

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study



Mohamed Abdulhasan Jasm Bahadlkhafaja¹, Kadhim Dahwi Abbas Al kuraishi²

¹Assistant instructor in the Iraqi Ministry of Education, General directorate of Education in Missan.

²Assistant instructor in the Iraqi Ministry of Education, General directorate of Education in the Holy Karbala.

ABSTRACT: This study is intended to show how the impact of discourse of modernism has made remarkable changes in women's status in patriarchal societies in the first decades of the twentieth century. Comparatively reading F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Naguib Mahfouz's *Zuqāq al-Midaq* (1947) [*Midaq Alley* (1966)], this paper endeavours to contrast and compare women's status both in the western and eastern societies after the two world wars; as women's struggle against patriarchy and its oppressive practices imposed on women was one of the most critical concerns of the time. The American school of comparative literature, particularly the theories put forward by Rene Wellek and Abda Abood, along with Western and Eastern feminist theories of Simone De Beauvoir's, Christine Delphy, Nawal El Saadawi and Qasim Amin are employed as the theoretical framework of this paper. The observation to emerge from this paper is that women's social and economic status has been vital to their perpetual oppression.

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

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there have always been attempts by women in general and women writers in particular to reform the deeply established patriarchal social structure in countries all over the world. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a growing movement for women's rights. Women themselves found a new perspective on traditional views of women's and men's opposite natures, the family as an institution, and their relationships to and with each other and society. The way women are portrayed in both Western and Arabic literature serves as a reliable barometer which measures women's roles and conditions in society. The available literature reveals that the idea of a modern woman within a modern society became quite a novel concept for emulating by females at large, but it also had its own impact on the minds of lower-class women in particular. Affected by the changes in the structure of society in the twentieth century, women thought that money would grant them invulnerability.

The first decade after WWI, known as the "Roaring Twenties" or the "Jazz Age", witnessed significant changes in all aspects of American life, which had already started before the war. The 1920s was an era that saw the rise of a culture of consumerism with American households became enamored with the modern forms of entertainment and purchased a wide variety of materialistic items such as automobiles, cameras, sewing machines and radios through which they could connect with other societies. Women started to break free from their traditional roles and the constraints imposed by patriarchy.

Thus, many women abandoned the villages to enjoy the modern life in the big cities. They enjoyed the freedom of not performing household duties and took jobs that offered them autonomy and self-independence well as. They also started to assume important roles in the society. They cut their hair short and wore "flapper" dresses. Nonetheless, in spite of the vitality of the scientific progress and the Industrial Revolution in that time, young Americans missed the identity, traditional values and the secure and supportive family as well (Curnutt, 2002, p. 29-30). The flourishing of the Jazz Age was synchronized with the coming of the urbanization and industrial renaissance in Cairo, which critics call *New Cairo (Al-Qahara el Jadid)* (Lane-Poole, 1902/1906, p. 1-31). The Egyptian people were under the British domination during the Second World War and the cultural mingling; they had to grapple with the changes that accompanied modernity (al-Said, 1978, p. 13-15). The industrial revolution did not only affect the people in the West but its impact came into being in the East and in Egypt in particular.

Imitating their counterparts in the West, Egyptian women set themselves free from the traditional roles allocated to them by patriarchy and proved themselves to face the challenges of new life of liberation and self-determination. Progress in technology blazed new trails to set up extremely large cities and huge industrial installations. Women now contributed a larger share to the different aspects of the household economy to have better lives. However, young people were much influenced by materialistic views turning away from traditional values under the influence of western modern lifestyle. Young people in most poor families were fond of the new aristocratic way of life.

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

FINDINGS

The current study is an endeavor to reveal how women from poor lower-class families were attracted to the idea of a modern woman throughout the first part of the twentieth century. The study also demonstrates how poor societies suffered from pathetic conditions of neglected poverty with the coming of WWI and long time after the war. The two novels under consideration Mahfouz's *Zuqāq al-Midaq* (1947) [*Midaq Alley* (1966)] and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) represent examples of Modern Woman of the Progressive Era (1890-1920), who tries to be liberated from old traditions. In these two novels, there are images of young women with short hair and short skirts. These young women reject conformity to their mother's and grandmother's way of life based on rigid social norms. For instance, they reject their traditional roles to take care of their husband, to give birth to children and do various domestic housework. They have great lust for wealth to the sacrifice of their most precious values.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The reason for choosing Fitzgerald and Mahfouz's fictions for comparison lies in the fact that both fictional works mirror cultural values and social norms of their society and share the same themes of loss, chaos, and human deterioration after the two World Wars. Reality is regarded as a principal theme in the works of both authors. These authors concentrated on those characters who descend from a lower social class and how they were taken or deceived by modernist ideas. Hence, the current study shows how both the impact of modernism and the social traditions influence lower-class women rather than the upper middle-class women. To achieve the desired aim, the American school of comparative literature, particularly the theories put forward by Rene Wellek and Abda Abood, along with Western and Eastern feminist theories of Simone De Beauvoir's, Christine Delphy, Nawal El Saadawi and Qasim Amin are employed as the theoretical framework of this paper.

