



'Good girls' and 'bad girls' in *The Great Gatsby*

An analysis of the portrayal of Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle

'Duktiga' och 'dåliga' flickor i *Den store Gatsby*
En analys av skildringen av Daisy, Jordan och Myrtle

Linn Karlsson

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

English III: Degree Project

15 hp

Supervisor: Marinette Grimbeek

Examiner: Anna Linzie

Spring 19

Abstract

This essay discusses how women in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) are portrayed in different ways. During this time between the world wars, progressive women walked the streets of New York. These 'New Women' wore short dresses, cut their hair, smoked and drank in public, and showed interest in politics and education. The New Woman is portrayed in different versions in the female characters Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson. These characters are also representations of the patriarchal idea of women as 'good girls' and 'bad girls', depending on how well they adapt to and fit into the traditional gender roles. Through a discussion of how Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle are portrayed as 'good' and 'bad', the essay shows how the 'bad girls' in the novel are punished by patriarchy by being described unfavorably by the narrator or by suffering socially in a society with patriarchal values.

Keywords: *traditional gender roles, stereotypes, The Great Gatsby, new women, feminism*

Sammanfattning

Den här uppsatsen diskuterar hur kvinnorna i F. Scott Fitzgeralds verk *Den store Gatsby* (1925) skildras på olika sätt. USA började förändras under mellankrigstiden, bland annat började en kvinnorörelse som resulterade i en "ny typ av kvinna". Kvinnorna började bära korta klänningar, klippte håret, drack och rökte offentligt samt intresserade sig för utbildning och politik. Den här nya kvinnan skildras på olika vis i de kvinnliga huvudkaraktärerna Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker och Myrtle Wilson. Men dessa karaktärer fungerar även som representationer av den patriarkala idén om att kvinnor är uppdelade i två kategorier: 'duktig flicka' och 'dålig flicka' beroende på hur väl de följer de traditionella könsrollerna. Genom att diskutera hur Daisy, Jordan och Myrtle är porträtterade som 'duktiga' och 'dåliga' visar uppsatsen hur de 'dåliga' blir bestraffade av patriarkatet genom att bli ofördelaktigt beskrivna av berättaren eller bestraffade socialt i ett samhälle som genomsyras av patriarkala värderingar.

Nyckelord: *traditionella könsroller, stereotyper, Den store Gatsby, nya kvinnor, feminism*

The American dream, class and love are classic themes that always will be mentioned when discussing F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). The novel also demonstrates social change in America after World War I: the economy was strong, and the women's rights movements grew. This resulted in a new type of woman, as women's position in society became less restricted. Young women, in particular, dared to be sexually promiscuous, smoke and drink (Henry and Bergström 372). Maia Samkanashvili states that, because of social changes, a 'New Woman' emerged in the 1920s. Such social changes are often reflected in literary works, Fitzgerald's text is no exception, as the women in his novel portray the ideological changes of the 1920s (Samkanashvili 47).

The New Woman defined by Martha H. Patterson is single, white, affluent, politically and socially progressive, highly educated and athletic (Patterson 27), and she is also a construction associated with the suffragette movement (Patterson 4). Women who embraced the New Woman version of femininity were either viewed as unattractive and intruders on the traditional masculine roles or as independent American girls dedicated to suffrage, progressive reform and sexual freedom (Patterson 2). A negative reaction towards the New Woman came from both men and women; it was considered a rejection of the traditional gender roles and therefore a destruction of society and the conventional family (Tyson 121). These New Women have to be understood in the context of the patriarchal society they, to some degree, rejected. 'Patriarchy' is defined by Merriam-Webster as "control by men of a disproportionately large share of power" ("patriarchy"). John Peck and Martin Coyle describe patriarchy as a set of norms that ensure male dominance and position within the family and women's obedience to men (Peck and Coyle 166). Peck and Coyle highlight two main ideas: the relation between the genders is political and patriarchal relations are based on inequities, as well as the process of conditioning women into accepting the idea of male superiority (Peck and Coyle 166-167). In a patriarchal society, women who follow the traditional gender roles are 'good girls' and if they do not, they are considered 'bad girls' (Tyson 89).

