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Sample Argumentative Essay on The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* is celebrated for many good reasons. More than just offering a glimpse into the life of a bygone era, the novel is also a deep examination of the values that defined a crucial stage in modern American history. Much has already been written about this work, from literary essays on the moral corruption in *The Great Gatsby* and character analysis essays to research papers on the influences it has had on American literature. But while a great deal of attention is paid to Jay Gatsby, less is given to Nick Carraway, despite the latter being the narrator of the story. Readers also often come to assume that Carraway is presenting the plain truth, especially since the perspectives of other characters are not given. But while there is no doubt that Nick Carraway is a charming, intimate, and entertaining narrator, his recollection of the plot should not be considered as objective. Important considerations such as inconsistencies in his manner, his deep attraction to Gatsby, and the rumor-filled nature of his world should prompt any reader to consider him as an unreliable narrator.

One of the reasons why Carraway should be considered an unreliable narrator is the inconsistencies in his manner. In particular, he sometimes tends to contradict himself. For example, Carraway knows from the very start that Gatsby is not being completely truthful about his background. During one of their initial encounters, Gatsby describes the charmed life he supposedly led in the past—a lie which Carraway easily sees through: “With an effort, I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter. The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked

no image except that of a turbaned 'character' leaking sawdust at every pore" (Fitzgerald 72). Yet despite knowing that Gatsby is lying, Carraway still drifts towards him and eventually becomes Gatsby's closest friend and confidante. In the scene in the Plaza Hotel, Carraway appears to extol Gatsby as an honest man: "I wanted to get up and slap him on the back. I had one of those renewals of complete faith in him that I'd experienced before" (Fitzgerald 135). The changes in Carraway's manner, especially towards Gatsby, suggest that he is not completely objective in his narration.

This is not to say that Carraway is being deliberately untruthful; rather, it could be he, himself, is not aware of the contradictions inherent in his attitudes and actions. Carraway is convinced of his own honesty, but belief in one's honesty does not guarantee honesty itself. For this reason, Carraway should not be considered as an objective authority of the events of that summer, even if he exhibits earnestness and sincerity in his telling of the story.

Apart from contradicting himself, Carraway can also be considered unreliable on account of being deeply entranced by Gatsby. While the life and death of Jay Gatsby is the center of the novel, the story is nevertheless told from Carraway's point of view. This fact alone already indicates that the story could easily be skewed, colored as it is by Carraway's perspective. But there is more to support this assumption than just the first-person point of view. Carraway is drawn towards Gatsby. From the very beginning, the narrator already has this to say about Gatsby: "there was something gorgeous about him [Gatsby], some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life...it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again" (Fitzgerald 8). Carraway's attraction to Gatsby makes him sympathetic, which means that his opinion is likely more positive than an objective examination of Gatsby's character would yield. Indeed, there is some speculation that Carraway's attraction goes beyond mere friendship, and that he might be harboring romantic

feelings towards Gatsby (Olear; Giunta). Regardless of the nature of Carraway's fascination with Gatsby, what is certain is the inherent bias in the way Gatsby is portrayed.

Finally, Carraway should also be considered unreliable for the reason that the world they inhabit is rife with rumors. A great deal of what Carraway shares with the reader are details and stories passed around social circles. For instance, Gatsby alone is already the subject of so many rumors, from being a relative of the Kaiser to having killed a man once. Being at the center of important events in the novel, Carraway serves as a conduit for such rumors. But it is noteworthy that he rarely attempts to verify any of the rumors he hears. The same is true for Jordan Baker, who presumably knows the history between Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan. The reader, however, is made to believe that these details should be taken as true for lack of credible authority. As there is no way of knowing whether any of these rumors are true, the prudent position that the reader can take is to consider them as merely that: rumors. Given the nature of the world Carraway moves in and his lack of effort in verifying these, he should ultimately be considered as to some degree an unreliable source.

That F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the most famous American authors should be enough to ensure that his novel will live on as one of the greats of Western literature. In this novel, Fitzgerald offers an intimate look into life in the 1920s and an examination of the values that dominated this era. Yet beyond serving as a social commentary, *The Great Gatsby* is also notable for the richness of its characters. True to the motif of duplicity, though, Nick Carraway emerges as an unreliable character, even though he views himself as an honest man. It is not only that Carraway's manner has contradictions and that his view of the story is partial to Gatsby, but the very world in which he lives is one where rumors are an inextricable part of existence. For these reasons, Carraway

cannot be considered as an unquestionable authority on the events that transpire in the novel but rather a compromise that the reader has no choice but to make.

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