

**Women's Loss of Identity and Self-
Degradation in F. Scoot Fitzgerald's *The Great
Gatsby* and Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin***

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Introduction:

Feminist psychoanalysis as a critical approach roots in the values, issues, and principles of feminism which focuses on both gender and social structures. This approach grows out of the influence of women's movement in the 1960's. Historically, feminist psychoanalytic criticism emerges as a reaction to most of the research that has been done from a male perspective, which *in se* gives evidence to man's domination and subalternation of women. For example, Freud's theory involving concepts such as "penis envy," which shows bias towards males and triggers offensive distaste from the supporters of the feminist movement, is another reason for the appearance of feminist psychology.

By adopting the feminist psychoanalytic approach, this paper hopefully aims at tracing female loss of identity and self-degradation in selected novels by the two renowned writers, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Margret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2000).

This study hypothesizes that subalternation of women is a universal phenomenon, which extends beyond regional and ethnic boundaries. Consequently, this cross-cultural investigation of the

phenomenon aims to prove that women have not yet gained their equal rights as they are still subalternated and degraded.

Within its scope, this study will also spotlight on such a predicament by applying a feminist psychoanalytic approach to the female characters in the aforementioned novels by the two writers who belong to the different nationalities: American and Canadian.

To begin with, the subjugating male characters look down the female characters in the two selected novels upon. Female identity is either lost or can only be recognized through males for whom they work as appendages and subordinates. Likewise, women in these works cannot defy the patriarchal society that has effaced their due right for having equal human entities and degraded them to subalternation. Female characters, in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Blind Assassin* are not allowed to engage in any activity other than those assigned to them by males. Actually, they are compelled to feel self-degraded due to the societal restrictions imposed on them.

As a result, women suffer oppressive feelings related to their loss of identity with the resultant feelings of alienation and loneliness.

Presumably, Fitzgerald and Atwood either with a didactic purpose or not the two writers have represented the dominant idea of their respective cultural backgrounds and portray their female characters as commodities and sexual playthings which are two embodiments of subalternation.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the female characters Daisy, Myrtle, and Jordan work as appendages and subalterns. Readers are not introduced to any one of them with a definite independent personality. Women are mere shadows and pariahs who serve the patriarchal society that has totally erased their own personalities and identities. All of these female characters are looked down upon by the subjugating male characters Tom, Gatsby, George, and Nick. Significantly, those female identities are either lost or can only be shown through male gaze. Consequently, they are compelled to degrade themselves due to those social patriarchal restrictions imposed on them. To begin with, Daisy and her friend Jordan Baker feel lost while having dinner with Tom and their guest Nick. Their meeting is "disappointed" and is "as cool as their white dresses."

Although Daisy is Tom's wife, she is subordinated and subalternated:

Sometimes she and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire. They were here, and they accepted Tom and me, making only a polite pleasant effort to entertain or to be entertained.

[...]its close in a continually disappointed anticipation or else in sheer nervous dread of the moment itself (*Gatsby* 19).

In a similar vein, Tom has many extramarital relationships which *in se* give evidence to man's conception of woman as a commodity and a sexual plaything. Jordan has told Nick about Tom's

mistresses in front of his wife Daisy; a thing that has harshly affected her psyche. Daisy has burst out crying as soon as she heard of her husband's licentious relations. Nick wonders:

Is something happening?' I inquired innocently. 'You mean to say you don't know?' said Miss Baker, honestly surprised. 'I thought everybody knew.' 'I don't.' 'Why —' she said hesitantly, 'Tom's got some woman in New York.' 'Got some woman?' I repeated blankly. Miss Baker nodded. 'She might have the decency not to telephone him at dinner-time. Don't you think?' [...] 'It couldn't be helped!' cried Daisy [...] (*Gatsby* 21-22).

Daisy is a helplessly subjugated woman who cannot face her husband with the fact of his betrayal, so she just meekly expresses her wish that his mistress would be kind not to call at dinner time. Ironically enough, "[i]n *The Great Gatsby*, most conflicts between men and women can get full explanations of patriarchal ideology. Nick, as the only narrator, seems to be the most subjective and righteous person in the novel, and truly has contempt for women. He feels disgusted of the immoral relationship between Daisy and Gatsby, while he never blames Tom's extramarital affair. [...] Moreover, deep traditional patriarchal ideology lays barriers to the female awareness. Women have been accustomed to the inferiority and trained the way of subsidiary thinking so as to neglect female potential" (Bao-feng 875-76).