'Good' and 'bad' girls are a common feature in literature. Sarah Appleton Aguiar for instance, writes in *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (2001), that the angel/whore division of women "has plagued female characters for centuries" (Aguiar 14). A good/bad categorization of female characters can be seen in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, which therefore is well suited for a feminist reading.

In *The Great Gatsby*, three versions of New Women are portrayed in Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson. These female characters are portrayed differently but they all violate the norms of patriarchal society in certain ways. Daisy and Jordan are both affluent and socially and politically progressive, while Myrtle is shows progression in social and sexual freedom. This essay argues that the novel reflects traditional gender norms by strengthening stereotypical images of women and categorizing them as 'good girls' and 'bad girls'. However, I argue that the female characters do not have fixed categorizations as 'good' or 'bad', but that they can be placed in on spectrum from 'good' to 'bad'. By using a feminist point of view and focusing on narration and characterization, I show that Daisy is mainly presented as a 'good girl', Myrtle as a 'bad girl' and Jordan as somewhere in-between, although the position of each character varies in the spectrum, depending on the situation. To show how the three female characters represent New Women, how they are considered 'good girls' and 'bad girls', and how the novel enforces patriarchal stereotypes, I first give an overview of the role of narration and the narrator in relation to these aspects before discussing Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle in terms of them being portrayed as 'good' and 'bad' girls.

Monika Fludernik writes in *An Introduction to Narratology* (2009), that the narrator functions as a presenter of the fictional world to the reader. The narrator also explains why events occur and ascribes them to political or social circumstances and conditions (Fludernik 27). Nick in *The Great Gatsby* is a first-person narrator, and naturally there are parts and aspects of the story that are left out if he is not part of them. Nick is the type of narrator that Fludernik describes as an overt narrator. An overt narrator is easily identified and is clearly seen to be telling the story and taking an active part in the story. Such a narrator clearly indicates his/her personal history and gender (Fludernik 21). Nick's gender is also important to note, because the readers are presented with a male perspective of the other characters. As Aguiar writes, female characteristics, positive or negative, perceived by male characters may not be representative interpretations of real women (Aguiar 16). My argument is that Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle are presented as stereotypes in a patriarchal narrative, rather than complex, realistic women.

In addition, a narrator can be unreliable. An unreliable narrator may give a biased picture of 'reality', lie and manipulate the reader and/or reveal him/herself as dishonest. A narrator's reliability can also be doubted when his/her view is restricted

to a first-person perspective that cannot describe characters and events as objectively as an omniscient narrator may (Fludernik 27-28). However, Nick is not a typical unreliable narrator since his story is never revealed as untrue. Neither is the reader presented with another perspective of the story that interferes with Nick's. However, Ansgar Nünning claims that the most obvious signal to suspect a narrator to be an unreliable narrator is when a narrator renders him/herself as reliable (cited in Fludernik 28). One of the first things Nick tries to convey to the reader is that he is reliable and honest. In the beginning of the novel, Nick tells the reader that his dad once told him something that he has been considering ever since: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had'" (Fitzgerald 3). Therefore, Nick is "inclined to reserve all judgements" (Fitzgerald 3) and persuade the reader that he is reliable and honest. Later on, Nick once again feels the need to remind the reader that: "I am one of the few honest people I have ever known" (Fitzgerald 39). If Nünning is right, Nick's claims that he is a reliable narrator undermine his reliability to some extent. Nevertheless, I here argue that Nick reliably represents the novel's patriarchal ideology/ideological biases.

The narrator has more functions than just narrating events. Through the narration the narrator can also function as a moralist or philosopher who expresses commonly valid propositions. However, the main function of an overt narrator is to "arouse the reader's sympathy or antipathy for certain characters and to develop a normative framework for the story world and the reader's reception of it" (Fludernik 27). Considering Nick as the moralist of the novel, he sympathizes with some characters, for example Jay Gatsby. Nick shows his fondness for Gatsby early on when telling the readers that the novel is about him: "Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction— Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him..." (Fitzgerald 3). This illustrates a clear bias Nick has, and that makes him tell the story about Gatsby in a way that benefits Gatsby. Thus, if Nick may sympathize with some characters, he may as well have antipathy to other characters.

