

1-1-2013

# Why We Believe Nick Carraway: Narrative Reliability & American Identity in *The Great Gatsby*

Taylor S. Murtaugh  
*Trinity College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/trinitypapers>

 Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Murtaugh, Taylor S., "Why We Believe Nick Carraway: Narrative Reliability & American Identity in *The Great Gatsby*". *The Trinity Papers* (2013).

Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, CT. <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/trinitypapers/22>

# Why We Believe Nick Carraway: Narrative Reliability & American Identity in *The Great Gatsby*

---

Taylor S. Murtaugh

As *The Great Gatsby* secured its place in the American canon, Nick Carraway's narration of the American dream found its way into countless high school classrooms. Although many modern critics today consider Carraway an unreliable narrator, the book is commonly taught emphasizing his reliability. This pedagogical approach seems at first to be in bad faith. An investigation of the specific nature of Carraway's narration and the place of *Gatsby* in the American canon suggests a pedagogical justification for what might otherwise seem a wrongheaded approach. When teaching *Gatsby* as a literary text it may be best to underline Nick Carraway's unreliable narration; but the best approach to teaching the book as a critique of the American dream may be to reinstate Carraway as a trustworthy guide.

Interestingly enough, F. Scott Fitzgerald does not seem to have intended any unreliability in the story's narration. Fitzgerald's letters to his editor, Max Perkins, concerning *The Great Gatsby* contain no indication of Carraway's unreliability. Max Perkins writes, "You adopted exactly the right method of telling it, that of employing a narrator who is more of a spectator than an actor: this puts the reader upon a point of observation on a higher level than that on which the characters stand and at a distance that gives perspective" (Fitzgerald & Perkins, 82). Perkins is convinced by Carraway's narration and believes him to give the reader the greatest insight possible into the story and its characters. Moreover, criticism of *The Great Gatsby* at the time of publication does not hint at Carraway's unreliability. Until 1966, critics like E. Fred Carlisle, who calls Carraway "mature" and "informed" saw Carraway as reliable (Carlisle, 351).

## HISTORY OF UNRELIABILITY

Carraway's untrustworthiness entered into literary criticism in the 1960s. The acceptance of a reliable Carraway at the time of publication falls under the definition of unreliability as explained and understood by Wayne Booth thirty years after publication. Booth, an American literary critic, defines unreliability as a narrator "at a distance" "who is presented as if he "spoke *throughout* for the norms of the book" but "does not in fact do so" and instead "pretends to qualities which the author denies him." (Booth, 182-183). Max

Perkins would have agreed with Booth's definition of unreliability if he had known it. Neither Perkins nor Booth however equates the "distance" seen within Carraway's narration with unreliability, but instead with a heightened objective description of the story. Both editor and critic, then, view Carraway as trustworthy as they believe he aligns with Fitzgerald's intentions and the "norms" he sets up within the novel. And yet, the unreliability of Carraway to the modern reader can primarily be attributed, to the development and acceptance of Booth's definition of unreliable narration. The definition is not simply of a narrator who flat out lies, but a narrator who is placed at a "distance," circumvents the "norms," and whose actions conflict with their narration.

Relying on Booth's definition, critics initially ascribed Carraway's narration to authorial mishap or intent. Gary Scrimgeour in *Against the Great Gatsby* in 1966 attributed Carraway's unreliability to Fitzgerald's confusion handling Carraway "clumsily" (Scrimgeour, 71). Charles Walcutt in *Man's Changing Masks* highlighted the untrustworthiness as a contribution to the overall mystery of the novel (Walcutt, 290). The argument for Carraway's unreliability was not entirely framed, though, until the work of Thomas Boyle in 1969.