Comparative literature enables and enhances the worldwide dissemination of artistic and literary works. The current study applies theories of the American school of comparative literature because the social realities of the authors' time, which affect young females, are reflected in their fictional works. Therefore, the American school of comparative literature will be a proper framework through which the feminist theoretical approach will be applied. The founder of the American School of comparative literature Henry Remak states that comparative literature is an academic discipline dealing with the study of literature that transcends the boundaries of nationalism (as cited in Shamsuddin & Abd Rahman, 2012, p. 4). It studies the relations between different literatures and other areas of knowledge and belief. So comparative literature goes far to study the relationship between social background, which helps to create a literary work (Abood, 1999, p. 10).

Rene Wellek, a renowned literary critic of the American school of comparative literature, claims that the comparison between literary works must be in its comprehensive whole, not being confined within artificial boundaries (as cited in Shamsuddin & Abd Rahman, 2012, p. 2-3). Wellek calls for linking the "literary history", "theory of the literature", and "literary criticism" as the prerequisites of comparative literature studies similar to the literary study (as cited in Shamsuddin & Abd Rahman, 2012, p. 2-3). Furthermore, focusing on the differences and similarities of different national traditions would lead to a broader perspective for comparative literary study.

Similarly, for Arab scholars of comparative literature such as Abde Abood (1999) and Muhammad Ghunaymi Hilal (1953), comparative literature is concerned with the study of literature in an international context. It provides a global perspective on the relationship between national literatures whether it is an artistic external relation, such as literary genres or substantive transmission, such as subject matters and intellectual currents that influence the development of literature in different parts of the world. Comparative literature concentrates on the relationship between literature and other forms of cultural expression and manifests points of both convergence and divergence among works of different national literatures. It enables the critics to investigate different literary movements and trends across nations. Hence, comparative literature is the study of aspects of literature beyond national boundaries (Abood, 1999, p.39).

In her book *The Second Sex*, the French materialist feminist and the second-wave feminist theorist Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986) has attempted to raise women's awareness to challenge the construction of women as "other". She (1949/1953) contends that Western society is run by patriarchal force which pushes women to a secondary role in life and makes them marginalized. She argues that human entity is not a submissive being; in a sense human society does not submit to nature rather it tries to control and use it to its own advantage, so submission is carried out through patriarchal systems. Beauvoir goes on to assert that woman is not regarded as a "sexual organism" and woman's awareness is not determined only by her sexuality. Hence, she concludes that two principal qualities characterize woman; first, her perception of the world is less acute than man's, and second, she suffers most from enslavement to the species than the male does (p. 79).

The French feminist Christine Delphy first coined the phrase "materialistic feminism" in 1975. She focuses her argument on the family as the first economic unit of closely related individuals. Just as the lower class is subjugated by the upper class in society, Delphy explains that women are oppressed by their families and have to submit to their husbands (as cited in Tyson, 2006, 2nd ed., p. 97). For Delphy, marriage is no more than an oppressive institution which exploits woman inside her house. The unpaid domestic labor by women in the home, as Delphy argues, is simply trivialized as "housework" (ibid., p. 97-98). Delphy argues

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

that women's domestic labor is unpaid since patriarchy characterizes women in their domestic duties as "non workers". Therefore, "non workers" should not expect to receive payment (as cited in Tyson, 2006, 2nd ed., p. 98).

On the other hand, the Arab feminist Qasim Amin (1899) points out that Islam confirms women's rights in all aspects of life. He observes that Allah has asked human beings, both male and female, to learn and search for knowledge. He argues that Islam has enhanced the notion of working for both genders to have the right to free dignified lives free of oppression; he reasserts that if only Muslims realized this concept without the effect of the social traditions and norms, Muslim women would not be oppressed and imprisoned behind the walls of their houses. Amin states that men have precluded women from rising to the upper levels of society and prevented them from being educated and living as autonomous human beings. Therefore, according to Amin (1899), it is not religion which oppresses women, but it is the impact of the social customs and norms that will cause women's subjugation (p. 31).