Nick has another obvious bias, which I suggest is a dislike of New Women. Hence, one of his functions as a narrator is to produce antipathy for the female characters, as can be seen when analyzing his descriptions of female characters from

a feminist point of view. For example, this happens in his first description of Jordan: “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” (Fitzgerald 9). This illustrates how Nick gives an image of Jordan looking masculine by comparing her appearance to that of a young cadet. Although Jordan’s appearance is fashionable, looking masculine in a culture that is still patriarchal is not always positive. Patriarchy uses a constructed image of women as either feminine with good attributes or as unfeminine without such attributes (Madsen 185). Nick describes Jordan as masculine to question her femininity. Nick also tells the reader that he “heard a story about her” (Fitzgerald 14) which appears to be a scandal about when she was caught cheating in a golf tournament. Tyson argues that Nick does this because he feels threatened by her and because Jordan threatens the patriarchal norms by not being a weak and submissive woman (Tyson 81). Nick’s insecurity is discussed in more detail later in the essay.

As the narrator, Nick represents the novel’s ideology, and this fact is central to my reading. As discussed below, Nick reflects dislike towards women who do not act according to the traditional gender roles given to them by patriarchal society, and this can be seen through his negative descriptions of women as well as the constant battle of power between him and the women who surround him. His narration reflects patriarchal values, and his biased perspective and descriptions can arouse the reader’s antipathy towards Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle, who all reject patriarchal values to some degree.

According to some descriptions of himself, people tend to talk to Nick due to his being an honest, open-minded, quiet and reflective man (Fitzgerald 3). For this reason, he gains Gatsby’s valuable trust and becomes one of the few people who can describe themselves as part of Gatsby’s closest circle. However, when looking at the relationships Nick has with other characters, men as well as women, it becomes evident that Nick has quite a low self-esteem and is himself suppressed by patriarchy. Nick’s low self-esteem is visible in his first encounter with Tom Buchanan. Tom greets Nick on the porch dressed in riding clothes and, as described by Nick, is both powerful and muscular:

He had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner.

Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave

him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body — he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage — a cruel body. (Fitzgerald 6-7).

In this encounter it can be seen that Tom and Nick are not equals. Even though they have studied at Yale together and have known each other for a long time, Tom clearly dominates. In this meeting, Nick imagines Tom thinking “‘Now, don’t think my opinion on these matters is final,’ he seemed to say, ‘just because I’m stronger and more of a man than you are’” (Fitzgerald 7). This illustrates Nick’s insecurity in relation to Tom and Tom’s presence as well as the possibility that he is dominated by Tom. Nick clearly knows what it is like to be dominated, but he in turn undermines the female characters in his descriptions of them, in order to reestablish male dominance.

By categorizing women into traditional gender roles, Nick’s narration, which can be seen as patriarchal, places women into a spectrum with ‘good girls’ at one end and ‘bad girls’ at the other. The definition of a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ girl in this sense is not a denotation of kind or nice versus evil or wicked, and does not describe good or bad behavior or manners. The classification of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ depends on how well the women characters fit into traditional gender roles, obey patriarchal society, and conform to the construction of femininity of the time in which the novel is set. A ‘good’ girl lets herself be used by men while a ‘bad’ girl usually takes herself off the male market. On this spectrum, Daisy is usually at the ‘good girl’ end and Myrtle at the other end, whereas Jordan can be found somewhere in the middle. This categorization of Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle is made by male characters and is particularly clear through Nick’s descriptions of and opinions about the female characters. Nick’s descriptions reflect the novel’s ideological biases.

Daisy is mostly characterized as a ‘good’ girl and most of the time she tries to be one even though she struggles to fit into this role. She is however also the embodiment of a *femme fatale*, a woman “who attracts men by an aura of charm and mystery” (“femme fatale”). Furthermore, Daisy grew up in circles with old money and she is under the pressure to follow society’s expectations of her. She is expected to marry a wealthy man and become a good wife. The pressure makes her unable to wait

for Gatsby; she breaks off their engagement and marries Tom because “she wanted her life shaped now” (Fitzgerald 96). Nick describes Daisy’s decision to marry Tom as a “certain struggle and a certain relief” (Fitzgerald 96). As a result, she is rich, belongs to the upper class, is married to Tom and they are both part of the old money society. According to Monica Bala and Lavinia Nadrag, Daisy embodies the traditional gender role of the submissive, angelic girl and is therefore considered a ‘good’ girl (Bala and Nadrag 1136). However, Daisy is not completely angelic and innocent because she is neither faithful to Tom nor Gatsby.

