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Illusion vs. Reality in *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman*

Each individual have memories that will be with them for the rest of their life, but those memories should stay in the past and not affect how one lives in the present. Living in the past can hurt how one lives in present day and this hurting can cause major downfall in the future. One sees how in both *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman*, the theme of illusion versus reality and how it causes the two main characters, Jay Gatsby and Willy Loman to live through their past and not in the present. ✓

F. Scott Fitzgerald, the author of *The Great Gatsby* leaves readers in suspense and curiosity when learning about who Gatsby really is and where he came from. As a boy, Gatsby was embarrassed with who his parents were and where he was from. He grew up in Minnesota with framers as parents (Fitzgerald, 98). However, his parents were unsuccessful in what they did on the farm. At the age of 17, Gatsby changed his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby to begin a better life for himself (98). ✓ Gatsby despised living in poverty and wanted a life of wealth and sophistication, hence why he dropped out of St. Olaf's College after two weeks because he could not handle his janitorial job, which was paying his tuition (*Sparknotes*). At 27, Gatsby enrolled in WW1. When in Louisville, Gatsby met the beautiful, innocent, charming and 18 year old Daisy Fay. To make her fall in love with him, Gatsby lied about his background and tried desperately to prove to her that he was worthy enough. Daisy promised to wait for him until after the war, but broke that promise as she married Tom Buchanan. Gatsby's only goal now was to make enough money to win Daisy back, in hopes that the love for him was still there. ✓ To gain this money, Gatsby participated in the bootlegging industry and produced "new money" (*Sparknotes*). He acquired millions of dollars and purchased a huge mansion across the bay from Daisy.

The use of lies is how Gatsby is known. No one really knows who Gatsby is truly. Rumours spread around who Gatsby is because people around say things just as " "Somebody told me they thought he killed a man" (44) or " "it's more that he was a German during the war" (44). Comments like these show how exclusive Gatsby is. The past life of Gatsby causes him to make a new life for himself, on that is strictly based on lies to win over the love of Daisy. ✓

After WW1, Gatsby knows that five years have passed and is now setting an illusion for his life as he wants the rest of his days to be spent with ^D daisy. Gatsby shows his depth for Daisy's love and admiration in multiple different ways. It starts when he buys his house right across the bay from her. There is no coincidence that he did this and he knows that there is only one thing that is so close to his grasp, yet he cannot grasp it and that is the love back from her. ^{avoid vague words} Nick Caraway, the narrator of the book and Gatsby's neighbour is also Daisy's cousin and went to school with Tom. Again, no one knows who Gatsby really is, not even Nick. Just about every weekend, Gatsby hosts the most elaborate parties that everyone knows about. These parties need no invite unless one is Nick, someone who is related to Daisy (40-41). Gatsby never wanted to be famous, he only wants Daisy to notice, hence why these parties are bright and loud enough to hear and see across the bay. Nick sets up a meeting between the long lost lovers and they reconnect instantly (85-89). After this meeting, the love in Gatsby for Daisy grows even stronger than it was before. It was so strong that he begins creating this illusion of how they are going to be together forever. Gatsby's only want is to recreate the love once shared between him and Daisy. He came back to the US, built up his fortune to please her and expected her to be waiting, even though it was the contrary (*Illusion versus Reality in The Great Gatsby*). Everything that Gatsby does is done to prove that he is worthy enough for her love. The thought of having her like he did five years ago takes over him from seeing the reality in the situation. The green light at the end of Tom and Daisy's dock is what keeps the hope alive for Gatsby. As readers, one knows that the green light is the closest that Gatsby will get to having Daisy like he did before. Nick writes, "Gatsby believed in the green light, the

orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter- to-morrow we will run faster, stretch our arms farther.... And one fine morning- so we beat on, boats against the current, born back ceaselessly into the past." (180). This quote represents how the green light shows Gatsby's hope which then plays into the illusion he is setting for himself. Gatsby is a man whose love for a woman takes over his true self completely and how one realizes that the "Great Gatsby" is not all that 'great'. One also sees how Willy Loman is another character who lives through past events and not in the present.

The past is very prominent in the way Willy Loman lives. Willy had a difficult childhood whose father left his family at the age of three. His father was a travelling business man, who Willy and his brother did not see very often. Willy's older brother, Ben of about 15 years was 17 when he went out to find their father. While doing so, he became a millionaire at 21. This quick acquisition of money causes Willy to become extremely jealous. At 63, Willy is still in the door to door business industry. At this age Willy still feels that he must live up to his brother to be a good father for his two boys, Happy and Biff. It seems to be that because of his parental absence, is why Willy is unsure about his parental abilities (*Character Analysis, Willy Loman from Death of a Salesman*). Willy is a man who hides the fact that he is self-conscious and worries about how others perceive him. All he wants is to have his son Biff to be proud of him and to be a well-known salesman. This constant of wanting to be worthy enough also causes Willy to have continuous flashbacks about how life used to be. He continues to want to live his past again in the present. The way Willy raises Happy and Biff causes one to see how he believes that being well-liked is how one becomes successful in the world. This puts major strain on Biff as his life goes on.