METHODOLOGY

Rene Wellek, a renowned literary critic of the American school of comparative literature, states that studying comparative literature supports the national awareness, through the contact with the various global intellectual currents, since it studies the aesthetic aspects, traditions, and customs. This field of literature studies the relationship, interaction and overlap between two or more literatures, where it goes beyond the time, influences and translations. This literary field concerns the text and the context in order to broaden the analysis and judge and to publicize the themes and forms of literary works (Wellek, 1948, pp. 40- 43). That is what this thesis intends to do to embrace all the research questions. Abood (1999)

The Arab comparatist, reinforces Wellek's opinion of the distinction between literature and literary study. He defines the first as a creative art while the second is a science through which the researcher delineates the artistic or aesthetic aspects of the national literature or the literary work. He adds that national literatures cannot be studied in isolation from other literatures (p.30-31).

Therefore, the current study will depend on the tenets of the American school of comparative literature. *The Great Gatsby* and *Midaq Alley* are culturally dissimilar since they were written in two different places and they emerged at different times; about twenty-four years intervening between the two works. The study attempts to demonstrate the similar and different depiction of female characters in *Midaq Alley* and *The Great Gatsby* because of various social, cultural, ideological, economic and political norms and values, and because of different styles and forms that Mahfouz and Fitzgerald have relied upon. With the application of the tenets of the American school, the current study seeks to investigate how the male authors have presented women in their novels. Moreover, the study will reveal how the two novelists are brought closer together or placed farther apart in portraying woman's image in their works, considering the fact that they are from totally divergent outlooks, cultures, languages, and societies. The comparative study attempts to internationalize the domestic and social life of the Americans and the Egyptians during the special period. Infused with the tenets of comparative literature, the two novels cannot be studied as a singular entity in isolation. The current study uses the American school of comparative literature (especially theories of Wellek and Abood) as the theoretical framework through which these similarities and differences would be investigated. With the application of Simone De Beauvoir's feminist theories as paradigms of western feminism and those of Qasim Amin's as paradigms of Arab feminism, the study reveals the impact of the economic and social status of women upon woman's oppression.

Engels claims that women can only be emancipated when they contribute to the social economic scale of production and when domestic duties are reduced to an insignificant degree (as cited in De Beauvoir, 1956, p. 81). Beauvoir criticizes Engels' claim that women's oppression is considered as a result of the institution of private property. Engels states that with the emergence of private property man found himself in need of more slaves to have more vast land, condemning woman to isolation and domestic duties (as cited in De Beauvoir, 1956, p. 80). Beauvoir (1956) argues that woman's ineffectiveness brought about her oppression because man viewed her in the perspective of his plan for enrichment and expansion. Beauvoir (1956) argues that this plan cannot still explain why she was oppressed; "for the division of labor between the sexes could have meant a friendly association" (p. 83). She believes that this event is an outcome of "the imperialism of the human consciousness", that has always sought to proclaim its sovereignty in objective fashion (p. 83). The oppression of woman, as Beauvoir (1956) argues, results from the human consciousness that includes "the original category of the Other and an original aspiration to dominate the Other" (p. 83). Therefore, the division of labor according to the sex as De Beauvoir (1956) argues has caused the oppression (ibid.).

Beauvoir (1956) argues that class divisions are not based on biological differences (p. 83). The slave is aware of his opposition to his master. She points out that man has found woman as a compliant being that she cannot revolt against him (p. 84). In the patriarchal society, woman is a man's sexual partner, a reproducer and an erotic object; she is the *Other* through whom the man seeks himself (p. 85). Christine Delphy (1984) subscribes to De Beauvoir's opinion; she concentrates on the family as the small economic unit in which women's oppression is exercised by men upon their daughters or wives. For Delphy (1984), marriage is the contract that restricts women to unpaid domestic labor, so women are oppressed through this marriage contract to unpaid labor, although her work is remunerated if she furnishes it for people with whom she is not related or married (p.64-66).

It seems that Sheikh Al- Huseini's wife suffers oppression since she realizes her husband's contradictory behavior. In the same

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

vein, Sanya Afify accepts to be oppressed under the control of a man who is about twenty years younger than her. Moreover, knowing about her position, Daisy Buchanan agrees to be a fool and be oppressed by a rich man who represents old money. De Beauvoir (1956) believes that women cannot improve their situations as long as there are always social laws and mores that consider maternity as the sole outcome, so women should revolt for themselves and proclaim for their rights (p. 80-86).

Moreover, the Arabian society had its part in the development of feminist movements. Qasim Amin participated in the liberation of Arabian women through the demands for women's rights and equal opportunities with respect to employment, pay, and education. Amin (1899) believes that men have imposed rigid laws and traditions only to restrict women to domestic works and their responsibility to serve their husbands, leaving the uneducated. *Midaq Alley* portrays how women stay at home to perform domestic works. There are no educated women in the district and all of them are under their husbands' control; they refuse Hamida and consider her as a strange female since she rejects staying at home to take care of her husband and domestic duties. Amin (1899) declares that the Arabian society could not be promoted unless women have the respectable positions that Islam has given them. Contemporary feminist Nawal El Saadawi (1931) admits that while Amin's books about women's liberation and the new woman does not contradict the Islamic rules; they are considered as a great triumph that supports women's rights.