Daisy reflects the New Woman in her thoughts, but not as much in her actions. She is able to see the patriarchal values and has understood the roles women have to play by. This is illustrated in the scene right after the reader and Nick find out about Tom’s extramarital affair and Nick and Daisy are having a conversation. Daisy says that she is “pretty cynical about everything” and Nick thinks that she “evidently had reason to be” (Fitzgerald 13). Because of this speculation by Nick it sounds at first as if Daisy is only cynical because she knows that her husband is lying to her. However, when Daisy says she hopes her daughter will be “a beautiful little fool” because “that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world” (Fitzgerald 13), it becomes evident that Daisy is not only cynical because of her husband. Her cynicism is due to how patriarchal society treats women and demonstrates that Daisy has realized that she, like all women, is just a pawn in the game. Linda C. Pelzer writes in “Beautiful Fools and Hulking Brutes”(2003) that Daisy’s perspective provides a focus for analyzing gender in the novel. Daisy remarks women’s roles and expectations with her cynical passivity (Pelzer, “Beautiful Fools” 127).

Daisy is just a trophy desired by men so that they can be validated by upper-class society. Daisy and Tom are only married because that is what society expects of them, and neither of them dares to split up completely. Furthermore, Gatsby’s love for Daisy may appear to be real, but Daisy is a desirable trophy to Gatsby as much as she is to Tom. Gatsby’s desire to win Daisy is evident in his description of her as “the first ‘nice’ girl he had ever known” (Fitzgerald 94). Judith Fetterley argues that the quotation marks around the word “nice” imply a reference to Daisy’s social status rather than her personality (Fetterley 74). Therefore, this description of Daisy is an illustration of how her social status is more desirable to Gatsby; he is more interested in what she represents than who she really is. Similarly to Fetterley, Pelzer writes that the best a woman can become in Fitzgerald’s novel, is an embodiment of an ideal, a

-muted object (Pelzer, "Beautiful Fools" 127). As Pelzer notes, Gatsby's vision of Daisy, is exactly to possess "something, some idea of himself perhaps" (Fitzgerald 71) (Pelzer, "Beautiful Fools" 127).

However, Daisy is not only a 'good girl', because she is unfaithful to her husband, even though Tom is unfaithful to her too. Morally, one could consider both of them as equally bad, but it is Daisy who is blamed for his extramarital affair, because men are not considered 'good' or 'bad' for the same reasons as women are in a society that works according to patriarchal norms. According to Madsen, relations within marriage are traditionally seen as positive as they are associated with family and motherhood, however, sexual relations outside marriage are seen as illegitimate (Madsen 196). Daisy balances on the 'good girl' side of the scale, since she gains extra 'good girl' points because she and Tom are the only couple in the novel with a child. On the other hand, Daisy is also unfaithful to Gatsby not just when she breaks their engagement and marries Tom, but also when their relationship is exposed to Tom. As soon as Daisy realizes that Gatsby is not from the well-established background she once thought he was, she returns to Tom's wealth and power. I agree with Pelzer who points to Daisy's crucial passivity as evidence that she relies upon others to care for her. And when Jay is exposed as a fraud by Tom, she returns to the assurance of Tom's money (Pelzer, *Student Companion* 87). Daisy is therefore a 'good girl' because she plays by patriarchal rules and accepts that her status depends on that of her husband.

A vital event in the novel is Myrtle's death, which Daisy is responsible for, but it is Gatsby who is accused and killed by George for it. Therefore, Daisy is indirectly responsible for two people's deaths. Here, Daisy is represented as a 'bad girl' and is punished in the sense that she is pushed back into the traditional 'nice girl' role; she is trapped in an unhappy marriage and rejects whatever could get her on the bad side again. Tyson argues that the narrative makes Daisy's punishment only right and proper: she is stuck in a loveless marriage with Tom and it is relatively certain that he will continue his extramarital affairs and Daisy does not deserve better (Tyson 122).

