

# THE GREAT GATSBY

## CHAPTER 1:

The reader needs to be aware that Nick is the narrator, as well as one of the most important characters. Since the story is told through his eyes about people close to him, we cannot be sure that the impressions he gets are necessarily accurate. And anything he says about himself cannot be taken as gospel in particular. So whatever conclusions the text gives of a character, remember the person that they are being filtered through.

Nick importantly brings up that he is from the midwest. Toward the end of the book he says that all of the characters were not from the east and therefore not fit to live there. Their past lives hindered their ability to live in their current ones. He also says that he is from the middle class. Class is one of them most important themes in the novel and affects the relationships of the characters. Much of the way people are treated can be linked to their class and social position.

Take Daisy, for example. While Nick and Jordan are their for dinner she talks about having her little girl. She was very upset after the birth because Tom was nowhere to be found. When the nurse tells her she is a girl Daisy said " 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". The social position of women is criticized here. Daisy is a witty and clever woman, far more so than her brute husband. Yet she is the one treated as inferior because she is a woman. This is also why Tom can flaunt his affair. He does not have to worry about the consequences.

Later, when Nick sees Gatsby on the lawn, he watches him intently. He notices that Gatsby is looking out at the water but the only thing that is visible is a green light. That green light is the most important piece of symbolism in the book. It is a light on the end of Daisy's dock. It's meaning and references in the text are discussed in the symbolism section of this site.

## CHAPTER 2:

Near the garage where Wilson and Myrtle lives is an abandoned advertisement that is another important piece of symbolism. It is an ad for T.J. Eckleburg, an eye doctor. The ad consists of the gigantic eyes of the doctor staring out at people. The meaning of this symbol is that of judgment, and accountability, further discussed in the symbolism section. The eyes are located at the place where Tom goes to meet his mistress without guilt. The garage also ends up being an important location in later chapters and the eyes will take on a greater meaning in light of those events.

When Myrtle goes out with Tom and Nick she spends on many silly things, including a new puppy. She takes full advantage of Tom's money. It is ironic that since she has his money to spend, she becomes very arrogant towards the less well-off, even though she and her husband have very little money. She is in the novel as yet another commentary on wealth and class. Her attitude exemplifies what money can do to a person. Also, Tom's senseless attack on Myrtle goes back to the issue of consequence. Tom need not worry about any reaction to what he does, so he has no fear.

## CHAPTER 3:

Everyone's gossip about Gatsby shows that no one at the party has any real understanding of who he is. During a song played by the orchestra, everyone in the crowd becomes very romantic and sentimental yet, as Nick points out, " but no one swooned backward on Gatsby and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link". His detachment from the group of people he is entertaining seems odd. Why would he have them at his home if he was not close to them? There are several reasons. Possibly Gatsby threw those parties in the hopes that Daisy would come to one of them and he could see her again. Another possibility is that throwing parties was what Gatsby always thought wealthy people did. He is always working on his image and this may be part of the image he is trying to accomplish. Since, as we find out later in the

novel, Gatsby started out poor, those opulent parties may be a way for him to tell himself that he has arrived and to make sure everyone is aware that he is a man of great wealth, just like he always wanted to be.

When Nick calls on Jordan, she drives him through the city. It is during this drive that one of the most important words in the book is first used: careless. Nick describes Jordan as a "careless" driver. She seems unconcerned that she drives so poorly. Nick asks, "suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself?" and she replies "I hope I never will". Fitzgerald uses the word careless to describe many of the characters because this attitude is so closely tied to the theme of consequence and responsibility.

At the end of the chapter Nick says of himself, "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known". Although this may seem important to understand the character, the quote must be looked at carefully. Nick is saying this of himself but it may not necessarily be true. Nick seems to lie several times in the book. So here again the untrustworthy nature of the first person narrator is exemplified.

#### **CHAPTER 4:**

The story that Gatsby gives Nick about his life is almost entirely false. Although Gatsby did go to Oxford and was a decorated soldier, his wealthy family life is all a fabrication. The true nature of Gatsby's beginnings are found in chapter 6. But Gatsby is compelled to lie because his whole life is a fabrication. Gatsby has cultivated an image for himself that he would like to uphold no matter what. But he does expose himself. He tells Nick that he is from the midwest but when Nick asks what part of the midwest he replies San Francisco. Gatsby has been caught off guard by the question and offers a hasty answer.

