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THE HEAD, THE HEART, AND THE VOID: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DAISY BUCHANAN IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY* AND QUEEN GERTRUDE IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

Ya Ma
Keystone Academy, Beijing 101318, China.
Corresponding Email: ya.ma@student.keystoneacademy.cn

Abstract: This essay offers a comparative analysis of Daisy Buchanan from F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Queen Gertrude from William Shakespeare's Hamlet. Despite differences in era and context, both characters exhibit a lack of introspection and an imbalance between reason ("the head") and emotion ("the heart"), which significantly contribute to the tragic trajectories of their respective narratives. However, their moral responses diverge: Daisy displays persistent emotional detachment and an absence of remorse, while Gertrude demonstrates a subtle but discernible capacity for guilt. This comparison illuminates how these flaws shape narrative turbulence and character agency.
Keywords: Daisy Buchanan; Queen Gertrude; Comparative analysis; The Great Gatsby; Hamlet

1 INTRODUCTION

The enduring power of literature lies in its capacity to illuminate the complexities of human nature across diverse eras and narratives. Despite being separated by centuries and originating from distinct cultural contexts, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* and William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* present profound female characters — Daisy Buchanan and Queen Gertrude — whose emotional instability significantly shape and drive their respective narratives. A detailed examination reveals striking similarities in the character flaws of Daisy and Gertrude, particularly a pervasive lack of introspection and a disproportion between the head, associated with reason, and 'the heart,' associated with feeling in their decision-making[1]. However, this imbalance diverges in its manifestations, evident in Daisy's persistent impulsiveness and emotional detachment, contrasted with Gertrude's subtle yet discernibly emerging sense of guilt and remorse. These shared traits and distinct characteristics warrant exploration, offering deeper insights into character motivations, the mechanisms of tragedy, and the ongoing sense of turbulence that characterizes both stories.

2 THE RETREAT FROM INTROSPECTION: COMFORT OVER CONFRONTATION

2.1 Daisy's Deliberate Superficiality

First and foremost, both Daisy Buchanan and Queen Gertrude exhibit a profound lack of introspection and a conscious retreat into their comfort zones, driving the tragic trajectories of their stories. To commence, Daisy's infamous wish for her daughter in *The Great Gatsby*, "And I hope she'll be a fool — that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald, 17), is not merely a cynical remark, but a chilling articulation of her own lived experience. Indeed, the diction "fool" carries the weight of Daisy's deep-seated belief that blissful ignorance offers the only protection from the crushing realities of her privileged life. Evident from her use of the verb 'hope', Daisy's embrace of superficiality appears deliberate, underscoring both her lack of courage to introspect and her craving for a life insulated from uncomfortable truths[2]. This pattern of retreat is further exemplified when, after allowing Gatsby to take the blame for Myrtle's death, Daisy, along with her husband "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated into their money or their vast carelessness" (Fitzgerald, 180). The repeated emphasis on the adjective "careless" signals more than mere oversight; it connotes Daisy's willful disregard for consequences and moral responsibility, reinforcing how her refusal to look inwards directly contributes to the tragic outcomes surrounding her. What's more, Daisy's line "we can't move" as she reclines on the couch in white, further portrays her retreat into her comfort zone, where the purity of the white hue symbolizes superficiality by serving as an illusion of innocence — an image Daisy has carefully curated. To that end, one might identify a discrepancy between Fitzgerald's use of white as a symbol of blankness and Daisy's gesture, which implies a conscious maintenance of an unspotted exterior, or rather, a superficial projection of being above life's disorders[3]. This psychological insulation, in fact, amplifies the sense of turbulence in the narrative. Beyond her passive acquiescence as Tom falsely implicates Gatsby in Myrtle's death, Daisy's own questioning before the climax is already laden with ennui. She conveys to readers, "What will we do with ourselves this afternoon…and the next thirty years?" (Fitzgerald, 118), undoubtedly a query brimming with emptiness towards engaging with the future due to fear of the introspection required to build one. Although some may argue that Daisy briefly attempts to resist Tom's oppressive influence by physically moving "out from the circle of his (Tom's) arm" (Fitzgerald, 113), this gesture is fleeting and superficial, lacking the courage to enact meaningful and sustained change. Ultimately, Daisy's

psychological state mirrors the "unquiet darkness" that depicts the theme of turbulence at the end of the narrative, where the moral and emotional chaos she leaves behind in her wake becomes more pronounced than ever — a directly consequence of her conscious refusal to introspect and her unwavering retreat into comfort, even when confronted with glimpses of uncomfortable truths[4].

