is attracted to Frank for purely physical reasons. He can give her something that her much older husband possibly can not. This is proven to be false when, upon learning of his marriage to Constance Ogden, Mrs. Forrester completely breaks down, saying “I never want to see you again while I live, and I forbid you to come and look at me when I’m dead” (Cather 114). Neither woman left a man with whom they did not feel entirely happy because they were scared of being without security. Love for a man who cannot be their own and an unwillingness to embrace uncertainty united these two women.

While physical beauty is not the main factor in Marian and Daisy’s apparent perfection, it does help that both are startlingly pretty. Mrs. Forrester was a California woman, with blue-black hair and fine features, accented by the expensive jewelry she wore. Daisy was a Southern belle, who was very beautiful but lacked definite physical descriptions. Physical beauty allows them to take full advantage of their natural gifts of personality. Willa Cather used a dinner guest named Mrs. Ogden to show how Mrs. Forrester took advantage of her natural beauty. Mrs. Ogden was a

kind, witty woman with a personality not unlike that of Mrs. Forrester. The greatest difference between the two women was that Mrs. Forrester was considered to be beautiful while Mrs. Ogden was homely. In fact, Niel comments that Mrs. Ogden was “almost unpardonably homely” (Cather 35). She still is able to make him laugh and enjoy himself, but only Marian can fill up a room with her laughter and be remembered for the rest of her guest’s lives.

Jay Gatsby and Niel Herbert built their lives around the women that they loved. No matter how unattainable their obsessions became, they persevered. Gatsby lived for three years across the bay from Daisy Buchanan’s house. Every night, he watched for the green light at the end of her dock because it “seemed very near to her, almost touching her” (Fitzgerald 94). Gatsby does everything he possibly can to impress her, including becoming rich through presumably illegal means. The man he once was, he cannot be if he wants to have any chance of winning her love for the rest of his life. Similarly, Niel is inspired by Mrs. Forrester to try to become the best person that he possibly can be in life. He stays with his uncle, studies law, and eventually goes to college to become an architect all in an attempt to gain Mrs. Forrester’s love. Daisy and Marian both had the same abilities to ensnare men without even trying, as if they were will o’ the wisps leading the unwary traveler off of the correct path. For their tantalizing light did destroy those they had ensnared.

Jay Gatsby died without ever having won the only game he ever played. His struggle to win Daisy consumed his life from the moment he saw her. Niel also spent much of his early life struggling to accomplish something that in actuality never truly occurred, which was making Mrs. Forrester love him. Due to their actions, beauty, and influence on the men in their lives, Mrs. Forrester and Daisy Buchanan are almost interchangeable.

Works Cited

Cather, Willa. *A Lost Lady*. New York: Vintage Books, 1971. Print.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Collier Books, 1925. Print.