DISCUSSION

The Egyptian novelist and screenplay writer Naguib Mahfouz was born in December 1911 in Cairo, Egypt. He spent his first years in the old quarter of al- Jamaliyya in Cairo and the sights and smells of his childhood neighborhood permeated his early works as he proclaimed it as his favorite world.

Mahfouz emphasizes the significance of Jamaliyya, or "the *hara* world" (a small quarter where people of the lower-class are usually settled) as he refers to in many of his works, because it represents a source of inspiration for his works. He remarks: "It seems to me that [a man-of-letters] must have a tie with a certain place or a certain object to form a point of departure for his emotions" (as cited in El-Enany, 1993, p. 2). He affirms that the *hara* world was reflected in his fiction even when he started to treat issues of an intellectual or symbolic nature. "What really moves me is the *hara* world", he states. It is his favorite world. His employment of the *hara* world can be seen as a background for his works and, in the same time, a medium through which he renders his vision of man and society. His dependence on the *hara* world has obviously furthered in his old age, particularly from the mid-1970s onwards. Mahfouz maintains:

With the advancement of age one realises that his origin is his true refuge.... In the tumult of this strange world, one takes refuge in his childhood, in the security of his past life. This explains my nostalgia for the *hara* and [my use of it] as a source for the *Epic of the Harafish*. (Al-Ghitani, p. 107)

Mahfouz is considered as one of the Arab world's most popular novelists. His works mostly depict Egyptian social, economic, and political problems with its specific details that affected people's everyday lives at that time. Mahfouz wrote about the history and culture of his native country, dealing with varied topics to give a clear image of Egyptian life. The topics included in his fictions covered a wide range of issues and themes that affected the lives of individuals from the upper, middle, and lower classes. The 1919 Egyptian Revolution had a tremendous influence on his life and later Mahfouz reflected its true impact in most of his works. Meanwhile, the noted American novelist and short-story writer F. Scott Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896. He is considered as one of America's greatest twentieth-century writers. He is known as a chronicler of the Jazz Age, a term coined by Fitzgerald himself. He portrayed the chaos that surrounded the American life after the First World War. His realistic fiction reflects the destructive nature of the "American dream". Fitzgerald's works and characters are typical of the real American life and they are an echo of Americans' national mood during the 1920s. His 1925 classic novel, *The Great Gatsby*, has long been considered one of the greatest representatives of the Jazz Age. Fitzgerald himself lived a careless life-style and reveled in extravagant parties to please his wife. Therefore, he had the ability to depict his immediate environment in details and with a great innovative skill. Both critics and readers alike have always been smitten by Fitzgerald's fiction as he could portray the corruption of the "American Dream" and reflect his own experience in his works.

On the other hand, the novel at its most abstract level, according to Raleigh (1957), is not concerned with "local customs or even national and international legends", instead, it deals with "the permanent realities of existence" (p. 57). At this level, no human value is ascribed to most people in the novel. They are just reduced to lead a mundane animalized existence that truly does not matter. In other words, in Raleigh's (1957) words, "they are merely a higher form of animality living out its mundane existence" (ibid.). This mundane type of existence is clearly displayed through the Jordan Bakers, the Daisy Fays, and the Tom Buchanans. Only the title character and the protagonist Jay Gatsby and the narrator Nick Carraway are given values in human existence. Nick still perceives the human value of Gatsby with all his sadness and absurdities and his short and pathetic existence (Raleigh, 1957, p. 57).

Nick's mind is connected with the conservative and historical views; so Nick is always escaping back, while Gatsby pursues the green light at the end of his ex-lover, Daisy Buchanan's dock. In this way, Gatsby attempts to recapture the past dream by winning back that dream in the guise of Daisy (Choudhury, 2000, p. 29). However, just as Raleigh (1957) claims, "No one knew

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

better than Gatsby that nothing could finally match the splendors of his own imagination” (p. 56). The novel’s ending clearly indicate, as Raleigh (1957) goes further to assert, that “not only had the American dream been corrupted but that it was, in part anyway, necessarily corrupted, for it asked too much” (p. 56). So Fitzgerald suggests that even the American dream cannot live up to Gatsby’s longings and wants, he has paid too much for his dream, so the corruption of this dream at the end would seem a necessity.

