

The Symbolic Meaning of Color in the Great Gatsby

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Abstract: In *The Great Gatsby*, the author makes full use of various color symbols to deepen the theme of his works. The purpose of this paper is to explain why the color symbol is called the unique literary and artistic technique of *The Great Gatsby* by analyzing the significance of different colors in the novel. The symbolic meaning of color mainly includes shaping the character, promoting the plot development, reflecting the characteristics of the times, deepening and enriching the theme connotation of the novel. The colors studied are: green, blue, white, yellow, red and grey. These colors reflect the growth and collapse of the American dream in Fitzgerald's works. With the disillusionment of the American dream, the protagonist and the main characters of the novel fall into a tragic ending. The analysis of the protagonist's tragedy in *The Great Gatsby* also reflects the abolition and unreality of the American dream in the 1920s. It is a kind of satire to the valueless problem of "American Dream" and the blindness of enterprise pursuers.

1. Introduction

Fitzgerald was born in a special era. In that confused era, Fitzgerald's achievements were only lower than those of Hemingway and Faulkner. The *Great Gatsby* also established Fitzgerald's position in American literature. ^[1]Postwar is a period of rapid economic development, people's traditional values and morality have been greatly impacted, people are more addicted to pleasure and life. ^[2]Fitzgerald had a deep understanding and feeling of post-war prosperity. Although the theme of his works is to describe romantic and luxurious life, these works show amazing artistic skills. His writing style is simple and elegant, and he is especially good at creating vivid literary metaphors. The position of the F. Scott Fitzgerald as the literary spokesman of the Jazz Age was determined by the beauty and destruction of the This Side of Paradise and its aftermath. Fitzgerald is known as the poet laureate of the jazz age and becomes the embodiment of the jazz age. He became the pride of the times, the man who made up his mind to despise life and indulge in joy after World War I. ^[3]But in essence, the two novels are as superficial as the times when they were born and admired. They lack real connotation in emotion, just model in description to attract everyone to win. Fitzgerald's third novel, *The Great Gatsby*, is particularly impressive. This work can be said to be the soul treasure of this meticulously crafted work, with accurate description, exquisite artistic conception and rich emotions. Even the serious Eliot thinks that this is "the first step of American novel after Henry James". Today, it is obviously an immortal work, which makes Fitzgerald famous and one of the classics of modern American literature. In the process of writing, he integrated the life atmosphere, mental outlook and social characteristics of jazz age into his novels. Therefore, it is also said that Fitzgerald's works are representative of the jazz age.

^[4]Fitzgerald used a lot of symbolism in the creation of *The Great Gatsby*, which vividly displayed more abstract concepts in front of people. The successful use of symbolism is the key to the success of *The Great Gatsby*.

The Great Gatsby is full of fantasies about love and wealth. The protagonist, Gatsby, is a victim of fantasy. During World War I, he fell in love with Daisy, a local beauty. They loved each other sincerely and swore to each other. Because Gatsby had no money and couldn't afford a lot of marriage expenses, Daisy had to marry Tom Buchanan, a rich man in the factory. But Tom likes the hostess Myrtle. Daisy is a little unhappy. Gatsby made a lot of money selling bonds during the war, but he never forgot Daisy. He did not hesitate to spend a large sum of money at the party and did everything in his power to lure Daisy back. At Gatsby's request, neighbor Nick Carraway built a party for their reunion. Gatsby and Daisy are back together. When Daisy's husband found out about it, they had a fight. Later, Gatsby and Daisy drove to New York. Daisy was so nervous that she accidentally crushed Tom's mistress Myrtle under the wheel. In order to protect Daisy, Gatsby takes responsibility for the accident, but Tom encourages Myrtle's husband Wilson to shoot Gatsby. Nick held a funeral for his neighbor Gatsby, but the funeral scene was so cold that even Daisy, Gatsby's beloved, did not attend. With the death of the body, Gatsby's dream was shattered. The disillusionment of the American dream is a traditional theme in American literature, and *The Great Gatsby* is undoubtedly one of the best works to reflect it. It uses traditional realism techniques, but also incorporates some modernist writing techniques. A large number of color images with multiple meanings in the works are one of the symbols of the author's application of modernism. The ingenious use of color symbols to express the author's profound ideological connotation is an important reason for the great success of *The Great Gatsby*.

2. Different Colors in *The Great Gatsby*

Fitzgerald successfully uses the symbolic meaning of color in *The Great Gatsby*, which not only deepens the theme of the novel, but also endows the novel with more profound connotation. Disillusionment of the American dream is the traditional theme of American literature, and the unbearable *Gatsby* is undoubtedly one of the best works to reflect this theme. It uses traditional realism techniques, but also incorporates some modernist writing techniques. A large number of color images with multiple meanings in the works are one of the symbols of the author's application of modernism. ^[5] The ingenious use of color symbols to express the author's profound ideas is an important reason for the great success of *The Great Gatsby*.