On the spectrum of good and bad girls, I argue that Jordan is somewhere in the middle, swinging back and forth. However, Tyson writes that patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two types of women – women are either 'good' or 'bad' (Tyson 85). The either/or classification can be seen in the end of the novel when Nick decides what to think of her, which is that she is 'bad'. Jordan in particular resists

social pressure to obey feminine norms and traditional gender roles, because she is a strong independent woman and she is in possession of wealth – without a man. In addition, she is also a professional in a sport dominated by men, golf. She is single and is seen dating a lot of men, and this also characterizes her as a New Woman (Tyson 120). Because of Jordan's denial of the traditional role patriarchy has prearranged for her and the other women in the novel, and Nick's confusion about placing her into either the 'good girl' or 'bad girl' role, I would like to discuss Jordan as an important representative of the impossible in-between position between the 'good' girl and the 'bad' girl extremes in the novel.

According to Fetterley, the relationship between Nick and Jordan is a constant powerplay, and Nick is almost entirely at a disadvantage (Fetterley 87). Both Nick and Jordan come from good backgrounds. Although the readers never learn where and how Jordan lives and how much money she possesses, one knows that Nick lives in a cottage, earns a small wage and is not as highly ranked socially as the Buchanans are. Jordan on the other hand, earns her own money and even though she is not in the top social ranks, she has access to high status society and therefore gains a little on Nick. Fetterley writes that the power struggle starts in the beginning of the novel when they first encounter each other in the Buchanans' house:

The younger of the two was a stranger to me. She [Jordan] was extended at full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless, and with her shin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. If she saw me out of the corner of her eye she gave no hint if it – indeed, I was almost surprised into murmuring an apology for having disturbed her by coming in. (Fitzgerald 7-8)

This excerpt illustrates how Nick almost wants to apologize for existing in Jordan's presence. She gains advantage in their first meeting and keeps it through the rest of the novel (Fetterley 87). Furthermore, the second time Jordan gains advantage to Nick is at Nick's first attendance at one of Jay Gatsby's parties. Nick does not know anyone at the party and stands all by himself when Jordan comes and rescues him:

I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table – the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone. I was on my way to get roaring drunk from sheer embarrassment when Jordan Baker came out of the house... (Fitzgerald 28)

This example illustrates how Nick is embarrassed by being alone at the party so that he “found it necessary to attach myself to someone” (Fitzgerald 28), and how he becomes dependent on Jordan’s presence at the party. He almost feels flattered when everybody knows her name and her status reflects on him. Jordan have figured out, like Daisy, that women can be used as objects for men to be validated in upper class society, and Jordan does not want to be used: “She wasn’t able to endure being at disadvantage” (Fitzgerald 38). Therefore, Nick tries to gain advantage in his relationship to Jordan. Tyson writes that men have the traditional role of being strong and protective (81). Nick and Jordan’s traditional gender roles have been reversed, because at the party Nick is defined by Jordan, when according to traditional values it should be the other way around. Therefore, Nick is tries to bring the patriarchal power back to him by repeatedly describing her as “hard” (Fitzgerald 38, 51) and is attempting to destroy her position and calling her unfeminine. Patterson describes how New Women often were called unattractive, barren and manly, and doomed to be unmarried (27). This can be seen in Nick’s many descriptions of Jordan’s jaunty body and slender muscles (Fitzgerald 9,14, 28, 33, 35, 38, 51).

As previously mentioned, Nick hints that he “heard some story of her too, a critical, unpleasant story, but what it was I had forgotten long ago” (Fitzgerald 14). He later says that he “at first... was flattered to go places with her” (Fitzgerald 38) and then he changes his mind when he remembers the story he heard about her: that she cheated in a golf tournament and later reveals that she had damaged a car and lied about it. Nick then establishes that “She was incurably dishonest” (Fitzgerald 38), but he is trying to preserve his image as being open-minded and tolerant and says, “It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply – I was casually sorry, and then I forgot” (Fitzgerald 38). But Nick does not forget, and he is unsure what to do with his feelings:

Her grey, sun-stained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires...I’d been writing letters once a week and signing them: ‘Love, Nick’, and all I could think of was how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint moustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip. (Fitzgerald 39)