Bewley (1954) comments that critics tend to consider *The Great Gatsby* somehow as a commentary on the elusive phrase of the American Dream (p. 223). However, Bewley refutes “[t]he assumption [that] seems to be that Fitzgerald approved”, proclaiming instead that “*The Great Gatsby* offers some of the severest and closest criticism of the American dream that our literature affords” (ibid.). This phrase embodies the romantic enhancement of the possibilities of existence on a level at which the material world and the spiritual world have become indistinguishably blended (ibid.). The novel is considered as an exploration of this elusive phrase; and in Bewley’s (1954) words, it is an endeavor to reveal the hidden boundary that isolates the reality from the illusions (p. 224).

Bewley (1954) insists that throughout the novel, the illusions, which are symbolized in the subordinate characters, appear more real than does the reality itself (p. 225). He goes on to state that the reality is embodied in Gatsby and it is “a thing of the spirit” and it is “a promise rather than the possession of a vision” (p. 225). The reality is seen as an act of “faith in the half-glimpsed, but hardly understood, possibilities of life” (ibid.). As Bewley proclaims, Fitzgerald has perfectly disclosed “the inadequacy of Gatsby’s romantic view of wealth” (p. 226).

Barzun writes that figures, regardless of whether they are real or fictional, insofar as they convey attitudes, destinies, and aspirations representative of a particular individual or group, are endowed with a “mythical character”(as cited in Bewley, 1954, p. 226). In this sense, Gatsby is regarded as a “mythic” character that represents the conflict between reality and illusion at the heart of American national life (p. 226-227). He embodies “an heroic personification of the American romantic hero”, and “the true heir of the American dream” (p. 227). From Nick Carraway’s perspective, there is something “gorgeous” about Gatsby, and although “gorgeous” is a favorite term in the “Roaring Twenties”, Gatsby conveys it with “an archetypal American elegance” (ibid.).

In Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*, critics focus chiefly on the main character who is a prostitute and represents a symbol of disorder challenging the accepted patriarchal structures of her society. al-Qaisi (2004) sees Hamida as a symbol for Egyptian rights that have been infringed through the British invasion. What makes Hamida a prostitute is a strange pimp, named Ibrahim Faraj, who is not an inhabitant of the alley while attempts to seduce her with money. Meanwhile, al-Naqash regards Hamida as a symbol for Egypt and how it collapsed under the impact of the British conquest (as cited in al-Qaisi, 2004, p. 131-134). However, Bader refutes al-Naqash’s opinion claiming that it would not be just to compare Egypt to a woman or girl in a novel (as cited in al-Qaisi, 2004, p. 131-134). 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 (as cited in al-Qaisi, 2004, p. 131-134).

El-Enany (1993) points out that Mahfouz in *Midaq Alley* has portrayed the conflict between present and past paradigms, or new and old value systems, one pursuing the stability of old traditions, and the other invoking the attraction of Western modernity with all its perils (p. 47). This struggle mirrors the horrors that accompany the modern age, showing how Egyptians are torn between their past culture and the new one, which was conveyed by the British army after the Second World War (p. 54). This struggle is obvious through the contrast between the title of the novel and its theme. The theme of the novel is that of the painful tension between old and new values “whose theatre is the soul of man” in general, as El-Enany (1993) argues (p. 54).

In particular, the threat of the new values concerns the soul of the modern Egyptians, which was affected by the war. El-Enany (1993) maintains that Mahfouz reveals at the outset of the novel the fact that the old and the new cannot live in unity and a choice must be made between the two (ibid.). He goes on to assert that the war for the Egyptians is such a gate which leads them to modernity in which people could flee from the death-in-life, deprivation, and squalor of the old alley to the promise of a new existence which can be furnished for them by employment in British army camps (p. 55).

SOCIAL SETTING

Up to the last decade of the nineteenth century, both western and eastern women suffered a great deal from patriarchy and its restrictions. 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 (Booker, 1996, p. 89-91).

The image of modern woman is reflected clearly in *The Great Gatsby* as well; Daisy as a high class young woman, realizes that there are many things in life that matter more than love; and that is why she prefers money to love in an attempt to fulfill her dreams of becoming a wealthy women. Consequently, she marries the rich East Egg inhabitant, Tom Buchanan. She accepts to be a possession in Tom’s house just to be a member of the aristocratic class; Daisy knows that Tom betrays her, but she could not live

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

independently; she realizes her role in the society as a submissive woman, which is observable when she reiterates what she told Nick when her daughter was born. 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).

