

# TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

## ENGLISH B

### EXTENDED ESSAY

#### ‘THE PRESENCE OF THE MISSING’

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**Research Question:** What is the significance of narrative ellipsis in the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald in reference to *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi?

## **ABSTRACT**

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi are both the analysis and portraits of two different corrupted societies in whom the concept of what is good and what is important has been lost. The novels deal with a society built by a group of characters who has lost their sense of moral and social judgement. And to emphasize and underline these missing aspects of the characters they omitted what actually can be considered important like the characters. Both writers had built their novels on what they have not written instead of what they have written using narrative ellipsis. By using narrative ellipsis both writers achieved to emphasize the characters' perspective and attitude towards life and each other in general.

Word Count: 129

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## 1.INTRODUCTION

*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered one of the literary classics. The novel revolves around a group of rich people who live in two bays whom are across each other, East Egg and West Egg, Whose lives are narrated by a middle class member among them: Nick Carraway.

The story is basically about a society whom have corrupted the concept “American Dream” and afterwards corrupted themselves as a society following the wrong and mostly unethical “American Dream” concept they have developed. What is “American Dream” originally and what has it become? It had started as the concept that anyone from any social class can get to the position they desire by working hard enough and being determined but because of people abusing it in time, it turned out to be the concept of the ambition and aim to get rich no matter what exactly like in the novel. So for the characters in the novel their lives are all about wanting more than they have, both money and socially, and not having any boundaries or limits to what they can do during the process of achieving what they want.

Throughout the novel characters behave and act based on lies and money which can be considered as the main themes of the novel other than the concept “American Dream”. Since the characters’ lives are based on lies, it is no surprise that the writer used narrative ellipsis throughout the whole novel. What builds the book is actually what is not mentioned rather than what is mentioned.

Four main aspects of the novel were created by and based on the narrative ellipsis: development of the themes, addition of suspense, creating controversy and plot development.

As for *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi, the graphic novel takes place in Iran during the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The novel is written and pictured from the perspective of Satrapi as a child during the revolution. Similarly to *The Great Gatsby* the writer builds the book upon what she hasn't written, instead of what she has written. Because as it can be seen in history when it comes to wars and revolutions it can never be known what exactly went down and there is always something which is not pleasant that hasn't been told yet. And Satrapi being a child means she also doesn't see and understand everything however sees enough for a child to be convinced that something is not right.

This graphic novel also has the same main four aspects that were built on narrative ellipsis: development of the themes, addition of suspense, creating controversy and plot development.

## **2. DEVELOPMENT**

### **a. Creating foreshadowing for plot development**

In the novel “*The Great Gatsby*” writer uses the narrative ellipses to create the foreshadowing necessary for the plot development. Foreshadowing is an advance sign or warning of what is to come in the future<sup>1</sup>. After the accident with Myrtle happened, Gatsby and Daisy drove back to the city and Gatsby dropped her off to her house. Afterwards while Gatsby was

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<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/foreshadowing>)

waiting in the garden of Buchanan's house, Nick arrives and sees Tom and Daisy on the porch and thinks this to himself:

*"Anybody would have said that they were conspiring together."* (Fitzgerald,159).

Here Nick doesn't explain why he is suspicious of the fact that they were conspiring together or how did they look and why conspiring instead of any other conversation type. And as seen later on the book they actually did conspire together that night and ran away. Another example is these words of Jordan when she and Nick are at one of Gatsby's parties and people are talking about Gatsby. Someone says that he is an Oxford man and Jordan reacts likes this:

*"However I don't believe it... I just don't believe."* (Fitzgerald,65).

In the novel Jordan Baker is the ultimate symbol of the society corrupted by the "American Dream" so her stating, without any reason, she doesn't believe what she heard is a sign that later on in the novel the society is not going to believe what they hear about Gatsby also. In this case the missing justification of Jordan's claim creates the foreshadowing that later on some similar event is going to take place. In the very beginning of the novel when Nick goes to Daisy and Tom's house for the first time he thinks this about Tom:

*"It was a body capable of enormous leverage – a cruel body."* (Fitzgerald,24).