2.2 Gertrude's Avoidance of Truth

Similarly, Queen Gertrude frequently avoids deep introspection, particularly regarding the moral implications of her hasty marriage to Claudius following her first husband's death, projecting choosing a façade of composure. Her direct instruction to Hamlet, "Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off" (Shakespeare, 1.2), reveals discomfort with overt displays of sorrow and a desire for emotional containment. The imagery "nighted colour" refers to Hamlet's mourning attire, but more so, signifies Gertrude's aversion to any emotional state that disturb the court's superficial harmony, a preference stripped of genuine mourning. This mirrors Daisy's avoidance of emotional depth and her commitment to an illusory calm in her interaction with other characters. Additionally, when Hamlet confronts the ghost, Gertrude's immediate dismissal, "This is the very coinage of your brain. This bodiless creation, ecstasy, is very cunning in" (Shakespeare, 3.4), showcases her firm refusal to acknowledge any reality implicating Claudius or, by extension, her own actions. The phrase "coinage of your brain" dismisses the Ghost as a mere hallucination, highlighting her commitment to a comfortable truth, even if illusory[5]. This denial, much like Daisy's retreat into carelessness, prevents Gertrude from truly confronting her complicity in the unfolding tragedy, thereby allowing events to spiral unchecked. Furthermore, her feigning of ignorance also shapes the play's escalating tension and Hamlet's despair. This is evident in her response to Ophelia's speech "The hearers to collection" (Shakespeare, 4.5), where she focuses on its effect on others instead of introspecting and examining its the cause. Moreover, her evocative imagery of Ophelia's death — "mermaid-like" and "fantastic garlands" (Shakespeare, 4.7) — further demonstrates her distancing from events she dare not face. Consequently, the metaphor "unweeded garden" (Shakespeare, 1.2) of Denmark vividly portrays the moral decay and turbulence festering beneath court's apparent stability — a direct result of Gertrude's lack of introspection and choice to retreat into a comfortable, albeit morally compromised reality[6]. That said, both characters' tendencies to avoid self-examination and retreat into familiar comforts—whether superficiality of the rich for Daisy or denial for Gertrude—serve as crucial drivers of narrative and the thematic turbulence, shaping the inevitable tragic outcomes in both worlds.

3 THE IMBALANCE OF REASON AND EMOTION: FUELING NARRATIVE TURBULENCE

3.1 Daisy's Impulsiveness and Emotional Superficiality

Secondly, another critical similarity between Daisy Buchanan and Queen Gertrude lies in their profound imbalance between rationality ("the head") and emotion ("the heart"), which consistently fuels instability and drives the tragic arcs of their stories. For Daisy, this imbalance manifests as a prevailing impulsiveness and emotional superficiality, where her actions are dictated by immediate gratification or self-preservation than reason. Indeed, Daisy's attribute of owning a "full of money" (Fitzgerald, 120), may perceptively highlight how she has so internalized the materialistic values of her privileged class that wealth has become intrinsic to her identity, shaping her choices and limiting her capacity for deep, principle-driven emotional commitments. This 'head' and 'heart' imbalance is further illustrated in her agonizing admission, "I did love him once — but I loved you too" (Fitzgerald 132). The conjunction 'but' here signals a division in her affections, revealing a heart swayed by convenience as opposed to genuine, reasoned commitments. Ultimately, this disproportion shapes Daisy's inaction and, therefore, the tragic narrative turnout[7]. Whether in her inability to confess her true feelings to Tom and Gatsby or in her failure to stop the car after hitting Myrtle, Daisy's actions intensify the conflict and emotional turbulence of the plot in the stifling heat — a consequence of her unstable and morally compromised character.

