

Motif of eyes in the great gatsby

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



The motif of eyes in *The Great Gatsby* Eyes are the gateway to the soul, or so the old saying goes. People's eyes can convey their feelings - their anger, excitement, or worry. Eyes can also convey subconscious emotions, revealing hidden depths that might not otherwise be apparent. In *The Great Gatsby* we are introduced to many characters whose eyes effectively reveal their personalities. The author explores the symbolism of eyes as Nick, the narrator, observes the lives and interactions of his friends on Long Island.

One of his acquaintances, Daisy, is a flighty girl, married to a retired football player. Her husband, Tom Buchanan, embodies the classic tough-white-male aura. These two and the majority of other east coast characters are eventually seen as immoral, and the author's portrayal of their eyes foreshadowed this development. Through a complex analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, one can argue that eyes are used as a motif that symbolizes the "loss of virtue in America." Through the eyes of our narrator, James Gatsby and Tom Buchanan represent the east coast American ideal.

Nick considers their wealth, social status, and confidence to be the level that he strives to attain. What he does not first understand is that these qualities ultimately lead to each man's demise. Although Tom and Gatsby had many differences, they shared the common flaw of lost virtue. When Nick reconnects with his old friends, his first impression of Tom Buchanan is that "two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over [Tom's] face" (9). In this passage we witness Fitzgerald's reference to eyes and his characterization of them with the adjective of "arrogant. These overwhelming eyes are the first feature Nick notes, and he claims even they

communicate Tom's stuck-up attitude. Tom's eyes make him appear to be "always leaning aggressively forward" (9) - clearly a negative personality trait.

Virtue is defined as a quality considered morally good or desirable in a person. Referencing the quote above, one can make the inference that Tom's character falls outside of this definition. This is a trend, which carries throughout this novel continuously with all of Nick's 'east coast friends. During the same evening Nick notes that Daisy's eyes "flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with thrilling scorn" (20). This quote is juxtaposed to an unflattering insight into Daisy's character, as Nick observes in the insincerity of her comments about sophistication and the falsity of his evening spent with her and Tom. Yet despite all this, he still acknowledges that Daisy's character always seems to be promising "gay and exciting things" have already happened and are still yet to come.

Daisy represents the wild side of high end New York, but we see that this lifestyle is not quite as superior as everyone believes it to be. In fact, Daisy seems to view it in quite a bittersweet manner and cries that it is not entirely satisfying. What Fitzgerald is displaying through the two figures of Tom and Daisy is that while they want for nothing, they long for everything. In order to satisfy their desires they turn to money and society, and still find these lacking. Nick moved from Midwestern America to the East Coast.

Cities have historically been viewed as centers of depravity, while rural areas represent simplicity and thus a kind of innocence. Every time the characters travel between the Eggs and the city, they pass beneath a billboard containing the infamous eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. His eyes are "blue and gigantic" with "retinas one yard high," all rising "above the grey land and
<https://assignbuster.com/motif-of-eyes-in-the-great-gatsby/>

spasms of bleak dust" below (26). These eyes are witness as the characters venture to the city - Tom for his affair, Daisy looking for ' fun,' even Gatsby to meet the man who fixed the World Series.

These fraudulent actions reveal the corrupted natures of characters, and in effect the corruption of people at large. The billboard's eyes are equated to the eyes of God, eyes witnessing everything everywhere. Just as one would feel shame knowing God was watching their deceitful actions, one should feel shame being scrutinized by Tj Eckleburg. The commercialism of the billboard is additionally reflective of the increasing commercialism of America, and of its citizens growing obsession with material wealth. Tom and Daisy's lifestyle is the epitome of this, as they solely pursue money and fun and have no interest in their moral states of being.

Yet just as this couple's lives lack true joy - as displayed through Fitzgerald's apt descriptions of their eyes - so will anyone's who obsessively pursues the ' American Dream' of endless wealth.

Works Cited

- Dictionary. com. " Virtue. " Dictionary. com. Dictionary. com, n. d. Web. 18 Mar. 2013.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby. Australia: Scribner, 1925. E-book. " The Great Gatsby; Symbols and Motifs. " Eyes of T. J. Eckleburg. Blog Spot, May 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.
- " Benjamin Franklin Quotes. " LibertyQuotes. Liberty-Tree. ca, 2005. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.