Johanna Svensson
851216-4065
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Supervisor: Eivor Lindstedt

Mr Gatsby's Illusory Greatness

– **How the narrator creates the "something gorgeous" in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby***

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Introduction

Fortune smiles at Mr Jay Gatsby, the main character in F. Scott Fitzgerald's short novel *The Great Gatsby*. At least that is what Fitzgerald wants us to believe. With clever narrative tricks, Gatsby is portrayed as a man who succeeds in all he does. However, at the end of the novel, Gatsby dies a broken man as a result of his failure to reunite with the woman who has been the motivation for his success.

Many factors contribute to the false assumption that Gatsby will succeed in his mission. The choice of narrator, the order in which the events are told and the description of Daisy's relationship to her husband, among other things. However, the most important factor is Carraway's partiality to Mr Gatsby, and how Carraway's feelings towards the characters affect his narrative.

This essay will investigate how the novel is designed to mislead, based on the hypothesis that the reader is deceived by Nick Carraway's way of telling the story.

Creating an Illusion –The Subjective Narrator

The romantic illusion about Jay Gatsby, an illusion which inclines the reader to believe that Gatsby will be successful in all he does, is created by he narrator of the novel, Nick Carraway. He is an observing character who tells the story of Jay Gatsby's fate from a subjective point of view. Thus it may be suggested that the narrative is not reliable, if we consider how shallow his relationship to Gatsby and the other characters is. Carraway moves to Long Island in the midst of the events, thus he cannot possibly know what has happened before his arrival; these events are based on the testimony and statements of other characters. He is not omniscient; therefore he cannot supply the reader with the true thoughts and feelings of the others. The novel is thus pervaded by Mr Carraway's interpretations of what the other characters might think and feel; interpretations often affected by his own feelings towards them. Thomas A. Hanzo suggests that Nick "introduces us to a period of his own life in which he is not entirely blameless and neutral" (Lockridge, 63). Nevertheless, he also claims that Nick "affirms no morality of his own" (Lockridge, 67), a statement which will be discussed below.

Carraway's morality

After Gatsby's murder, Carraway becomes aware that none of Gatsby's friends will attend the funeral, and realizing this he feels that he is "on Gatsby's side, and alone" (170). He recalls some of Gatsby's many houseguests and how one of them "used to sneer most bitterly at Gatsby *on the courage of Gatsby's liquor*" (176, my italics).This is not the first time that Nick comments sarcastically on the guests and their freeloading behaviour: "Gatsby's notoriety, *spread about by the hundreds who had accepted his hospitality and so became authorities upon his past*, had increased all summer until he fell just short of being news" (104, my italics). When one of the most frequent guests, Klipspringer, calls on the day of the funeral only to ask about a pair of shoes that he has left at Gatsby's mansion, Nick cuts him short by hanging up the receiver. It is thus clear that Carraway imposes his moral standards on the reader, wanting us to consider attending a man's parties and enjoying his food and liquor, but not appearing at his funeral a case of bad morals. Carraway has in vain tried to gather Gatsby's friends for the funeral. Even Wolfshiem, Gatsby's business associate, has declined. Nick then states that "[w]hen the butler brought back Wolfshiem's answer I began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all" (172). It may be suggested that it is actually because of a high sense of morality that Nick stays with Gatsby until the end. However, there are signs that indicate that Carraway has a more personal interest in Gatsby and therefore sees it as his obligation.

Carraway's feelings towards Gatsby are highly inconsistent. Even though he claims that he "[...] disapproved of him [Gatsby] from beginning to end" (160), he tells Mr Gatz, Gatsby's father, that he and Gatsby "were close friends" (175). He shows a strong solidarity with Gatsby when he says "I didn't want to go to the city. I wasn't worth a decent stroke of work, but it was more than that –*I didn't want to leave Gatsby*" (160, my italics), and at the end of the novel when he erases the obscene word that had been scrawled on the steps of Gatsby's mansion, it may be implied that he does so in order to protect Gatsby. In the beginning of the novel, Carraway promises that "Gatsby turned out all right at the end" (8). Dan Coleman believes that Carraway's purpose of telling his story is a way of keeping this promise, and that "by the end of this book, he [Carraway] will have us believe that Gatsby really did turn out all right" (Coleman: 62). This assertion refers to Carraway's morality; his intention of keeping a promise. However, the possibility of Nick having a personal interest in Gatsby should not be excluded. Examining Nick's sarcastic comments on Gatsby's houseguests once again, a sense

of solidarity, or rather the defence of a friend can be detected: "[...] I can still read the grey names, and they will give you a better impression than my generalities of *those who accepted Gatsby's hospitality and paid him the subtle tribute of knowing nothing whatever about him*" (67, my italics). Theories on Carraway's interest in Gatsby will be discussed further down.

