

AQA English Literature A-level

The Great Gatsby: Character Profiles

Jordan Baker

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JORDAN BAKER - SOCIALITE, GOSSIP, AND NICK'S ROMANTIC INTEREST

OVERVIEW

Jordan is a **gossiping, aloof, professional golfer** and a **confident socialite**. She is an old friend of Daisy Buchanan and is often presented as her twin. She is also the casual **romantic interest** of the narrator, Nick Carraway. Jordan is from Louisville, Kentucky, where she and Daisy spent their **"white girlhoods"** together. Jordan comes from **old money** and has the same upper-class standing as Daisy. When Jordan and Nick meet during Nick's first visit to the Buchanan's home, he is immediately enthralled by Jordan, finding her **glamorous** and **captivating**. However, Nick soon realises that Jordan is **cynical, prone to gossip** and **"incurably dishonest"**. Her dishonesty is hinted at early on, when Nick reveals Jordan has been suspected of cheating during a golf tournament. Her gossiping nature is established in the first chapter, where Jordan tells Nick at dinner that Tom is cheating on Daisy with another woman, Myrtle. Throughout the novel **Jordan's love of gossip is used to move the plot forward**. Jordan had witnessed Daisy and Gatsby's original relationship when they were young and knew how Daisy almost did not marry Tom. When Gatsby pulls Jordan aside at his party, he tasks her with sharing this information with Nick in order to facilitate a meeting between him and Daisy. Nick and Jordan have a casual romance over the course of the summer, however their romance represents a **more subdued version of love** compared to the dramatic, if imbalanced, relationship between Gatsby and Daisy. While Nick and Jordan seem to be fond of each other, Nick's interest is born out of boredom and circumstance. While he feels **"a sort of tender curiosity"** towards Jordan, **Nick states that he never fully loves Jordan**. By the end of the novel **they grow apart** as Nick becomes disillusioned by the carelessness and dishonesty of the people that composed East Egg's upper-crust society, including Jordan (who can be counted as an honorary member of East Egg society, although she lives in New York).

While Jordan and Daisy are old friends, they have very **different personalities and characteristics**. Jordan is characterised as **intelligent, direct, cynical** and career-driven, almost the diametric opposite of the **giggling, flighty and "foolish"** Daisy. This difference in representation can be accounted for by the fact that Fitzgerald uses Jordan to represent the wild, liberated **"New Woman"** of the 1920s. Jordan often spends her nights at extravagant parties and enjoying the social scene. While she is described by Tom as a **"nice girl"**, Jordan is often judged for her disregard for settling down, preferring to travel the country and playing in golf tournaments. It's curious that Jordan is **so unlike Daisy** and yet they are often **pictured as twins**. Perhaps by **simultaneously contrasting and pairing them** Fitzgerald questions whether the "New Woman" is really a different kind of woman.



It is argued that Jordan serves a **symbol** to Nick of New York and life in East Egg. While Nick initially finds Jordan **enthraling and interesting**, by the end of the novel he finds her carelessness and shallowness **disgusting**, realising they are not as compatible as he thought, leading the pair to drift apart. This is a **similar journey** to the one Nick has regarding the luxurious life on Long Island. Arriving in the Eggs, Nick first finds the area without fault and full of excitement, however by the conclusion of the novel, Nick reckons with how vain and careless life is there.

CONTEXT

Gender and the 1920s:

In 1920, the 19th amendment was passed, giving white women in the United States the right to vote. Though this legally afforded more opportunities for women, their role remained relatively unchanged. Women were still **expected** to marry and have children and remain in the domestic sphere.

1920s America is referred to as the **'Roaring Twenties'**: the age of jazz, vast amounts of money, the Prohibition of alcohol (however liquor was still smuggled into and consumed in great quantities) and the emergence of the flapper. A flapper was typically a young woman, often characterised by a bob and painted lips, found on the dance floor doing the Charleston. Flappers **flouted the rules of respectable womanhood** - they drank, smoked and 'petted' with multiple men. Their bob, short skirts and sheer stockings signalled their **emancipation**.

The emancipated behaviours of the flappers were a **direct reaction** to biologically deterministic ideas around femaleness and motherhood, expectations of chastity and purity, and ideas about the private sphere being women's natural sphere. According to historian Gordon A. Craig, **"the First World War [had] weakened old orthodoxies and authorities [...]. One result of this was a profound change in manners and morals that made a freer and less restrained society"**. While the First World War may have enabled the figure of the flapper to emerge, conservative gendered ideas still persisted. Jordan, Daisy and Myrtle exist in this very **contradictory** time.