Since this quotation is in the beginning of the novel there's no image or description of Tom in readers mind yet. So by this, without clearly stating, through Nick's thoughts the writer foreshadows the fact that Tom is going to turn out to be a cruel man. Another example is Nick's description of Gatsby during his second encounter with him at the first party of Gatsby he attended; he says

*“I could see nothing sinister about him.” (Fitzgerald,66).*

Here Nick says “I couldn’t see anything sinister about him.” instead of “There was nothing sinister about him.” After this quotation Nick doesn’t explain why he said “I couldn’t see” instead of “there was nothing” and this narrative ellipsis shows the reader that he is not actually pure good like he seems, it’s just the fact that he has hid his sinister side so well that no one can see anything sinister about him. One other example is when Nick and Jordan are in the city together Nick suddenly thinks this to himself:

*“I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known.” (Fitzgerald,75).*

This statement is a significant example because before this statement there was no deep description of any character or none of the characters pasts have been told or no event that may cause Nick to say this has happened yet. So this unclear “accusation” shows that later on in the novel people are going to turn out to be dishonest. Another example of foreshadowing created by the narrative ellipsis is while Nick and Gatsby are driving to the city for lunch after they go across the bridge Nick thinks this to himself:

*“Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge, anything at all...”*

**(Fitzgerald,84).**

Without mentioning that there is going to be series of climactic events in the city later on, he creates a blurry image in readers’ minds that anything can happen there and by this the reader gets the idea, the foreshadowing, that later on something extreme will happen in the city.

As for “Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood” Marjane Satrapi also creates narrative ellipses in order to develop the plot using foreshadowing. For example father of Marji, Ebi, says

*“Let’s talk about something else. Let’s enjoy our new freedom!” and the mother of Marji, Taji continues “Now that the devil has left!” (Satrapi,43).*

Devil being the symbol of bad leaders and unpleasant events happening in their country, since it’s a situation of narrative ellipsis we don’t read the characters mention anything about devil still being there however we see from the drawings that the devil’s long tail is surrounding the whole frame in the scene and he’s still there. So the devil still being there is a foreshadowing of the fact that even if they think the devil is gone it’s still there and again a series of bad events are going to happen in their country.

#### **b. Adding suspense**

Another thing F. Scott Fitzgerald uses narrative ellipsis is in order to add suspense to the novel. Suspense creates a sense of mystery and excitement to the novel. In the second sentence of the novel Nick talks about what his father told him earlier in his life:

*““Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages you’ve had.” (Fitzgerald, 17)*

Writer places this statement at the very beginning of the novel without stating any connection to the plot or any character in the novel. The writer uses this quotation to get the reader to think and question the significance of this quote, in other words to fill in the missing information, the gap he knowingly left and to add suspense since does not give any kind of explanation or connection to the novel itself. Another example when Nick is at Buchanan’s’ house for the first time, Nick asks Daisy about her daughter Daisy says this to Nick:



*“I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool – that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool. You see I think everything is terrible anyhow.” (Fitzgerald, 34)*

This also adds suspense to the novel because this one quotation creates many questions in the readers mind. Since Daisy just randomly states that she hopes her daughter will be a fool and gives no explanation or any reason that why someone being a fool can be the best thing for them. And how is everything being terrible is related to the topic they are discussing or what makes her think everything is terrible? Lastly while Nick and Gatsby are driving to the city for lunch Nick thinks this to himself:

*““Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge.” I thought; “anything at all...” Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder.” (Fitzgerald, 84)*

In this example Nick saying “anything at all... Even Gatsby could happen...” brings many questions to the readers mind, creating a sense of suspense, because he doesn’t give any reason to him saying “Even Gatsby...” Why would Gatsby happening is the farthest possibility or why and how anything can happen? Writer also doesn’t say what is meant by anything and lastly what does someone a person happening mean? All these unanswered questions created by the narrative ellipsis adds suspense.

Secondly Satrapi also uses this technique in order to add suspense into the novel. For instance in the last scene of the book at the airport Marji happens to turn around while she was walking towards the gate to get on the airplane which was going to take her to Europe she happens to turn around and she sees her mother fainted she doesn’t tell this is words we see it in the pictures however she says

*“It would’ve been better to just go.” (Satrapi,153)*

Here again no narration of the event or any explanation of what happened to the mother is not included in order to add suspense.