Even with Scrimgeour and Walcutt's hinting at unreliability, Boyle takes it a step further in "The Unreliable Narration in *The Great Gatsby*," in which he rejects Booth's opinion of Carraway as trustworthy. Although Boyle agrees with Booth's definition of unreliability, he submits that Booth's two conclusions regarding Carraway having "minor involvement in the events of the novel and 'thoroughly reliable guidance' are wrong," (Boyle, 21). Furthermore, Boyle attributes critics' belief of Carraway for forty years, to "having been taken in by Carraway in somewhat the same way that Carraway has been taken in by Gatsby," (Boyle, 22). Following Boyle, critics have no longer been "taken in by Carraway," and Carraway's untrustworthiness and its effect on the understanding of the novel are heavily debated.

The mystery remains as to how Carraway can be viewed as an unreliable narrator when Fitzgerald never intended him to be. Modern criticism of *The Great Gatsby* has depended, in part, on a post-Booth and post-Boyle evolution of the idea of unstable narration having to do with the role of the author, in this case Fitzgerald. Although current critics realize that Fitzgerald did not consciously write Carraway as unreliable, they are still able to view him as such. It is apparent in modern criticism of *The Great Gatsby* that Carraway does not speak for the "norms" of the book, and throughout it Carraway fails to fit his actions. Although this reading of Carraway comes close to Booth's definition of unreliability, the lack of intent by Fitzgerald is missing, and therefore the mystery remains unsolved of the modern interpretation of Carraway as unreliable.

## MODERN CRITICISM'S INCLINATION TOWARD UNRELIABILITY

In the 1980s, cultural criticism exemplified by the work of Bruno Zerweck found a way to reconcile Fitzgerald's intention to produce reliability with a reading of Carraway as unreliable. Bruno Zerweck's belief in the effect of historical and cultural context upon the reader plays a role in the modern view of Carraway as unreliable. Modern literary critics believe the contemporary reader's determination of reliability heavily relies on the historical and cultural context in which the readers are set. Additionally, the development of psychology, specifically Freudian psychology and the ever present role it plays in our understanding of human behavior, feeds into our viewing of first person narratives as unreliable. The acceptance of Freudian psychology leads us to believe that unconscious motives cause those around us to project themselves onto others. This psychological understanding leads to a general untrustworthiness of narrators. The combination of Zerweck's role of historical context and Freudian psychology in determining reliability has led many literary critics to now view Carraway as unreliable even without Fitzgerald's intention.

The attribution of unreliability to historical and cultural setting has been most notably set into motion by Zerweck's "Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction." Zerweck writes, "The existence of an implied author is neither necessary nor a sufficient requirement of unreliable narration...Unreliability is culturally and historically variable," (Zerweck, 151). Zerweck therefore supports the surprising notion that Carraway can be viewed as an unreliable narrator even without the intention of Fitzgerald due to the social situation the reader finds him or herself in. Zerweck further expands his argument to claim that the reader's interpretation of unreliability depends upon the social norms constructed at the time in which the story is read rather than the social norms in which the narration is set. In a sense, Zerweck's argument follows Booth's definition of unreliability lying within "norms," but instead of whether the narrator follows the accepted values or norms within the setting of the novel, it is more important that the narrator follows the norms of the time in which the reader is set. For example, as medicine advances and the social stigma of mental illnesses decreases, our understanding of mental illnesses and its effects increase. Due to this understanding, we are inclined to interpret characters that present such mental conditions as unreliable. Their unreliability, although understood not to be a conscious decision on the part of the narrator or author, is still undeniable to the modern reader who infers their lack of mental sanity. It is therefore the modern reader's link of unreliability with mental illness that causes the mentally ill narrators to be assumed unreliable until proven otherwise (Zerweck, 158).

Zerweck also discusses the growth of skepticism in the ability to interpret reality and account for something factually and accurately (Zerweck, 161). As the reader grows more skeptical of the ability to interpret reality, he is unable to accept first person narratives as objective and so he tends to view narrators as unreliable. Due to the placement of the modern reader's norms (growing skepticism in one's ability to account for reality) upon Carraway, his unreliability is almost undeniable.

