

The Symbolism of The Character "Owl Eyes" in *The Great Gatsby*

There is an odd character mentioned in chapter 3. Fitzgerald depicted in which way "a stout, middle-aged man with enormous owl-eyed spectacles". The man sat and stuck to the books owned by Gatsby, asserting that the books are certainly real, but it turned out to be unread. By the end of the chapter, he shows again, pointing repeating the obvious event of car crash. And we could find the Owl Eyes in chapter 9 at the funeral for Gatsby, and his words left "the poor son-of-a-bitch". Three times totally mentioning about this character, what is the attribute/symbolism of him?

He was the only sight-deepened observer into Gatsby at the party, and in the whole book except Nick. He was regarding Gatsby as a book lover when he observed the real printed books, but subsequently he realized that though the books are real, they haven't been read. Gatsby bought those "real" books, still being use of decoration. Fitzgerald criticized through the muttering of the Owl Eyes that "if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse".

In fact, the character has his real-life prototype. "Owl Eyes" is a nickname of a friend of Fitzgerald: Ring Lardner, who was a sports writer. He once covered about a "fixed" 1919 World Series by a group of New York gamblers. At the Series, a fellow sports writer recalls, "as Ring Lardner poked fun at Rollie Zeider's nose, Rollie countered by calling him Owl Eyes, but those owl eyes, too, were **seeing a lot of strange things**."¹ "Those eyes and what they saw, the national pastime **corrupted for money**, suggest the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg, of which Owl Eyes is a thematic echo, overlooking the corruption of the Valley of Ashes."² It seems like the author didn't regard Gatsby as a true man, but belittled him as a man educated of the surface and emptiness of the inside.

But that is still a superficial layer of the Owl Eyes. The attribute to the character is not discerning as we thought previously. The latter two times of his showing, Fitzgerald demonstrated an image of drunk-abuse, muddled, and have problem in understanding. He described the character, after stepping down his car, repeatedly wiped his rain-poured-down glasses outside and in as if the writer implied the character had no clear eyes to see as a matter of fact. Under Gatsby's pretend to be a wealthy gentleman, it is his ardent heart which matters much more than anything else. Only Nick really observed.

Works cited:

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¹ Frederick G. Lieb, *The Story of the World Series: An Informal History* (New York, 1949), pp. 133.

² Hampton, Riley V. "Owl Eyes in *The Great Gatsby*" *American Literature* 48.2(1976): 229.