### **c. Developing the themes**

One other thing the writer uses narrative ellipsis for in “The Great Gatsby” is to develop the themes in the novel. During the first party Nick attended an accident occurs and when the old man involved in the accident tries to explain himself narrator introduces him to the reader like this:

*““You don’t understand,” explained the criminal.”(Fitzgerald,71)*

Nick calling the old man a criminal, without stating any reason or being sure he is a criminal, while he is trying to explain why he’s not guilty is a significant example of the theme “Dishonesty”. Nick assumes like other characters the old man is dishonest and guilty. Another theme in the novel is the corruption of “American Dream”. American Dream had started as the concept that anyone from any social class can get to the position they desire by working hard enough and being determined but because of people abusing it in time, it turned out to be the concept of the ambition and aim to get rich no matter what exactly like in the novel. An example of American Dream developed by the narrative ellipsis is when Gatsby and Nick are talking about Meyer Wolfsheim when Nick asks what he does for a living Gatsby says:

*“He is a gambler and that “He is the man that fixed the World Series in 1919”*

**(Fitzgerald, 88)**

and when Nick asks how did he managed do that and Gatsby answers:

*“He just saw the opportunity.” (Fitzgerald, 89)*

In this case how he did it not being clearly explained and the situation being defined as an opportunity shows how the characters think how he earned his money is not that important next to the fact that he has a lot of money. And the narrator Nick who always seems to be the reasonable character in all events doesn't question or give a second thought about the situation. Another example for the fact: where the money comes from is not important as long as it keeps coming is that the writer doesn't clearly mention what anyone does for a living except Nick whom does not have much money. One other example is when Daisy, Gatsby and Nick are at Gatsby's house when they go to the ballroom and while they are listening Klipspringer play the piano just randomly without any shift of time, transition to another event or any reason stated Nick starts to read this poem in his mind:

*“One thing is sure and nothing's surer, The rich get richer and the poor get – children, In the meantime, In between time’ –“ (Fitzgerald, 110)*

Then suddenly stops and continues with the normal story as if the poem wasn't there. Nick suddenly without any reason reading this poem which is about the main theme and the main problem, The American Dream, helps develop the theme in both readers' mind and for the plot in the novel.

Another reason Satrapi uses the technique of narrative ellipsis is to develop the themes. In page 107 when the family is celebrating the new born child until the bombing starts. The mother of the child abandons and starts running to the basement as soon as she hears the sounds of the bombing the new born immediately leaving her into Marji's arms. Even though this event where mother's fear of the war overcomes her maternal instinct is an important scene considering the

concepts fear and warfare however writer chooses to write about neither the details, her emotions nor her thoughts to show how important the event is for the theme fear and warfare.

#### **d. Creating controversy**

Last but not least Fitzgerald uses narrative ellipsis in order to create controversy in the novel. Firstly what is controversy? Controversy is “an argument about something that involves many people and continues for a long time”<sup>2</sup> So any subject or event that creates at least two sides, two different perspectives and lasts for a long time meaning that stays unclear without a solution or a conclusion is a controversy. In the case of the novel “The Great Gatsby” it has many controversies. Since a feature of controversies is that they last for a long time, the readers don’t get to learn how they turn out while reading the novel. This intentional omission of details of arguments and their conclusions create controversy. An example of this is in the beginning of the novel during his first days in West Egg before any event happening Nick says this to himself:

*“Life is much more successfully looked at from a single window after all.”*

**(Fitzgerald,21)**

This quote is controversial because in society it is usually stated that more perspectives you look from, the better. So the other perspective to this argument can be like this: how life can be successfully looked, lived and analyzed from a single window meaning a single perspective since more perspectives allow us to empathize and think wiser. Due to having no explanation or conclusion for the argument because of the narrative ellipsis and since this argument shown is not a fact and one may oppose to this with a different opinion the situation is classified as a controversy. Another example is when Nick goes to the city to Myrtle’s apartment with Myrtle

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<sup>2</sup> (<http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/controversy>)

and Tom. Later on Myrtle's sister Catherine joins them and while she is talking with Nick she says this:

*"It's really his wife that's keeping them apart. She's a catholic, and they don't believe in divorce."* **(Fitzgerald,50)**