Creating the "something gorgeous"

As stated earlier, Nick Carraway is not omniscient. He does not possess the power to enter the minds of the other characters, yet he tends to guess at the thoughts and feelings of others, a quality that affects his narrative. As Coleman insightfully suggests, Carraway's narrative may be

> [..] an opportunity for Nick to fill Gatsby's emptiness with lyrical prose, his absence with perfect metaphors, his silence with words for the feelings that Nick imagines his hero must have felt. That is: the novel as a whole might be less about the self that Gatsby creates for the love of Daisy than about the "something gorgeous" that Nick attempts to make out of Gatsby. (Coleman: 72)

Coleman also asserts that "there is something deeply compassionate about Nick's narration" (Coleman:75) and that Nick portrays the characters with sympathy. However, this statement may be contradicted. Throughout the novel, there are signs of Nick Carraway being partial to Gatsby, something that may affect his portrayal of the other characters negatively. This assertion will be discussed further down. As Hanzo suggests,

> [t]he narrator's part complicates the action. We are expected to realize that what we are told comes to us through his peculiar agency, and therefore – to complete an obvious matter – our knowledge of the narrator will establish the limits of our knowledge of the whole action. (Lockridge: 64)

Using Carraway as narrator, Fitzgerald creates a mysterious and glorified notion of Mr Gatsby, which affects the reader's understanding of the novel.

Carraway's judgement

Despite not being omniscient, parts of Carraway's story take place when he is not present. He is then obliged to rely on the testimony of others, as is the case of the period of time after Myrtle's death up until Gatsby's murder. Nick is not present during this episode and must thus base his narrative on the testimony of Michaelis, the man who stayed with Mr Wilson during the night. When Mr Wilson sets out to murder Gatsby, there is no longer a witness who

can confirm the events, so the police assume that Mr Wilson got Gatsby's address by asking around in the garages along the way. The case is dropped and Carraway concludes this part of the story, but not before imposing his own theory:

> The police, on the strength of what he [Wilson] said to Michaelis, that he 'had a way of finding out', supposed that he spent that time going from garage to garage thereabout, inquiring for a yellow car. On the other hand, no garage man who had seen him ever came forward, and perhaps he had an *easier, surer way* of finding out what he wanted to know. (167, my italics)

It is thus clear that Nick was suspicious when he heard the police statement, and his suspicions are confirmed when he sees Tom Buchanan some time after Gatsby's murder. He confronts Tom, and when Tom admits that he was the one who directed Wilson to Gatsby's house Nick realizes that "what he [Tom] had done was, to him, entirely justified." (186). Similarly, Nick is not present at Gatsby's mansion when Gatsby is murdered, yet he manages to give a quite detailed description of the course of events. This time he bases his narrative on the testimony of Gatsby's servants. As opposed to Michaelis' testimony, which Carraway never questions, he seems less convinced by the servants who, Nick is aware, are Wolfshiem's men and therefore not trustworthy:

> The chauffeur – he was one of Wolfshiem's protégés – heard the shots – afterwards he could only say that he hadn't thought anything much about them. I drove from the station directly to Gatsby's house and my rushing anxiously up the front steps was the first thing that alarmed anyone. *But they knew then, I firmly believe.* (168, my italics)

Yet another example of Carraway being obliged to base his narrative on somebody else's words is when he tells the story of Gatsby's past: "The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that [...]" (105). This passage is clearly Nick's own statement, however, there are other passages where it is not as clear who is supplying us with the facts: "[...] Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (155-156). It may be suggested that since Gatsby's story is told by Carraway, Carraway's comments on the story blend with the facts, which results in confusion and makes it difficult for the reader to separate the one from the

other. According to Coleman, "these narratorial comments often occupy a strangely intermediate space - like that of free indirect discourse - in which the narrator, while supposedly telling us about characters from the outside, seems to be speaking from inside them" (Coleman:73). As demonstrated above, even the parts of the story where Carraway has not been present are pervaded by his subjectivity. He uses his judgement to decide on what he finds trustworthy and he imposes his own view on what he is retelling.

