Judy Jones: Perspectively Drawn and Quartered

In the short story “Winter Dreams” F. Scott Fitzgerald examines the life of Judy Jones, a wealthy 1920’s woman, through the perspective of men. Several different types and roles are exhibited as the ideal as Judy is appraised throughout the story. Although it is a common opinion that Judy is a predatory flirt, Fitzgerald juxtaposes the male perspectives in the story to demonstrate the consequences Judy suffers while confined by the archetypes created by men.

During the time that Fitzgerald created Judy Jones in his writing of “Winter Dreams,” American women were in a period of transition. The post WWII women of the 1920’s were undergoing a change in what their role was perceived to be. The two main archetypes were “love goddess” or “mother imago” as C. G.and A. C. Hoffmann explain in their Journal of Modern Literature article, "Re-Echoes of the Jazz Age: Archetypal Women in the Novels of 1922." Julie Malnig, a professor at New York University, further demonstrates this point and addresses the consequences saying, “Both of these typologies,[...]expressed an ongoing tension regarding expectations for women in American middle-class culture and underscored the often dichotomous roles women were asked to serve.” This struggle is reflected in the American literature of the time and is particularly represented in Judy Jones. The two ideals are pressed upon her throughout the story and directly impact her choices and search for happiness. In her confusion she becomes victimized by the confining roles society has created for her.

The first impression readers receive of Judy is when she is a young girl and focuses primarily upon her appearance. The narrator describes her as “--beautifully ugly as little girls are apt to be who are destined after a few years to be inexpressibly lovely, and to bring no end of
misery to a great number of men,” (966). The narrator, like many of the men in the story, immediately focuses on Judy’s pleasing appearance and foreshadows how it will intensify as she matures. He places her value, very early, on how she looks and then demonizes that beauty by predicting how it will torture men. According to the narrator, Judy’s only power is her appearance, but this is the same power that also condemns her. Poor Judy is trapped in a lose-lose situation where she is expected to be beautiful, but is also accursed for it, portrayed as a beautiful plague among men. Michele Aschkenase discusses this in her article, “All the Sad Young Women: A Feminist, New Economic Analysis of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Debutante-Flappers,” and believes that the women in 1920’s short stories “are not self-centered destroyers of men and male dreams but courageous, rationally-maximizing women, adaptable and willing to seek happiness within socio-economically bred cultural confines.” Judy is stuck in a society that determines her value can only be measured in one of two ways, however, she is still adamant in seeking a happiness that will suit her. Unfortunately, because the binds of society and the male perspectives that uphold it are so strong, she will ultimately fall short.