Likewise, Daisy continues to tell Nick how she bitterly felt when she gave birth to her own daughter, Pammy:

Listen, Nick; let me tell you what I said when [my daughter] born. Would you like to hear?' 'Very much.' 'It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about—things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, [...] And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.' 'You see I think everything's terrible anyhow'[...]. Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with thrilling scorn. 'Sophisticated—God, I'm sophisticated!' (*Gatsby* 23).

This passage is highly suggestive of the fact that Daisy is suffering identity loss hence she lives in a repressive patriarchal system that gives no standing to woman. She is subalternated to the status of being a sexual commodity by her rich husband Tom Buchanan, who has many extramarital relationships. Sanna Jokipohja mirrors Daisy's remark in *The Great Gatsby* that "a woman's ideal identity" is that of "a beautiful little fool" [...]. It apprises that it is best for a woman to be empty-headed and physically attractive, because cultural practices repress women's possibilities. Autonomous and intelligent women are understandably unhappy in a mere decorative role, serving a man" (34). In the above

quotation, Daisy, implicitly, expresses her traumatic feelings of subalternity and identity loss that is why she is not happy with her baby girl. Daisy wishes her baby to be a boy because she lives in a world that confesses men only: it does not give any woman due respect as a wife and a mother. Abdelwahid Abidi comments that "Daisy's crying can be taken as a sign of her dissatisfaction with women's situation in that period. This shows up when she says the she "hopes that she will be fool-that's the best thing a girl can be in this world." Daisy's generalization conveys her dissatisfaction with women's status. Tom is portrayed from the beginning of the novel as an "archetypal male figure," a "modern prototype of the ancient patriarch presiding over his family and property"[...]. Tom is married to Daisy and has got an extramarital relationship with Myrtle. Daisy knows that but has nothing to do because Tom is the man and he is in control" (56-57).

Daisy is also compelled to self-degradation because she always, unconsciously, searches for a savior who could provide her protection and endow her with affection and self –esteem. Daisy had had a love relationship with Gatsby before her father married her to Tom. Although she seeks his friendship as a remedy for her psychological ailments, he makes use of his relationship with her for his own selfish interest. Gatsby makes use of Daisy as a decorative sexual object. Jordan tells:

They were so engrossed in each other that she didn't see me until I was five feet away. 'Hello Jordan,' she called unexpectedly. 'Please come here.' I was flattered that she wanted to speak to me, because of all the older girls I admired her most. [...]The officer looked at Daisy while she was speaking, in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at sometime, and because it seemed romantic to me I have remembered the incident ever since. His name was Jay Gatsby and I didn't lay eyes on him again for over four years—even after I'd met him on Long Island I didn't realize it was the same man (*Gatsby* 65-66).

As a matter of fact, Gatsby was a very poor young man and to fulfill his dream of being rich he had convinced the aristocratic beautiful Daisy of his love. Gatsby wants to make use of Daisy as a decorative object and he uses her, too, as a ladder through which he could reach the world of the rich. When her family marries her to Tom, Gatsby disappeared for a long time working as a bootlegger and a drug seller and has made a very big wealth. Ironically enough, when Gatsby appears again, he begins to search for Daisy in order to accomplish his social pretension and prestige. And even though Daisy is married to Tom, Gatsby asks her cousin Nick to arrange a meeting between them. "I called up Daisy from the office next morning and invited her to come to tea. 'Don't bring Tom,' I warned her (*Gatsby* 71).

Here, Daisy's self-degradation is so evident. She does not show any kind of objection when Nick asks her to come alone. Daisy also

does not ask him about the reason of the visit and when he asks her to dismiss the chauffeur for an hour, she does not refuse. A plausible presumption is assumed that there is a relationship between Daisy's feelings of aimlessness, loss of identity and her need for psychological support from Gatsby. It might be she desires to arrange herself against her husband's infidelity. As Nick does not inform the subaltern Daisy of Gatsby's visit and does not even take her opinion if she wants to see him or not, she was terribly shocked, terrified, and cried. Presumably, she tastes the bitterness of her patriarchal society. She senses loss, being of no regard, and remembers how she has been married to Tom against her own free will:

I certainly am awfully glad to see you again.' A pause; it endured horribly. I had nothing to do in the hall so I went into the room.[...] They were sitting at either end of the couch looking at each other as if some question had been asked or was in the air, and every vestige of embarrassment was gone. Daisy's face was smeared with tears and when I came in she jumped up and began wiping at it with her handkerchief before a mirror[...]. Her throat full of aching, grieving[...] (*Gatsby* 74-76).