Adding to the Mystery – The Rumours

"'[...] they say he's a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's. That's where all his money comes from." (38)

We are continually presented with different speculations on Gatsby. These rumours, it is later revealed, are completely untrue. For instance, at the first party Nick attends, he overhears a conversation between Jordan Baker and two other women. One of them tells Jordan that she had accidentally torn her dress at the last party, and less than a week later Mr Gatsby had replaced it. "'There is something funny about a fellow that'll do a thing like that,' said the other girl eagerly. 'He doesn't want any trouble with *any*body.'" (49). Some people claim he killed a man once, others say that he was a German spy during World War II. Nick explains the curiosity that Mr Gatsby arouses in the following way: "It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from *those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in the world*" (50, my italics). Once again, Carraway comments sarcastically on the houseguests, which may imply his disapproval of them, or perhaps a compulsory need to protect Gatsby. This assertion will be discussed under the heading "Carraway's partiality to Gatsby".

Gatsby is not the only character who is subject to rumours and accusations. In fact, the whole novel is pervaded by rumours, lies and preconceived opinions. For instance, Nick has heard it said that Daisy lowers her voice in order to make people lean toward her (15). Moreover, Tom has obviously misled Myrtle and her sister Catherine into believing that Daisy is a Catholic and therefore will not agree to a divorce:

> ’It’s really his wife that’s keeping them [Tom and Myrtle] apart. She’s a Catholic, and they don’t believe in divorce.’ Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie. (40)

Catherine also seems to believe that neither Tom nor Daisy can stand the person they are married to (39). However, at the end of the novel Tom states that he and Daisy love each other and they end up leaving the East together. This decision may come as a surprise to the reader considering Carraway’s negative portrayal of their relationship.

When he meets Jordan Baker for the first time, Nick asserts that he has heard an “unpleasant story” about her as well (25). It is later revealed that Jordan once cheated in a tournament, and afterwards he describes her as “incurably dishonest” (64). Nonetheless, Nick and Jordan become quite intimate, and there are even hints that they have become lovers. However, this is never confirmed and Carraway’s sexuality remains a mystery throughout the novel. It has even been speculated that he might be homosexual, a theory that will be discussed further down.

The greatness of Gatsby

The rumours strengthen Gatsby’s mysterious image; nobody knows who he is or where he has come from, and people are intrigued. The fact that people take such an enormous interest in Gatsby proves how prominent he has become; that he has, in fact, become *great*, as the title of the novel suggests. Moreover, as Nick himself asserts, the rumours demonstrate how the rich seem to have nothing better to do than to gossip. Daisy is one of the characters who are especially inclined to gossip. She tells Nick over dinner how her butler ruined his nose, working as a silver polisher, and in another episode she murmurs something to Nick about her driver to which Carraway responds “’Does the gasoline affect his nose?’” (92). This ironic response suggests that Carraway objects to the gossiping. Nonetheless, he includes all the rumours about Gatsby in his narrative, which may be his way of demonstrating what a phenomenon Gatsby has become. In doing so, he adds to the mysterious atmosphere. The reader is inclined to believe that Gatsby is untouchable, an illusion which is shattered along with Gatsby’s dreams in the end.

Even though the story is told retrospectively, Carraway chooses to tell it in the order in which the events happened, starting with the evening when he is invited to the Buchanan’s for supper, which is when, according to him, “the history of the summer [...] begins” (11). Only a

few times does he present the reader with clues to what is to come, for instance in his introduction when he states that "it was what preyed on Gatsby [...] that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (8). Accordingly, Carraway possesses all the facts when he starts telling the story. Nonetheless, he maintains the illusion of Gatsby's greatness for quite some time.

Maintaining the Illusion –The order of Events

Nick Carraway moves to Long Island in the spring of 1922, only a few months before Gatsby's death. He is already acquainted with Tom and Daisy Buchanan; he and Tom went to Yale together and Daisy is his second cousin once removed. Mr Gatsby lives next door to him, and they meet for the first time at one of Gatsby's extravagant parties. They quickly become acquainted, because of Mr Gatsby's personal interest in Mr Carraway; his connection to Daisy. We learn that Gatsby has been in love with Daisy for five years and is hoping to reunite with her.