Dexter, like the narrator, also idealizes Judy’s beauty, but in contrast he loves her for it, placing her in the role of goddess. To him, every torture that comes from Judy’s loveliness is like a religious experience, an encounter with the divine. He describes her, “slender lips, down turning, dropping to his lips like poppy petals, bearing him up into a heaven of eyes...a haunting gesture, light of a warm lamp on her hair;” (975). Dexter becomes obsessed with the glitter and vibrancy he feels Judy exudes. She is often described as being lit and emulating light like a summer goddess. In this scene she is haloed in the lamp light while being described as celestial harbinger. Dexter has put Judy on a pedestal, placing her in a role she will be incapable of
maintaining. He dehumanizes her, making her a personal quest, declaring her a “grail” (973). To Dexter, Judy is simply a collection of beautiful body parts he wants pursue. He often fantasizes about her lips and when he feels she has committed herself to him he glories that she is “his own, his beautiful, his pride,” (977). Dexter idealizes Judy and tries to own her like a prize, pressuring her into a role that is detrimental to her self image. Feeling trapped, Judy both conforms to and rejects this archetype. She confesses, “And in that house there is a fella waiting for me. [...]I drove out by the dock because he has watery eyes and asks me if I have an ideal,” (970). Judy is running away from the worship she has grown tired of. The exhausting archetype of the perfect beautiful woman will fade and puts little value on her true self. She wants to put as much distance between her and that absurd role as possible. A. Mary McCay, author of “Fitzgerald's Women: Beyond Winter Dreams,” highlights this when she states in her article “His [Fitzgerald’s] women are seldom[...] passive.” Judy doesn’t want to sit idly by as society determines her life’s role. But, as she cannot seem to find what will make her happy, she is torn and turns back to the ideal that society has provided for her. In a moment of desperation she begs, “I’m more beautiful than anybody else,’ [...] ‘why can’t I be happy?’[...] ‘I’d like to marry you if you’ll have me, Dexter. I suppose you think I’m not worth having but I’ll be so beautiful for you, Dexter,” (977). All Judy’s search has been for naught. She is cornered in a society that offers her only two options: trophy goddess or domesticated wife and mother. In her melancholy she tries to conform to both, offering Dexter the only valuable things society says she has, her beauty and commitment. With no other outlet available, Judy feels she has no choice but to give in.
Another way Dexter pressures Judy into the role of “love goddess” is through his idealization of her rebellion of the opposing role of “mother image.” When he feels she doesn’t live up to these standards he is disappointed. For example, when he goes to dinner at Judy’s house, “He was disappointed at first that she had not put on something more elaborate…” and later, “It even offended him that she should know the maid’s name,” (971). Dexter wants Judy to be the anti-housewife. Judy’s rebellion of domesticity is exactly what Dexter finds attractive about her. Although he wants to own her, the majority of the excitement comes from the pursuit and the knowledge that she is too elusive and unobtainable. His young blood wants an exciting new creature to entice his self-proclaimed quest. Judy becomes a mere dream or legend to Dexter. James M. Mellard, author of "Oedipus Against Narcissus: Father, Mother, and the Dialectic of Desire in Fitzgerald's 'Winter Dreams'," comments on how Dexter has most of want he wants, but Judy represents what he has yet to satisfy. She is something he is constantly on the fringes of grasping in the night, but, as the waking hour dawns, it melts from his hand like the evening mists. This constant seeking of the unobtainable appeals to him and makes Judy’s beauty more vibrant. He determines she is completely unsuitable to be a housewife when “he enumerated her glaring deficiencies as a wife. Then he said to himself he loved her and after a while he fell asleep,” (975). To Dexter, Judy’s conformity to a domestic ideal would kill this dream. It is only when he admits both her lack of wifely skills and that he loves her that he can lull himself into sleep. In contrast, it is the very embodiment of the motherly wife that Dexter tries to marry in Irene. She is described as a looming motherly figure rather than a person.

Lecturers at the School of Foreign Languages, Beijing Institute of Technology, Lihua Zhang and Cui Liying, comment that “Irene is a symbol for the traditional virtues of women,” highlighting
the contrast in Judy and Irene’s roles. The narrator describes Irene saying “Irene would be no more than a curtain spread behind him, a hand moving among gleaming tea cups, a voice calling to children,” (975). Women like Irene, who fill the role of wife so perfectly, are as objectified as Judy, and, though they are what some male perspectives claim are the ideal, Dexter ultimately rejects Irene. His thoughts always seem to return to the elusive Judy, and he breaks off his engagement with Irene in order to have any chance with Judy. Judy, however, in the midsts of these contradictory roles is torn apart by opposing views and struggles to find fulfillment in herself.

As Judy ages, true to the narrator’s prediction, her beauty increases until few men can resist her charms. It is in this state that Dexter encounters her for the second time while once again on the golf course. In this interaction another important male perspective, that of the domesticated woman, is put into play. Mr. Hendricks represents this view, saying “All she needs is to be turned up and spanked for six months and then to be married off to an old fashioned cavalry captain,” (969). Hendricks wants to break women like Judy because they exist outside of the homemaker mold of women that men are comfortable with. Judy is a threat to his ideal. He calls her “crazy” and her behavior “outrageous” (968). For Hendricks, the only option is to break her, subduing her through home and family. Men like Hendricks and their opinions symbolize a barrier or hindrance to Judy’s pursuit for happiness. They limit the progress she can make unless she yields to their archetype. Neil D. Isaacs, a professor at the University of Maryland College Parks, points out in his article, “Winter Dreams' and Summer Sports,” that the golf course sport and setting help to show Judy’s true value. Fitzgerald illustrates this point when Judy hits Hendricks in the stomach with a ball while golfing. She says, “Here I am! I’d have gone on the
green if I hadn’t hit something,” (968). The only barrier between Judy and her aspirations is Hendricks. Judy has the skill to achieve what she wants, but, despite her skill, a man is literally the only thing standing in her way. This can be applied to Judy’s success in reaching what she wants in life. Even if she is skilled, she will be unable to achieve all she wants because stereotypes will block her way. Her value will be diminished because men already think she is worth so little. Judy is trapped by the restrictions of her own society. This idea is further demonstrated in a previous scene when she, in frustration, fights against the archetype of the homemaker housewife. As a young girl, Judy is once again prevented from getting what she wants. Her frustrating situation is described, “For further emphasis she raised it again and was about to bring it down smartly upon the nurse’s bosom, when the nurse seized the club and twisted it from her hands,” (967). In Judy’s rage she blames the very ideal woman figure Hendricks later believes she needs to become. The nurse personifies all the restraints Judy will experience from this idealized role, including the limitations and her struggle in adapting to them. She acts out in her dissatisfaction and tries to strike the most motherly feature of that ideal, the nurse’s bosom. And, in the same way that Hendricks limits her, the nurse rips the club away from Judy prohibiting her strike. Judy doesn’t know how to flourish in this contradictory society and is once again uncertainly rebelling in hopes of finding fulfillment.