Thus, it can be concluded that Daisy's character offers a good example of a woman's submission. Daisy accepts her role as a submissive wife, she knows that a woman in such a patriarchal society should be like a fool; otherwise she would become a dismissed female who is rejected by everyone. So knowing about her position, Daisy Buchanan allows oppression at the hands of a rich man who represents old money. And despite the fact that Gatsby attempts to regain Daisy, she remains with Tom until the end of the story and prefers to stay as part of the patriarchal society.

The situation is different in *Midaq Alley*, as Hamida, the protagonist, is from a lower class. Hamida, like many other secondary school girls who seek money and modern life, has been seduced by Faraj Ibrahim. Faraj who is a wealthy man deludes young women with love by buying them jewelry and stylish clothes. Once these young women are involved with Fajar, they are turned into prostitutes and offered to the British soldiers.

Hamida's dream of being a modern and rich woman helps Faraj to fulfill his aim. He instills in Hamida's mind the idea that domestic work, children, and motherhood ruin women's beauty and, alternatively, he promises her the life she dreams about. Abbas, who sincerely loves Hamida, has tried his best to save her from such a spoiled life and put an end to her unlimited lust for wealth and fun; however, he does not get the chance to do so as he faces his tragic end by the English soldiers just the same as Gatsby's trial which pushed him to his tragic end by George Wilson, Myrtle's husband. While Daisy as a high-class member of society continues her life and leaves others to clean up the mess she has made. In the same vein, Hamida is rescued alive to continue her life, after having worked for the English soldiers' interests. However, her ruined face, leave little opportunities for her to continue her career which was depending on her physical beauty.

CLASS

The *Great Gatsby* explores the representations of social class. Fitzgerald depicts the image of modern woman of varied social classes. For instance, Myrtle Wilson, George Wilson's wife and Tom Buchanan's mistress, endeavors to belong to modern women by her short fair hair and stylish clothes. Unlike her mother or grandmother's way of life, Myrtle enjoys parties and tries to make up for her unhappy life with George by involving herself in an illegitimate love relation with Tom Buchanan. Though Tom Buchanan treats her very badly, she keeps her relationship with him as his extravagant and modern lifestyle gives her a sense of belonging to such a way of life. From the first moment of their relationship, Myrtle begins to care a lot about her appearance and spend more than her financial means to buy stylish clothes. In their relationship, Myrtle appreciates Tom's generosity and her being with a rich man rather than the mutual love they pretend to have for each other. It seems as if she appreciates the material interest and the appearance with the rich she receives in return of offering him her body to Tom.

On the other hand, in her relationship with Tom, Myrtle attempts to put an end to her poor life in the garage she shares with her husband George who truly loves her. Similarly, Daisy has ditched her lover Gatsby and his sincere love and accepted Tom whose treachery is well known to her. From Tyson's (2006, 2nd ed.) perspective, Fitzgerald portrays Myrtle's sexual vigor as a form of aggressiveness, or as a personal assertiveness much greater than that of either Daisy or Jordan, despite her powerless position in the society as a woman from the lower social strata (p. 127).

It is obvious that Myrtle means nothing to Tom but a sexual toy to gratify his sexual desires. Thus, she is disrespected by Tom. Though she fancies herself a high class woman via the relationship she has with Tom, Myrtle is deprived the right to ask of Tom's wife, "'Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!' shouted Mrs. Wilson. 'I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai—'" (*The Great Gatsby* p. 25), she received a severe punishment for such a trivial matter and her nose was broken by Tom. Tom does not feel sorry for hitting Myrtle so hard; as he believes that it is normal to punish a lower class woman by her high class master.

However, Myrtle accepts Tom's mistreatment and the way she is commodified in order not to lose the material benefit she receives from Tom in return. Myrtle has preferred being a mistress of a rich man who belongs to the world via his money only to her life with her sincere husband. For Tom, money is the only issue that connects him to people of high positions within his society. Money makes it possible for him to "purchase" Myrtle Wilson many other working-class women such as the chambermaid and the pretty young woman he has seen at Gatsby's party (Tyson, 2006, 2nd ed., p. 70). In order to win Myrtle's sexual favor, Tom promises to marry her in the future (*The Great Gatsby* p. 23). Myrtle's tolerance of Tom's harsh treatment is based on the hope to put an end to the poor living conditions in the valley of ashes and become a wife of a wealthy man.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald explores "love" and "existential freedom" in the early twentieth century. The story's world maintains barriers between the wealthy and the needy, the well-educated and the poorly-educated, and males and females (Berman, 2001, p. 79). It was consistent with the most radical changes that took place in the early twentieth century that some of poor people received any behavior or style or as a modern and better modal to follow. They started doing whatever they desired under the aegis of change and newness. In *The Great Gatsby*,

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

Despite that fact that Myrtle is married and her loving husband spends his day working to offer all her needs, she betrays her husband with another man due to the influence of modernism and change in social life only. She does not mind being a mistress to a married man and continues her secret and illegitimate relationship in an attempt to gratify her desires of being a modern woman. Her quest to live with a rich man like women high-class background leads her to a tragic end in which she has lost her life before meeting her farfetched dreams.

