
Is Nick Carraway an Appropriate Narrator for *The Great Gatsby*?

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Despite the negative reception and reviews when it was first published, *The Great Gatsby* is now considered a classic of American fiction and part of Modern literature. Fitzgerald (1896-1940) was an American writer and novelist, who wrote *The Great Gatsby*, his most famous novel, during the Roaring Twenties in the United States, which he described thoroughly in his works, and to which he gave the name of the "Jazz Age". Fitzgerald's work was criticised for many reasons when it was first published, but one of the many points of discussion that has been brought up was the role of the narrator of the story. In the novel, apart from the main character of Jay Gatsby, we are presented with Nick Carraway, Gatsby's neighbour and narrator of the story. The figure of Nick has provoked much controversy among literary analyses, whether his position as a narrator is reliable or not, or even, whether his figure is an important one or if he could have been omitted as a character. Therefore, an important question arises, that is, if the real reader, and not the implied reader, is influenced to have certain beliefs and likes or dislikes towards certain characters and events of the story because of the emotional and moral content, which can be purely subjective, that Nick provides.

Inside the narration, there are different levels and certain kinds of relations between the narrator and the fictional world. It is following these criteria that Nick is often considered a Sympathetic Observer because not only does he present the world and provides an explanation to the reader for characters' attitudes and actions, but also gives moral content:

Nick Carraway is a snob. He dislikes people in general and denigrates them in particular. He dodges emotional commitments. Neither his ethical code nor his behavior is exemplary: propriety rather than morality guides him. He is not entirely honest about himself and frequently misunderstands others. (Donaldson, 2010, p. 157)

He should be an ethically superior narrator who is not involved in the problems created by the characters, and who does not pass judgement towards others, but rather has sympathy. However, as the story advances, Nick grows more and more judgmental of the characters and believes that he has the power to moralise about them. The story is told to the reader through Nick's mind, and therefore, the reader is conditioned to understand it under the influence of Nick's ideas and opinions. He normally expresses himself through the use of humour, sarcasm, irony, and even, deprecating language. He uses charged language that can totally influence the opinion of others.

The passage "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." (Fitzgerald, 1925/1950, p. 13) clearly presents a negative description of Tom Buchanan, which is in fact the sole impression of Nick. It is true, however, that Tom is a character that was designed to be hated by most readers; nevertheless, this is a passage that works unfavourably for Tom. On the contrary, the reader would much more likely feel inclined to love a character who is described in the following way:

He smiled understandingly (...) I was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that may come across four or five times in life. It faced (...) the whole eternal world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favour. (Fitzgerald, 1925/1950, p. 54)

This description of Jay Gatsby is full of positively charged language, and is obvious that Nick's first impression of him influences his opinion throughout the rest of the story and the reader's attitude towards him. The reader would clearly feel sympathy towards a person who treats others in the same way that Nick is treated, and the way in which Nick describes this certain person.

It is apparent then that Nick narrates the story from his personal point of view and, his perspective, which should be much more impersonal at his position of narrator, is influenced by his own emotions, concepts, and moral standards. At the same time, Fitzgerald manages to make him a reliable narrator that is not completely committed to the development of the story. Nick offers a version of the events presented on an offside version of what happened to the actual main characters.

Nevertheless, as readers, it is necessary to remember that Nick is a character who represents a human being, a man in full flesh and bone, and therefore, it means that he is flawed. As human beings, we cannot avoid perceiving and understanding a situation or person under our own personal view and, therefore, express our judgement about it in that way. Although the narration of the story might be biased on occasions, it is interesting to see how the author found a way to introduce a character that expresses what the reader might feel about the story and its characters, and at the same time, he helps the reader understand the events.

After all, personally, I feel that Nick is an important part of the story and a great narrator. The novel would not have been the same without him because he provides the complete version of the story and gives the reader a more profound understanding of the character's attitudes and feelings. He offers a version of an outsider, but at the same time, that version is full of meaningful messages and opinions that can be useful to understand everything. He provides a personal touch to the narration and it is very interesting to see how it develops throughout the story.

References

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- Donaldson, S. (2010). The Trouble with Nick: Reading Gatsby Closely. Bloom, H. (Ed.), *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretation. F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*. Troy NY. Infobase Publishing.