2.1 Green

2.1.1 Positive Significance—Youth and Love

Green is a mixture of yellow and blue. It is a vibrant and hopeful color. In the novel, green symbolizes Gatsby's dream and wealth. The green light on the dock reflects Gatsby's dream. The port's impressive green dock lights appear to be Daisy's incarnation, symbolizing Gatsby's love. According to literary tradition and general understanding, green represents ideal and hope. In the *Collection of Leaves of Grass*, the American poet Whitman describes grass as a "green thing full of hope", because in his view, green is the "color of hope". Green means wealth, youth, hope, happiness and freedom. The word "green" runs through the whole story and is closely related to Gatsby's short life. It symbolizes Gatsby's hard pursuit of his dream in this life, until his dream is disillusioned and the hero Gatsby dies earlier than himself. Gatsby's spiritual dream is incompatible with the mainstream society of material desire, and the disillusionment of the dream is inevitable. The green of the *Sweatshirt* reflects Gatsby's simplicity, youth and vitality. He is full of expectation

and confidence in the future. ^[5]

Green symbolizes the yearning for dreams and happiness. In the novel, the green light on the dock appears three times, and the first time appears at the end of the first chapter: “I decided to greet him. Miss Baker mentioned him at the dinner. It was an introduction. However, I did not go to meet him because he suddenly made a gesture implying that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms to the dark sea, which looked strange, and although I was far away from him, I could swear that he was shaking. I also looked at the sea unknowingly—everything was unrecognizable except for the green light. The light was small and distant, probably at the end of the pier. When I look back at Gatsby, he’s gone, so I’m in the dark again.” This is Gatsby’s first appearance in the book. By observing “I” (Nick), the author depicts Gatsby alone in the dark at night. Even if there is still a distance to him, “I” can still clearly see that Gatsby’s body is shaking, and he extends his hands to the sea. His strange and persistent appearance aroused the curiosity of “I”, so that “I” could not bear to disturb. This shows that Gatsby’s heart is full of ups and downs, and his emotions are hard to restrain. There is only a small green light in that direction. On midsummer night, Gatsby’s appearance touched me. Maybe he’s looking, he’s asking, he’s chasing.

The integrity and profundity of the theme. I remember Gatsby’s surprise when he first recognized the green light at the end of Daisy wharf. It took him a long time to come to the Blue Lawn. His dream seemed so close that he could hardly grasp it. He doesn’t know that he has forgotten the dream. It was somewhere outside the big fuzzy City, the dark Republic fields rolling forward in the night. ^[6]The green light is Gatsby’s fantasy of a better world, the epitome of Gatsby’s dream, rather than the cheap and nihilistic feeling brought by money. The dream and love symbolized by green light degenerate in reality. The gap between dream and reality has brought Gatsby a sense of loss and confusion. The gap between ideal and reality reveals the cruel nature of the American dream, which lays the foundation for Gatsby’s love, dream and even the end of his life.

2.1.2 Negative Meaning—Impossible Dream and Tragedy

However, in Fitzgerald’s works, green does not bring real hope to Gatsby. Every night, Gatsby looks at the green light on the wharf opposite the Bay, which is also out of reach. The green light that never goes out at night symbolizes his pursuit of a dream that has never been realized in his life. Despite his endless wealth, Daisy, a beautiful married girl, is always out of reach. It was Gatsby’s wishful thinking, an unrealistic and illusory dream, until he paid the price of his life for his dream, and no one took care of the funeral. ^[7] Green is also the symbol of spring, the embodiment of hope and life. So Gatsby took the green light as his hope. As long as the green light is there, Gatsby may see Daisy again. Such a future is full of hope and light. Gatsby acquired wealth through his own efforts, but when wealth and dreams intersected, Gatsby’s pursuit of Daisy also changed. The pursuit of money is bound to produce a series of tragedies.

2.2 Blue

2.2.1 Positive Significance—Dream

According to color experts, blue is closely related to dreams, so this color is mainly related to Gatsby and Tess, as well as Gatsby’s dreams and illusions. The blue uniform driver, the blue garden and the blue lawn in Gatsby’s home represent a pure land where you can put down all the troubles in life and enjoy the pursuit of happiness. This special blue lawn makes Gatsby closer to the goddess in his heart and his dream. The third chapter discusses Gatsby’s subjectivity, starting from his blue garden; When Daisy came to Nick’s cabin to meet Gatsby, her hair looked like “blue paint”

because of the rain. So far, the meaning of the blue symbol seems to be hidden, and the author hopes that its profound meaning can be revealed slowly. In chapter seven, Gatsby finally feels that it's time to have a showdown with Buchanan. He gazed at "a sailboat heading towards the blue end of the bay". In front of it are some quiet islands. However, this is just Gatsby's illusion. There was no tranquil island or port in front of the sailboat sailing to his coveted wonderland. On the contrary, when Gatsby, who is addicted to the blue dream all day, is shot, what Nick hears is "a ghost bird singing sadly on the blue leaves".

2.2.2 Negative Significance—Greed

The blue in the text symbolizes secular factors. Eckberg's eyes are considered to be the eyes of God because they are blue eyes with big pupils. Myrtle's blue dress symbolizes her desire to run away with Tom, and Myrtle's desire to get out of her petty life.