As time has passed since the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, distrust in one another in America has steadily increased due to various social and historical reasons, leading to the gradual distrust in first person narratives within literature. This rise in distrust has affected the modern reader's view of the first person narrative of Carraway. Robert Putnam cites researchers' claims that "Americans born roughly between 1910 and 1940 (*Great Gatsby* published in 1925) were a particularly civic and trusting generation, forged in the crises of the Great Depression and World War II—crises that required people to rely on one another and band together. Government dealt with these crises effectively through New Deal programs and military victory over the Axis powers, winning the confidence of its citizens" (Smith & Paxton, 2008). In other words, due to the historical and social settings at the time of publication and shortly after, Carraway would have been viewed as a reliable narrator. The last two generations, though, have been raised in quite a different social climate, one in which " 'trust no one' has essentially served as the American motto....For 40 years—the years of Vietnam, Watergate, junk bonds, Monica Lewinsky, Enron, the Catholic Church sex scandals, and the Iraq war—our trust in each other has been dropping steadily," (Smith & Paxton, 2008). In addition to these historic events, the rise in distrust stems from the rise in technology, in which interactions are no longer personal and face to face (Smith & Paxton, 2008). The lack of personal communication and isolation of individuals from human contact has led to the inability to trust what any other person, including a fictional character, is saying.

Lastly, the economic conditions within America foster a sense of distrust among people as the gap between the rich and the poor widens. During the time of publication, when Americans were most trusting according to Smith and Paxton, inequality between Americans was on the decline, but since then the economic gap between the classes has dramatically widened (Smith & Paxton, 2008). Since 1979, the tax income of the richest one percent of the population increased by 176 percent, while only increasing by 20 percent for the rest of the population (Smith & Payton, 2008). This huge disparity between the rich and the poor lead those "at a social disadvantage to feel more vulnerable, making it more risky to trust others" (Smith & Paxton, 2008).

The distrust felt among one another in America can easily be applied to the distrust the reader feels for the first person narrative within literature. The inability to trust each other, especially someone's word, has led to the increased viewing of narrators as unreliable as the reader sees their narration

cannot be objective. Overall, due to historic, technological, and economic conditions shaping the social setting in America, the rise in the modern reader's interpretation of Carraway as an unreliable narrator can be attributed to the steady decline in our trust in one another.

Although Booth's definition of unreliability, Zerweck's historical and cultural effect, and the decline in trust among Americans can contribute to the rise in viewing narrators as unreliable, these factors do not account completely for the modern inclination to assume unreliability. To further understand this tendency, the reader needs to look at the effect of Freudian psychology upon the understanding of human behavior and motives. America, more than any country in the world accepted Freud's theory. Freudian theory became truly integrated into Americans' understanding of the powerful unconscious forces that govern human behaviors (Torrey, 240; 249). These unconscious forces developed into the understanding of self-projection onto others - that is, the way in which an individual describes other people speaks more about him than about them:

It is an involuntary transfer of our own unconscious behavior onto others, so it appears to us that these qualities actually exist in the other people. When we have anxiety about our emotions or unacceptable parts of our personalities, we attribute these qualities -as a defense mechanism- to external objects and other people. So whatever we don't own about ourselves we project onto other people (Ford, 1999).

Carraway's narration can be seen as a projection of himself, revealing little truth about the world around him and more about his inner self. From the beginning when Carraway states, "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments," the modern reader is already hesitant to accept such a self-assessment as judging is part of human nature (Fitzgerald, 1). As the novel continues, it is quite evident that Carraway's narration is a judgment of those around him, and his earlier statement about "reserving all judgment" is refuted. For the modern reader, his narration becomes an unconscious unraveling of himself as a character rather than a characterization of the people around him whom he judges. For example, he claims that Jordan "was incurably dishonest," but "everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known," (Fitzgerald, 48). For the contemporary reader it is quite easy to pick up on the fact that Carraway is projecting his own inclination of being dishonest toward Jordan. Therefore due to our Freudian understanding of Carraway and his behavior, the modern reader is more inclined to classify him as an unreliable narrator, who is projecting more of his qualities onto others. As a result, Carraway's presentation and judgment of the characters within the novel makes sense as an inaccurate depiction of them (albeit an accurate one of Carraway). The

determination that his depictions of others are not entirely accurate leads to the modern view of him as unreliable.

