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It's all about life... except death

Literature is so much more than words written on a page; between the lines lie the author's true meaning. Thomas C. Foster goes in depth with every story he reads, and connects many things together to define their significance. This helps many readers to see beyond what the eye can see, and use more thought and focus to understand what is happening. His book—How to Read Literature Like a Professor—shows ways for readers to better identify what to look for as they analyze many different pieces of text. He has very virtuous insight to all different types of literature; no matter what kind or age. F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" is a great example of many of Foster's themes: where seasons, weather, a Christ-like figure and geography take leading roles.

Foster focuses his attention on many different aspect of writing, especially seasons. The Great Gatsby, which starts during spring, turns to summer with new beginnings for each of its characters. As Nick Caraway says, "And so with sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on trees... I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer" (Fitzgerald, 4). Nick moves into a new house and along with it comes a new start for him and for Jay Gatsby. Foster states that "being compared to a summer's day" (Foster, 183) is much lovelier than a winter evening. Summer brings up many blissful memories and relates to Gatsby as he has many summer parties at his house creating his own merry times. As the season changes from

summer to fall, things start dying. Gatsby's parties start winding down and multiple deaths occur—including his own. The leaves start falling off the trees as bodies are put into the ground. Fitzgerald did an excellent job with this aspect of the story, capturing how lively a summer can start, and the slow and eventual death that proceeds it to the end; "It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete" (Fitzgerald, 163) Foster states that every aspect of a story has a purpose and the main purpose of the fall at the end of the book was to help the reader to visualize the deaths of the leaves. Much like Fitzgerald's characters went to their deaths or quiet homes.

In "It's more than just rain or snow" (Foster, 74), Foster describes his theory that every monumental event in a literary piece can be explained by a weather transformation. The weather throughout The Great Gatsby is illustrative of the characters' lives as they progress through the seasons. The sun shines as Nick moves into his new house in the spring and continues to be beautiful as Nick is introduced to Gatsby. The weather takes a turn as Fitzgerald takes us through "a valley of ashes" (Fitzgerald, 23) where most of the poor and desolate people live. A light and cheery day can lead to a sad and lonesome one in a matter of minutes coming from the effects of this place; as an unexpected thunderstorm can ruin an otherwise beautiful day. Foster talks in his book of how "weather is never just weather" (Foster, 74). Later on in the book, Nick organizes a meeting of Gatsby and Daisy; as they start their meeting the rain pounds on the windows. Nick hadn't anticipated this meeting to go well, for at the time Gatsby was ready to lay his heart on the line and give Daisy all the detail of his love for her, although she didn't share the same feelings. However, like the dreariness of a storm can be lifted as the clouds fade away and sunshine arrives; Nick returns to the house a long while later. The sun has come out, the rain has cleared up, and he finds Gatsby and Daisy laughing on his sofa. Fitzgerald shows how the weather can

impact the mood of a scene through this sequence of events. This is a perfect way to end off that scene. Foster's theory is further backed up in these themes as the rain signifies sad events, but transitions to lighter moments, as do the moods of Jay Gatsby and Daisy.

Symbolism is also a very important and influential theory of Foster's in many literary pieces today. Fitzgerald creates the symbol of an omnipotent being, through "The Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg" (Fitzgerald, 23) which are always watching. The eyes are there in the dark, in the light, in the morning, and the night. Myrtle spots them as she looks out her window before meeting Tom, knowing that the eyes are watching her cheat on her husband. Myrtle is married but knows her husband is too blind to see that she is cheating, so with the eyes watching her, she leaves her husband to go be a mistress to Tom. Although Foster theorizes that symbols are "likely not reducible to a single statement but will more probably involve a range of possible meanings and interpretations" (Foster, 98), in this instance a strong argument can be made that these eyes embody a symbol of the upper class always reigning over the lower class. Further the eyes are often mentioned when something momentous is about to occur. The first of many events where this is shown is when Nick meets Tom Buchanan's mistress—Myrtle. These eyes seem to it that they know everything about these people and the lives they lead. A concluding example near the end of the book is where the eyes watch in horror as Myrtle gets hit and dies in her husband's arms. The influence of symbolism is reflected in the manner of which the eyes capture Myrtle's trials, tribulations and final untimely death.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's view of New York City and the 1920s is vibrant and fanciful. The city is beautiful and the characters are from the richest parts of New York City. Fitzgerald shows immaculate differences of the people of the "Egg" society and people of the inner city while going on a drive to town. The main characters; Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby "lived at West Egg

the—well, the less fashionable of the two...Across the courtesy bay, the white palaces of the fashionable East Egg glittered along the water” (Fitzgerald, 5). As we learn later on in the story, Gatsby is in love with a woman, Daisy, who lives on East Egg. Gatsby’s house is directly across from Daisy’s house on the river so that each and every night he can look and see the end of her dock. Foster shares that geography matters, “we feel that those novels and stories couldn’t be set anywhere but where they are, that those characters couldn’t say the things they say if they were uprooted”(Foster,164), much like Gatsby and Daisy’s locations. The Eggs both symbolize wealth, because only the rich can and will live there. The West Egg has become the newer Egg and as the years have gone on the East Egg has become “rotten”. Rotten in the context of the wealthy becoming so spoiled in wealth even the people of West egg are not good enough for them anymore. In the end, the geography separated Daisy and Gatsby not only physically but socially as well.

Foster can be applied very liberally to the book, The Great Gatsby, through his imagery and many meanings to single words. The season and weather change the time and atmosphere to add a happy tone or sad tone to the piece, while the symbolism and geography set the scenes and foreshadow into the tragic ending. Every small detail in Fitzgerald’s book seems to make no meaning to readers skimming over the pages. But when taking the techniques learned from Foster, there are meanings hiding around every turn of the page. Overall Foster is very useful in helping to pick apart what Fitzgerald is saying between the lines.