Despite women's emancipation movement in the Arab world was delayed, by the early decades of the twentieth century Eastern women made some important advances to bring about significant changes in women's role and status in their own society. Women became part of rebellious intellectual movements, which challenged the prevailing ethos of Arab communities, to attain similar rights like western women. The challenges experienced by the modern Eastern woman clearly appeared when European powers colonized most Arab countries up to the mid-twentieth century (Haddad, 1984, p. 137).

Mahfouz also writes about people especially women who come from different social classes. The emergence of New Cairo exercised its influence on the alley under the aegis of modernity. Most of the girls in the districts near to the alley started working in the factories like the Jewish girls who came with the English army. Seeing them walking through the alley streets makes Hamida jealous of the freedom they have as she sees herself more beautiful than them. She wishes to imitate those girls. As she desires to lead a life different from that other women's in her district, Hamida looks for changes in her way of life by abandoning her fiancé, social traditions and religious beliefs. Nonetheless, her dreams have led her to a world where deception and treachery prevail. She becomes known as a prostitute and loses her reputation as a "pure woman" in the alley. Thus, she has lost her religious faith and dignity in order to pursue the deceptive appearances of modern life.

Rich women in the alley also welcome modernity and seek for changes to escape from the bitter reality they live in. Among them, the fifty-year-old widow Sanya Afify suffers also from a sense of alienation that comes to appear with modernity, as she states: "The truth is that I am tired out, Umm Hamida!" (*Midaq Alley* p. 17) to Hamida's mother responds, "This is one of the evils of being alone. ... Isn't loneliness terrible?" (ibid.). Simply by being married, she wants to overcome her painful sense of alienation and isolation. So, she agrees to marry a man who is twenty years younger than her. By bringing Sanya's story to light, on the one hand, Mahfouz attempts to portray the negative effects of the war on the minds of his characters and on the other hand, to portray the effects of patriarchal society on women. Therefore, Sanya wants to escape from solitary life and live under male control just to regain her social status and respect. As she despises "standing in front of strange men asking for rent" (ibid.). She finds life difficult without a man in a patriarchal society.

Both novels reflect the conflict between tradition and modernity. The two novels are replete with the theme of the loss of faith, and demonstrate that most of the characters are alienated and suffer from spiritual emptiness. They portray examples of people who suffer from poverty and lack of education which lead the characters toward many unwanted actions. The two novels demand loyalty toward the loved ones; neither Myrtle nor Hamida or Daisy chooses true love. They prefer material interest and modern appearance to love. Daisy prefers the security of old money and the assured status of her husband to Gatsby's romantic love. Myrtle's concern is to spend time in restaurants and parties with her paramour, Tom. Hamida spends the most of her time with the British soldiers, as she finds modernity in them and the source where she can get expensive clothes and jewelry. These characters occupy themselves with aimless relationships and flashy parties in order to make up for their disloyalty.

Both Amin and De Beauvoir have mentioned the influential role of education. Also, one of the main themes that both novels emphasize is education. In both Western and Eastern societies, many people from the lower-class still missed education by the early decades of the twentieth century. The theme of ignorance could be traced in some of upper-class families as well. The darkness of mind became a dominant phenomenon of their lives which forced the characters to look for trivial matters and follow the emblems of modernity. However, if they had learned they could have used their knowledge and intuition as a guide for their life. Even society was unhelpful towards women who were poorly educated or illiterate.

They were exploited for the benefits of the upper class. However, if those lower class women had been educated, they could have resisted the abuse and exploitation or at least find a way by which they could live a respectful life in their societies. For instance, Tom Buchanan and Faraj Ibrahim are rich people who descend from upper class families; however, they are sexist with no moral conscience. They are not true but to themselves, as they go the way their sexual desires go. They exploit women and deceive them either to gratify their sexual lust as it is the case with Myrtle and Tom or to satisfy their financial desires such as Faraj Ibrahim who uses Hamida to win more money. They are misled by destructive values that contradict their social and religious traditions. They follow their hearts without any rational thinking in an attempt to reach their desired happiness.

Money is the fundamental preoccupation of everyone's life in the alley. As Mahfouz comments in the novel, "Money might be a dead tongue in other places, but in *Midaq Alley* it was very much alive language" (Takiyeddine-Amyuni, 1985, p. 137). In any given community, when people lead a miserable life, they start imitating the fortunate who get whatever they need and desire. In the same vein, Hamida's dream is to have the opportunity like other women and get a job somewhere outside *Midaq*. She finds herself well qualified and more suitable to do any job due to her beauty and attractiveness when she compares herself to other women who have already gained some freedom and economic independence. Similarly, Myrtle compares herself to Daisy and

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

other high class women who are regularly invited to Gatsby's extravagant parties.