Jordan's actions and descriptions often **contrast with traditional ideals of femininity** exemplified by Daisy throughout the novel. This duality represents the changing ideals and newfound availability of choice for women in this era. At first glance Daisy is the perfect pure woman, portrayed as **traditionally feminine**, indicated in advance by her name - florally and feminine. In comparison, **Jordan's name is gender-ambiguous**. Furthermore, it **plays on two American car manufacturers**: the Jordan Motor Car Company and the Baker Motor Vehicle. This link to industry hints at Jordan's **subversion of gendered expectations**. Furthermore, unlike Daisy, Jordan is neither a wife nor a mother and it appears she has no plans to marry, despite being just two years younger.



Jordan Baker is the epitome of the ‘flapper’: she is unmarried, pursues a career as a professional golfer, drinks, parties and engaging with multiple men. Nick portrays her **physique** as **almost masculine** - using terms such as **"erect"** and **"like a young cadet"** when describing her – embodying the **“boyish”** look that was trendy at the time (Chapter 1). Additionally, Jordan’s hobbies throughout the novel are traditionally masculine, especially for the era. She is in pursuit of a career in golf and enjoys driving cars. These attributes create an image of Jordan as a ‘New Woman’, someone who resists old gender expectations. However, despite the contrasts Jordan and Daisy do have similarities being upper-class women of the 1920s. Both are frequently **associated with the colour white**, suggesting purity, innocence and wealth (white clothing traditionally signalled that you belonged to the leisure class), perhaps suggesting their shared dissociation from the struggles of reality. While Jordan does not outwardly subvert **gender expectations**, still following many of the social norms for women, she definitely does not fully conform to the traditional, feminine values that were the norm for the 1920s.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Attractive:

Throughout the novel, descriptions of Jordan are heavily reliant on her physical features and her attractiveness. Also emphasised are not simply her physical attributes, but also Jordan’s aura of class, sophistication and glamor, detailed through her language and posture.

"I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her grey sun-strained eyes looked back at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming discontented face. It occurred to me now that I had seen her, or a picture of her, somewhere before." (Chapter 1)

"I knew now why her face was familiar — its pleasing contemptuous expression..." (Chapter 1)

"dull on the autumn-leaf yellow of her hair, glinted along the paper as she turned a page with a flutter of slender muscles in her arms." (Chapter 1)

"She was dressed to play golf, and I remember thinking she looked like a good illustration, her chin raised a little jauntily, her hair the color of an autumn leaf, her face the same brown tint as the fingerless glove on her knee." (Chapter 9)

As Nick is both the narrator of the novel and romantically interested in Jordan, he highlights the features that he finds attractive. Jordan is not described as being traditionally or femininely beautiful, as exemplified in the quotes above. The terms **“young cadet”** and **“small-breasted”**, give almost a masculine impression of Jordan. Additionally, Nick also highlights Jordan’s athleticism which he finds compelling, using terms like **“hard”** and **“muscular”**. These descriptions again detail how Jordan exemplifies the “flapper” trend of the 1920s, being



unconventionally attractive and more thin and boyish than the ideal woman of previous decades.

The above descriptions of Jordan contrasts with depictions of Daisy where Nick uses incredibly light, delicate and feminine language. Daisy has a **“sad and lovely” face**, **“bright eyes and a passionate mouth”** (Chapter 1) and uses delicate accessories like a **“little gold pencil”** (Chapter 6). Their physical contrasts reflect the different roles they occupy: Daisy represents the old class of woman and Jordan the new. Nevertheless, both women seem to wear similar feminine attire, often **white and flowy dresses**. Comparable to Daisy, white in reference to Jordan can symbolise purity as well as privilege. However, Fitzgerald **plays with this motif** to suggest that neither woman is as pure and innocent as they lead the world to believe. Perhaps white is used to represent a lack of intellectuality and conscience and signifies Daisy and Jordan’s distance from reality.