Carraway's power over the narrative

As stated earlier, Carraway wants to create a mysterious atmosphere and, apart from including the rumours in his narrative, he does so by revealing the course of events gradually. It is, as is shown above, implied in the beginning that something will eventually happen to Gatsby, but what that is Nick cleverly avoids revealing. For instance, while observing Gatsby's behaviour one evening, Carraway emphasizes a detail that may not seem important to the reader at the time:

> [...] – he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single *green light*, minute and far away, that might have been the end of the dock. (28, my italics)

It is later revealed that the green light shows where Daisy Buchanan resides, and this is what provokes the trembling mentioned. However, no explanations are given at this point, and the reader is left only to assume that Gatsby is concealing something. As the story continues, Nick continually presents us with further evidence that there is something suspicious about

Gatsby, for instance, as mentioned earlier, by revealing all the rumours that circulate about him.

In 1922, most of the events that lead to the climax of the novel have already happened. Gatsby and Daisy have had their love affair, Daisy has entered a seemingly unhappy marriage with Tom and Gatsby has risen from nowhere and become rich and powerful. It may be suggested that the unstable situation of *The Great Gatsby* is that Carraway, a stranger, moves to Long Island; a stranger who will eventually become the glue that holds all the pieces together. Carraway then tells the story chronologically up to the point where one day a reporter knocks on Gatsby's door. One of the rumours about Mr Gatsby has apparently interested the reporter so much that he has gone to Gatsby's house on his day off in order to get a comment. At this point, Gatsby and Daisy have rekindled their love affair and things seem to be going well. Carraway then reveals some parts of Gatsby's past; how James Gatz became Jay Gatsby, in order to give the reader a clearer idea of him: "He told me all this very much later, but *I've put it down here* with the idea of exploding those first wild rumours about his antecedents, which weren't even faintly true" (108, my italics). This quote demonstrates Carraway's power over the narrative.

Gatsby's delusion

Henceforth, Carraway gradually presents the reader with clues to Mr Gatsby's past, and we learn more about Gatsby's relationship with Daisy. On the night of the party which Daisy and Tom attended, Gatsby tells Nick his side of the story. Gatsby's story is then told to the reader through Carraway. However, these retrospects are based on Gatsby's understanding of the antecedents, and their reliability may therefore be questioned. It may be suggested that Gatsby is deluded throughout the novel and therefore his testimony cannot be relied upon. Apart from the fact that Daisy actually stays with Tom in the end, and sets off with him without leaving a message, Gatsby's stubborn conviction that the past can be repeated is one of many qualities that demonstrate Gatsby's delusion; "'Can't repeat the past?' he cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!' [...] 'I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before,' [...] 'She'll see.'" (117).

The story continues in chronological order until it reaches its climax, on the day that is described as the warmest of the summer. Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Jordan and Nick are having lunch together at the Buchanans' when they suddenly decide to go to the city. It is Daisy who

suggests it; however, it is not until Tom realizes what is going on between his wife and Gatsby that the plan is carried out. They all get a room at the Plaza Hotel, and it is here that Tom confronts Gatsby:

> 'What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house anyhow?'
> They were out in the open and Gatsby was content. (136)

The assertion that "Gatsby was content" serves as further proof of Gatsby's delusion; at this point he is convinced that Daisy wants to leave Tom. However, Daisy seems to have changed her mind: "'I've got something to tell *you*, old sport – ' began Gatsby. But Daisy guessed at his intention. 'Please don't!' she interrupted helplessly. 'Please let's all go home. Why don't we all go home?'" (136). It is here that we realize that Gatsby's money comes from shady business; Tom has done some research and it is revealed that Gatsby has bought some drugstores together with Wolfshiem and sold grain alcohol over the counter. No explanations are given at this point, and we see how Gatsby's courage sinks as his hopes and dreams are destroyed. Nick observes that Gatsby looks as if he had "killed a man" (141). With great confidence, Tom then lets Daisy ride home in Gatsby's car. He has penetrated Gatsby's façade, and realized that Jay Gatsby will be no threat to him.

The climax is one of the few passages of the novel where Carraway does not impose his own thoughts and theories. It is being reported as a conversation between Tom, Gatsby and Daisy to which Nick and Jordan are witnesses. Only at the end does the narrator interfere: "only the dead dream [Gatsby's dream] fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice [Daisy's voice] across the room" (141).

