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1. ABSTRACT

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* proves that the narration is the main element of literature, being both constructive and reflective. The novel mainly represents Fitzgerald's conflicting feelings and thoughts about Jazz Era and American Dream. These confusions reach the reader through the changing points of view and distinct speaking styles of the narrator Nick Carraway. This essay focuses on the oppositions of Nick's narration style by asking:

How do the narrator's, Nick Carraway, changing points of view and distinct speaking styles affect the reader in the way of perceiving the events in the novel "The Great Gatsby"?

These contradictory styles are examined in terms of overrated depictions of the environment, narration of the two deaths and the disparity between the first and the last chapters. Nick is evaluated both as a character and the narrator of the novel.

The essay concludes that Nick's incompatible narration throughout the novel does not confuse the reader's mind. Although the novel's heading indicates that Gatsby is the main character, as a secondary character Nick strengthens his position by his narration as his unbalanced narration is the only thing that helps the reader to understand the main emotions and affections.

2. THE ESSAY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The art of literature, consists of a story which is told by a narrator who can reflect this story well. The other factors that form the general structure of the novel change according to those two elements, because “the story” and “the narrator” form the base of the novel and they are unforsakeable, as the narrator is the most important figure of the novel, being located at the center of the events. Without the narrator, it is impossible to narrate the events and present the important characters to the reader because the narrator is the main element of literature, being both constructive and reflective. Narration is present in every kind of literary device even in the daily speaking style of the people. The writer uses time and setting for a particular purpose and narrates the events to intensify the background of the novel. In literature, determining the position of the narrator is as important as determining the typology. As the narrator cannot be thought separately from the story, its point of view plays an important role. Sometimes the writer may also include his/her confusions and they approach the reader through the changing points of view and distinct speaking styles of the narrator. The reflections of those confusions affect the understanding and perception of the events.

In his novel *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald finds himself in a society which materialism sets the tone and he sees through the moral emptiness and hypocrisy. *The Great Gatsby* represents Fitzgerald’s conflicting feelings about Jazz Era. Although he finds this new lifestyle seductive and exciting and idolises the very rich, he is unhappy. This side of F. Scott Fitzgerald is represented by Gatsby, and the other side is represented by Nick Carraway, being a quiet, reflective man and also the narrator of the story. The novel can be best described as a narration of a series of events as viewed by Nick, who is an important figure in the novel. The reader should not only judge Nick as the narrator, but also as one of the central figures of the novel. He is not only narrating the story but also implying that he is the book’s author. He narrates events as they appear to him at an exact time, and also in some sections he reveals his own interpretations and the motivations of the other characters. The process of portraying all events and establishment of the moral norms make the story dramatic, along with the sense of romantism. Nick plays an important role on making decisions about the characters of the novel. Nick’s character cannot be looked upon in the same manner as he always has different perceptions and distinct speaking styles, causing the reader to evaluate him as dishonest and hypocritical. He has a strong inner conflict which does not resolve until

the end of the book. This situation affects the reader about perceiving the series of events because everyting learned is presented to the reader through the medium of Nick's consciousness, reflecting the understanding of the world for Nick. The novel, inspite of the fact that it is based on the life of Gatsby, is actually the journey of understanding and illumination for Nick, as he perceives events differently and from a wider window, when compared to his perceptions and attitudes at the beginning. In this essay I will examine the effect of Nick's changing attitudes on reader's perception.

2.2 NICK AS A NARRATOR

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's main innovation is to introduce a first person narrator and protagonist whose consciousness filters the events of the story. It is not the main protagonist, Gatsby, who recounts his own story but a secondary character, Nick Carraway, who is successively suspicious wary and fascinated by Gatsby. Nick, uses his logical mind to come up with a definite story which is a result of words that have been filtered by different minds. He also uses his critical judgement to form an opinion not only on the events but on himself about the way he narrates. Throughout the novel, Nick has two functions: seeing and acting. The seeing action creates an extra mystery instead of providing information as he cannot be really sure of what he has been told. Also, there is a lot more in Gatsby's life than Nick's eyes can see. His actions are contradictory because of his thoughts and observations. As Nick is a romantic, uncorrupted and unmaterialistic character, he has difficulties to see what is behind the obvious actions.