In this sense, Gatsby invites Daisy to his mansion. "I want you and Daisy to come over to my house,' he said, 'I'd like to show her around' (*Gatsby* 76). Meanwhile, Daisy is degraded by Gatsby to be a mere decorative object irrespective of being a wife and a mother.

She is highly fascinated by Gatsby's luxuriance and he has already succeeded to seduce her. Nick narrates:

Daisy put her arm through his abruptly but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. [...] Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon [...]. As I watched him he adjusted himself a little, visibly. His hand took hold of hers and as she said something low in his ear he turned toward her with a rush of emotion. [...] They had forgotten me, but Daisy glanced up and held out her hand; Gatsby didn't know me now at all. I looked once more at them and they looked back at me, remotely, possessed by intense life. Then I went out of the room and down the marble steps into the rain, leaving them there together (*Gatsby* 79-80-81).

Psychoanalytically speaking, A. Mojtaba Gholipour and B.

Mina Sanahmadi contend that:

[s]exual sublimation, also known as sexual transmutation, is the attempt [...] to transform sexual impulses or sexual energy into creative energy. In *The Great Gatsby*, sublimation is the transference of sexual energy, or libido, into a physical act or a different emotion in order to avoid confrontation with the sexual urge, which is contrary to the individual's belief or ascribed religious belief. It is based on the idea that sexual energy can be used to create a spiritual nature which in turn can create more sensual works, instead of one's sexuality being unleashed raw. [...] What is obvious in Gatsby's behavior and some characters of the story like Daisy and Tom, is Id, ego, and superego. These are the three parts of the human psyche. According to the

Sigmund Freud "The id is the impulsive (and unconscious) part of our psyche which responds directly and immediately to the instincts. The id is not affected by reality, logic or the everyday world. [...]Superego is the part of the mind-set that appeals more to pathos and emotion (Gholipour & Sanahmadi 51-52).

Daisy's self-degradation is also shown while attending one of Gatsby's parties with Nick. Daisy is offering herself free to Nick to kiss her any time. "They arrived at twilight and as we strolled out among the sparkling hundreds Daisy's voice was playing murmurous tricks in her throat. 'These things excite me SO,' she whispered. 'If you want to kiss me any time during the evening, Nick, just let me know and I'll be glad to arrange it for you. Just mention my name. [...] I'm looking around. [...] Tom's arrogant eyes roamed the crowd" (*Gatsby* 87). Daisy may be vengeful and doing this to retaliate against her husband's infidelity.

Gatsby treats the subaltern Daisy as a commodity and a decorative object no more no less. He wants her to get divorced in order to fulfill his old dream of both gaining wealth and owning a beautiful woman. "He found her excitingly desirable [...] it excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes" (*Gatsby* 120). Evangelia Papadaki argues that "we can certainly imagine someone who has no interest in using the prostitute as an instrument for sexual gratification. Perhaps the man in question [*Gatsby*] only wants to possess and controls her. In such

a special case, we could possibly think of the prostitute as an aesthetic object. However, this is not the typical way in which clients treat prostitutes. The former aim mainly—if not exclusively—[is] to use the prostitute as a tool for sexual purposes" (335). Daisy is aware of her worthlessness that is why she prostitutes herself.

Equally, when Tom faces Gatsby with drug dealing and bootlegging, Daisy becomes ashamedly confused and terrified.

Drawing on Freudian theory, Daisy, unconsciously, uses denial or repression as a defense mechanism in order to keep herself distance from such unpleasant news. Repression as a psychological symptom is defined as "the 'forgetting' or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious" (Barry 96-97):

I glanced at Daisy who was staring terrified between Gatsby and her husband and at Jordan who had begun to balance an invisible but absorbing object on the tip of her chin[...]. It passed[...]. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, toward that lost voice across the room. The voice begged again to go. 'Please, Tom! I can't stand this anymore.' Her frightened eyes told that whatever intentions, whatever courage she had had, were definitely gone (*Gatsby* 109-110).

In this situation, the turbulence between Daisy's conscious and unconscious shows in her neurotic hesitation is very expressive of her turbulent feelings.