“They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering” (Chapter 1)

“Daisy and Jordan lay upon an enormous couch, like silver idols, weighing down their own white dresses...” (Chapter 7)

The above quote suggests a life of leisure, which contrasts with Jordan’s career as a golfer. Their **twin-like appearance** suggests that Daisy and Jordan are similar at heart. This is also reinforced by their financial circumstances. Although **Daisy’s wealth is intertwined with Tom’s wealth**, and Jordan is not directly reliant on a man for her upkeep, Jordan seems to be an heiress, which suggests that she is **not really financially independent** and therefore not as much a ‘New Woman’ as we are otherwise led to believe.

“With Jordan’s slender golden arm resting in mine, we descended the steps and sauntered about the garden” (Chapter 3)

“It was dark now, and as we dipped under a little bridge I put my arm around Jordan’s golden shoulder and drew her toward me and asked her to dinner.” (Chapter 4)

Fitzgerald frequently describes Jordan, particularly her skin, as “golden”. Gold is a symbol with a multitude of meanings. Golden may be in reference to a tan, most likely gained from rounds of golf during the summer. Additionally, gold can be a reference to her wealth, prosperity and beauty. In *The Great Gatsby*, gold symbolises both ‘old money’ (think of Daisy’s golden pencil, Chapter 6) and ‘new money’ (think of Gatsby’s flashy Rolls Royce, Chapter 3).

Confident and Charming:

Paired with her attractiveness, Jordan is also portrayed as a very **confident** and **charming** woman. Her confidence potentially arises from a combination of her **high status** in society, her **attractiveness** and her **careless attitude** towards life. For Jordan, whose wealth and status allows her to be removed from the reality and struggles of everyday life, it **is easy to be**



confident. At first, this confidence and associated careless attitude is attractive to Nick. To represent this confidence, Fitzgerald frequently uses variations of the term “jaunty”, meaning lively, cheerful, and self-confident manner, in reference to Jordan, exemplified in the quotes below:

“I noticed that she wore her evening-dress, all her dresses, like sports clothes — there was a **jauntiness about her movements as if she had first learned to walk upon golf courses on clean, crisp mornings.” (Chapter 3)**

“Her brown hand waved a **jaunty salute” (Chapter 3)**

“leaned back **jauntily just within the circle of my arm” (Chapter 4)**

“Her chin raised a little **jauntily” (Chapter 9)**

Jordan’s confidence also gives her the **ability to freely speak her mind**. While Daisy uses (arguably fake) ditsy-ness to avoid conflict and dealing with consequences, Jordan is not as passive. On a few instances, she has **no qualms about voicing her opinions**. When Tom tells Jordan and Nick that he has **“made an investigation”** into Jay Gatsby and does not believe the story Gatsby his story nor his upper-class pretensions, Jordan demands crossly **“Listen, Tom. If you’re such a snob, why did you invite him to lunch?” (Chapter 7)**. This outburst is a rare moment of directness in the novel, and is even more surprising coming from a female character.

However, there are hints that Jordan’s **confidence may be a facade**, with Nick suggesting that she is in fact always posing and that her confidence has an air of superficiality, stating Jordan’s **“bored haughty face she turned toward the world **concealed something**” (Chapter 3)**. Throughout the novel, Jordan is portrayed as **separating herself from others** and keeping people at arm’s length. In a few descriptions of Jordan, she is described as **“balanc[ing] an invisible but absorbing object on the tip of her chin”**, as if she is posing and putting on a front (Chapter 7). It is possible that Jordan uses faux self-confidence as a shield to protect herself against an oppressive society. This is a different tactic than the one employed by Daisy, who uses her charm and foolishness to draw admirers in. In contrast, Jordan attempts to protect herself from the cruelty of the world by keeping people distant.

Dishonest:

Dishonesty is **a trait that Nick persistently attaches** to Jordan. While Nick finds Jordan interesting and spends more time with her as the summer goes on, he highlights that Jordan has a habit of lying to avoid consequences and is inherently dishonest. In Chapter 1, Nick reveals that he **recognises Jordan’s name but cannot place it**. Later (Chapter 3) he realises she had previously been involved in a scandal in which she was accused of cheating in a golf tournament. Jordan’s dishonesty is exemplified in the passage below:



“When we were on a house-party together up in Warwick, she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then **lied** about it — and suddenly I remembered the story about her that had eluded me that night at Daisy’s. At her first big golf tournament there was a row that nearly reached the newspapers — a suggestion that she had **moved her ball** from a bad lie in the semi-final round. The thing approached the proportions of a scandal — then died away. A caddy retracted his statement, and the only other witness admitted that he might have been mistaken. The incident and the name had remained together in my mind.” (Chapter 3)

However, Jordan’s dishonesty is not simply for entertainment, instead she uses dishonesty to distance herself from the world and society. Like her confidence, her dishonesty is a tool to protect herself from a society that was oppressive and harsh. Nick seems to understand this when he writes:

“Jordan Baker instinctively avoided **clever, shrewd men**, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was **incurably dishonest**. She wasn’t able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in **subterfuges** when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, **jaunty** body.” (Chapter 3)

Nick highlighting Jordan’s dishonesty is also telling of Nick’s character. Nick claims he is an honest person and it is clear that he holds himself as morally superior to Jordan’s, going so far as to claim that he is “**one of the few honest people that [he has] ever known**” (Chapter 3). However, despite this moral high ground, Nick seems to be attracted (or at least unbothered) by Jordan’s dishonesty. In fact, he seems to give Jordan a pass because she is a woman.

“Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply — I was **casually sorry**, and then I **forgot**.” (Chapter 3)

This **dismissal of Jordan’s dishonesty**, because he still (for a while) finds her a respectable partner, **stresses the change in Nick’s character** as he settles in to the East and the Eggs. Nick’s constant pointing out of Jordan’s dishonesty may also be **projection or displacement**. As the writer Marian Keyes has said, “**The things we dislike most in others are the characteristics we like least in ourselves.**” It could also be said that the flaws we pick up on in others are flaws we share with them. Although Nick constantly stresses his honesty and integrity, certain things lead us to doubt it. We may conjecture that Nick’s stress on Jordan’s dishonesty is a **psychoanalytic defence mechanism** to obscure from himself his own dishonesty, while simultaneously revealing it to others.

Gossiping and a Socialite:

Throughout the novel, Jordan frequents parties and enjoys the social scene of East and West Egg, and is seemingly more at ease socially than Nick. In Chapter 3, Nick is invited to his neighbor Jay Gatsby’s house for a party where he encounters Jordan Baker. In this chapter the



reader can see the relationship between Nick and Jordan begin to develop, mirrored by the way he at first calls her Miss Baker and then Jordan. The presence of Jordan at Gatsby's party, accompanied by some friends and an **"escort"** suggests that she is part of a group that regularly attends parties. Later on in the novel, Jordan calls Nick up at his office. Nick states: **"she often called me up at this hour because the uncertainty of her own movements between hotels and clubs and private houses made her hard to find in any other way"**, exemplifying Jordan's **socialite** and flapper status (Chapter 8).

While enjoying the social scene, Jordan also frequently enjoys gossiping. Much of the description of Jordan throughout the novel involves her gossiping. From the first time Nick encounters Jordan at the dinner party with Tom and Daisy Buchanan, when the phone rings. When Tom and Daisy leave the table, and Nick attempts to continue conversation with Jordan she states:

"Don't talk. I want to hear what happens."

"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. (Chapter 1)

This interaction establishes two facts, one: that Tom is cheating on Daisy, and two: Jordan not only **gossips about her close and old friend**, but **will do so in their own home**. Jordan continues to gossip at Gatsby's party in Chapter 3, Jordan participates in speculation about Gatsby. When Nick bumps into Jordan at the party and they mingle with the other guests, Jordan and the others share rumors about Gatsby ranging from he was a German spy during the war, a graduate of Oxford, and that he once killed a man.

The two girls and Jordan leaned together confidentially.

"Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once." A thrill passed over all of us. (Chapter 3)

However, Jordan's gossiping is not simply an interesting character attribute, instead Jordan's information serves as a way to move the plot forward. At Gatsby's party, when Gatsby sends for Jordan to share his past with her and plan to rekindle his romance with Daisy, Jordan leaves the meeting saying that she has just heard something astonishing.

"I've just heard the most amazing thing," she whispered. "How long were we in there?"

"Why, about an hour."

"It was — simply amazing," she repeated abstractedly. "But I swore I wouldn't tell it and here I am tantalizing you." (Chapter 3)



Jordan is then tasked with sharing the story of Daisy and Gatsby's past to Nick and convincing Nick to assist in arranging a tea at Nick's house to allow Gatsby to see Daisy. Sharing this **"amazing"** story serves the purpose of providing Nick more information on the complex background of Gatsby, and convincing Nick to assist in helping reconnect the couple.