Throughout the novel, Nick tries to narrate the society and the events. Nick himself seems to enjoy the parties and the times that are only spent on entertainment. However, he is actually aware of the corruption of the society. There are contradictions in not only the events he narrates but also in his own personality. He really acts to the outside world as if he was really happy but the reader knows that throughout the whole novel, there is not a certain time that Nick can be described to be in "real happiness". "*I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness.*"¹ As the quotation proves, actually he misses a life that is only made up from peace, love and trust. However in the world that he lives in, there is no such a thing and he knows it well. As Nick does not get carried away by the corruption in the society, he actually represents the modernism and everything reflects postmodernism except Gatsby. Everything is changing under the name of "American Dream" but the people are not actually ready for it and after a very short time period, materialism starts to set the tone of the society. With materialism, importance of real emotions and relationships are forgotten and instead of them, the shallow and meaningless relationships become irreplaceable. Nick is a person that gives more

¹ Fitzgerald,S. p 63

importance to emotions than thoughts. Because of that, at certain times, he feels lonely and desperate: “ *at the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes.*”² Among all of the people, Gatsby is the only one that Nick feels really close to and because of that, while narrating the story, he uses his objectivity very well, but only in the events that are related to Gatsby, this objectivity is greatly weakened as he perceives Gatsby as “the man of emotions” and he tries to protect him like a biologist as if trying to protect the last member of a species. After the death of Gatsby, he continues to be the only person who really cares about Gatsby and he shows that wonderfully while narrating his death; in contradiction with Mrytle’s. As a result of his great affection to Gatsby, he narrates events in a biased and confusing way.

2.3 OVERRATED DEPICTIONS OF ENVIRONMENT

As a narrator, Nick always gives importance to senses and descriptions of the environment, not explaining the relationships between characters. At the beginning of the book, Nick says:” *I was rather literary in college and now I was going to bring all such things into my life*”,³ indicating his desire to be a writer. Nick almost always describes the characters only physically, especially Tom Buchanan, his cousin Daisy’s husband: “*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.*”⁴ By this explanation and all the other similar descriptions throughout the novel, the reader perceives Tom only as a physical creature, forgetting that he also has emotions. His narrating style changes according to characters as he gives too much importance to tangibility. The similar problem can also be seen while Nick is narrating the parties at Gatsby’s house: “*The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter...and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other’s names.*”⁵ The outside descriptions sound really materialistic, being a reflector of the society’s priorities and also making connotations of the American Dream in reader’s mind. People are pretending to enjoy this empty and apathetic life. Nick’s style appeals to all senses deliberately but he forgets to balance the

³ Fitzgerald, S. p 10

⁴ Fitzgerald, S. p 13

⁵ Fitzgerald, S. p 46

emotional and visual side of literature. Once he says that *he does not want ritous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart*⁶ and throughout the novel he only breaks this rule for Gatsby. Loneliness, alienation and moral emptiness are ruling in the society and by not reflecting the emotions of the characters, Nick reflects this reality well but also he confuses the reader's mind by giving too much importance to environmental and physical depictions.