Ironically, as much as she fights this role, she is often described as being part of it in her search for some sort of contentment. Hendricks describes her as “Turning those big cow-eyes on every young calf in town,” taking her from the child who needs to be spanked to the role of mother, (969). The narrator comments on Hendrick’s unintentional reference to motherly instinct, but, because Hendricks has such a narrow idea of the roles women can fill, he is forced
to leap from child to wife to mother. Poor Judy, in search of her own personal fulfillment, takes on part of these roles as mother. For example she often refers to others as “Kiddo” and while leaving a dance with Dexter claims it is idiotic “with those children,” (977). Judy doesn’t find what she is looking for wholly in either the role of pedestaled beauty or future housewife, so, when one is not giving her what she needs, she turns to the other role to find it. In this case she is done being chased and worshipped for her appearance and wants to escape to the only other option, that of the domestic.

It would be easy to read Judy’s character as fickle or selfish, but one of the first perspectives readers encounter reveals that there is much more to her than this, though it is subtle. Dexter’s perspective is the most prominent throughout the story, but it is through his and the narrator's discreet observances of Judy’s behavior that readers can obtain a revealing glimpse into Judy’s real motives. Dexter’s first examination of Judy occurs when they are both relatively young. He spots her on the golf course, where he works, and, while still struck by Judy’s physical attributes, his first impression is of her behavior. He notices, “...she was standing by the caddy-house rather ill-at-ease and trying to conceal the fact by engaging her nurse in an obviously unnatural conversation illuminated by startling and irrelevant smiles.” (966). Although many men put Judy up on a pedestal, including Dexter, this early observation reveals some of the underlying insecurities that contribute to Judy’s character and behavior. When Judy feels out of place or is unsure of her role, she hides it with a hollow smile, falsifying her genuine emotions. This observance begins the subtle motif that she is not as sure of herself and confident in her role as she is perceived to be. In his article, "Tamed Or Idealized: Judy Jones's Dilemma in 'Winter Dreams',” Quinton Martin, comments on Fitzgerald’s strategy in building Judy’s character,
saying “... he, with his sure and careful touch, created female characters, like Judy Jones, so subtle and probing that today’s hasty commentators miss the point entirely.” It is easy to get caught up in the narrator’s description and Dexter’s fascination with Judy because they are dominating and recurrent in the story, but, to Fitzgerald’s credit, he supplants the subtle realities for observant readers throughout the text. However, even scholars can miss these subtle descriptions. Jill B. Gidmark, author of the critical essay “Winter Dreams”, gets caught in this trap and describes Judy as “spoiled” and a “merciless flirt.” Gidmark and other critics, such as Bryant Mangum, who compares Judy to a hunter in *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Context*, fail to understand that Dexter’s initial detection of Judy’s covering her uncomfortableness with an insincere smile indicates a behavior that will be repeated in her maturity and will acutely expose her true emotions. Dexter’s perspective here gives the readers an opportunity to avoid succumbing to the later misogynistic views of Judy.