The character Meyer Wolfsheim helps shed a little light on Gatsby. Gatsby makes no attempt to hide the fact that Meyer is a criminal, yet the two are very good friends. If Gatsby keeps such close company with a man like this, one has to question the nature of how Gatsby earned his money and position.

In the beginning of the chapter Nick says that he kept a ledger of all of the people who came to Gatsby's party. Although it seems oddly placed and has nothing to do with the plot, this list offers insight into the worlds of East and West Egg. The kind of people who come from East Egg and of a more refined breed, old money. Those from West Egg are people who earn money through things like the entertainment industry. Not only does the list offer an explanation of the makeup of the two Eggs it is also a description of the excessive nature of these parties. Fitzgerald wants this book to be critical of the materialism of America during this time period. The list talks of people who were wealthy and acted excessively in all that they did.

#### **CHAPTER 5:**

The reason Gatsby wants Daisy to come to Nick's house is because he wants her to see his house. After all the money he has spent on it, he wants her to see it. Her opinion is really the only one that matters. This is why he also wants to get Nick's lawn mowed and has flowers delivered to Nick's house for the tea. Gatsby has created an image in his mind about how he would like the afternoon to go, and he does all in his power to achieve it. We learn more about Gatsby's nature to fantasize in the next chapter.

Again we are posed with the problem that the narrator presents. Because the story is told through Nick's eyes we have no idea what is said between Gatsby and Daisy during the half hour that he leaves them alone. The only impression we get is the one that Nick gives us, and that is not necessarily reliable.

When the trio are going through Gatsby's house, he points out to Daisy that you can see her house across the bay. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock". The green light is symbolic of Gatsby's longing for Daisy, and for his longing in general. Gatsby, although wanting

Daisy, wants her as part of his whole world. A world of wealth and success. The green light represents to Gatsby all that is off in the distance that he wants to possess. Daisy is only part of that.

#### **CHAPTER 6:**

Nick's insights into Gatsby's past help the reader get a complete understanding of the character. Gatsby was an unhappy youth who yearned for something better. He wanted it so bad he created a type of imaginary world in which to inhabit. When Nick talks about Gatsby's false name he says "I suppose he's had that name for a long time, even then". Gatsby has spent much of his life with the image of something better planted firmly in his mind. And when Dan Cody takes him under his wing he gets a glimpse into that world and believes that he can one day attain it, that he can one day be a part of it.

That is what makes the scene with Tom and the horseback riders so hard for Gatsby. He tries to fit in, be gracious, but in the end they leave without him. The funeral towards the end of the book also highlights this point. For all the effort that Gatsby put into being a member of "the club" he never fits in. He's a novelty to others, not an equal.

But Gatsby did fit in that moment between he and Daisy that Nick talks about. He was being accepted by one of the wealthy and elite. It was one of the most complete moments of Gatsby's life and he believes that if he gets Daisy back, he can return to moments like those. As Nick says, "He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy".

#### **CHAPTER 7:**

Despite all that takes place in this chapter, the most important moment as far as gaining insight into the characters in when the group finally meets Daisy and Tom's baby. It brings an interesting consequence to the relationship of Gatsby and Daisy. When Gatsby first sees the baby Nick says "I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before". Gatsby and Daisy have been so wrapped up in their own relationship and their own happiness they have not even taken the child into consideration. Yet Daisy is so possessive of her little girl. She eagerly tells the group that "She doesn't look like her father. She looks like me. She's got my hair and shape of the face". Not only does Daisy want to keep Tom's involvement in the child to a minimum, but the child is something that is totally hers. Given her life, Daisy has very little to control or hold on to. Her own husband comes and goes as he pleases and she has no job or means of independence. So her child is something she can hold up to the world and say is hers.

It is shortly after this that Gatsby says that "Her voice is full of money", referring to Daisy. This simple line clearly shows how tied the idea of wealth is to Daisy in Gatsby's mind. If there is any true love between the two, it has been preserved by Gatsby's lust for wealth and possessions and Daisy becomes another object to him at times. Like the green light, Daisy herself is symbolic to Gatsby of all that he can have.