This excerpt illustrates how insecure Nick feels about his relationship with Jordan; he does not know whether he loves her or if he despises her. It is not until the end of the novel that he makes up his mind whether to stay or leave her. And he is still trying to imply that he does not care about her one day when they are talking on the phone and ends their relationship with each other (Fitzgerald 99). When Nick and Jordan have their last meeting, Nick describes how: “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” (Fitzgerald 113). Fetterley argues that this description of Jordan is similar to Nick’s first vision of her, but there is a subtle change in the balance of power between them since the beginning of the novel (89-90). Fetterley also argues, in this passage, that Jordan takes a final advantage by invoking the bad driver metaphor when Jordan tells Nick that she is engaged to another man and he doubts her once again and he thinks she is a liar:

‘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.’ (Fitzgerald 113)

But according to Fetterley, this attempt to win the argument and dominance backfires because Nick gets the last word and implies that in “this charade of deceptions is the ultimate lie” and that Jordan “stoops to the slander of calling him dishonest” (Fetterley 90). Jordan’s punishment for not conforming to gender roles is to be condemned as a liar and cheater and believed to be a spinster. In addition, according to Aguiar, she is a ‘bad girl’ because she refuses to be a “use-value for man”; she establishes her own value and takes herself off the male market when denying her traditional role. Aguiar writes that patriarchy wants the ‘bad girl’ excluded from the patriarchal playground “because she won’t play ‘nice’ with the boys” (Aguiar 32). Jordan takes herself off the male market when she does not want to be dependent on Nick, or any other man for that matter. Jordan plays by her own rules and she is therefore exiled from the patriarchal playground.

Myrtle is the character who threatens patriarchy the most and therefore she receives the most severe punishment as well as the categorization of being a ‘bad girl’ and Daisy’s opposite. Myrtle lives with her husband George in the valley of ashes and belongs to the lower social classes. There are many things that categorize Myrtle as a

'bad girl': her poverty, sexual vitality and the fact that she is unfaithful both to her husband and her lot in life. According to Tyson, it is Myrtle's violation of the patriarchal sexual taboos that makes her a representation of the New Woman (Tyson 120).

Myrtle's poverty is the first traits that categorizes her as bad, because patriarchy reduces women to a social group corresponding to their husbands' social status. If a woman is a housewife like Myrtle, she does not have the same rights and possibilities as her husband does since she has no income or security of their own (Madsen 195). Myrtle is identified with her husband George, who is a car mechanic in the valley of ashes. The valley of ashes, where the Wilsons live above the garage, is described as a "desolate area of land" where the "ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke" (Fitzgerald 16). In addition, George's garage is "unprosperous and bare" (Fitzgerald 17) which illustrates the condition of George and Myrtle's household and finances.

Moreover, Nick often describes Myrtle and her appearance of sexual vitality (Fitzgerald 18,21,44) as almost sexually aggressive: "Then she wet her lips, and without turning around spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse, voice" (Fitzgerald 18), she is also the only woman who is seen having sex (Fitzgerald 20) in the novel. According to Tyson, this sexual appearance is a threat against patriarchy since patriarchy's view of femininity is to be humble, weak and delicate (Tyson 121).

Myrtle represents the New Woman in her social and sexual progressiveness. She is not happy with her social status and desires to climb the social ladder. To become affluent, she has to marry a wealthy man. Therefore, she has an affair with Tom in the hope and belief of being able to move away with him and gain his social status. However, according to Tyson men do not marry 'bad girls', they just sleep with them. A patriarchal male desire is to dominate in both financial and sexual matters. A 'good girl' should not have any needs of her own; she should be self-sacrificing and only serve her family (Tyson 88). Hence, for Myrtle's desire to become something greater is not feminine according to patriarchal values. To become a desirable trophy wife, a woman needs to come from a wealthy family – like Daisy does. Myrtle is not socially desirable, since she is neither from a wealthy family nor does her husband possess wealth.

In addition, Myrtle violates patriarchal values as she challenges marriage as a patriarchal institution. Her affair with Tom threatens both Tom and Daisy's marriage

and her own with Tom. In her relationships with male characters like George and Tom, she does not conform to the traditional values of a 'good' girl. She is not modest, self-sacrificing, and nurturing, and Myrtle is much more dominant than a 'good' wife is expected to be. Myrtle's dominance in her marriage can be seen in this description by Nick: "She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye" (Fitzgerald 18). Nick also describes Myrtle's husband as "his wife's man and not his own" (Fitzgerald 87). Myrtle and George's relation to each other is the reversal of a patriarchal model marriage. George is emotionally dependent on his wife, while she is only financially dependent on him: "He had discovered that Myrtle had some sort of life apart from him in another world, and the shock had made him physically sick" (Fitzgerald 79).