Similarly, Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson is portrayed in this patriarchal society as his sexual plaything whom he can smash or breakdown as long as she is regarded with contempt. She is portrayed as a body and a commodity which are two embodiments of subalternation. Implicitly, Fitzgerald has not introduced any one of his female characters with any intellectual or spiritual traits; rather, they are introduced only by their sexual vitality and physical traits. Nick tells; "Mrs. Wilson had changed her costume some time before and was now attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream colored chiffon, which gave out a continual rustle as she swept about the room. [...]The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment [...]" (*Gatsby* 32).

Myrtle's self-degradation is also shown when Tom orders her to meet him in his apartment in New York, she has answered him immediately. "I want to see you, said Tom intently. 'Get on the next train.' 'All right.' [...] She nodded and moved away from him just as George Wilson emerged with two chairs from his office door" (*Gatsby* 29). Regardless of her personality or identity, Tom uses

Myrtle as a tool and an instrument for his sexual pleasure. Equally, he uses Myrtle as a sex slave and gives her orders and tasks in order to please him and his friends. 'You McKees have something to drink,' he said. 'Get some more ice and mineral water, Myrtle, before everybody goes to sleep.' [...] Myrtle raised her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders. 'These people! You have to keep after them all the time.' She looked at me and laughed pointlessly. Then she [...] swept into the kitchen, implying that a dozen chefs awaited her orders there" (*Gatsby* 33). According to Kant, "human beings are ...not entitled to offer themselves, for profit, as things for the use of others in the satisfaction of their...propensities. In so doing, they would run the risk of having their person used by all and sundry as an instrument for the satisfaction of inclination" (165).

Likewise, Catherine, Myrtle's sister is presented as a sex slave to Tom's friends. Tom orders Myrtle to bring her Sister Catherine for his friend Nick. 'Come on,' she urged. 'I'll telephone my sister Catherine. She's said to be very beautiful by people who ought to know.' (*Gatsby* 31). In what follows, the subaltern Catherine is depicted by her physical traits wearing heavy cosmetics and tight revealing clothes which prove her as a sexual subaltern and a commodity. Noticeably, Fredrickson and Roberts suggest that "women may adopt some strategies to avoid sexual objectification,

ranging from wearing loose-fitting clothing, to not removing "unwanted" body hair nor wearing cosmetics" (197). That is to say, according to Fredrickson and Roberts, wearing cosmetics and wearing tight revealing clothes that reveal woman's body, as in the case of Catherine, all these are means for facilitating sexual objectification and of course seeing woman (Catherine) as a sexual object. "The sister, Catherine, was a slender, worldly girl of about thirty with a solid sticky bob of red hair and a complexion powdered milky white. Her eyebrows had been plucked and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle [...]. She came in with such a proprietary haste and looked around so possessively at the furniture that I wondered if she lived here" (*Gatsby* 32).

Similarly, early, in *The Blind Assassin*, when Laura drives Iris's car off the bridge, the policeman identified Iris through her husband's name. In other words, Iris as a woman cannot be identified by herself, but through Richard who represents the absolute identity in such a patriarchal society. Iris tells; "[...] the car was mine, and they'd traced the licence. His tone was respectful: no doubt he recognized Richard's name" (*Assassin* 7). For Richard Griffen, Iris is identityless because she is his subaltern. She is the "wife of the prominent manufacturer" (*Assassin* 9). Here, Lyla assists that " *The Blind Assassin* is, indeed, a world of women. Most of the novel comes from Iris Chase Griffen's perspective. Her primary

interactions are with Laura, her sister; Reenie, her housekeeper; and Winifred, her husband's sister. However, this is a world of women run by men. Richard's happiness and good reputation are the women's primary concern [...]" (1).

Laura is also Alex Thomas's subaltern. She has committed suicide upon learning of Alex's death in the war which reveals her inferiorness and powerlessness. Laura, self-degradedly, cannot live in this world without Alex who symbolizes her both existence and identity. Even in the parallel story, women are treated as subalterns who are not equal to men, for example, their clothes are completely different in quality from that of men; male's clothes are comfortable and flexible whereas female's clothes are not. "The male Snilfards wore masks [...], which moved as the skin of their faces moved, but which served to hide their true emotions. The women veiled their faces in a silk-like cloth made from the cocoon of thechaz moth. It was punishable by death to cover your face [...]" (*Assassin* 18).