Careless, Bored and Privileged:

Similar to Daisy, Jordan is bored throughout the novel. In Chapter 1, Nick portrays Jordan and Daisy as **stationary** and **buoyed** up floating **objects** in the room, which mimics her **empty** and **privileged** life: **"their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in"**. This image is repeated in Chapter 7, when we see them **"l[ying] upon an enormous couch, like silver idols, weighing down their own white dresses"**. In Chapter 1, Daisy asks Jordan **"helplessly"**, **"What'll we plan? What do people plan?"** in reference to the upcoming solstice. Likewise, in Chapter 7, Daisy **"crie[s]"**, **'What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon, [...] and the day after that, and the next thirty years?'** While her exclamations may seem melodramatic, those of a spoiled child, they betray the meaninglessness of her life. While **Jordan is somewhat more proactive**, both she and Daisy are **"silver idols"**, objects without a function or purpose to be worshipped for their proximity to money and finally revealed as corrupt.

Jordan, at first, seems different to the upper-class people of East and West Egg; she has a career as an athlete, (supposedly) makes her own money, lives in New York and is more of a "modern woman". However, she shares carelessness and **apatheticness** with the inhabitants of the Eggs. Carelessness is one of the novel's overarching themes, and leads to the breakdown of their relationship.

When Nick and Jordan go driving he tells her: **"You're a rotten driver... either you ought to be more careful or you oughtn't to drive at all" (Chapter 3)**. When he calls her out for carelessness and wishes for her to meet someone as careless as herself she says, **"I hate careless people. That's why I like you" (Chapter 3)**. Jordan's driving, like Daisy's reveals her carelessness. It appears that **carelessness is a class marker**; the more privileged are less careful since they can survive the fallout of their actions; they are **"safe [...] above the hot struggles of the poor"** (Chapter 8). Nick is initially **superficially attracted to her unconcerned attitude** towards life, but on a deeper level may be attracted to the privilege that allows Jordan to be so unconcerned. This **mirrors the way Gatsby is seemingly in love with Daisy but may actually be in love with money**. For Gatsby, money is simply a means by which he can access her. Nevertheless, Daisy - most notably through her voice - symbolises money, so perhaps Gatsby is unconsciously attracted to money after all.



RELATIONSHIP WITH NICK [see *Character Profiles: Nick Carraway*]

Nick is instantly infatuated by Jordan at his first dinner party at the Buchanan's, which Jordan attends. He immediately notes Jordan's attractiveness and he seems to be slightly awed by her cold and powerful demeanor. Nick is **both drawn to and repelled** by Jordan. At the beginning of the novel, Nick notes her "**contemptuous expression**" (Chapter 1) and her "**scornful mouth**" (Chapter 4), which seem like negative traits. However, they do not prevent him from "**dr[awing] her up again**" to kiss her. Nick almost does not know how to act around Jordan, with her presence causing Nick to apologize for any small movement on his own part. This is possibly representative of how different Jordan is from other women that Nick has known and that throws him.

"Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me" (Chapter 1)

The **initial relationship between Jordan and Nick is supported and encouraged by Daisy**, with Daisy saying she is going to set them up, to which neither Nick nor Jordan declines.

"In fact I think I'll arrange a marriage. Come over often, Nick, and I'll sort of—oh—fling you together. You know—lock you up accidentally in linen closets and push you out to sea in a boat, and all that sort of thing——" (Chapter 1)

The relationship with Jordan serves the purpose of showing Nick's true colours. While Nick attempts to portray himself as the "everyman" throughout the novel, not concerned with status, it is obvious that **Jordan's higher social standing** and wealth compared to Nick **is enticing to him**. Jordan's status as a young celebrity and golf pro also makes her interesting to him. He states that he **"was flattered to go places with her, because she was a golf champion, and everyone knew her name"** (Chapter 3). This is contradictory to the image of himself that Nick tries to portray: that he is **humble and not bothered by status**. This demonstrates that even those who say otherwise can be tempted by the American dream of wealth, prosperity and higher status.