Returning momentarily to Booth's claim, Carraway's projection onto others directly contributes to the view of him as an unreliable narrator. Carraway is "pretending to qualities" that Fitzgerald denies him. For instance, Fitzgerald clearly denies Carraway's "cardinal virtue" of 'honesty' within the book. As Boyle states

Carraway's honesty and moral responsibility are manifested by his easy decision to play the panderer for Gatsby; it was "such a little thing." His response to a similar situation in which he is not involved, the affair between Tom and Myrtle Wilson, is quite different: "my own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police." Yet when the police should be brought in, Carraway instead becomes an accomplice after the fact by concealing Daisy's crime of manslaughter (Boyle, 22).

For many reasons then, the modern reader sees Carraway as an unreliable narrator who chooses to attribute different qualities to events in which he is involved and uninvolved. He draws little attention to negative events in which he is involved such as his role as a panderer for Gatsby compared to events where he is uninvolved for example the affair between Tom & Myrtle- in order to elevate himself as morally righteous in contrast to those around himself. Overall, Carraway's projection of himself, of his dishonesty, materialism, and judgmental attitude, onto others lead the modern Freudian reader to the discovery of his unreliability.

## THE PEDAGOGY OF GATSBY

Even with so much debate surrounding the reliability of Carraway, his untrustworthiness is still left out of the discussion in American high school classrooms. Within high school teaching manuals from the Central New York Regional Information Center and the National Council of Teachers of English, Carraway is described as nothing less than a "reliable narrator" who, "immediately captures the confidence of the reader." (Reilly, 10). His competency is apparently necessary for presenting the lessons students intend to gain from *The Great Gatsby*; specifically materialism, the American dream, and American identity. Maintaining Carraway as reliable, Fitzgerald's social commentary regarding materialism and the need to revert back to traditional Western virtues of work ethic and purity transmits clearly at the high school level. Carraway must remain reliable to serve as a moral exemplar to the classroom as the embodiment of the American identity of the West, able to resist the temptation of material wealth that crept into the understanding of the American dream. Even more so, Carraway's reliability is necessary to accept his portrayal of Gatsby and, therefore, to declare the dreamer as

incorruptible. His dependability exposes only the “new” American dream of material wealth as corrupt.

If Carraway’s unreliability were introduced into the high school pedagogy, not only the dream but also the dreamer would become corrupt. The ability to instill in the youth the importance of having a dream would be undermined. In addition, if Carraway was read as unreliable, teachers would be less able to expose the negativity of materialism within the American dream. Therefore, in order to expose the desired portrayal of the American dream and American identity for the youth of America, maintaining Carraway as trustworthy is pedagogically justified.

In order to expose Fitzgerald’s commentary about the rise in materialism within American society, Carraway must remain a moral exemplar, able to escape such social pressures toward material wealth. An unreliable Carraway is no better than Daisy and Tom, completely consumed in their superficial fortune. Throughout the novel, people are defined materialistically and their success is defined solely on their material accumulation. Gatsby is defined through his obscene house, his lavish parties, and his clothing, and he believes that his extravagant possessions and lifestyle will attract Daisy. In addition to Gatsby, Daisy is defined materialistically as her voice is compared to “money” (Fitzgerald, 96). Carraway completely separates himself from this materialism as he states, “I lived at West Egg, the-well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them” (Fitzgerald, 8). It is evident that Carraway does not view himself as belonging to the world of luxury and finds the designation of West Egg as less “fashionable” to be extremely “superficial” and “bizarre.” In addition, Carraway describes never feeling at home in the money-driven world of the East, as he retreats back west always viewing the east with a “quality of distortion,” and symbolizing his journey east as turning into the “wrong house” (Fitzgerald, 140).