There is a single-mindedness to Gatsby once he sets his sights on something. After the accident Gatsby seems oblivious to the fact that a woman was killed by he and Daisy. His only concern is for Daisy. As Nick explains what happened he says of that "He (Gatsby) spoke as if Daisy's reaction was the only thing that mattered". Despite all that has happened Gatsby is still fixated on Daisy.

#### **CHAPTER 8:**

When Gatsby opens up to Nick about his past, we see why he acts the way he does. He has a romantic view on what happened between he and Daisy and it is because of this that he tries so hard to get back to it. Whether it is real or not, we cannot be sure, but it is very real to Gatsby and that is all that matters to him. This story also shows the profound impact Daisy had on Gatsby's thoughts of wealth. All of his memories of her are tied to the glamour and richness of her life. The large, beautiful house and the fine clothing. It is more than Daisy that he has fallen for, it is the mystique of wealth that she has. He wants it as well, and believes that by having Daisy he can obtain it.

As Wilson talks to Michaelis about his wife's affair, an allusion is made to the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg. Wilson says "God sees everything" and Michaelis replies, "That's an advertisement." Here we gain a better understanding of what those eyes mean. They remind the characters of the judgment they deserve, even if they never receive it. The eyes make them and the reader conscious of the guilt these people should be feeling.

## **CHAPTER 9:**

The poor attendance at Gatsby's funeral exemplifies the ultimate failure of Gatsby to ever achieve what he wanted. The woman he loved was not present, she was off with her husband. None of the people who frequented the parties over the summer showed up and Wolfsheim, one of the few people who could be called a close friend to Gatsby, refused to attend. This can all be tied into the final quote about trying to grasp for that green light. The more Gatsby tried to obtain, the less he ended up with. Like the green light, it receded before him no matter how badly he wanted all of it.

And Tom and Daisy's sudden disappearance shows the truly careless nature of these two. As Nick says, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy- they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money...". The privileged life the two had led made them incapable of accepting responsibility for their actions. They simply were not able to accept their judgments. This is why Daisy is willing to leave Gatsby in order to escape punishment. No matter how true her words of love to him were, she was willing to sacrifice them to run away from responsibility.

Another look at the importance of the word careless is when Nick goes to see Jordan. She brings up the time he called her a careless driver. She says that Nick was careless also and that it was careless of her to trust him, that he was false and a liar. This is also interesting because of how honest Nick claims to be. Because we have no objective perception of the situation it is one character's word against the other's.

# **SYMBOLISM IN GG**

## **The Green Light**

The green light is a multi-faceted piece of symbolism in the book. Its most obvious interpretation is that the light is symbolic of Gatsby's longing for Daisy, but that is too simplistic. Daisy is part of it, but the green light means much more. Gatsby has spent his whole life longing for something better. Money, success, acceptance, and Daisy. And no matter how much he has he never feels complete. Even when he has his large house full of interesting people and all of their attention, he still longs for Daisy. He created in his dreams for the future a place for her, and he will not be content to have that gaping hole. So the green light stands for all of Gatsby's longings and wants. And when Nick talks about the green light at the end of the book he says "It eluded us then, but that's no matter- tomorrow we will run faster, stretch our arms out farther...." . He connects the green light to all people. Everyone has something that they long and search for that is just off in the distance. That is the green light.

## **The eyes of T.J. Eckleburg**

Fitzgerald uses the word careless a lot in describing most of the people and events in this book. There seems to be no fear of consequence, of judgment. So who is doing the judgment? That is, in part, what the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg are there for. These eyes are from a billboard that looks over Wilson's garage. The eyes are always mentioned whenever Nick is there. They look over the situation, objectively, but offer a kind of judgment on the characters and their actions. They are placed near Wilson's because that is where some of the most selfish acts take place: Myrtle's death, Tom's affair. All of these crimes go unpunished. So they eyes look on and remind the characters of the guilt that they forget to have for what they have done.

## East and West Egg

One of the most important themes in the novel is class and social standing. It is a barrier for almost every character. East and West Egg acts as a symbol of this in its physical makeup. Tom and Daisy live on the East which is far more refined and well bred. Nick and Gatsby are on the West which is for people who don't have any real standing, even if they have money. The green light shines from the East Egg enticing Gatsby towards what he has always wanted. And Daisy, the woman that Gatsby has always wanted but never gets, lives on East Egg. The barrier that the water creates between these worlds is symbolic of the barrier that keeps these people apart from one another and from much of what they want.