Their relationship grows over the course of the novel, with Nick evolving from addressing Jordan as "**Ms. Baker**" in opening chapters, to her first name "**Jordan**" as they become more comfortable with one another. When Gatsby pulls Jordan aside at his party and tells her his story, he asks Jordan to have a word with Nick about inviting Daisy and Gatsby to his house so they can meet. When Jordan asks Nick, stating that **"And Daisy ought to have something in her life"**, **Nick's strict moral code seems to be clouded by Jordan** and he agrees (Chapter 4). After this party, the couple begins to spend more time together.

However, Nick's admiration of Jordan is not long lasting. Jordan and Nick do not seem to have much in common below the surface; in fact much of Nick's interest in Jordan is superficial. Nick compares his relationship to Jordan to the relationship between Gatsby and Daisy. While Nick admires Gatsby's romanticism, he notes the **solipsistic nature of his fantasy**; Daisy exists for



Gatsby as a “**disembodied face**” (Chapter 4). Nick concludes that he does not have a disembodied face to float “**along the dark cornices and blinding signs**” so “[he] **dr[aws] up the girl beside [him], tightening [his] arms**” (Chapter 4). He seems incapable of imagining the possibility of a healthy romance with someone he likes yet does not over-idealise. Essentially, Nick thinks Jordan is as good as he will get, so he decides to be content with her.

However, this doesn't prevent Nick from noticing Jordan's faults, mainly her dishonesty. He points these out, seemingly believing that these observations makes him realist, however he does not end the relationship despite these flaws. Jordan and Nick's relationship is exemplified in Chapter 3, when Nick is retelling a conversation they had in the car.

“You're a rotten driver,” I protested. “Either you ought to be more careful, or you oughtn't to drive at all.”

“I am careful.”

“No, you're not.”

“Well, other people are,” she said lightly.

“What's that got to do with it?”

“They'll keep out of my way,” she insisted. “It takes two to make an accident.”

“Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself.”

“I hope I never will,” she answered. “I hate careless people. That's why I like you.”

Her gray, sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. (Chapter 3)

This passage exemplifies Nick's **ambivalent attitude** towards Jordan; he both criticises her carelessness and is attracted to it, to the point where he feels that he loves her. Jordan can afford to be this careless and Nick finds that charming and potentially freeing. However, **“carelessness” soon becomes into what Nick detests about East Egg**, after it triggers tragedy and **reveals the characters' moral apathy**. After Myrtle's death, the careless responses of Daisy, Tom, and Jordan fill Nick with disgust. Jordan does not utter any words in the aftermath of Myrtle's death; her first words after the accident are to invite Nick into the Buchanan's house. Her apparent indifference prompts Nick to say **“I'd had enough of all of them for one day and suddenly that included Jordan too” (Chapter 7)**. Nick finds himself newly irritated by her superficial and self-centered ways. This change of attitude and symbolizes Nick's newfound nerve to stand-up against the wealthy world he was previously marveled at.

However, when the couple have their final interaction, Jordan calls out Nick for his behaviour over the summer. She names him as **deceitful and dishonest**, despite his claims of honesty and directness throughout the novel.

“You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I



thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride.”

“I’m thirty,” I said. “I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor.”

She didn’t answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (Chapter 9)

This is important for two reasons. As the novel is told through Nick’s perspective, this passage provides the reader’s only information regarding Jordan’s true feelings for Nick. Additionally, it allows the reader to recognize that **Nick is not as virtuous as he leads the reader to believe**, although the reasons for this are obscure.

This **transition from awe to revulsion** that Nick feels for Jordan is an echo of Nick’s own inner conflict with the life of leisure, carelessness and privilege he encounters during his summer. As the novel progresses, **Nick seems to develop a moral compass**. Nick’s relationship with Jordan represents how his feelings about the wealthy and East Egg evolve. First he was attracted to their extravagance and the excitement, but appalled by how Jordan reacts to the car accident, eventually finds himself appalled by their carelessness and cruelty. He eventually concludes that East Egg society is a **“rotten crowd”** and **“they were careless people”**. He no longer finds this carelessness attractive.

