

"the great gatsby": a
critical evaluation of
dialogue and
narration essay
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“ The Great Gatsby”: A Critical evaluation of dialogue and narration Essay Sample

Throughout “ The Great Gatsby” there are many different forms of narration and dialogue. Barbara Hochman takes these narrating voices into account in her essay, “ Disembodied voices and narrating bodies in ‘ The Great Gatsby’.” Throughout her writing she gives thorough explanations of each of the major characters dialogues and how they relate to one another, as well as focusing on one of the main characters and narrator of the novel, Nick. Dan Coleman also provides sufficient information on dealing with the dialogue of the novel in essay, “ Tuning in to Conversation in the Novel: Gatsby and the Dynamics of Dialogue.” Coleman further breaks down the dialogue and addresses the relationship between another two of the novels main characters, Tom and Daisy. The two relate to one another fairly well, agreeing on some of the major points about the novel. There is some disagreement between them though and this, as well as their similarities will be discussed in content that follows.

Hochman begins her writing first, by breaking down the writing style of Fitzgerald. She believes that unlike in his other novels, Fitzgerald takes a more cautious and skeptical approach in “ The Great Gatsby”. By using the main character Nick as the narrator, Fitzgerald is able to jump in and out of conversation, while having Nick break down each one. Allowing Nick to become involved in conversation provides face-to-face narration and gives the reader another perspective on the development of Nick himself, as well as the characters he is interacting with. Hochman believes this to be true as “ Nick’s wish to separate voice from body can be related both to his

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motivation for the his story in writing and to the functions, for Fitzgerald, of employing the figure of Nick as his own primary narrating presence in this book" (4).

" Storytelling voices" is the next thing that Hochman addresses. All throughout the novel Nick is very responsive to the sound of speaking voices, particularly Gatsby and Daisy. On one occasion Nick, Gatsby and Daisy are all in conversation. Gatsby tells Daisy that her " voice is full of money" (4). This sends Nick's mind spinning. This creates a " capacity of wonder" that later shows up in his narrative voice as he elaborates on the relationship of Gatsby and Daisy. (4) On another occasion, Daisy and Nick are in conversation and Daisy's voice is described by Nick as a " wild tonic in the rain" (5). Nick is befuddled by the sound of her voice and in some instances, is left speechless. All of this interpretation and misinterpretation on Nick's part clarifies what kind of narrative point of view he takes. (6)

Although Nick makes a connection with all of the major characters throughout the novel, there is no better connection made than with that of Gatsby. Nick becomes Gatsby's confidant and with this is the change in Nick's emotions, as well as the way he narrates the novel. As Hochman puts it, " Nick is necessarily a listener to and observer of Gatsby before he is a narrator. Before he can tell Gatsby's story, Nick suspends and enters Gatsby's world, accepting his terms of discourse... It is precisely by articulating both his faith and his doubt about Gatsby that Nick becomes a model for the reader in addition to being a writer and storyteller" (9). As Gatsby's mood and character changes throughout the novel so does Nick's view of him, thus affecting the reader's perspective. Gatsby's " radiant and <https://assignbuster.com/the-great-gatsby-a-critical-evaluation-of-dialogue-and-narration-essay-sample/>

understanding smile" is the sole characteristic about him that allows Nick to fade in and out of his loyalty and love for Gatsby.

In the final confrontation between Nick and Gatsby, Nick is left in awe as Gatsby flashes his compassionate smile towards Nick after hearing him say, " You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." This gives both characters complete renewal of faith throughout the rest of the novel and assures Nick's loyalty to Gatsby (11). In another particular instance, Gatsby explains to Nick how he " lived like a young rajah in all the capital of Europe- Paris, Venice, Rome-collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game, painting a little, things for myself only, and trying to forget something very sad that happened to me long ago." With this, Hochman describes Nick as being disappointed in that he sees the " failure of Gatsby's rhetorical power" (10).

In narration, Nick gives his understanding of what it was that Gatsby was trying to convey when he says, " Gatsby's very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned ' character' leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne" (10). This criticism makes perfect sense from the readers perspective because Nick has expected more of Gatsby, not necessarily and an extremely honest person, but at least a storyteller.

