The Great Gatsby- Essay, Research Paper

The Great Gatsby-

In the novel, The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald,

symbolism adds depth to the story, without introducing confusion.

Fitzgerald’s symbols are large, concrete and obvious. Examples of this

symbolism are the valley of ashes, T. J. Eckleburg’s huge blue eyes,

and the green light on the Buchanan dock which Jay Gatsby idolizes.

The valley of ashes is “a fantastic farm where ashes grow like

wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take

the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a

transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling

through the powdery air…”(23) The valley represents the moral

disintegration of the roaring twenties by showing the barren wasteland

which contains the byproducts of the pursuit of wealth and the

American dream. “Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an

invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and

immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up

an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from

your sight.” (23) This shows how one can get caught up all of a sudden

in a cloud of confusion. They are just walking along, minding their

own business, doing their day-to-day activities, and suddenly get

caught up in an impenetrable mess. This happened to Nick. He was just

minding his own business, and then he met Gatsby, who planned things

for him without his approval or advice, and who basically used him to

his advantage. Nick had no way out of this mess, but he did not

really want one. He was the only person who cared enough to give

Gatsby a proper burial.

Another symbol in this novel is T. J. Eckleburg’s huge blue

eyes. “The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic- their

retinas are one yard high. they look out of no face, but, instead,

from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-

existent nose.” (23) The eyes of T. J. Eckleburg are said to represent

the eyes of God at one point. His eyes make Wilson, the husband

ofTom’s mistress, kill himself because he thinks that God is actually

looking at him in shame for murdering Gatsby. When in the valley of

ashes, the eyes of the doctor are also like the eyes of God, though it

is not stated. T. J. stands on a hill looking over the occurrences in

the valley. Like God, he is watching over the waste created by the

spiritless society, and then later on his eyes represent God to a man

who was wasted by society; a resident of the spiritless wasteland of

society.

Yet another symbol in The Great Gatsby is the green light on

the end of the Buchanan dock. This light represents hope and dreams to

Gatsby. It represents his love for Daisy and his need for a companion,

or in Nick’s words, “He stretched out his arms toward the dark water

in a curious way….Involuntarily, I glanced seaward- and

distinguished nothing except a single green light…that might have

been the end of a dock.” If Gatsby had lived in the nineties, he

would have a telescope looking directly into Daisy’s bedroom, he would

be considered a stalker, and Daisy would bring up sexual harrassment

suits on him. But, in this time, Daisy did not know, and what Daisy

did not know could not hurt her. “Compared to the great distance that

had separated him from Daisy [the green light] had seemed very near to

her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the

moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted

objects had diminished by one.” When, at last, Gatsby believes that

Daisy is his, he no longer idolizes her, and the green light has no

more symbolic meaning to him. Is like the saying, “You always want

what you can’t have.”

The symbolism in The Great Gatsby is a big part of what makes

the novel so great. It is simply stated, so it does not confuse the

reader as symbolism tends to do, but it merely adds depth to the

story.

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