Same as Tom and Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*, men in *The Blind Assassin* treat their women as mere playthings: just for sexual gratification as well as having extra marital relationships with other women. The subaltern female servants are wearing revealing clothes that actually reveal their bodies to the aristocratic men of Sakiel-Norn. "They indulged in court intrigues, held magnificent feasts, and fell elaborately in love with one another's wives.[...] They wore

shabby grey tunics with one shoulder bare, and one breast as well for the women, who were—needless to say—fair game for the Snilfard men" (*Assassin* 18-19). Consequently, women are of no identity they are mere subalterns and sexual slaves.

More than that, if any of this repressive gender biased society men come through a financial problem or a bankruptcy, "[...]he might avoid such a fate by selling his wife or children in order to redeem his debt.[...] since the way up is usually more arduous than the way down[...]" (*Assassin* 19). Significantly, a woman who could be bought or sold like a commodity is beyond doubt a mere object and a subaltern. This humiliating account of Sakiel's women goes on as the narrator says: "The part about the veils is, anyway, and selling your wife. I could give you chapter and verse" (*Assassin* 19).

Meanwhile, Atwood's female characters are treated by men as others. Implicitly, the idea of women as playthings and commodities is clear in Atwood's description of one of the girl's clothes and appearance, on one hand, and the boy's reaction to the girl on the other hand. "[...] a girl in a sunsuit and two boys in shorts, are conspiring beside it. Her dress is primrose yellow; her arms bare below the elbow, fine pale hairs on them. She's taken off her cotton gloves, wadded them into a ball[...]" (*Assassin* 20). The boy's gaze is another evident of considering the girl as a sexual plaything.

"Look at my shopping bag. I bought some stockings; they're very

good—the best silk. They're like wearing nothing. She smiles a little. I've only got fifteen minutes. She's dropped a glove, it's by her foot. He's keeping an eye on it" (*Assassin* 20). In this scope, Fredrickson and Roberts contend that "the most subtle and admirable way sexualized evaluation is enacted—and arguably the most ubiquitous—is through gaze, or visual inspection of the body" (175). In a similar vein, girls, in Sakiel-Norn town, are subalternated and exploited in prostitution. "[...] the brothel-owners, always eager for trade, would apply them with ink to those of their youngest whores who could put on a show of haughtiness. This appealed to those clients who wished to feel they were violating some blue-blooded Snilfard princess" (*Assassin* 30). Degradingly, these subaltern girls were sold as commodities or as "racehorse[s]." Iris tells; "As the girl bore the family's name, they'd get credit for the sacrifice. It was like owning a racehorse. [...] in Sakiel-Norn, everything was for sale" (*Assassin* 30). More to the point, the girls of this sexually biased society are of no identity hence they are treated as animals not as human beings. They were imprisoned and crudely butchered as gifts for gods. "The dedicated girls were shut up inside the temple compound[...] so they would be ready for the great day—able to fulfill their duties with decorum, and without quailing. The ideal sacrifice should be like a dance, was the theory: stately and

lyrical, harmonious and graceful. They were not animals [...]" (Assassin 31).

Iris and Laura's appearance is an embodiment of self-degradation. They wear cosmetics, high heel shoes, and revealing clothes. They unconsciously recognize the fact that they are mere bodies and sexual objects in this patriarchal society which subalternize them. Their real worth is the sexual gratification they may offer to the male members of the society. Hence, they are being fetishized as sexual playthings. When Iris went to the graduation party, her main concern was "to make [herself] look sane and acceptable to other people." She says, "They barely glanced at me. To them I must have seemed quaint, but I suppose it's everyone's fate to be reduced to quaintness by those younger than themselves (Assassin 34-38). The subaltern Iris spends too much time looking after herself in the mirror:

I pulled myself up and out of my tangled bed, then forced myself through the usual dawn rituals—the ceremonies we perform to make ourselves look sane and acceptable to other people. The hair must be smoothed down after whatever apparitions have made it stand on end during the night, the expression of staring disbelief washed from the eyes. The teeth brushed, such as they are. [...] I suspect myself of having an odour I myself can no longer detect [...]. Dried, lotioned and powdered, sprayed like mildew, I was in some sense of the word restored. [...] Each time I put a foot out I set it down provisionally, as if the floor

might give way underneath me. Nothing but surface tension holding me in place (*Assassin* 34-35).

