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The Dark Side of Nick Carraway

The roaring twenties. “The parties were bigger. The pace was faster, the shows were broader, the buildings were higher, the morals were looser, and the liquor was cheaper.” (F. Scott Fitzgerald). This was the time to be alive. Set in New York’s upper east side, *The Great Gatsby* showcased the life of the rich. The beloved story is told through the eyes of Nick Carraway, who portrays himself as an ethical man trying to survive in the overwhelming city; however, the fast paced world could have been too much for him to wrap his head around. Throughout the story, Carraway endures a lot of stress, which could cause a weak mental state. Therefore, his narration could be fabricated; Schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, and Narcolepsy could all influence his perception of the events that actually occurred.

While many readers have reason to believe Nick is an average male, the young man shows distinct signs of being Schizophrenic. Similar to Napoleon believing he was a great influential leader, Nick idolizes Gatsby, despite the numerous lies the mysterious celebrity feeds him throughout the book. In the beginning, Nick is extremely clear about his admiration for Gatsby. He states, “Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction” (Fitzgerald 2). The audience sees how highly Nick thinks of Gatsby, and people come to a conclusion that this Gatsby figure must be incredible. However, once the story is over, a question still remains unanswered. What made the hopeless romantic so amazing? The undeniable truth Nick refuses to admit is that Gatsby, in fact, was not glorious. Believing

someone is greater than they actually are is a clear sign of Schizophrenia. It shows that Nick's perception of reality is misinterpreted, and he is delusional about what is happening. In addition to this, Nick thought that he was somehow special or significant to Gatsby. In chapter three when Nick received his invitation to Gatsby's party, he constantly reassured himself that he is important to the mansion owner since the neighbor was the only one actually invited (Fitzgerald). Oblivious to Gatsby's ulterior motive, the loner does not realize the millionaire is just using him to get closer to the golden girl. He believes that his familiar presence is crucial, and without it Daisy and Gatsby's love will diminish. Although there is no mention of Nick hearing voices, the storyteller believes in a misconstrued version of reality that readers do not see. Nick's absurd mindset is potentially a sign of Schizophrenia. After several months of monitoring unusual behavior, doctors can diagnose someone with the disease. Specialists say after significant amounts of stress, mental illnesses could manifest themselves into the human brain (Skrzypiąńska). Mourning Gatsby's death, Nick becomes angry and stressed, the perfect combination to bring on Schizophrenia. Gatsby's only friend is extremely overwhelmed with reporters mocking, distorting, and lying about Gatsby's reputation. Then when no one arrived for the funeral, not even Daisy, it was the icing on the cake. The Midwesterner proceeded in a downward spiral and began to blame the east coast for everything going wrong in his life. However before he went insane, Nick was likely simultaneously suffering from borderline personality disorder (BPD), only adding to his instability.

Unfortunately for Nick, he continuously finds himself battling an internal conflict. In the introduction, the narrator builds himself up as being an honest man who tries to reserve judgement; nonetheless, when Gatsby is explaining his questionable past, Nick is nothing but judgmental. One moment the narrator is immersed in Gatsby's claims and hangs on to every

word the bootlegger is saying, but the next second Nick is so humored by the extravagant story he begins laughing to himself. As the audience, we are not aware of what exactly is going through Nick's head because of his split personalities, even though he is the narrator. If in the beginning, the realist never mentioned his honesty or blatantly said he was judgemental, this could easily be overlooked. Only a critical dissection of this scene illustrates how distinct Nick's borderline personality is. Furthermore, *The Great Gatsby* includes many love stories, and readers thought that one might bloom between Nick and Jordan as well. Unfortunately, the midwesterner's many personalities were showcased during his interaction with the glamorous golfer after the car accident. He stated, "I'd be damned if I'd go in; I'd had enough of all of them for one day, and suddenly that included Jordan too" (Fitzgerald 142). For the majority of the book Nick seemed extremely intrigued by Jordan, so much so, that he was willing to break things off with a girl he had been casually seeing. Then out of the middle of nowhere, Nick suddenly decides that he wants nothing to do with the dishonest woman. A mentally stable person would have calmly rejected her invitation or would have given a reason as to why they need space, but not Nick. An abrupt change in mindset is a clear sign that borderline personality disorder is present. Along with a split personality, people who experience BPD also deal with dream reality confusion, not being able to decipher between reality and fantasies (Skrzypińska). When people experience dreams, they typically spend about two hours of the night in rapid eye movement (REM). On the other hand, a person with borderline personality disorder spends double the time in REM. This means that they experience more dreams than the average person, and it is harder to differentiate what is real and what is an illusion. While telling the reader his problems, Nick claims he suffers from disturbed sleep; therefore, this proves that the storyteller experiences dream reality confusion.

In addition to his possible mental illnesses, Nick appears to suffer from a sleep disorder that could also explain why the story could be a fabricated narration. Narcolepsy is the third and final reason for the inconsistency in *The Great Gatsby*. The sleeping disorder also correlates with dream reality confusion or hallucinations (Skrzypińska). Major psychological stress can contribute to a narcoleptic condition and cause the person to suffer from memory problems or hallucinations. Scientists who specialize in sleep awareness say that people with this condition often experience vivid dreams or hypnagogic hallucination; someone in a state of confusion between sleep and wakefulness. An example of possible Narcolepsy was after the big fight between Tom and Gatsby, Nick mentions that it was his thirtieth birthday. This should raise questions with readers because how could someone forget their own birthday? The answer could be that Nick's narcolepsy made it difficult for the narrator to recall real life events. An insignificant detail like this verifies that Nick was not in the right mindset during the time these events took place. If Nick could hardly remember his own birthday, a significant milestone in someone's life, how could he remember every minor detail about the story a full year later when he was writing his book. This could be another indication that Nick's memory is unreliable, and his narration could be fabricated or exaggerated. Nonetheless, a portion of the story could also be Nick's hallucinations. When Tom, Myrtle, and Nick arrive at the apartment, there is a picture. "The only picture was an over enlarged photograph, apparently a hen sitting on a blurred rock. Looked at from a distance, however, the hen resolved itself into a bonnet, and the countenance of a stout old lady beamed down into the room" (Fitzgerald 29). This confusion could be due to a state of narcolepsy. Standing too close to the painting, Nick cannot fully comprehend the picture. This also illustrates that the wallflower's mind is not clear and focused. Not only does this scene show that Nick, in fact, was hallucinating, but it also serves as a metaphor. Throughout the novel

Nick seems to fixate on the event right in front of him; the romance between Daisy and Gatsby. The bystander is too delusional from the combination of his mental illnesses and sleep problems to step back and look at the big picture: the events never happened. Because of this, the lost narrator automatically seems unreliable and proves that his mentality was too unstable to be recalling the significant events.

As you can see, there is a clear indication that Nick Carraway is not of a sound mind, and his narration could be fabricated. Due to a large amount of psychological stress, Schizophrenia and borderline personality disorder can be triggered, as well as hallucinations, which are symptoms of narcolepsy. The potential combination of these conditions makes for an unreliable narrator since the mind can not properly comprehend the events that occurred, or if they occurred at all. The story itself is potentially a twisted fantasy of the American dream that everyone, even an ethical man like Nick, truly longs for in life.

Works Cited

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