

How effective is nick carraways first person narrative technique in the great gat...

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Priya Parmar How effective is Nick Carraway's first person narrative technique in *The Great Gatsby*? Nick Carraway is an impartial narrator, however not a passive one. Nick Carraway's first person viewpoint is effective as it allows the reader on the one hand to see how the narrative is being constructed and, on the other hand, to participate in Nick's sense of discovery as the story unfolds.

We see things from Nick's point of view therefore see the action firsthand as he is always present as the story is untold or has the story told to him as it unfolds therefore he knows all that there is to know at any point in the book, and follow this up with him. We see things through Nick's eyes and hear his judgements. We also trust him and believe he is a trustworthy narrator. From the beginning he says 'I'm one of the few honest people I know.' So we trust him automatically. He becomes our eyes and ears therefore we have to see him as reliable if we are to proceed with the story's development.

This is the first sign that we can trust this narrator to give us an even handed insight to the story that is about to unfold. He also says 'I am inclined to reserve all judgements.' He shows himself to be very judgemental and partial. This tells us that he is not totally trustworthy and cannot have an effective narrative technique due to him being biased. For example he does not think that it is right for Jordan Baker to cheat in a golf game, but overlooks the shady business dealings associations with organised crime and speakeasies of Jay Gatsby.

He is also associated with Meyer Wolfsheimer, rumoured to have fixed the World Series in 1919. He also talks about a murder, and to think that Gatsby

is his friend makes him look bad in the novel proving he is not as clean as thought to be. Surely Gatsby's bootlegging business is far worse than Jordan Baker cheating in a game of golf, yet he calls Gatsby 'The Great Gatsby' making him the eponymous character. Due to the fact that the first person narrative is limited in perspective, some of the facts that we hear from Nick may have been distorted or even lies.

For example, one day Nick drags himself along to Myrtle's apartment in New York. While he is there, he gets drunk. In this book we don't really think for ourselves as we become Nick and only see things from his perspective. The narrator can position us to like or dislike certain characters. Gatsby is trying to steal someone's wife and was into bootlegging yet we like him because Nick regards him highly. Nick sets out to immediately secure the trust of the reader. He insists that unlike the other characters he has a 'sense of the fundamental decencies'.

By implying that he is the ideal person to be telling the story, the narrator persuades the reader to believe that he or she will be hearing the impartial version of the events. Nick however betrays the reader's trust. He makes judgements about events and chooses to respond to characters differently. The story is also told in retrospect-almost a year after the events of summer took place. This allows the narrator to look back on the events and make public judgement about Gatsby and the main characters even before the story starts.

It is through Nick's eyes and ears that we form our opinions of the other characters. Anyone would say it is wrong to have an affair but due to the fact that Nick thinks highly of Gatsby and talks about him passionately we empathise with him for going after Daisy, a married woman with a child. There isn't much of a gap between the author and the reader as the reader becomes the author. Nick is well suited to narrating *The Great Gatsby* because of his temperament. He says that he is tolerant, open minded, quiet, and a good listener.

As a result of this people tell him secrets and talk to him therefore he always knows what's going on which helps develop the plot and seeing as we see things from his point of view we are also told the information as it comes. He becomes close to Gatsby himself, making the plot easier for us to understand and allowing us to get closer to Gatsby's thoughts and learn more about his past and his motives for trying to get with Daisy. Gatsby treats Nick as a confidant so we are told things said straight from Gatsby's mouth instead of people talking about him like in the first three chapters where we only learn what is said by others talking of him.

In the first chapter Nick talks about himself. He says that he is from a prominent Midwestern family and graduated from Yale. This tells us that he is a reliable, intelligent and respected person. Automatically we respect him and believe that he will be a reliable narrator. The fact that he fought in the war makes him more respectable and people usually gain respect when they fight for their country. Nick is extremely quick in falling in love with Jordan

Baker. As soon as he sees her he says that he loves her and this crush continues every time he sees her.

This tells us that he gives judgements too quickly without knowing the person and simply went for her looks, making him narrow minded and maybe not so much of a reliable and trustworthy narrator. In conclusion we can see that there would probably be a more fair view of the world in the novel if it was narrated in the third person. This would allow us an insight into the thoughts of the characters that we cannot gain as the novel stands now. Nick plays such an important role in the book and we have little alternative but to accept his version of events. The reader will therefore inherit Nick's response to the characters and Nick's only.

We still are not able to get inside Gatsby's head to see why is still hung up over Daisy and how he got so rich. He is a bit of a mysterious character. If a small passage or a few chapters were written in Gatsbys point of view we would gain an insight as to what his motives are and why he has all these house parties but is disconnected from the world. He is an illusionist who lives in a fantasy world and focuses on the past and builds his whole life around Daisy but without her. He organises parties to meet her and when she finally is in his life he acts a bit rude and cold i. when she goes to his house for the first time.

He also talks passionately about a kiss they had in the past but fails to realise that it is the past and believes that the past can repeat itself. Is we could see things from Gatsby's point of view, it would be clearer for us to

understand why he does what he does and what is he is feeling. After all the book is named after him but we don't find out too much about him personally. A third person narrative technique would be better in telling us the viewpoints and thoughts of all the main characters.