2.4 NARRATION OF DEATHS

Nick's distinct speaking styles especially show themselves obviously while he is narrating the two deaths of the novel: one is Myrtle's, the woman whose life is certainly destroyed by Tom Buchanan, and the other is Gatsby's; the man that has everything except happiness and whose dreams about Daisy Buchanan lead his life to destruction. To start with Myrtle's death, it is described as *"her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick dark blood with the dust."*⁷ Nick conveys this scene in a very detailed and physical way as if Myrtle is only a flesh; not a human having emotions and sensations, continuing as *"..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. Her 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."*⁸ Like everything in this scene, also Tom's reaction is physical even to death of his mistress: *"'Wreck!' said Tom. That's good. Wilson'll have a little business at last."*⁹ He seems to be really self-centered when he sees that there is a serious accident. Myrtle has two men in her life; Tom and her husband George Wilson. George really loves her and Tom uses her but she loves neither. Both her relationships with Tom and with George do not contain love from her side, so this scene is described too physically by Nick. However, the narration in Gatsby's death is highly different from the one in Myrtle's. The depictions are poetic and indicate a calm atmosphere. Before his death, he waits a phone call from his love, Daisy, that never comes. Then Gatsby is murdered by George; for revenge. However, Gatsby is not the one that deserves this act of revenge; it is Daisy. Gatsby takes all the responsibility to protect her and he dies because of his love, because of Daisy. In spite of Myrtle, Gatsby builds his own life around his love so he is an emotional man. Nick explains

⁶ Fitzgerald, S. p. 8

⁷ Fitzgerald, S. p. 144

⁸ Fitzgerald, S. p. 144

⁹ Fitzgerald, S. p. 144

this as ” ... *he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living to long with a single dream ... A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about .. like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees.*”¹⁰ Nick thinks about Gatsby, just before his death. They found him in pool and Nick describes this as: “*There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other ... a small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden.*”¹¹ These quotations reflect the deep respect to Gatsby who has emotions, thoughts and dreams, in contradiction with the rest of the society. Water has very strong meanings, as it symbolises calmness, peace and softness. The body is not described and with the strong meanings that water provides, the reader perceives the scene in a holy way. Nick even describes blood as “*The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of transit, a thin red circle in the water*”¹². The main difference between these two deaths is their perceptions of the life. Myrtle is not really different from the rest of the society; but her husband George thinks differently, not so materialistic as Myrtle. So Myrtle finds the cure in the arms of Tom and he uses her. However, all the richness in Gatsby’s life is only for one purpose: to fulfill Daisy’s wishes to reach her. “*The only inhabitant of West Egg not to enjoy Jay Gatsby’s legendary parties is Jay Gatsby*”, the back cover of the book writes. The only aim of Gatsby’s life is Daisy, but he learns too lately that money cannot buy happiness. Among all of the people who are focused on wealth but not emotions, love or all the other values that should belong to a human being; Gatsby is very different as he uses his addiction to wealth only to reach the woman she loves, so he is still highly aware of the power of love. As a result of these facts, as his life, Gatsby’s death should also be more different and special from a woman like Myrtle.

2.5 DISPARITY BETWEEN THE NARRATION STYLES IN THE FIRST AND LAST CHAPTERS

Besides those differences in the descriptions of the deaths, Nick’s narrating style and point of view in the first chapter also show disparities from the last chapter. Nick starts the book by explaining his relationship with his father, which is then resulted in *his inclination to reserve all judgements*¹³. Because of this, Nick can continue unaffected by what he has heard about

¹⁰ S. Fitzgerald, p. 168

¹¹ S. Fitzgerald, p. 169

¹² S. Fitzgerald, p. 169

¹³ S. Fitzgerald, p 7

Gatsby-if he believed it, he would have never given Gatsby a fair chance. He continues explaining his life and family; but from his words, the reader understands that his mind is too confused and he does not know what he wants from his life: ***“most of the confidences were unsought- frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; for the intimate revelations of young men.”***¹⁴ He describes the events happening around him only physically, at the beginning, and the first person that he depicts is Tom Buchanan, who is looked upon by means of a physical creature. He says that he wants to be a writer but immediately in the first chapter, he proves that he is not suitable for being a writer. His life includes lots of contradictions and he does not feel peace. As he moves on and meets people, especially after he meets Gatsby, he learns to criticise and interpret more emotionally and thoughtfully. Although Gatsby represents almost all of the addictions that Nick does not like (especially money and ostentation) he still likes him and this makes Nick wiser and more understanding. As the events move on, the novel is actually turns into a journey of self-understanding of Nick. Nick in the first chapter is really different from who he is in the last chapter. This transformation is obvious in the last chapter as the phraseology is poetic, reflecting that he is at the end of his confusions. He finally learns to be mature and thoughtful but also he is full of sorrow. He now starts to balance his writing style. ***“Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams.”***¹⁵ With Gatsby’s death, Nick is made aware of the bareness and sterility of the East, of a world that is ‘material without being real’. Nick’s process of initiation ends with his realization that his fascination for a gleaming, dazzling East was unfounded. After his death, Nick can only hear imaginary music and laughter: ***“I spent my Saturday nights in New York because those gleaming, dazzling parties of his were with me so vividly that I could still hear the music and laughter.”***¹⁶ When other characters spread to wind after his death, Nick stays, makes all arrangements and makes sure that Gatsby is not alone. The only genuine affection in the novel is shown by Nick towards Gatsby. Nick is in love with Gatsby’s capacity to dream and ability to live as if the dreams will come true. Through the novel, Nick grows; from a man dreaming of a fortune, to a man who knows only too well what misery a fortune can bring; and he reflects this to the reader by the changing narrating styles from the beginning till the end.