Solving the puzzle

The falling action after the climax is then told in chronological order, through Michaelis' testimony of the accident and later through Gatsby's confession about his past, which is given to the reader by Carraway. It is here that we are presented with an explanation to why Daisy married Tom: "She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand. That force took shape in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan" (157). Nevertheless, this explanation is given by Gatsby and presented to us through Nick who, as

examples have shown, cannot be entirely relied upon. It is thus uncertain what "force" it really was that drove Daisy into her marriage with Tom.

Finally, at the end of the novel it is revealed how Wilson had found Gatsby. It is the last piece of the puzzle and Carraway has waited until the very last pages of his narrative to reveal it. At this point we also learn that Tom is still under the misconception that Gatsby was the driver of the car: "'He ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car.'" (186). Carraway then draws the conclusion that Tom and Daisy were careless people who "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made..." (186). It may be suggested that Nick Carraway feels this way about rich people in general since he, for instance, on one occasion claims never to have approved of Gatsby either (160). However, this statement is more personal, and once again we get a notion of Nick's partiality to Gatsby. Jay Gatsby is the martyr of Nick's story, and the Buchanans are the culprits.

Why Fitzgerald chose a narrator like Nick Carraway, a stranger, is a matter worth speculating on. Nevertheless, it is precisely this decision that makes the story so exciting; the process of putting the pieces together and eventually solving the mystery that is Gatsby.

Carraway's unreliable self-description

Being the sole narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway is able to choose freely what to reveal about himself, the events, and the other characters. On the very first page of the novel he states that he is "inclined to reserve all judgements" (7). However, a few lines down he admits that "after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on". (7-8). The reader is thus informed that Carraway, though he might be inclined not to judge, is just a man and will at some point form opinions which he will impose on the reader through his narrative.

Carraway's prejudices

Carraway tends to make racist remarks, a tendency which contradicts his claim of not being prejudiced. He describes Wolfshiem as "A small flat-nosed Jew" (75), and puts emphasis on his Jewish accent when quoting him: "'I understand you're looking for a business *gonnegtion*.'" (77, my italics). Moreover, he seems to find it surprising that a white man would be working for black people when he says:

> As we crossed Blackwell's Island a limousine passed us, driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry. 'Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge,' I thought; 'anything at all...' (75)

Nevertheless, he describes Wolfshiem's secretary as a "lovely Jewess" (176), a key fact that might contradict this theory. However, it cannot be ignored that he seems to have prejudices which show that he is not free from judgements.

Carraway's secret love life

Many critics, when reading this novel, have come to the conclusion that Nick Carraway feels a homosexual attraction to Jay Gatsby. Throughout the novel there can be found evidence that strengthen the theory of Nick being homosexual. For instance, when he joins Tom Buchanan and his mistress Myrtle at a party in their city apartment, he is introduced to a man named McKee, a "pale, feminine man" (36). Mr McKee is a photographer and married to a woman who seems to be so taken with herself that, if we are to assume that Mr McKee is homosexual, she would be oblivious of this fact. Carraway portrays Mr McKee as a man who takes little interest in his wife, which for instance shows when she suggests he take a photograph of Mrs Wilson's sister: "'Chester, I think you could do something with *her'*, she broke out, but Mr McKee only nodded in a bored way, and turned his attention to Tom" (39). They all drink, and afterwards Nick admits to have been quite drunk. At the end of the chapter he gives a blurry description of the events. Mr McKee has suggested he come to lunch someday, and Nick has accepted. Then there is a blank where Nick does not inform the reader what happens, and all of a sudden they are alone in Mr McKee's bedroom:

> "...I was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands. [...] Then I was lying half asleep in the cold lower level of the

> Pennsylvania Station, staring at the morning *Tribune*, and waiting for the four o'clock train" (44)

Lois Tyson insists that, apart from these more explicit passages, a "queer" reading of the novel can be justified if we consider symbols and subtext as well, for instance Gatsby's pink suit, or his "extravagantly feminine" possessions (Tyson: 348-349). She also states that "Nick's attraction to Jordan seems to have a homoerotic dimension because of his fixation on her boyish appearance" (Tyson: 348).