The essay by Coleman focuses firstly on language, dialogue, and how the two combined have been shut out by solely tuning in to the narrative voice. With the use of the opinions of other critics, he explains how most critical evaluations focus on either the language and dialogue, or the narrative

voice, but never link the two together. Fitzgerald himself offers an invitation to reconsider the critical method in saying, " There was never a good biography of a good novelist. There couldn't be. He is too many people if he's any good" (2). With this Fitzgerald is implying that there is not only one author behind a good novel, and there cannot be just one narrative voice within that novel. This is exactly what Fitzgerald is trying to do with " The Great Gatsby".

By speaking through Nick to narrate, and having him engage in conversation, Fitzgerald creates more than one narrative voice. By doing this, he is able to use what a character says to create him/her (3). In support of this, Coleman states that " In conversation, we use our words like fencers use their foils—as means by which to do things to each other in ways laid out by the rules of the game. Moreover, just as players reveal themselves by their playing styles, speakers distinguish themselves by how they behave in conversation—not by the things they typically say, but by the moves they tend to make in dialogue with other characters" (4). An example of this is when comparing the dialogue of Daisy, to a conversation between Tom and Myrtle.

One story that becomes recurrent for Daisy is one of the butler and " how he got his nose". She uses this story not to inform her companions of anything in particular, but as a conversation piece to engage in " her enthusiastic whispering" from which she gains all her pride and joy. (6) On the opposition, Tom speaks to Myrtle simply with the intent of communicating his desires as he says, " I want to see you. Get on the next train. I'll meet you by the news-stand on the lower level" (6). The three previous sentences are all spoken
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with a point and have no intention of misleading Myrtle. By the use of different approaches to dialogue with the individual characters, it is shown here how Tom's character is quite the demanding type as Daisy continues to come off as the gossipy spoiled brat who hasn't a clue of her husband's whereabouts (7).

Like Hochman, Coleman believes the way Gatsby carries himself and the dialogue he uses has a lasting effect on the way Nick narrates. He makes a reference to Gatsby's comment, [Speaking of Daisy] " Her voice is full of money" (19). This statement turned on the little light bulb inside Nick's head and helped him to realize what it was about Daisy's voice that he had spent so much time dwelling on throughout the novel thus far. As Coleman puts it, " Nick transmutes the ' money' in Gatsby's direct speech into a narrator's ' golden' girl" (19). All throughout the novel it becomes apparent that Nick dwells on the words and ways of Gatsby. As in the essay of Hochman, Coleman also makes a reference to the small speech by Gatsby on his excursion through " all the capitals of Europe" (19). In contrast though, Coleman offers a different perspective on what Nick gathered from the situation. He believes that Gatsby's story lacking in " storytelling quality" is an opportunity for Nick to " fill in Gatsby's emptiness with lyrical prose, his absence with perfect metaphors, and his silence with words for the feelings that Nick imagines his hero must have felt" (20). In short, the image that Gatsby creates for Nick is not as fairytale-like as Nick had once thought it to be.

Nick's narration as a result of his interaction with the other characters is something that Hochman and Coleman both not only focus on, but agree on. <https://assignbuster.com/the-great-gatsby-a-critical-evaluation-of-dialogue-and-narration-essay-sample/>

As shown above, having Nick narrate the book and function as a speaking character allows the reader to get in touch with Nick as well as the entire novel in an entirely different manner than in other novels of the time.

Throughout her essay, Hochman broke down the individual conversations of some of the major characters. Coleman too did this, but in a manner approached from the perspective of Nick. Basing his essay mainly around Nick narrating and source of information from the book, Coleman's essay goes deeper into the actual narrative conversation that takes place.

In Conclusion, there has been sufficient information provided that shows how Fitzgerald intended for there to be two types of narration throughout "The Great Gatsby". Having said that, I believe that Hochman and Coleman are quite right in their descriptions of the dialogue and narration. The use of quotes taken directly from the text compared and contrasted with one another shows how each character, through his/her interaction with Nick, was molded by what was said in conversation. Narration plays a huge role in all novels, but in Fitzgerald's novel, the narration and dialogue are what makes it a timeless classic.

Reference:

Coleman, Dan. "Tuning in to Conversation in the Novel: Gatsby and the Dynamics of Dialogue". Literature Resource Center. 10/30/2003. Copyright 2000 Northern Illinois University.

Hochman, Barbara. "Disembodied voices and narrating bodies in 'The Great Gatsby'." Literature Resource Center. 11/5/2003. Copyright 1994 Northern Illinois University.

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