It can be concluded that both novels deal with the conflict between the world of the educated upper class and the world of the illiterate lower class. Both Fitzgerald and Mahfouz depict the plight of the lower-class, who are inhabited in the "valley of ashes" and "*Midaq Alley*" respectively and demonstrate the everyday, trivial actions and feelings of their people. Their residents expose the inner workings of power behind which lurk evil intentions towards each other. The two poor neighborhoods in all their details concentrate on the images of the poorly educated or illiterate women of different ages who do plan to have children and reject their traditional domestic responsibilities. Their only concern is money and modern style of living.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Over the centuries, women have been introduced in literature in different roles that provide a vivid image of the age 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.

The exploitation of women has always been regarded as the great social evil, exercised by the powerful and controlling class. 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.

Destitution and ignorance render women an easy prey to the capitalists as it has been depicted by Fitzgerald and Mahfouz. 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. Armed themselves with scientific knowledge and rational thinking, women became stronger to confront patriarchal restrictions and oppressive institutions and to overcome the ill-traditions and capitalist exploitative practices 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.

REFERENCES

- 1) Abood, A. Al-adab al-muqaran: Mush'kilat wa afaq (Comparative literature: Problems and horizons), Damascus: Arabic Writers' Union, (1999).
- 2) al-Ghitani, J. Naguib Mahfouz Yatadhakar (Naguib Mahfouz remembers), Cairo: Mu'assasat Akhbar al-Yawm, (1987).
- 3) al-Qaisi, M. A. Naguib Mahfouz, namathij al-shakhsiat al-mukararah (Patterns of repeated characters in Mahfouz's novels), Amman: Dar el-Yazori, (2004).
- 4) al-Said, S. Trends of Egyptian novel from the second world war to 1967, Cairo: Dar al— Ma'arif, (1978).
- 5) Amīn, Q. Tahrir al-mara'a [Woman emancipation]. Cairo: Al-Turqi Library, (1899).
- 6) De Beauvoir, S. The second sex. (H. M. Parshley, Ed. & Trans.). London: Jonathan Cape, (1953). (Original work published 1949)
- 7) Berman, R. The Great Gatsby and the twenties. In R. Prigozy (Ed.), The Cambridge companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald (pp. 79-94). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2001).
- 8) Bewley, M. Scott Fitzgerald's criticism of America. The Sewanee Review, 62(2), 223-246, (1954).
- 9) Booker, M. K. A practical introduction to literary theory and criticism. New York: Longman Publishers, (1996).
- 10) Choudhury, Z. Dream to delusion; Gatsby's tragic pursuit of the American dream. The Chittagong University Journal of Arts and Humanities, 16, 28-34, (2000).
- 11) Curnutt, K. F. Scott Fitzgerald, age consciousness, and the rise of American youth culture. In R. Prigozy (Ed.), The Cambridge companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald (pp. 28-47). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2001).
- 12) El-Enany, R. Naguib Mahfouz: The pursuit of meaning. London: Routledge, (1993).
- 13) Fitzgerald, F. S. The great Gatsby. Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, (1993). (Original work published 1925)

The Influence of Modernist Discourse on Lower Class Women between the West and The East: A Comparative Study

- 14) Haddad, Y. Y. "Islam, women and revolution in twentieth-century Arab thought". *The Muslim World*, 74(3-4), 137-160. doi: 10.1111/j.1478-1913.1984.tb03451, (1984).
- 15) Hilal, M. G. *Al-adab al-moqaran (Comparative literature)*. Beirut: Dar-o-al- audah and Dar-o-al-thagafah, (1953).
- 16) Lane-Poole, S. *The story of Cairo*. London: J. M. Dent & Co., (1906). (Original work written 1902)
- 17) Mahfouz, N. *Zuqāq al-Midaq (Midaq Alley)* Beirut: Dar al-Qalamsa, (1972). (Original work published 1966)
- 18) Raleigh, J. H. F. *Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: Legendary bases and allegorical significances*. *The University of Kansas City Review*, 24(1), 55-58, (1957).
- 19) Shamsuddin S. M. & Abd Rahman M. Z. *A note on French and American theories in comparative literature*. *International Science and Investigation Journal*, 1-10, (2012).
- 20) Tyson, L. *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: Routledge, (2006).
- 21) Wellek, R. & Warren, A. *Theory of literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., (1942).