To put this more accurately, Fredrickson and Roberts appreciate the phrase "looking-glass self" because mirrors reflect the physical attributes that...can monopolize women's sense of self. According to Fredrickson and Roberts, a mirror is a tool for internalizing an observer's perspective on physical self or objectifying self (179). In this sense, Iris is a mere sexual object.

By checking and rechecking herself in the mirror Iris desires a certain standard of presentability in the society that regards women in general as mere commodities. In the same context, Laura asks Iris a crucial question that signifies their state of identity loss. "Why should we be? Said Laura" (*Assassin* 35). As a matter of fact, Walter, the driver, gazes at Iris. "At half past nine Walter came by to collect me.[...] He gave his version of a smile—a thin crack in his face, like mud drying—opened the car door for me, and installed me in the passenger seat. "Big day today, eh?" he said" (*Assassin* 35). In this scope, Fredrickson and Roberts postulate that "the most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted—and arguably the most ubiquitous—is through gaze or visual inspection of the body" (157).

Women in this Patriarchal society suffer from the loss of their identities; they are mere subalterns and sexual playthings for men.

Iris is self-shattered and confused; she cannot even decide what she wants. "I should have married someone like Walter. Good with his hands. No: I shouldn't have married anyone. That would have saved a lot of trouble" (*Assassin* 36). This passage is highly suggestive of Iris's trauma. The subaltern Iris actually suffers many psychological problems in this masculine society such as oppression and parental loss, but all of which end up to identity loss. Iris's feeling of loss is aggrandized after she has lost her own sister Laura. As soon as she hears her sister's name in the graduation party, she cannot control herself. Iris is psychologically damaged and enters a state of instability hence she always feels lost. "I teetered, regained my balance. Now what had I been intending to say? "My sister Laura would be so pleased," I gasped into the microphone. My voice was reedy; I thought I might faint" (*Assassin* 41). Moreover, the subaltern Iris, helplessly, wishes to die because life is worthless for her. She suffers both alienation and subalternation. "Having long ago whispered I want to die, I now realize that this wish will indeed be fulfilled, and sooner rather than later" (*Assassin* 42).

Iris's traumas of identity loss and alienation make her frightened and nervous. Here is a part of her agony:

[...] I had the feeling that someone was about to walk into the room—some other woman, the unseen, valid owner—and ask me what in hell I was doing in her kitchen.[...] At night the house was more than ever like a

stranger's. I wandered through the front rooms, the dining room, the parlour, hand on the wall for balance. My various possessions were floating in their own pools of shadow, detached from me, denying my ownership of them (*Assassin 56*).

Iris does not only suffer from fear and anxiety, but also sexual exploitation, alienation, and loss have some other psychological effects on her psyche resulting in sleeping and eating disorders. Iris tells; "[...] things long done with, that still reverberate as pain. When the ache is bad enough it keeps me from sleeping. Every night I yearn for sleep, I strive for it [...]. There are sleeping pills, of course, but the doctor has warned me against them" (*Assassin 56*). More important, however, is Iris's suffering of eating disorder. "I've fallen into the habits of the solitary; my meals are snatched and random. Furtive snacks, furtive treats and picnics" (*Assassin 56*). In this respect, Frederickson and Roberts argue that "[a]t a psychological level, perhaps the most profound effect of objectifying treatment is that it coaxes girls [like Iris] and women to adopt a peculiar view of self. Objectification theory posits that the cultural milieu of objectification functions to socialize girls and women to, at some level, treat themselves as objects [subalterns] to be looked at and evaluated" (175- 77). Equally, This self-objectification [self-degradation] that Fredrickson refers to and sexual objectification, too, can, according to Fredrickson and Roberts, cause many mental

health problems such as depression, shame, anxiety, eating disorders, and sexual dysfunction:

More specifically, Fredrickson and Roberts... postulate that self-objectification can increase women's [Iris and Myra] anxiety about physical appearance (i.e., fear about when and how one's body will be looked at and evaluated); reduce opportunities for peak motivational states or flow; diminish awareness of internal bodily sensations (e.g., hunger, sexual arousal, stomach contractions); increase women's opportunities for body shame; i.e. the emotion that results from measuring oneself against a cultural standard and coming up short; and increase women's anxiety about their physical safety (e.g., fears about being raped), which in turn can lead to disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction (qtd. in Szymanski & Moffitt 8).