3.2 Gertrude's Emotional Override of Rationality

Likewise, Queen Gertrude exhibits a similar imbalance that often allows her emotions and desires to override rational thought. This is particularly apparent in her hasty remarriage "within a month" (Shakespeare, 1.2) of King Hamlet's death, which bypasses proper mourning and decorum indicating prioritization of instant gratification and superficiality. From Hamlet's indignant cry, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (Shakespeare, 1.2), readers not only witness Hamlet reflecting on his personal anguish and misogyny, but also a direct condemnation of Gertrude's perceived lack of moral strength and fidelity. The noun "frailty" here encapsulates her fundamental weakness of a susceptibility to temptation that overrides reasoned judgment, justifying the imbalance between her rationality and emotion. Moreover, although some argue that Gertrude's remark during the *Mousetrap* play—"The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (Shakespeare 3.2)—reflects mere annoyance, the contrast between her response to the Player King's staged murder and King Claudius's reaction—the actual murderer of the deceased King Hamlet—suggests otherwise. In the scene, Claudius dramatically rises and exclaims, "Give me some light! Away!" (Shakespeare 3.2), rushing out of the performance and leaving no room for doubt about his guilt. By making Claudius's reaction too obvious, one could argue that Shakespeare is, in truth, cunningly directing one's gaze toward Gertrude's quieter yet equally telling response, which is devoid of Claudius's overt histrionics but is profoundly indicative of a deeper, more psychological impact of

the play on her and on a heart instinctively recoiling from intense scrutiny—a near-subconscious self-incrimination. Such an internal imbalance also fuels the play's escalating turbulence by deepening Hamlet's suspicion. Indeed, Gertrude's remarriage, driven by her emotion-rationality disproportion as well as a desire to shroud her worst fears, culminates in Hamlet's searing condemnation, "O, most wicked speed, to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (Shakespeare 1.2). Her persistent reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths thus serves as a critical catalyst for the pervasive moral and narrative chaos that propels the tragedy.

4 DIVERGENCE IN MORAL CAPACITY: DETACHMENT VERSUS INCIPIENT REMORSE

4.1 Daisy's Emotional Void and Absence of Remorse

Next, while both Daisy Buchanan and Queen Gertrude grapple with a flawed disproportion between rationality and emotion, their respective proportions of "head" versus "heart" diverge, producing distinct tragic manifestations: Daisy's defensive impulsiveness and detachment versus Gertrude's subtle, yet discernible, emerging sense of remorse. To begin with, Daisy embodies an extreme form of emotional detachment, where her "heart" is consistently minimized in favor of a self-serving "head," and her sense of remorse and moral agency is nominal. Specifically, Daisy's chilling statement to Gatsby, "Oh, you want too much!" (Fitzgerald, 132), precisely illustrates her emotional limitations and unwillingness to embrace the depth of Gatsby's idealized love or the responsibility it entails. The phrase "too much" conveys a sense of burden, signifying that Gatsby's devotion and demand for an unequivocal past exceed Daisy's capacity for genuine emotional reciprocation. This exposes her profound incapacity for sustained, demanding emotion, cementing her image as emotionally hollow and self-absorbed. This detachment and lack of moral agency is further amplified by her quick shift in commitment to Tom after receiving Gatsby's letter, conveying to readers, "next day at five o'clock she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver" (Fitzgerald. 75). This stresses her ability to switch off profound emotions instantly, as if coldly calculating. Moreover, her actions—such as her reckless driving that kills Myrtle Wilson and her subsequent retreat into silence and the protective embrace of her wealth with Tom—demonstrate a startling absence of remorse, further compounded by her decision to let Gatsby take the blame. Indeed, her final act of not sending "a message or a flower" (Fitzgerald 165) after Gatsby's death showcases her ultimate moral retreat, making her a destructive force through her utter lack of reconciliation. Although one may argue that Daisy shows subtle signs of remorse, such as weeping into Gatsby's shirts, crying "It makes me sad because I've never seen such—such beautiful shirts before" (Fitzgerald, 94), this moment does not indicate genuine sorrow for past choices but rather a response to lavish material display and self-pity over what she has lost in Gatsby's devotion. In fact, it is this void that deepens the sense of turbulence in the story—whether in the trail of destruction she leaves, where Gatsby bears the consequences, or at the beginning, when she first meets Nick and "attempts to rise" but is "p-paralysed with happiness" (Fitzgerald 1). This initial hint of Daisy's disconnected action prefigures the turbulence that culminates in Gatsby's tragic end. Arguably, such actions and lack of remorse reduce Daisy to nothingness, leaving even Gatsby "in the moonlight, watching over nothing" (Fitzgerald 153), with the hope once symbolized by the green light finally dimmed by her character[8].