In order to view Carraway outside of the materialism that is the east, his description of his time there must be taken as the truth. It is in his reliability that the reader is able to view him as uncorrupted by materialism, and it is this message American pedagogy wants to transmit in the classroom: the ability to remain untainted in the world of materialism and value the other blessings of life outside the ephemerality of physical possessions. The fact that Carraway travels east to engage in the “bond” business to accumulate material wealth and rather easily integrates himself into the lives of the rich of East and West Egg is disregarded within the classroom, as such details would serve to undermine Carraway’s ability to separate himself from the superficial east. Without Carraway remaining reliable, his ability to remain pure of heart within the materialistic world becomes questioned, and maybe the most important and relevant discussion in the high school classroom would be lost: the birth of America’s consumerism and its progression to the materialistic

world in which we live today. Overall, Carraway must remain reliable in order to criticize the materialism of America and the real ability to set oneself apart from it. His untrustworthiness would forfeit the “take-home message”: that an individual can remain pure of heart in a materialist world.

Carraway’s reliability also directly links into our understanding of Gatsby as a mythical and larger than life figure who is admired greatly by Carraway for his “heightened sensitivity to the promises of life,” and his “extraordinary gift for hope.” (Fitzgerald, 6). Accepting Carraway’s narration and his high esteem of Gatsby, the teacher instills in the youth the admiration for a life dedicated to a dream. If Carraway were presented as unreliable, the view of Gatsby would fall apart as a man no better than the rest, but a criminal bootlegger obsessed with wealth. The life of a dreamer would become corrupt and the value of having a dream would be lost. Carraway clearly idolizes Gatsby throughout the entire novel, and by the end compliments him in stating, “They’re a rotten crowd, you’re worth the whole damn bunch put together” (122). By accepting Carraway’s narration as reliable, we accept Carraway’s judgment of Gatsby, and as Boyle writes, through his reliability the reader believes that

Gatsby turned out all right in the end, that the dream is good, and that it is what has happened to the dream, ‘what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that is corrupt.’ Gatsby is great because of his dream-however naïve, gaudy, and unobtainable-is one of the grand illusions of man (Boyle, 26).

Carraway’s competency within the high school classroom is essential to encouraging young American students to “dream the impossible dream” and to stay devoted to the dream no matter how “naïve, gaudy, and unobtainable” it may seem. In addition, his reliability allows for the reader’s acceptance of Gatsby and his consequent glorification through Carraway’s eyes even with his criminal activity. His life dedicated to a dream becomes “incorruptible” as Carraway describes it to the reader (Fitzgerald, 123). It is this “incorruptibility” the current pedagogical approach wishes to express to students through Carraway’s reliable narration.

While Gatsby’s life as a dreamer is “incorruptible,” “what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams”- Daisy and her symbolism of the materialized American dream has become corrupt. If Carraway’s narration is reliable, Daisy is “what has happened to the dream,” and Carraway’s accurate description of Daisy exposes the corruption and unworthiness of materialism. The American dream evolved but its origins consisted of a few general principles. It incorporated the rags to riches motif seen within the Horatio Alger story of the mid-19th century, in which one raises oneself up “by their bootstraps” and through hard work and resilience makes something of their life, usually in the sense of material wealth and high social standing (Reilly, 6). In addition, the American dream strongly ties into Jefferson’s idea of the “pursuit of

happiness,” and American containing the resources and opportunities to do so (Reilly, 6). The later incarnation of the American dream, though, while remaining within the rag to riches motif, lacks the “by their bootstraps” ideal of hard work, and Jefferson’s “happiness” is equated with material wealth. Carraway’s reliability in his characterization of Daisy is necessary to reveal the corruption of the American dream by material wealth intended by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*. Otherwise, as Boyle points out, “If, on the other hand, we recognize the narrator’s unreliability, we see that Carraway’s knowledge of Gatsby’s corruption and his belief that the dream which he embodies is ‘incorruptible,’ is a paradox resolved only in our awareness of Carraway’s last and most serious compromise with truth” (Boyle, 26).