More to the point, Iris expresses her state of identity loss and describes herself as a "basketball" that moves from Reenie's hands to Myra's hands. Thus, as have been assumed earlier, oppression and parental loss have ended Iris up to identity loss. Iris tells; "Myra will corner the job, no doubt; she thinks she has inherited me from Reenie. She'll enjoy playing the trusted family retainer. I don't envy her: any life is a rubbish dump even while it's being lived, and more so afterwards. But if a rubbish dump, a surprisingly small one; when you've cleared up after the dead, you know how few green plastic garbage bags you yourself are likely to take up in your turn" (*Assassin* 57).

Similarly, Adelia, Iris's grandmother, is a subaltern of her husband Benjamin. She has no independent identity. Her family repressively marries her to the rich man Benjamin Chase for the sake of money. By forcing her to marry without her consent, Adeila becomes another subjugated female subaltern. "[W]hen time had begun to run out on Adelia [...] she'd married money—crude money, button money. She was expected to refine this money, like oil. (She wasn't married, she was married off, said Reenie, rolling out the gingersnaps. The family arranged it. That's what was done in such families, and who's to say it was any worse or better than choosing for yourself?" (*Assassin* 59).

Adelia's subalternation is also evident during having meals. Although she spends most of the time in preparing food, she cannot sit with Benjamin on the same table. "Adelia's task would have been to design and order these dinners, then to avoid being seen to devour them. Custom would have dictated that she only pick at her food while in company: chewing and swallowing were such blatantly carnal activities. I expect she had a tray sent up to her room, afterwards. Ate with ten fingers" (*Assassin* 61).

Concomitant with her loss of identity, Adelia feels confined within the barriers of her marriage. Iris tells; "Adelia was showing off with her Christmas card, but I believe there was more to it. Avilion was where King Arthur went to die. Surely Adelia's choice

of name signifies how hopelessly in exile she considered herself to be[...]”(Assassin 61). Benjamin repressively does not permit Adelia to travel to her family. He treats her as his possession. She is, in the full meaning of the word, "a prey." "Adelia declined to travel without him, to Europe or anywhere else. It might have been too tempting—not to come back. To drift away, shedding money gradually like a deflating blimp, a prey to cads and delectable bounders, sinking down into the unmentionable" (Assassin 62).

In this respect, it is important to highlight that Atwood unconsciously depicts her subaltern female characters as mere sexual preys for men who are liable to seduction and rape. She makes their sexual vitality the focus of most of the novel. Atwood often informs the reader of Adelia, Iris, Laura, and Myra's charm, but without providing any one of them with substance that proves their identity such as thinking or intellectual women. In what follows, Atwood describes Adelia as "a nymph" and gives due care to her bodily traits which proves her as a sexual plaything. "[...] there was a nymph, a modest girl with small adolescent breasts and a rope of marble hair over one shoulder, one foot dipping tentatively into the water. We used to eat apples beside her, and watch the goldfish nibbling at her toes" (Assassin 62).

Psychologically degraded, Iris contemplates women's status in this patriarchal society. She refers to the fact that women are as any

other movable and controllable objects at men's whimsical desires. Traumatically, Iris considers women as many other objects and items that are controlled and moved by men such as "Boats," "engines," and "lamps." "Boats are female for Walter, as are busted car engines and broken lamps and radios—items of any kind that can be fiddled with by men adroit with gadgetry, and restored to a condition as good as new. Why do I find this reassuring? Perhaps I believe, in some childish, faith-filled corner of myself, that Walter might yet take out his pliers and his ratchet set and do the same for me" (Assassin 65). Obviously, this oppressive patriarchal society has erased women's real identity and reduced them into objectified subalterns, stereotypes, and sexual playthings. All these practices have its bad impact on the subaltern's psyche. For instance, the subaltern Iris is trying to escape this harsh reality by giving rein to her imagination, but, unfortunately, fate is irrevocable and inescapable. Iris, unconsciously, uses painting, coloring, and ambiguity to compensate her hurt feelings of self-shattering and identity loss. This psychological symptom has been defined by Sigmund Freud as *parapraxis* which means that a "repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, or unintended actions" (Barry 98). In other words, Iris tries to create a virtual world for herself. "I didn't want realism anyway: I wanted things to be highly coloured,

simple in outline, without ambiguity, which is what most children want when it comes to the stories of their parents. They want a postcard" (*Assassin* 67).