Nick is never outspoken about his sexuality, thus it remains a mystery. It is suggested that he has had some relationships with women, for instance, a rumour has reached Tom and Daisy that Nick was engaged before he came to the East. However, this turns out to be false. It is also suggested that he is romantically involved with Jordan Baker, but this is never confirmed. According to Hanzo, Jordan's "unconcern for any standards beyond those of a frank self-indulgence is evidence enough that the two have become lovers" (Lockridge, 64). Nonetheless, the fact that Nick Carraway is secretive of his love life leads to the assumption that he might conceal other facts, hence he might not be as honest as he claims to be: "Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (66). Thus, the evidence that contradicts Carraway's self-description as an honest and unprejudiced man may lead to the conclusion that Carraway is not reliable. If we cannot trust Nick to give us a reliable description of himself, how can we trust him to give a just portrayal of the other characters? Moreover, if we assume that Carraway in fact feels a homoerotic attraction to Gatsby, would it not be justified to presume that Nick Carraway is partial to Jay Gatsby throughout his story? These questions will be discussed below.

Carraway's partiality to Gatsby

Having reached the conclusion that Mr Carraway may not be a reliable narrator, it is natural to assume that the other characters might be unjustly portrayed by him. Nick seems to be quite impressed by Mr Gatsby and gives descriptions of him such as:

> Something in his leisurely movements and secure position of his feet upon the lawn suggested that it was Mr Gatsby himself, come out to determine what share was his of our local heavens. (27)

Even though Carraway builds up suspense in the novel by not revealing all at once, one of the first things he says about Gatsby is that there was "something gorgeous about him" (8). Nick changes his opinion of Gatsby many times throughout the course of events, however, this is his first statement, and thus it inclines the reader to believe in the greatness of Gatsby. In addition, the assertion is made retrospectively, which further proves Nick's true feelings. As stated earlier, Coleman suggests that creating the "something gorgeous" may be what the whole novel is really about. Carraway seems to be inclined to glorifying Gatsby, which will be demonstrated below.

Gatsby and Daisy

Carraway portrays Daisy as very unhappy in her marriage with Tom. He describes her as a victim, caught in her own misery. "Her face was sad and lovely" (15), he says. He then refers to her voice as a "singing compulsion" (15), something that will be discussed further down. He clearly feels that Daisy should leave Tom, however, at an early stage he realizes that "there were no such intentions in her head" (27). These personal opinions of Nick's should not be forgotten when considering how he portrays Daisy's relationship to Gatsby. When Daisy leaves Gatsby's party, Carraway gives the reader his guess at Daisy's thoughts:

> What was it up there in the song that seemed to be calling her back inside? What would happen now in the dim, incalculable hours? Perhaps some unbelievable guest would arrive, a person infinitely rare and to be marvelled at, some authentically radiant young girl who with one fresh glance at Gatsby, one moment of magical encounter, would blot out those five years of unwavering devotion. (116)

Carraway suggests that Daisy is jealous which inclines the reader to believe that Daisy loves Gatsby and will leave Tom without hesitation. It is therefore difficult to understand why she decides to stay with Tom who, according to the narrator, mistreats her horribly. Perhaps Tom and Daisy were not as unhappy together as Nick Carraway would have us believing.

Gatsby – a liar and a cheater?

As a reader, it is difficult to ignore the narrator's preference for one character. Nevertheless, it is possible to pay closer attention to the details that are not affected by Mr Carraway's personal opinion, for instance Mr Gatsby's own statements.

> 'I am the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West –all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition.' (71)

In order to execute his plan to reunite with Daisy, Gatsby obviously feels that it is important to give an explanation to who he is. However, we soon realize that his explanation is untrue, which per se suggests that Gatsby is a shady character. He continues his story by revealing that something very sad happened to him long ago, referring to Daisy, and sums up by saying: "'I didn't want you to think I was just some nobody'" (73). In order to verify his story, he carries evidence; a medallion from the war and a photograph from Oxford. The fact that he carries these items with him indicates that he is eager to project a false image of himself, which in itself supports the theory of his shadiness. However, it may also suggest that Gatsby is merely trying to conceal his past, since he is ashamed of his origin and wants to project himself as someone of importance. Money plays an important role in this novel, and Gatsby is aware of the fact that money was what stood between him and Daisy. Thus, Gatsby wants to meet with Daisy at Nick's so that she can "see his [Gatsby's] house" (85), in other words; see what he has become.

Nick Carraway sympathizes with Gatsby, and this is especially clear when he says to him at the end of the novel: "They [Tom, Daisy and Jordan]'re a rotten crowd. You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (160). If we consider Coleman's assertion that there is something "deeply compassionate" about Carraway's narration once again, we may find it to be true with regard to Gatsby. Nonetheless, the other characters do not seem to be given the same benefit of a doubt by the narrator. Mr Gatsby appears as a quite sympathetic character, even though he lies and cheats. It is natural to assume that the narrator is responsible for this portrayal and thus we may conclude that Nick Carraway is partial to Gatsby.