Within the novel, Gatsby appears to have accomplished the American dream but he has still not obtained Daisy and consequently she becomes the tangible American dream. She clearly begins to symbolize the American dream as Gatsby defines his success through her. She is not valued as an individual or a woman he loves, but instead by market value and how she will raise his status. Fitzgerald writes, “It excited him (Gatsby), that many men had already loved Daisy- it increased her value in his eyes” (Fitzgerald, 118). It is evident that Daisy, to Gatsby, follows the laws of supply and demand within the market, in which the more men desire her, the greater value she is to him. It is Daisy and her voice of “money” that will raise his material wealth and social status, and therefore she takes on the role of the American dream through obtaining her, his quest will be complete (Fitzgerald, 96).

In taking Carraway’s narration as reliable, Daisy quickly becomes unworthy and corrupted in the eyes of the reader. Carraway characterizes Daisy as “insincere,” quite unmotherly, and completely consumed in the material world impressed in Gatsby’s house, parties, “gold toilet set,” and “linen and silk shirts.” (Fitzgerald, 17; 73-74). Gatsby is described as taking her “under false pretenses”, “ravenously and unscrupulously”, and Daisy is further highlighted as corrupt and unworthy by losing her virginity before her marriage and possibly before her relationship with Gatsby (Fitzgerald, 118-9). If the reader accepts Carraway’s characterization of Daisy, he finds her embodiment of the American dream corrupt and unworthy. In addition to debased and valueless, Daisy is fatal to Gatsby due to her involvement in Myrtle’s death, and therefore Fitzgerald evokes the fatal quality of the materialistic American dream.

If Carraway’s description and characterization of Daisy throughout the novel as an aloof and careless woman completely defined materialistically changes due to his unreliability, Fitzgerald’s exposure of the corrupt American dream would break down at the seams. Through viewing Carraway as unreliable, Daisy would become flesh and blood, a woman caught in a complicated situation with two men she loves and no longer a simple embodiment of the American dream. If Carraway’s narration is not held to

the end, Daisy becomes sincere in her statement, "I did love him once-but I loved you too," and Daisy no longer simply represents materialism but a woman "who can't help the past," and is attempting to reconcile the two men she loves (Fitzgerald, 105). Without Carraway being able to convince the reader of Daisy symbolically as the unworthy and corrupt version of the American dream, Fitzgerald's social commentary is lost within the high school classroom.

Most important to Carraway's reliability as the narrator is what his role as a character means to American identity. The American dream is historically "anti-Calvinistic" and believes in the "goodness of nature and man," (Bewley, 37). "It is accordingly a product of the frontier and the West rather than of the Puritan Tradition," (Bewley, 37). Carraway, the Westerner, is the embodiment of the true American dream and the principles in which America was founded, in a sense the American identity. Carraway early on in the novel is presented as a "guide, a pathfinder, an original settler," further revealing his role as a symbol of the early settlers who represent purity and work ethic of the American identity (Fitzgerald, 7). His image as an "original settler" is soon presented in contrast to the "dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities...in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew" (Fitzgerald, 7). Carraway's placement in relation to the big barons of wealth throughout history only serves to highlight Carraway further as a Westerner rooted in American tradition and values. Ironically though, the fact that these are Carraway's books is disregarded in the conversation within American high school English courses, as it serves to undermine him as a symbol of the pure American ideal of work ethic. The books serve to highlight his wish to enter the bond business, distant from the American ideal as most bonds at the time were junk (Reilly, 11). The purity of the West is further displayed throughout the novel through Carraway's description of an evening in the West, which rushed to end in order to get rest in order to resume work early in the morning, compared to rather long and elaborate parties in the East in which no one seems to be worried about work the next morning (Fitzgerald, 14). The East is therefore presented as a place in which the accumulation of wealth with the least effort is ideal in order to engage in the luxuries of life, while the West embodies the work ethic of the traditional American dream.

