

Depiction of the valley of the ashes in chapter 2 of great gatsby essay



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Fitzgerald's depiction of the Valley of Ashes in Chapter Two The Valley of Ashes, a landfill site solely for ashes, is painted by Fitzgerald to greaten our appreciation of American Society and the themes it generates such as social decline, moral ambiguity, the loss of hope and faith and the dominance of shallow materialism. Nick Carraway labels the Valley as " desolate", thus steering our attention into one which will perceive the Valley negatively. Fitzgerald then paints the Valley of Ashes as a crude distortion of nature. The references to nature stem from a " farm" where " ashes grow like wheat", among " hills" and " gardens" of ash.

The ashes give life to the wheat and are the foundation of all 'life' in this area. Consequently they are seen as a symbol of fertility. A problem with this foundation is that ashes from industrial cinders are hardly a fertile symbol yet they support an entire ' community'. This is waste and a pollutant, which miraculously gives way to wheat. The " wheat" (the basis of a Western diet) having sprouted from the ash must also be corrupted. Therefore the " crumbling" men would also be corrupted, who live off the land, along with their dreams and ambitions.

This is a very bleak outlook on life and promises little success to the average American. Like all themes throughout Great Gatsby, this is a microcosm of America (as the title not chosen of the book would suggest: Under the Red, White and Blue) so Fitzgerald questions the validity of the American Dream too. Fitzgerald has chosen ash to be the basis because ash is the waste of the rich and industrious. Fitzgerald questions the morality of the rich by suggesting that their extravagant materialistic hunger distorted the ideals of those less well-off; leading by ' bad' example.

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Marx (a recent thinker when the book was written) called agriculture basis for an economy, which questions if the growing of wheat from ash is corruption of American society from the top down or bottom up. This passage shows the bottom being corrupted also; therefore it is that spiritual corruption is taking place at every level of society. The process is however is unbroken and cyclical, which portrays continual decay: The ash is the foundation for buildings, with chimneys, which let out more ash. An interesting viewpoint is that the ash is an echo of the rich; after all it is predominantly their waste.

This is why the men from the ash appear to be already building a small community and trying to imitate their predecessors. This is another economic chain forged from the waste of the wealthier economic chain. Such a statement stresses Fitzgerald's understanding of how money-orientated America was in the early 20's. It develops an appreciation for his insight; as we progress through the Great Gatsby we find everything has the materialistic taint of money. It is interesting to wonder how far materialism has replaced faith and God. The ash gives a "transcendental effort" to create humans.

Can humans or even the burnt remains of their waste have "transcendental" powers? One possibility would be that God is no longer able to and the reader is to view the capitalist megalomania of the all devouring rich as trying to usurp and imitate his power by using their own wealth. Is god dead or does society perceive him to be dead? Friedrich Nietzsche in his most famous (and then recent) book Thus spoke Zarathustra wrote that "God is Dead". This is also what Fitzgerald hints at: God is no longer a viable source of any absolute moral principles.

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This loss of 'ontological ground' that societies experienced and tried to make sense of, along with all the moral confusion that arose, meant that American society boiled down to an economically fuelled mass, which Fitzgerald ironically points out is discontent with the material. Nietzsche argues, similarly to Fitzgerald that, the material all devouring nature of the upper class is due to people trying to comfort themselves, after losing the moral benchmarks - or their reliance upon God or a higher power. Nick notes that Gatsby is always yearning and Tom is always restless.

These actions are simplified examples of their wanton manner. Americans act as if God is no more or meaningless by deceiving themselves that riches can provide the same contentment as God. The eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleberg are another reference to God. This association is concretely made in chapter eight, when George takes Myrtle to the window (from which, we know, the billboard is visible) and tells her she "can't fool God". Wilson then makes the very same connection we are; the eyes of T. J. Eckleberg are always watching, and so are the eyes of God.

One of the many interesting things to note about Dr Eckleberg is that he is bespectacled. The immediate assumption would be farcical: God has bad eyesight. The reality is much more sinister: God is not all powerful, he shall not always come to the aid of the weak, he is flawed, he is not all seeing - an intrinsic characteristic of God's has been taken away. Again Fitzgerald could be underlining the loss of moral certainty and the loss of their reliability upon a higher power and concrete social order. The eyes re judging the same traits of people which they judge about themselves, just how Daisy judges herself as "sophisticated" and Nick judges himself (even if not accurately). A <https://assignbuster.com/depiction-of-the-valley-of-the-ashes-in-chapter-2-of-great-gatsby-essay/>

breach of this honesty with oneself can have menacing results, because without faith the characters all put a premium on money. This concludes that faith has the redemptive quality it promises: those who respect God, try to salvage themselves from becoming acquisitively driven. George Wilson seems to fare better than most could in his position of near-poverty, though is not necessarily content, has moments when his eyes light up with the “damp blue” of hope.

It is his hope and faith that gives him a redemptive quality and keeps him from ending up like Tom- an all devouring monster of eternal want. Many parallels are established between Tom and George Wilson. Tom God is painted as a piece of old fiction only the weak hang onto for they have little tangible sustenance. George however only accesses God through a billboard. This is ironic as the means he uses to access God and escape the entrapment of material unfulfillment is through a billboard - which was created to further somebody else's financial gain.

This idea again usurps the idea that God does not offer help but so strongly so, with emphasis on the fact that ‘his image’ was created for somebody else's monetary gain that the reader is forced to believe that the financial path is the only one really open and that remotely promised success. The advert is very powerful only due to its aesthetic effect - rather like an artwork. Fitzgerald does seem to express the advertisement as a work of beauty with mysterious floating eyes “gigantic and blue”. By humans seeking profit, God has been reduced to 2D, to sell glasses. In such the very idea of God has exploited for financial gain.

To reflect upon such an idea shows how corrupt a society must be to use connotations of a sacred being for personal advancement. The punishment for the oculist, who enacted such a immoral deed is left for the reader to decide. The book hints that oculist forgot the eyes on the billboard he erected and moved away. This second option is more drawn out and realistic: there is no religious punishment - life unremarkably goes on. All these paradoxes (God with glasses) and mysteries (wheat growing from ash) that Fitzgerald describes to greaten our admiration of the way he portrays social decline and the hollowness of faith.

The annihilation of faith is also represented by imagery of the river Styx: river across which the barges cross represents the Greek mythological river that formed the boundary between Earth and the Underworld, which the dead would be ferried across. It is juxtaposed against the passengers of the train who epitomise the wealthy classes. For these passengers the significance of the river is lost. They might recognise its semblance nominally, but not something that can connect to emotionally. Typically all it represents is another inconvenience to their financial welfare - a train delay.

If the idea of a reliable God is to be rejected then what we have left in the Valley of Ashes is a bleak desolate area. It is the only place we have a poor and named character from (George Wilson) and this figure fights with Tom over the possession of his wife. Nowhere else is the class-divide clearer than on this battleground. This is an area where the forces of dialectical materialism come into play - two different class interacting. The new social order is one of discordance and anarchy, ultimately leading up to Gatsby's murder.

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