Carraway's disapproval of Tom

Due to the rivalry between Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, Nick's relationship with Tom should be examined in order to substantiate the narrator's partiality to Gatsby. It is obvious that Nick Carraway dislikes Tom Buchanan. He describes him as:

> [...], one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savours of anti-climax [...]. Now he [Tom] 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. [...] It was a body capable of enormous leverage – a cruel body. His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked – and there were men in New Haven who had hated his guts. (12-13)

As a reader, you are inclined to feel what the narrator feels. However, can we rely on how Carraway describes Tom?

Understanding the story by ignoring the narrator

If we cannot trust the narrator to present us with the truth about the characters, we have to consider other possibilities, for instance by focusing on the passages which do not contain Carraway's comments on the events. All the rumours about Mr Gatsby are good examples of this. Moreover, Nick's mere observations may serve as a tool for us to understand the characters of the novel.

At the dinner party with the Buchanan's, Nick observes Tom's behaviour. Tom is dismissive towards Daisy and interrupts her several times. Moreover, he shows a strong racist attitude when he starts discussing a book at the dinner table; "'[...] it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved. [...] It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things.'" (19) He also seems to suggest that Daisy does not belong to this 'superior race'; "'This idea is that we're Nordics. I am, and you are, and you are, and –' After *an infinitesimal hesitation* he included Daisy with a slight nod [...]" (20, my italics). In addition, he shows his wife little respect by taking

Myrtle's phone call in the middle of the dinner party and, on top of everything he is not even discrete about his mistress:

> The fact that he had one [a mistress] was insisted upon wherever he was known. His acquaintances resented the fact that he turned up in popular cafés with her and, leaving her at a table, sauntered about, chatting with whomsoever he knew. (30)

Nevertheless, when Myrtle disrespects Daisy he puts a fast end to it: "'Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!' shouted Mrs Wilson. 'I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai –' Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand" (43). Furthermore, when Tom is confronted by Gatsby he claims that Daisy loves him. "'And what's more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time.'" (138).

Tom Buchanan does not appear to be a pleasant man, even when ignoring the narrator's comments on him. However, it is suggested that he and Daisy share a bond that Carraway does not understand: "They weren't happy [...] – and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said they were conspiring together" (152). Tom's claim that he loves Daisy should not be dismissed; when faced with the danger of losing her, Tom gets panic-stricken, and only when he feels that she is returning to him is he able to collect himself fully. He talks to her with a "husky tenderness" (139) in his voice and he even promises to take better care of her from that moment on. Daisy seems to soften during the confrontation. It may be suggested that this was what Tom and Daisy needed; to get everything out in the open and so get a chance to start over.

Whether Daisy stays with Tom because of love, money, or some other "force", it is difficult to say. Nick certainly does not give the reader a satisfactory explanation, perhaps because he does not know himself. However, he seems to suggest that money plays an important role in her decision. A recurring thing in Carraway's description of Daisy is her voice. He cannot seem to find the right words to explain the curiosity of it. Gatsby then suggests something which strikes Nick: "That was it. I'd never understood it before. It [Daisy's voice] was full of *money* –that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl..." (126, my italics).

Whether this is the case or not is open to speculations, but what we do know is that Daisy did not choose Gatsby. Consequently, the romantic illusion that Carraway has created is shattered and Gatsby's failure becomes a fact.

Conclusion

Fitzgerald's choice of narrator in *The Great Gatsby* is what fundamentally makes the story interesting. Carraway is a character with many conflicting qualities, and his complicated personality affects the narrative even though he makes an effort to be honest. He imposes his morality on some issues, glorifies Mr Gatsby and judges the rest of the characters in spite of his claim that he is "inclined not to judge". He deliberately creates a mysterious illusion in order to justify his portrayal of Gatsby as someone "great", and he supports Gatsby's delusion by imposing his commentaries on the other characters' thoughts and feelings.

There is evidence that indicates that Nick Carraway is not as trustworthy as he wants to project himself, and this evidence can be found in his self-description. Considering the fact that the narrator may not be telling the whole truth, the novel takes a new twist. Perhaps Gatsby was not so great, after all?

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