The evaluation of her smile is often the indicator of Judy’s real emotions. Dexter comments on its insincerity, but, like many readers, fails to recognize the relevance. He notices, “The smile again radiant, blatantly artificial --convincing,” (966). As a young girl, Judy has learned to cover her own emotions. She uses the facade of a smile to veil the inner struggle she is undergoing. She is constantly trying to find the balance between the different roles that are expected of her. The smile represents her desire for happiness, but the insincerity reveals her failing to find it. She is confused and smothered in the liminal space of her paradoxical world. When she sees Dexter on the lake this mental frustration is personified in her described behavior. Judy is depicted as, “...a figure standing at the wheel,...—then the boat had gone by and was sweeping in an immense and purposeless circle of spray round and round in the middle of the
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Judy is at the head of the boat and appears to be in control, but, with no real direction and confused about her role, she is aimless and erratic. She is literally driving in circles with an unawareness of where she wants or needs to be. She feels subject to so many different archetypes and molds of who she should be by others, that she has no idea how to actually behave. Being pulled in so many directions has got her spinning in circles and going nowhere. The control she has at the helm is a misleading front, just as her smile is a facade. This contradiction is demonstrated again in Judy’s position as she rides a surf-board with Dexter. She is submissively placed “kneeling on the low rear,” but attempts dominance or control by giving confident commands, saying “Go faster,[...]fast as it’ll go,” (970). While Judy physically conforms to the passive position, she also tries to rebel against it by verbally asserting some control. However, it is a limited control because Dexter is actually driving the boat. Judy is portrayed stuck between roles, and the inconsistency and lack of full commitment again results in dissatisfaction. She comments, “…it would amuse me. Except that I’m too cold,” (970). The ride is short lived and, as the initial thrill wears off, all Judy can feel is the cold. She is unable to find the contentment she wanted and is left with a cold impression of disappointment. Her earlier mentioned proposal to Dexter also shows this. She blatantly says she wants happiness but cannot find it and the narrator describes her as “broken” (977). That is exactly what Judy is, broken, fractured between two worlds. She is the product of what society made her. She is pulled in two drastically different directions, trying to rebel and please both archetypes and completely failing to please herself. Dexter comments that she “gave a continual impression of flux, of intense life, of passionate vitality-- balanced only partially by the sad luxury of her eyes,” (968). Judy has successfully put on a show for everyone. She appears to be the essence of joy, but her eyes
betray her. She is effectively stuck in this facade as much as she is in the bipolar roles she is forced to be subjected to. When she finally expresses her true emotion of sadness, Dexter is so shocked that he questions whether it is an act, (977). Judy is so practiced and well trained that the tantrums of her youth no longer burst out. She has fooled those around her into thinking she has become what they wanted her to be. Only she knows her pain of being imprisoned in their perspectives.

It is through this confining isolation that Judy finally reaches her tragic downfall. Throughout the story she has been spinning down, falling closer and closer to an unfortunate result. The gloom of Judy’s demise is best shown through Dexter’s perspective. He receives the news through a mutual friend, Devlin, who claims he is sorry for Judy, then explains “Oh, Joe Simms has gone to pieces in a way. I don’t mean he beats her, you understand, or anything like that. But he drinks and runs around--” (979). Through all her searching and rebelling against archetypical roles, Judy has finally chosen her lasting confinement, a broken marriage. She becomes subject to probably the most misogynist male character this short story offers, and in so doing all the passion and value she has slips away. Devlin continues, “Lots of women fade just-like-that. You must have seen it happen.” (979). While Devlin is referring specifically to Judy’s appearance it can also be applied to her personality and vitality. Being trapped in an emotionally abusive marriage has finally broken Judy. Hoffmann goes even further to say “Since the essence of her soul equalled the beauty of her body, her soul is lost.” Society, and even Judy herself, places Judy’s value in her appearance, and it is through the loss of that physical grandeur that Fitzgerald demonstrates the gravity of valuing oneself through the perspectives of others.
Judy was never able to be truly happy because she tried to find that happiness in others' opinions of how she should live. She was victim to the dominant views of men in society who pulled her in conflicting directions. In her desire to move both ways she only moved herself backwards. What she has been taught to value was not herself, but who she was for others and how well she fit their ideal. Although Judy was not impassive, in the end she was a result of the inconsistent and dominating views of her society.

Works Cited

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