In addition, the glorification of the West is presented through Gatsby's list within Hopalong Cassidy, a reference to the Old West, of extremely moral, worthy, and hard-working ideals (Fitzgerald, 137). The East is then viewed as part of the "foul dust" corrupting Gatsby and leading him down a path of criminal and bootlegging activity to achieve his material wealth instead of the work ethic instilled in him in the West. Consequently, Carraway unveiled as unreliable leads to his symbolic role of the West and the breakdown of the pure untainted American dream breaking down in the eyes of the reader. As

stated above, the West is characterized as defining the American dream and American identity. Revealing the narrator within the book who is supposed to embody all of these principles of morality, work ethic, and lack of materialism, as unreliable, no place within America holds virtue, neither the East nor the West. In addition, if Carraway is viewed as unreliable, all hope is lost of returning back to the tradition and virtuous times of the West, just as Carraway returns to the West by the end of the novel. In transmitting this message to high school students, the American identity of work ethic and morality is completely dissolved through Carraway's untrustworthiness and leads to a dismal view for the young Americans of a possible return to such values. Carraway's unreliability continues to cause doubt of whether the moral traditions of the West ever existed, as he arrives in the East already morally tainted.

## CONCLUSION

Overemphasizing the reliability of Carraway as a narrator, readers view Fitzgerald's social commentary on America and materialism as too simple and one-sided. Fitzgerald's argument is not that simple. The inability to trust Carraway creates a convoluted argument about Fitzgerald's intentions in writing such a novel and his true opinion of the materialism that has come to consume the American dream. In a sense, the ambiguity of Carraway's narration speaks to Fitzgerald's genius in writing the great American novel.

Without the ability to hold steadfastly to Fitzgerald's commentary through a reliable Carraway, the foundations of the American identity are shaken to the core. Viewing Carraway as untrustworthy, American identity, its origins, and the foundations upon which the country was built become hazy, and corruption cannot be avoided, neither the East nor the West with no traditional virtues to fall back on to resolve the current condition of society. The instability with which Carraway's unreliability leaves the reader is exactly why it is nonexistent in the pedagogy. The complete dissolution of the American dream set out to be taught in the classroom by *The Great Gatsby* can only be reconciled with Carraway as a reliable narrator, showing America's youth what citizens can turn back to in order to regain the virtues, morality and work ethic of the past.

## WORKS CITED

- Bewley, Marius. "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby*. 1954. 37-53.
- Booth, Wayne. "Distance and Point of View: An Essay in Classification." *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. 2nd Edition. Duke University Press: 1996. 170-189.
- Boyle, Thomas E. "Unreliable Narration in 'The Great Gatsby'" *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*. Vol. 23, No 1. 1969. 21-26.
- Carlisle, E. Fred. "The Triple Vision of Nick Carraway." *Modern Fiction Studies*. Vol. 11. 1966. 351.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Oxford England: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Fitzgerald, F. S., and Maxwell E. Perkins. *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald-Perkins Correspondence*. New York: Scribner, 1971. Print.
- Ford, Debbie. *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers: Reclaiming Your Power, Creativity, Brilliance, and Dreams*. New York: Riverhead, 1999. Print.
- Rielly, Deborah. "The Great Gatsby." *ENotes*. The Central New York Regional Information Center, 2002. Web. 3 Dec. 2012.
- Scrimgeour, Gary J. "Against *The Great Gatsby*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby*. 1954. 70-81.
- Smith, Jeremy A., and Pamela Paxton. "America's Trust Fall." *Greater Good, The Science of a Meaningful Life*. University of California, Berkeley, Fall 2008. Web. 3 Dec. 2012.
- Torrey, E. Fuller, M.D. "An Audit of Freud's American Account." *Freudian Fraud The Malignant Effect of Freud's Theory on American Thought and Culture*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. 240-57. Print.
- Walcutt, Charles Child. "Man's Changing Mask." *Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1966. 286-290.
- Zerweck, B. (2001). "Historicizing unreliable narration: Unreliability and cultural discourse in narrative fiction." *Style*, 35. 1st Edition. 151-178.