Being well-liked and well-known is the definition of success in Willy's eyes and he pushes that on both of his sons, but Biff in particular. Willy cares about what Biff thinks of him and he wants to be an

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extraordinary father for him. At the same time, Biff admires Willy and greatly cares about what his father thinks of him (Miller, 16). Willy has set a whole illusion for his family to live by and he uses multiple different lies and fake stories to make this illusion seem real. Suggesting that Willy has some mental disabilities, throughout the play he has continuous flashbacks about Biff's high school days and how popular, athletic, and intelligent he was. These flashbacks cause Willy to believe that Biff is just as well-liked and successful as he was then, but as one knows it is the opposite. Willy explains to Linda, "Like a young god. Hercules-something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him. Remember how he waved to me? Right up from the field, with the representatives of three colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the cheers when he came out- Loman, Loman, Loman! God Almighty, he'll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away! (68)". This shows how caught up in the past Willy is and how it is causing him not to be able to see the real picture. Biff is not a successful man and neither is Willy. Willy's problem is he thinks his son is a god and continues to live with that mind set. Success is the only thing that Willy cares about and he tells people that Biff sold to Bill Oliver to make it seem that he is well-known and well-liked (92). When in an argument with Bernhard, who is more accomplished than Biff, Willy says, "Well Bill Oliver- very big sporting goods man- he wants Biff very badly. Called him in from the West. Long distance, carte blanche, special deliveries (92)". He uses this lie to try and make up the fact that Biff is not as successful as he would like him to be. As the play comes to an end, Biff realizes that he cannot become successful the way his father wants and Willy believes that Biff is just trying to spite him because of this (*Illusion vs. reality in Death of a Salesman*). Biff wants to tell Willy the truth to try and show him that he never sold anything to Bill Oliver and that he is just a shipping clerk (105-106). In the end, Biff was the only one in the Loman family that came to any realization of this illusion that was set in place by Willy. Just as Gatsby, Willy lives in the past and his only wish is to turn back time and re-live those moments in the present. This causes strain and downfall on both characters.

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Gatsby soon realizes that the love with Daisy would have never returned the way it was and that it was a part of his past. However, for Willy, he never came to that same realization about how living in the past was not doing him any justice. With Gatsby, his realization begins when he and Daisy hit Myrtle with their car and he takes the blame for Daisy's actions (Fitzgerald, 143). After sitting in the bushes until four in the morning waiting for Daisy to leave Tom, Gatsby sees that she does not truly love him, so he returns to his empty mansion alone (147-149). Throughout the book, Gatsby is convinced that everything will go back to the way it was and when in an argument with Nick he says, "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before" (110). This shows how desperate Gatsby was for Daisy and how much pain he was in waiting for her. Right before Gatsby is soon found struggling for his life, his second part of realization comes. The mansion that was strictly for Daisy also had a pool. On the day of his death, he tells his servant who was going to drain the pool, "'Don't do it today,' 'you know, old sport, I've never used that pool all summer'" (153). Before his realization, Gatsby just saw that pool as a material item and never used it for what it actually was. Gatsby's life comes to an end when Wilson shoots him for killing Myrtle (162). As for Willy, he does not come to that same realization as Gatsby. Any time someone in the Loman family tries to tell Willy the truth about reality; he believes that they are just trying to spite him (Miller, 113). He cannot handle hearing the truth, even though he knows what the truth is. With Willy's mental downfalls, his flashbacks cause him to forget about present life. He believes that if he gets the car insurance by officially crashing the family car that Biff will finally be proud of him (126). He explains to his brother how well-known he is and that at his funeral he will have people from all over like Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey (126). In reality, Willy does not see how unknown he is in the business world and that one does not have to be well-known and well-liked to be successful. Willy takes his life because he wanted Biff to see how successful he was, so he carries out the plan of crashing the car in hopes to get the car insurance (136). The Loman family was crushed, as they thought that they had gotten rid of the suicidal

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thoughts of Willy. At the funeral, Linda could not understand what had happened and why she could not cry (137-139). Biff explains to her, "He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong (138)." Biff was the only member in the family that realized Willy had more issues on the inside and that living in the past was not doing him any good. In the end, both characters experienced the downfall of living in the past and not looking at reality.

In conclusion, one sees how the theme of illusion versus reality is prominent in both *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman*. One sees how living in the past can cause someone to hide who someone really is and how it can lead to major downfall in life. Reality was not all that clear to the main characters and one can see how this causes them both to lose their lives.

Connection to society?

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