¹⁴ S. Fitzgerald, p. 7

¹⁵ S. Fitzgerald, p.187

¹⁶ S. Fitzgerald, p.187

2.6 CONCLUSION

Nick's first person narration allows the reader to realize the composition of the novel providing the sense of discovery, as detached fragments of narration is present throughout the novel. Through physical observations made by Nick, the reader only understands the general gist and the norms of the society. Emotional depth is not shown directly by Nick, which arouses confusions in the reader's mind. The downfall of the American Dream is reflected by materialism having a commanding influence over society.

Nick, as a character, not only narrates the events but also plays an important role in the flow of the novel. In the beginning of the novel, the reader understands that Nick is so bewildered about his not fully resolved past and expectations about his future. He says that he wants to be a writer and so he starts to narrate the events in the West Egg not only as a narrator but also as one of the central figures in the novel. Narrators do not have to be objective but still they have to use a balanced form of narration which includes both physical and emotional analysis of the characters and events. He forms a real emotional connection with Gatsby who is the only person that is worth this according to him. Therefore, he cannot act and narrate in an unbiased way especially about Gatsby.

In this extended essay, Nick's changing points of view and incompatible speaking styles are examined with their effects on the reader. These contradictory styles are inspected in terms of the overrated depictions of the environment, narration of the two deaths and the disparity between the narration in the first and the last chapters. Because of these inconsistent descriptions, Nick is mainly evaluated as "prejudiced" and "not trustworthy" by some critics. However, these are essential factors for Nick to identify with himself and discover his soul. Although the main protagonist is Gatsby, the reader witnesses the progress in Nick's maturity level as well. Jay Gatsby, after all, does not change throughout the novel and remains as a stable character until the very end when he finally understands that his hopes about Daisy are not beyond a deceptive conception. On the other hand, Nick goes through the different stages of self-understanding and gaining insight as he narrates the events in West Egg, which makes him a dynamic character. This increased level of self-awareness slowly opens a channel of sensitivity and emotions in a materialistic world. Nick, who has an aimless existence in the beginning of the novel, gradually turns into a man that questions the society, himself and his purpose in the life. In this respect, his acquaintance with Gatsby plays a vital role. With Gatsby's death, Nick's understanding of life and his self awareness reach the highest point. Such a journey of self-understanding for Nick is very confusing and

full of consecutive fascinations and realizations in a highly corrupted society. It can be said that at the beginning, as it is obvious from his unclear narration, he is about to be a man having a desire to make fortune. However, after he moves on West Egg and meets Gatsby, he starts to look upon the world through a different aspect and in the very end, he narrates the events in a poetic way.

He resolves all the contradictions within himself and in this process, the reflection of those conflicts as well as resolutions on the reader is natural as the reader understands the main emotions and affections from those conflicts and their resolutions.

Narrator himself is a dynamic character and he examines the same person or the same event in a different aspect after some time. This does not decline the understanding or confuse the reader proving that the unbalanced narration is the main factor that attracts the reader. The duality of Nick's role in the novel is a clear indication of the importance of him in the development of the novel.

3. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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