After Catherine says this Nick thinks this to himself:

*"Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was shocked at the elaborateness of life."*  
**(Fitzgerald,50)**

Even though Nick knows Daisy is not Catholic after Catherine's words there's no explanation about whether Nick fixed the false rumor about Daisy or warned Catherine not to gossip about his cousin. As the narrator Nick shows the event and just leaves it at that. Doesn't tell what he did or even whether he said something or not after Catherine's words to create controversy by not writing about it. After they leave Myrtle's apartment Nick goes upstairs with Mr. Mckee neighbor of Myrtle who was also present at Myrtle's apartment before in order to look at his artistic work portfolio. They go up with the elevator and suddenly without any description or reasonable shift of time they are suddenly in Mckee's apartment in this situation:

*"I was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands... Then I was lying half-asleep in the cold lower level of the Pennsylvania Station, staring at the morning Tribune, and waiting for the four o'clock train."* **(Fitzgerald,54)**

The situation is a controversy because what they were doing in Mckee's apartment half naked on the bed is debatable since there is no clear explanation or evidence of what exactly went

on after they left Myrtle's apartment because of narrative ellipsis. After this quote the chapter finishes and the narrator never returns to the event to explain what happened or to clear the controversy. The event is left unexplained and is never mentioned again. So it stays as a controversy for the readers throughout the novel. Another example is when Nick and Gatsby are driving to the city for lunch and when a police officer warns Gatsby about him driving too fast he tells his name and the officer immediately apologizes and says that he will know Gatsby next time he sees him and this won't happen again. And Gatsby explains the situation to Nick like this:

*"I was able to do commissioner a favor once, and he sends me a Christmas card every year."* (Fitzgerald,83)

In this situation Gatsby doesn't explain what kind of favor is this or why he did it and because he did a favor for the commissioner does he have the right to break the rules? And this makes the situation seem controversial because it's highly debatable that whether someone should be treated differently because they know certain people or did a favor for certain people in any way. And since he doesn't clarify the situation by saying what he did it stays controversial because there's a possibility that his explanation may be reasonable and the controversy may clear up. One other example is when Gatsby, Tom, Daisy, Nick and Jordan are all in the plaza and they start to talk about Tom and Daisy's wedding and they mention a man named Biloxi who has fainted during the ceremony due to heat and Jordan explains:

*"They carried him to my house," appended Jordan, "because we lived just two doors from the church. And he stayed three weeks, until Daddy told him he had to get out. The day after*

*he left Daddy died.” After a moment she added, “There wasn’t any connection.””*

**(Fitzgerald,141)**

The situation is controversial because besides the fact that Jordan decided to share this, the fact that she also told that his father was died after he left makes it seems like there is a relation with his father’s death. She later states that there was no connection then why did she mention it in the first place? This unexplained situation creates controversy.

One of the main aims of Satrapi using narrative ellipsis is to create controversy. Throughout the book there are many unanswered questions that create controversy and confusions because of the narrative ellipsis intentionally placed in the events. For example when Marji is upset with his dad because of the maid incident she yells at her dad and says

*“Are you for or against social classes?” (Fitzgerald,37)*

Even though in this kind of a situation a person’s reaction would be to instinctually say he is against it but his father who was previously described as *“modern and avant-garde”* doesn’t answer this question. And this creates controversy on the fact that whether they are really supporting equality or they are just glad that they have the privileges and they don’t care about the rest.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

“The Great Gatsby”, a literary classic by F. Scott Fitzgerald, can be defined as the portrait of the corrupted society of a group of people who had lost their sense of ethics, morals and judgement of what’s good and bad. Their lives based on lies and materialism were explained by a technique parallel to their lifestyle: “narrative ellipsis”. The writer has built the novel and the plot

on what he has not written instead of what he has written. By this the writer makes the reader think and understand the details he has knowingly left and portrays a clear picture of the society in the novel, by leaving all these details unwritten.

As for *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi while using narrative ellipsis she used the fact that being a child meant some things were going to be kept hidden from her and some she wouldn't understand. And it developed the concept of revolution and war since in history there's always an unpleasant truth and backstage of events behind what's going on.

#### **4. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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