

Symbols in “The Great Gatsby”

Gatsby's green light: Located at the end of the Buchanans' dock, this green light represents Gatsby's ultimate aspiration: to win Daisy's love. Nick's first vision of Gatsby is of his neighbor's trembling arms stretched out toward the green light. Later, after Daisy and Gatsby's successful reunion, a mist conceals the green light, visibly affecting Gatsby. Nick observes, "Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever....Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one". This image suggests Gatsby realizes he must face the reality of Daisy, rather than the ideal he created for her.



Valley of Ashes: A mid-way stopping point between West Egg and New York City, described as "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". The valley represent the moral decadence of the 20s with the ashes being what's left of society after everything good has gone. This is shown in the events of the novel that occur there. It is in the valley of the ashes where Tom has his affair with Myrtle, where Daisy kills Myrtle with Gatsby's car, and where George Wilson decides to murder Gatsby.

Eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg: These gigantic blue eyes without a face look out at the valley of ashes from behind a pair of yellow eyeglasses. This billboard advertisement -- which provides its eternal presence looming above the ash-heaps -- takes on added significance in Chapter 8, as a grief stricken George Wilson refers to it as God. While looking at the giant eyes after Myrtle's death Wilson reveals he had taken his wife to the window just before she died and told her, "God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me but you can't fool God!...God sees everything". Thus, the desolation of the valley of ashes may be seen in Fitzgerald's image of an abandoned billboard serving as Wilson's provider of solace and ultimate judge of morality. This new God watches over his paradise which has been reduced to ash-heaps by modern man.



Gatsby's house: This image serves as a key symbol of aspiration, reflecting both Gatsby's success as an American self-made man and the mirage of an identity he has created to win Daisy's love. Gatsby follows his American Dream as he buys the house to be across the bay from Daisy, and has parties to gain wide-spread recognition in order to impress her. Yet, Owl Eyes compares Gatsby's mansion to a house of cards, muttering "that if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse". Ultimately, the inevitable collapse occurs, as Gatsby loses Daisy and dies (with the exception of Nick) absolutely friendless, prompting Nick to refer to Gatsby's mansion as "that huge incoherent failure of a house."



Weather: Weather is used throughout the novel to reflect what is going on with the characters. When Gatsby and Daisy reunite, it is raining. As water symbolises rebirth, this represents the rebirth of their relationship. On the hottest day of the summer, tensions are rising amongst the characters at the Plaza. The heat represent the eruption of emotions in the key scene. On the day Gatsby dies, it is leading into Autumn. He comments that he hasn't used the pool all summer and invited Nick to join him. Once Nick has refused and returned to work, George Wilson turns up and shoots Gatsby. As Autumn represents the end of things which were once great, this season reflects the end of Gatsby's life.