More important, however, is that Atwood's society, in *The Blind Assassin*, is not only a patriarchal society, but also a class-segregated one. Liliana, Iris's mother, is not equal in social rank to her husband Norval: she is his social subaltern. "My mother was a Methodist, but my father was Anglican: thus my mother was below my father's level socially, as such things were accounted then. (If she'd lived, my Grandmother Adelia would never have allowed the marriage, or so I decided later. My mother would have been too far down the ladder for her—also too prudish, too earnest, too provincial" (*Assassin* 67).

In this sense, Liliana suffers identity loss. It was Norval's hope to marry a rich wife, but his poor wife was below the standard. As a result he has always looked down upon her and never treated her as equally or lovingly as a wife, rather a subaltern and a sexual plaything. Liliana, though worked as a teacher and tasted the bitterness of poverty. Iris narrates: "My mother had been young, only eighteen, but she was not a silly, flighty girl, said Reenie. She'd been teaching school; [...] she'd accepted a position at a one-room school, farther west and north, in what was then the back country. She'd

been shocked by the experience—by the poverty, the ignorance, the lice" (*Assassin* 67-68).

Significantly, Norval has chosen the subaltern Liliana according to her physical and bodily traits; that is why he will ruthlessly make use of her in the factory. There is no love story between both of them. The proposal of marriage comes immediately after he had touched her shoulders and arms while skating. Iris narrates:

Her pallor and thinness were commented upon: roses were required in her cheeks. So there she was at the skating party, on the frozen mill pond, in company with my father. He'd laced up her skates for her first, kneeling on one knee.[...] After they had skated around the pond several times, my father asked my mother to marry him.[...] At this instant, although they must have been touching at shoulder and hip,[...] What did my mother do at this crucial moment? She studied the ice. She did not reply at once. This meant yes (*Assassin* 68-69).

Implicitly, the instant acceptance of Liliana of Norval's marriage proposal is highly suggestive of self-degradation. Lilliana is a poor girl who lives in striking poverty so she, helplessly, degraded herself in order to escape her position. Liliana, actually, escapes from the frying pan into fire. She is subalternated, subjugated, and has her own identity totally erased. Here is a part of the subaltern Liliana's physical and psychological suffering and

torture at Norval's. Sadly, Liliana's bad psyche has affected her daughters Iris and Laura. Iris narrates:

My mother took the train to Halifax to see my father off. [...]and from these visits she would return drained and shaken, and might even weep, in the kitchen, drinking the cocoa Reenie would make to prop her up. She did not spare herself, said Reenie. She ruined her health. She went beyond her strength, especially considering her condition. [...] and by my time the knack or secret of it must have been lost. Or perhaps I didn't try, having suffered from the effects it had on my mother (*Assassin* 71-72-73).

Same like other men in this study Norval has many extramarital relationships and gives no standing to Liliana. Iris admits that her father and mother have become "strangers." "They were now strangers, and—it must have occurred to them—they always had been. [...] Something else materialized like a sword between them. Of course he'd had other women, the kind who hung around battlefields, taking advantage. Whores, not to mince a word my mother would never have pronounced. She must have been able to tell, the first time he laid a hand on her: the timidity, the reverence, would have been gone" (*Assassin* 76).

Liliana's powerlessness and submission towards her husband's constant betrayals have caused her many psychological problems. She is always confused, perplexed, and feeling lost. Iris tells; "She did understand, or at least she understood that she was supposed to understand. She understood, and said nothing about it, and prayed

for the power to forgive, and did forgive. But he can't have found living with her forgiveness all that easy. [...] its tyranny" (*Assassin* 76-77). As a subaltern, Liliaa cannot expose the secrets of her husband's trespassing; she is passive and silent.

To sum up, this study shows how women in the two selected novels, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Blind Assassin* lose their own identities by being passively subservient to men who regard them as mere subalterns. It also highlights the way the represented women in the two novels become mere shadows sadly shaped according to the viewpoint of their domineering male masters—a father, a lover, or a husband. Accordingly, their feelings of loss, alienation, and loneliness are aggravated and aggrandized. Finally, this paper spotlights how the feminist psychoanalysis helps the reader to understand the impact of gender roles and power differences in the two different societies. It also shows how the feminist movement has, unconsciously, urged many writers to express the oppressive status an inner suffering of both American and Canadian women.

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