4.2 Gertrude's Fleeting Yet Profound Moral Reckoning

In contrast, Queen Gertrude, while equally morally compromised, exhibits a subtle capacity for remorse compared to Daisy, characterized by unyielding detachment. During the intense closet scene where Hamlet confronts Gertrude of her hasty and incestuous marriage to Claudius as well as complicity in his father's demise, the Queen is momentarily forced into a raw confrontation with her inner self, crying, "O Hamlet, speak no more! Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct" (Shakespeare, 3.4). This poignant admission signifies a brief yet overwhelming emotional impact that pierces Gertrude's composure. Furthermore, the visceral imagery of "black and grained spots" that "will not leave their tinct" conveys a deep, indelible stain on her soul, marking a fleeting but profound moral reckoning absent in Daisy[9]. Although this moment of self-awareness does not lead to a complete transformation or a radical break from Gertrude's passive complicity, it evidences a capacity for genuine feeling that adds a layer of tragic complexity, making Gertrude's character even more flawed due to conscience yet ultimately inert. Moreover, in her final act of defiance, where she drinks the poisoned wine against Claudius's direct warning, she states, "I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me" (Shakespeare 5.2). The resolute phrase "I will" can be interpreted as a moment of agency and a tragic recognition of her prior flawed choices, underscoring her latent, limited capacity for remorse. This burgeoning remorse, however subtle, still distinguishes Gertrude from Daisy, whose emotional landscape remains largely barren of guilt. It is also this difference in moral agency that contributes to the pervasive turbulence in *Hamlet* by creating moral tension within the court, slowly unraveling deceit, and shaping the tragic plot through Gertrude's final, fatal act of defiance against Claudius's control. Ultimately, the extent to which remorse is felt shapes these two characters' distinct contributions to the narrative turbulence and informs readers' perception of character capacity, even as both trajectories end tragically.

5 CONCLUSION

To conclude, Daisy Buchanan from *The Great Gatsby* and Queen Gertrude from *Hamlet* serve as profound characters who shape the narrative, heighten conflict, and reveal the complexities of human nature and moral capacity. Both

exhibit a lack of introspection and are ensnared by a disproportion between their "head" and "heart," yet the precise nature of this imbalance diverges significantly in their capacity for moral agency and remorse. Daisy's unyielding retreat into comfortable superficiality, coupled with her chilling absence of genuine contrition, renders her a trigger for destruction at the heart of the narrative's turbulence—a void that Gatsby attempts to fill with nothing but phantom hope in his tragic idealism[10]. Conversely, Gertrude, who similarly lacks the courage to engage in self-reflection and bears her own moral compromises, is afforded a fleeting glimpse of self-awareness and capacity for remorse, adding a nuanced layer of tragedy to her characterization. Through a detailed comparison of these two characters, readers can more clearly apprehend how the extent of character flaws shapes narratives and whether the presence or absence of a moral compass and reconciliation can redefine a character’s capacity to change and mold their own trajectories.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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