

Fitzgerald is occupied with the notion of illusion and reality essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Great Gatsby's extensive and frequent references to illusion and reality mirror Fitzgerald's concerns. Illusion, by dictionary definition, is 'The condition of being deceived by a false perception or belief', the opposite of reality which is 'The totality of all things possessing actuality, existence, or essence'. These were extremely important in the jazz age of the 1920's because many traditions and laws were ignored, creating an illusion of freedom and prosperity. Fitzgerald expresses his concern for this notion in many ways.

Fitzgerald uses Nick as a narrator to convey his own ideas about illusion and reality. He is a perceptive narrator who although faced with many illusions of people's characters he sees the reality for what it is, such as when he became friendly with Gatsby but insisted that he disapproved of him from beginning to end" because he saw through the illusion of Gatsby as a person. Also we know that Tom and Nick had been good friends in college but Nick readily admits the reality of Tom and Daisy as being careless and selfish people.

As a reader of the novella, we are under the illusion that we meet the characters as Nick tells us and learn about them as he does, but the reality is that Nick is talking after the summer is over, he is telling the story backwards. Therefore he knows the outcome of the story before we do. "After two years, I still remember". This illusion is created so that we trust and agree with his initial evaluations of character, therefore feeling closer to Nick and adopting his attitudes and feelings towards characters.

Illusion and reality are also expressed through symbolism in the novella. Colour is used symbolically to try to make characters seem to be what they are not, and covering up the reality of who they are. For example, when we first meet Daisy and Jordan were “both in white” symbolising purity and innocence. This illusion is used to cover up the truth of the person inside : we later find out Jordan is a cheat and Daisy is an adulterer and murderer The critic Daniel J Schneider picks up in this, “ Except in Gatsby's extravagant imagination, the white does not exist pure: it is invariably stained by the money”. Another example is when Gatsby dresses up in gold and silver clothing to make himself appear rich, successful and wealthy, which he is, yet he is not as he appears to be because he is morally corrupt.

The broken clock on the mantelpiece of Nick's home is also important, symbolising the theme of time. Later in the novella Nick tells Gatsby “ You can't repeat the past” to which Gatsby replies “ Of course you can”. Here Gatsby is under the illusion that if he becomes what Daisy wants then he can ‘ turn the clock back’ to when Daisy was in love with him. The reality is that this simply cannot happen, Daisy is now a married woman with a young daughter, yet Gatsby's “ love” for Daisy is so strong he cannot see this.

Another significant symbol is the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. This symbolises Gatsby's love for Daisy and he stands and stares at it every night, to feel close to her. Green means hope, in this example it means Gatsby's hope for Daisy. Daisy is the corrupted ideal, even Gatsby can see that she is not as pure and sweet as he would like her to be, when he says “

Her voice is full of money” yet this reality is overthrown by the illusion he sees as love between them.

The marriage between Fitzgerald himself and his wife Zelda is paralleled with Gatsby and Daisy. In the novel ‘Zelda Fitzgerald’ he is quoted “All the time I was idealizing her to the last possibility, I was perfectly conscious that she was about the faultiest girl I’d ever met” and he readily admits “She was selfish, conceited and uncontrolled”. This shows how Fitzgerald also was aware of the reality of Zelda, yet her illusion had him captivated, and how he saw his faults with this through Gatsby.

To Gatsby, Daisy is his goal, much like the Holy Grail and the strive for her keeps him aiming high in life. This heroic way of seeing Gatsby shows us the reality of life’s need for hope. Something solid and secure to aim for. Gatsby’s reality of needing this goal reflects our need for something to dream for. This is Fitzgeralds way of speaking to the audience through Gatsby.

Society in the novella also portrays reality and illusion by talking about gentlemen. In the eyes of society, as he has the upbringing, money and education, Tom would be seen as more getlemanlike yet he is rude, which is shown at Myrtle’s gathering when he “yawned audibly” as Mrs McKee was talking. He has a lack of manners and respect that Gatsby is quick to express, although Gatsby is corrupt and involved in the black market. It is difficult to understand who is the illusion and who is the reality here, as

gentlemen can be defined either as wealthy and well brought up or polite and well-mannered.

The theme of the American Dream seems to be an illusion in the novella. It is desperately sought after, Wilson worked very hard to get him and Myrtle away from the Valley of Ashes but it was out of reach. It was too hard to achieve this goal. The reality of the American Dream is that it is actually an illusion. Myrtle also tries to achieve an American Dream by having an affair with Tom, she likes to think she can better herself and so tries to create the illusion of wealth and prosperity at her gathering by “ implying that a dozen chefs awaited her orders” in the kitchen. However, reality is shown when Tom breaks her nose, letting her know that this life is very far from the perfect dream she had imagined for herself.

Illusion and reality as an idea is widely used throughout the whole novel, even at the end when the description of Gatsby's death creates a fantasy illusion. “ Poor ghosts breathing dreams like air”. They are emphasised at the beginning of the novel, whilst describing the juxtaposition of parties in the first three chapters. First we see the reality of wealth and success at the gathering at Tom and Daisy's home, the house is described as very extravagant “ french windows, glowing now with reflected gold”.

Then we see Myrtle and Tom's apartment where it is only the illusion of prosperity that is given, such as when Myrtle puts on an extravagant dress and exclaims “ its just a crazy old thing”. Then, we see Gatsby's party which is reality in the way that he is rich and spends a lot of money on his

extravagant parties, but they are an illusion because he only has money through corrupt ways which would have been frowned upon by most rich people. People at this party are not naturally rich they are “ new money” such as actresses and celebrities. When Tom and Daisy come to a party at Gatsby’s house later in the novella, they notice the reality straight away.

Gatsby deliberately presents the illusion of popularity by holding huge parties. The reality is, he is only holding them in the vain hope that Daisy might come to one. He does not care at all about anybody else coming, just her. Also, the reality of these “ new money” people is that they use Gatsby to go to his parties, but when it really mattered – at his funeral – not one of them turned up. This shows how no matter what happens, you cannot ‘ buy’ friends, perhaps reflecting on how shallow Daisy is if Gatsby can ‘ buy’ her affections.

Illusion and reality is expressed in the parallels between the characters. Both Myrtle and Gatsby strive for something better, to better themselves in the eyes of the world. This is a mere illusion for Myrtle, she experiences it briefly but not fully, whereas Gatsby took his fantasy and made it a reality. In this way, Myrtle is perceived as a weak character and Gatsby is seen the total opposite, which is why he is seen as more of a hero than anyone else throughout the novella. Myrtle is also paralleled with Daisy. They are both drawn to the illusion of wealth and money. For Myrtle it means aspiring to be with Tom, Tom is Daisy’s reality but Daisy aspires to be with Gatsby.

Fitzgerald also uses synesthesia to describe the houses and parties, in order to create a magical illusion. When Gatsby is telling his and Daisy's story, he says it in a dream-like trance and describes it to be beautiful and perfect, with a "rose-coloured" aura which does not sound like reality at all, it enhances the idea of Gatsby believing illusions.

Fitzgerald, when writing *The Great Gatsby*, seems intrigued by the paradox of illusion and reality. They intertwine, characters such as Gatsby relived illusion so many times he believed it to be reality. Perhaps this is how Fitzgerald wanted his own life to be, during his life he always aspired to be successful but the dream - the illusion of what he wanted to become - never became reality. Perhaps the most meaningful quote of the novella, this reflects the idea of dreams being magical and mystical - yet totally unattainable.