“I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye.” (Chapter 3)

This quote contrasts when his reaction when Jordan calls him to tell him that she's leaving Daisy's to go to South Hampton; then, he describes her voice as **“harsh and dry”** as opposed to its usual **“fresh and cool”** quality (Chapter 8). This final call ends **“abruptly”** and marks the end of their relationship, which he regards with indifference: **“I don’t know which of us hung up with a sharp click but I know I didn’t care.”**

Gender Dynamics of Jordan and Nick’s relationship:

Jordan subverts gender roles and accordingly, she has equal if not greater authority than Nick in their relationship. Her display of **“self-sufficiency”** at the beginning of the novel renders Nick almost speechless and prompts in him the desire to make a **“stunned tribute”** to her (Chapter 1). This **reverses the traditional gender order**, in which men are self-assured and self-sufficient, guiding their less assured, relatively passive female partners. Nick also appears domestic compared to Jordan; he can be found in his home at specific times, whereas Jordan’s whereabouts are often unknown: **“she often called me up at this hour because the uncertainty of her own movements between hotels and clubs and private houses made her hard to find in any other way”** (Chapter 8). The domestic realm was traditionally seen as the woman’s domain, while men worked and fraternised outside the home. However, Nick **appears tied to the domestic** whereas Jordan is wilder. The sentence also indicates that Jordan has the upper hand in the relationship; she can call Nick but Nick does not know how to reach her. This solidifies the impression that we receive



at the start of the novel: that Jordan is dominant over Nick, albeit not in a controlling way. At Gatsby's party, Jordan **"h[old[s his] hand impersonally, as a promise that she'd take care of [him] in a minute"** (Chapter 3). This sentence **infantilises Nick**, recalling a mother holding her child by the hand and promising she'll attend to him/her, creating the impression that Jordan has a kind of **maternal authority**.

CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF JORDAN BAKER

Among the literature on Jordan, there are two main theories surrounding the character. One, that **Jordan is a lesbian** and two, that **she is a "white-passing" mixed-race woman**. While it is impossible to prove Fitzgerald's thoughts or intentions when writing the character, these two theories are interesting to explore deeper.

Maggie Gordon Frohlich argues in her [paper](#) that Jordan Baker is a gay woman. A similar argument has been made about Nick. Many critics have analysed Nick's use of masculine language when describing Jordan's body and his admiration for his masculine attributes as confirming his homosexuality. However, the oppressive nature of the early 1900s meant that if these characters were in fact intended to be gay, Fitzgerald had to be subtle about their non-conforming sexuality. This similar argument has been made regarding Jordan. Frohlich argues that Jordan's **sexual ambivalence towards men**, her **desire to keep unintelligent men around**, and her **dishonesty** indicate that she is gay and trying to hide her sexuality.

Additionally, Tom Phillips [argues](#) that it is possible that Jordan is in fact a **"light-skinned, mixed-race person "passing for white"**". The 1920s were a time of great movement for many of the country's African-American population, however there was little to no social mobility allowed to African Americans at the time. Therefore, some African Americans who could, would try to pass for white to allow for social mobility. It is argued that Jordan Baker is one of the **"many "passers," slipping past the color line into the lily-white, country-club world of golf and from there into white society"**. Another contemporary account of mixed-race passing is Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*, which also takes place in 1920s New York.



JORDAN AND OTHER FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

	PARALLELS	CONTRASTS
Myrtle	<p>Both Jordan and Myrtle are proactive. Myrtle is unhappy in her life and actively pursues Tom to have economic freedom. Jordan, while seemingly happy in her life, lives an active life as a socialite and golfer and pursues Nick. Both women are fairly sexual and outwardly independent, going to parties and travelling where they want. In fact, Jordan seems to be more active than Nick, who appears domestic and settled in comparison: “she often called me up at this hour because the uncertainty of her own movements between hotels and clubs and private houses made her hard to find in any other way” Additionally, both act cynically, motivated purely by self-interest and with little regard to the feelings of those around them.</p>	<p>Jordan and Myrtle differ in their social standing.</p>
Daisy	<p>Daisy and Jordan both come from old wealth. Daisy considers divorce and Jordan mentions an engagement to Nick. Daisy is dependent on Tom and Jordan is dependent on her wealthy aunt (who controls her inheritance). They do not control their own finances. They perform a lifestyle of freedom and Jordan performs resistance, but both are ultimately decorative personas without any real social role. This is highlighted by their twin-like appearance in Chapters 1 and 7: “They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering” “Daisy and Jordan lay upon an enormous couch, like silver idols, weighing down their own white dresses [...] ‘We can’t move,’ they said together”</p>	<p>Jordan is more outgoing and independent while Daisy is a more traditional woman (married with child). Daisy is seemingly more gender conforming and feminine than Jordan is. Jordan drives cars and plays golf and is described using very angular and masculine language. Daisy is very light and delicate language, highlighting her feminineness.</p>

