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## Linguistic Characterization and Impact of Daisy in The Great Gatsby

Throughout F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterwork *The Great Gatsby*, the remarkably capricious character of Daisy Fay Buchanan succinctly epitomizes the ideas of aristocracy and superficiality so readily present in the hedonistic society of the roaring twenties. Regardless of whom she associates herself with, Daisy, through her inherently mercurial nature and incessantly cynical attitude, acts as a plague, with her complaints and melodrama siphoning the life, albeit unintentionally, out of her acquaintances. By way of Fitzgerald's illustration of Daisy through his language and that of other characters, as well as the use of her own distinctly ambivalent and promiscuous language in conjunction with her infamously alluring voice, Daisy effectively and significantly impacts both the characters and the overall plot of *The Great Gatsby* in a decisively negative manner, fostering animosity and sowing discord along her destructive path.

Daisy's obsession with worldly possessions and her subsequent superficial nature are among the most apparent of her characteristics, with her depiction by others and personal actions further advancing her materialistic identity. When Daisy's second cousin and narrator of the novel, Nick, observes that, "It was full of money-that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl," (Fitzgerald 120) he explores the wonders of Daisy's 'indiscreet' voice, noting how it seemed to simply exude wealth, effortlessly scream of her status in society. By comparing Daisy and her voice to a princess and a 'golden girl,' Nick places Daisy on the pedestal that so many before him have, giving her the admiration and status she achieved through her mysterious vocal allure, though does not necessarily deserve. This materialism and superficiality shown through Daisy's voice is made manifest in Kermit Moyer's criticism of the matter, stating, "Daisy represents the materialism of her class as well as the materialism at the core of Gatsby's transcendental ideal" (Moyer 221.) By saying this, Moyer not only directly exposes Daisy's materialistic priorities, but also reveals the fact that Daisy's obsessed lover Jay Gatsby is only attracted to her because of her status, wealth, and captivatingly deceptive voice. Though Daisy is indeed wealthy and of high class, the illusion her voice creates and the raw emotion it evokes proves to be the most powerful aspect of her irresistible charm, with the linguistic description of it by characters such as Nick and attraction to it by Gatsby only adding to the already superficial and materialistic label she carries, effectively increasing her negative effect on the characters and novel as a whole.

Daisy's life, though often appearing stagnant and tedious, is in reality filled with stark contrasts and contradictions that serve to poison rather than perfect the lives of those around her. When describing the seemingly innocent and naive world of Daisy Fay Buchanan, Fitzgerald is in actuality depicting the more complex effect it has on the novel, as well as the hidden multitude of conflicts and realities Daisy must face. For example, when Fitzgerald states that "Daisy was young and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year, summing up the sadness and suggestiveness of life...while fresh faces drifted here and there like rose petals blown by the sad horns around the floor" (Fitzgerald 151,) he creates stark contrasts between the illusions of Daisy's insulated world and the the harsh realities of aristocratic life. By juxtaposing 'young' and 'artificial' as well

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as 'cheerful' and 'sadness', Fitzgerald shows once again the superficiality of both Daisy and the time period by showing the feigned spirit of young Americans and the ambivalent emotions of the current era. Critic Norman Pearson states that "...this was not the Gay Twenties, when youth was free, but a time of illness and disease" (Pearson 24,) exemplifying the idea that the life of Daisy only served to harm, acting as a disease that, through its vector of snobbishness and aristocracy, crippled the society of the time. Though the contradictions and paradoxical occurrences in Daisy's seemingly whimsical life act as a challenge to her, they more so negatively impact the very culture of the era as an aristocratic and materialistic disease of which she serves as a crucial constituent.

The complex relationship between Daisy and Gatsby was initially mutual, but later evolved into a one sided obsession on the part of Gatsby. As Daisy struggles to find the feelings or commitment towards Gatsby necessary to warrant leaving her husband Tom Buchanan, her truly ambivalent and indecisive nature is uncovered. For example, on the subject of Tom and her true desires, Daisy states "Why- how could I love him- possibly," and even reluctantly says "I never loved him," (Fitzgerald 132.) Remarkably, however, when further promoted, Daisy cries to Gatsby, "Oh you want too much! I love you now- isn't that enough? I can't help what's past. I did love him once- but I loved you too." Through this outburst, Daisy reveals her dishonesty, as she retracts what she said about never loving Tom, and through her rhetorical question she shows her ambivalence concerning emotions toward Tom and Gatsby. Because of Daisy's dangerously mercurial nature, her true identity as an unfaithful and noncommittal woman is revealed. When critic Daniel Burt states that, "...the material allure to capture Daisy is hollow and tawdry, but Daisy herself is a cheat, unworthy of his (Gatsby's) consummate desire. Like her husband Tom (and virtually all who inhabit Gatsby's world), Daisy is a rapacious consumer of things and people, a base betrayer, lacking Gatsby's idealism that gives his world value and the moral sense that Nick ultimately finds wanting in their self-indulgence and self-protections..." (Burt,) he observes the apparent fact that Daisy, though on the surface seems innocent and unremarkable, she is in reality an avaricious and materialistic woman who only serves to destroy and harm others through her betrayal of them. Therefore, the very idea of Daisy is given an inflated importance throughout the novel, as she indeed lacks the essential ideologies in her life that serve to give it meaning, wallowing instead in her own luxury and insulation, and while protecting herself, it leads to the destruction of those closest to her.

Daisy's dishonesty and entrancing allure combine in the novel in some of its paramount moments, particularly in the instance of Myrtle Wilson. At no other time in the work does Daisy have a more profoundly negative impact on a character, in this case Gatsby, leading to their almost immediate destruction and fall. When Gatsby is probed on whether Daisy was driving when their car struck Myrtle, he reluctantly states, "Yes, but of course I'll say I was... I tried to make her stop, but I couldn't..." (Fitzgerald 134.) This act of selflessness and sacrifice for Daisy's irresponsibility shows the extent of Gatsby's love for Daisy, a love so deeply rooted that he would sacrifice his honor and eventually his life for it. As said by the critic Malcolm Bradbury, "...despite the fact that she is now married... And simply does not want Gatsby. He fails and is destroyed; Daisy possesses the seductive carelessness of the rich, and this is what finally brings about disaster." Though Gatsby would go to great lengths for Daisy, she simply is not interested, with her removal of interest from Gatsby and dishonesty in admitting her fault in the accident leading to his downfall. Daisy's 'seductive carelessness,' her combination of enchantment and disinterest in the occurrences of the the world around her, does indeed lead to the grisly end of Gatsby and the emotional tension between Tom, furthering her identity as a harbinger of misfortune and disease.

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Within and throughout Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the remarkably capricious, superficial, and materialistic character of Daisy Fay Buchanan truly epitomizes the aristocracy and ambivalence of the Roaring Twenties. While at first appearing to be an innocent and pure, in actuality Daisy is a disease that poisons the very fabric of society, with her alluring voice and mercurial nature entrapping even the most cautious of individuals. Through Fitzgerald's use of language to describe Daisy, as well as her own incriminating language in conjunction with her vocal charm, Daisy is revealed to have a truly negative impact on the characters and events of *The Great Gatsby*, fostering animosity and sowing discord along her path to the destruction of those around her.

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