Furthermore, in the relationship between Myrtle and Tom, she, according to patriarchal values, should be subordinate. However, she does not show any signs of being subordinate to Tom in their extramarital affair. Just like Nick and Jordan struggle with each other to be the dominant party, Tom and Myrtle are involved in a power struggle. Tom is superior because he is a man and he is wealthy. Myrtle is the subordinate because she is a woman and of a lower class. Therefore, Tom should have all the power in their relationship. Tom and Myrtle's struggle can be seen in their argument about Daisy in the middle of the night in the apartment in New York. Tom claims Myrtle has no right to mention Daisy's name and when Myrtle shouts Daisy's name several times, Tom hits Myrtle and breaks her nose (Fitzgerald 25). Myrtle dares to rise against Tom, and her unwillingness to be subordinate can also be seen when she talks about her husband who "wasn't fit to lick my [her] shoe" (Fitzgerald 23). Hence, Myrtle does not act the way she is supposed to act according to the patriarchal norms about femaleness. Due to Myrtle violating the patriarchal norms, she is penalized in Nick's descriptions of her. In contrast to Daisy, Myrtle is not described as conventionally beautiful:

She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her flesh sensuously, as some women can. Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crepe-de-chine, contained no facet or gleam of beauty, but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering. (Fitzgerald 17-18)

Instead, Nick describes Myrtle in terms of her sensuality. When she changes clothes, the narration focuses on her sensual body, for example: "She had changed her dress

to brown figured muslin, which stretched tight over her rather wide hips as Tom helped her to the platform in New York” (Fitzgerald 18). Myrtle, unlike Jordan, is putting herself on the male market to be able to get what she wants. Later, her clothing is again in focus:

Mrs Wilson had changed her costume sometime before, and now attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream-coloured chiffon, which gave out a continual rustle as she swept about the room. With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. 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, and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her, until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air. (Fitzgerald 21)

In this excerpt, it is illustrated how the room shrinks while Myrtle’s vitality grows. Similar to Daisy, Myrtle is only described in terms of her physical appearance. However, Daisy is described by men who desire her valuable representation of wealth, and the descriptions of her are therefore almost angelic, while Myrtle is described only in terms of what sexual value she holds for men.

Another way of comparing Daisy and Myrtle is to associate them with fairy tales. Fairy tales can provide good examples of how patriarchal ideology operates (Tyson 84). Daisy, just like a fairy tale princess, is a sweet young girl who is saved from a dreadful condition, in this case from a tiresome life in Louisville, Kentucky. A princess is often “saved” by a prince and thereafter live a wealthy life “happily ever after”. Daisy’s prince is Tom Buchanan who comes from a good aristocratic family. Myrtle share characteristics with the wicked antagonist, of many fairy tales: she is jealous of Daisy (the princess) and wishes to marry Tom (the prince). Tyson writes that the ‘good’ girl is passively waits for the man to come to claim her, while the ‘bad girl’s’ wishes are unattainable because a girl must be pretty to be worthy of a prince’s romantic admiration (Tyson 85). Therefore, Myrtle cannot be Tom’s wife. Tyson points to the fact that patriarchal norms can influence us without our knowledge; fairy tales can impose a norm of femininity as passivity and a girl as only being good enough if she is beautiful (Tyson 85). These old patriarchal norms are reflected in Fitzgerald’s novel as well.

A question a feminist may ask of a text is why female characters must die in order to promote male characters' development, and why female characters must sacrifice themselves for the men to benefit (Madsen 187). Myrtle dies at the end of the novel because patriarchal ideology cannot give her another destiny. Her death can be seen as a reflection of what could happen if these norms are not followed. She has to die to maintain the patriarchal power structure and maintain traditional gender roles. In the following passage, Myrtle has been hit by the yellow car:

Michaelis and this man reached her first, but when they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped a little at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long. (Fitzgerald 88)

Myrtle is not only punished by death. Her body is also physically damaged in places like her breast and mouth; spots that previously have expressed her sexual vitality are now destroyed too. Myrtle is punished because she threatens the patriarchal norms and values of being subordinate and humble.