KEY QUOTES



1

“The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women [Jordan and Daisy] were **buoyed up** as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house.” (Chapter 1)

“The room, shadowed well with awnings, was dark and cool. Daisy and Jordan lay upon an enormous couch, like **silver idols, weighing down their own white dresses** against the singing breeze of the fans. ‘We can’t move,’ they said together.” (Chapter 7)

Our introduction to Jordan and Daisy reveals a **life of leisure**. Unlike Wilson, who has become one with his grey Valley of Ashes environment, Jordan and Daisy are buoyant here - not anchored to the ground. This buoyancy or weightlessness reflects their lack of responsibilities. The repetition of this image in Chapter 7 shows that Nick / Fitzgerald really wants the reader to establish the association between Jordan and Daisy and weightlessness. The phrase “**silver idols**” summarises Nick’s position on Daisy and Jordan: they are attractive but ultimately fallible - not gods but **false idols**.



3

“When we were on a house-party together up in Warwick, she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then **lied** about it — and suddenly I remembered the story about her that had eluded me that night at Daisy’s. At her first big golf tournament there was a row that nearly reached the newspapers — a suggestion that she had **moved her ball** from a bad lie in the semi-final round. The thing approached the proportions of a scandal — then died away. A caddy retracted his statement, and the only other witness admitted that he might have been mistaken. The incident and the name had remained together in my mind.” (Chapter 3)

“Jordan Baker **instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men**, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn’t able to be at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.”

Nick believes that Jordan believes she is better than those around her and uses lies and subterfuges in order to stay on top and take advantage of others. Additionally, this is why she surrounds herself with men that she feels are not smart enough to catch on. However, it is possible that instead of being a malicious or cruel trait, her dishonesty may be a **defense mechanism** to keep the world at arm’s length and keep herself protected.

The line “**she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible**” also indicates that Jordan prefers traditional affairs with men, in which she can **pre-empt their moves** and **respond in a formulaic way**. This means she will not be surprised or caught off-guard. If Frohlich’s **thesis that Jordan is a lesbian** is correct, this line would make sense; if she is not attracted to men she would not be able to play a **spontaneous game of love** without revealing the falseness of her feelings.



<p>3</p>	<p>“You’re a rotten driver,” I protested. “Either you ought to be more careful, or you oughtn’t to drive at all.” “I am careful.” “No, you’re not.” “Well, other people are,” she said lightly. “What’s that got to do with it?” “They’ll keep out of my way,” she insisted. “It takes two to make an accident.” “Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself.” “I hope I never will,” she answered. “I hate careless people. That’s why I like you.” Her gray, sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her.</p> <p>This quote is telling of both Jordan and Nick. In this conversation that the couple are having during a car ride, Nick finds Jordan’s carelessness attractive. Because of her wealth and privilege, Jordan can afford to be careless and rely on others to be careful. Nick enjoys this aspect of Jordan, finding this carelessness charming and freeing. However, the term “careless” foreshadows the end of the novel, when Nick concludes after the deaths of Myrtle and Gatsby that “they were careless people” (Chapter 9). Nick matures to detest the overarching carelessness and cynicism that is palpable amongst the residents of East Egg.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>There was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age.</p> <p>As Nick is turning 30, and reflecting on his own mortality and his complicated emotions around growing older, he compares the characters of Jordan and Daisy. Nick is not excited for his next decade, however he is pleased that he has Jordan by his side, who is realistic and practical. This is in contrast to Daisy, who lives whimsically and cannot be counted on to ground anyone. He seems to feel a sense of affinity with her, based on their mutual cynicism - or at least a lack of romanticism. At first, he seems content with Jordan, but this feeling does not last.</p>



9

“You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn’t I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride.”

“I’m thirty,” I said. “I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor.”

She didn’t answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (Chapter 9)

This quote is the last conversation that Jordan and Nick have with one another, after the death of Myrtle and Gatsby. Jordan’s words assert that Nick’s is not as **“honest”** and **“straightforward”** as he believes himself to be. This calls Nick’s into question truthfulness as a narrator.