Daisy is not killed but, like Myrtle, she is also sacrificed. Both of these female characters are sacrificed to benefit Tom and to develop Nick's character. Tom benefits because he does not have to choose between his two women and is excused from a socially awkward situation: that his affair with Myrtle becomes known and Daisy leaves him to be with Gatsby. Nick develops from this scene and finds the people's careless lifestyle on the East Coast appalling: "I'd be damned if I'd go in; I'd had enough of all of them for one day, and suddenly that included Jordan too" (Fitzgerald 91), which results in his move back to Minnesota to seek a quieter life.

In conclusion, Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle are representations of the 1920s New Woman in three different versions. Daisy reflects the New Woman in her way of thinking, because she knows that she and other women are only objects that are needed in their husbands lives. Jordan is considered a New Woman because she is affluent, socially and politically progressive, athletic, and she is not financially dependent on a husband. Myrtle reflects the New Woman in her progressive actions of social and sexual freedom.

The novel categorizes women into traditional gender roles. Through Nick's narration, Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle are considered 'good girls' and 'bad girls'. Daisy,

Jordan and Myrtle are all considered 'bad girls' on different levels because of their violation of patriarchal values, and each female character is punished for her violations. Therefore, they can be placed on a spectrum from 'good' to 'bad.' Daisy is born and raised on the 'good girl' side, but her actions bring her to the 'bad girl' side. She violates the values of trust in marriage and of being a good wife and mother. Her punishment is to be distrusted and stuck in a loveless marriage, but she is taken back to the 'good girl' side when she moves away. Jordan is considered to be somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. She is considered a 'good girl' because she has an acceptable background with a wealthy family. But she is also 'bad' because she intrudes in sport, which usually is a male-dominated area. Because of Jordan's violations of the patriarchal norms, she is punished by being non-desirable to Nick and characterized as arrogant and unemotional. However, Jordan is not completely a 'bad girl'. Since she is not violating martial values by engaging extramarital affairs such as Daisy and Myrtle. Jordan is dating a lot of men, but she is not considered as 'bad' as Myrtle, since she is not showing as much sexual vitality as Myrtle does. In comparison to the other women, Myrtle is the only woman who is considered a 'bad girl' from the beginning of the novel and stays in that position. She is viewed as bad because of her promiscuous vitality and her wish to have more than life has already given her. Nick's dislike towards the New Women is reflected in his narration which reproduces patriarchal values. This essay has shown, with the help of feminist literary theory, how these three characters are oppressed by patriarchal society and how the novel reinforces the patriarchal idea of women as 'good girls' and 'bad girls'.

Works Cited

Primary source:

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. Ed. Guy Reynolds. Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2001.

Secondary sources:

Aguiar, Sarah Appleton. *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2001.

Bala, Monica and Nadrag, Lavinia. "Woman as 'Moon', Man as 'Sun'." *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2014, pp. 1134–1144.

"Femme Fatale". *Merriam-Webster*.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/femme%20fatale>. Accessed 3 August 2018.

Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1978.

"Flapper". *Merriam-Webster*.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flapper>. Accessed 3 May 2019.

Fludernik, Monika. *An Introduction to Narratology*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009.

Henry, Alastair & Bergström, Catharine Walker. *Texts and Events: Cultural Narratives of Britain and the United States*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2001.

Madsen, Deborah L. *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*. Pluto Press, 2000. *Ebsco*.

Patterson, Martha H. *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915*. University of Illinois Press, 2005. *EBSCOhost*.

“Patriarchy”. *Merriam-Webster*.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy>. Accessed 20 March 2019.

Pelzer, Linda C. *Student Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000.

Pelzer, Linda C. “Beautiful Fools and Hulking Brutes: F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925)”. *Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender*, edited by Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003, pp. 127-129.

Peck, John and Coyle, Martin. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. 3. ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012.

Samkanashvili, Maia. “The Role of Women in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.” *Journal in Humanities*; Vol 2, No 1 (2013); 47-48.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2015.