2.3 White

2.3.1 Good Things—Purity and Innocence

At the beginning of the novel, Nick mentioned "the luxurious white palace" in the East Egg Area (Buchanan's residence). Then he saw Daisy in a white dress and her girlfriend Jordan in Buchanan's living room. Here, Tessie tells the story of her "white and beautiful" childhood in Louisville. In Chapter 6, she talks about her "white and beautiful" childhood in Louisville, where Nick has a feeling that Tess is actually "the princess who lives in a white palace." Funerals are in sharp contrast to "white New York, full of magic and beauty". At the same time, it seemed to be the prelude to Gatsby's funeral. The difference is that the hot funeral Gatsby saw is far from the desolate scene after his tragic death. What is unforgettable is that Gatsby, who always loved White and hoped that White would bring him miracles, was finally sent to the cemetery by a "dark, damp and surprising central car". Nick saw that the white and beautiful white was illusory in the end. In the end, he was mercilessly destroyed by the black people. "Can't do it!" Here, the image of a white man leads people to think that when Fitzgerald was baptized, his parents called him "Fujie" The white clouds floating in the sky are white and beautiful, but they are far away and unpredictable, which means Daisy can't reach Gatsby at last. Gatsby had a special love and longing for white people. The steps in front of his Chinese-style house are white, and he specially wore a white dress on the day of reunion with Daisy. But his heart of Daisy did not bring him a happy ending. Daisy and Seth Key are named after the author of the American National Anthem. The Star Spangled Banner and the distant relatives of their grandparents. It turns out that the name suits him best because he spent most of his life fighting for the "American dream". From Princeton to Hollywood, he traveled through Long Island and the Riviera to experience all kinds of life in the "Jazz Age". When he was young, he was a major admirer of that era. It is white that symbolizes purity, and the author uses it to reflect and highlight the stain in her soul. Fitzgerald's arrangements were clever and appropriate. Black and white always go together. The author uses his own color as a logo, highlighting the black. In the second chapter, Nick and Buchanan, and Buchanan's mistress, Buchanan. Wilson drives to New York. Fitzgerald spoke of what he had seen and felt along the way: "it was a summer Sunday afternoon". The weather was warm and pleasant, like an idyllic sight, and I wouldn't be surprised if a large flock of white sheep came out of the corner. How can such a place be compared with "idyllic scenery"? Referring to New York later, Nick described it as "a white city full of magic and beauty".

2.3.2 Evil Things—Shallow Ignorance and Greed

The Great Gatsby, white symbolizes the moral decay and spiritual emptiness of an era. Daisy often wears white clothes and drives a white sports car. On the one hand, it reflects Daisy's innocence and beauty on the surface. On the other hand, it symbolizes Daisy's inner emptiness. After marriage, she lived in a white palace style mansion with white curtains. "A breeze blew through the room, opening the curtains at one end and blowing out the other, like a pale flag... like the wind blowing across the sea, rippling on the crimson carpet, leaving a shadow." Daisy is also the name of a small white flower. These white clothes show Daisy's emptiness, boredom, shallowness and lack of spirit after marriage. The author's use of white vividly exposes her vanity, ignorance, indifference, selfishness and cruelty to readers, which accelerate Gatsby's tragedy. Gatsby's mansion is also white, wearing a white suit when dating daisy. He too is empty. In order to dream, he lived in poverty and achieved so-called material success, but his spirit is still in the extreme emptiness. From this unrealistic dream and pursuit, he is empty.

2.4 Red

2.4.1 Tom's Selfishness and Savagery

As a representative of the noble class, Tom Buchan's family is rich and generous, which is unimaginable: they live in luxurious "red and white villas", "bright rose rooms", "crimson rooms", "crimson carpets" and "half an acre of fragrant dark roses" all kinds of red and what Nick saw when driving away from Tom's house. The cruel, bloody and shameless nature of Tom and his wife: after Mittel's body was knocked open, they walked away, blamed others, killed three people in succession, and "screwed up and ruined others". Then he flinched to his own money and indifference and let others clean up the mess they left behind. Crying like a child. Fitzgerald uses red to explain the ugly behavior of the upper class, represented by Tom and his wife, who use bloody means to trample and destroy the dreams of others for their own benefit.

2.4.2 Violence and Death

Unlike previous naturalist writers, Fitzgerald associated red with violence and death. At the beginning of the novel, the cover of Nick's economics book is "bright red and gold"—which seems to mean that Gatsby's economic success comes at the cost of violence and bloodshed. Another prominent example is that when Nick first visited Buchanan, the Buchanan living room changed from rose red to "blood red" at night. Then on the way home, the author mentioned the "brand-new red gas station" in front of the garage. These descriptions perfectly complement the bloody car accident that followed near the Grey Valley gas station, as well as the final shooting of Gatsby in the swimming pool by Buchanan's mistress Mattner and her husband, Wilson, a car mechanic. At The Great Gatsby, Nick's securities investment book is "Books with a red gilded cover standing on a shelf, shining like a new note just printed from mint." These "red, gilt-covered books" allude to the bloody, tearful history of brazen extortion in capitalism's early years. As a representative of the noble class, Tom Buchan's family is rich and generous, which is unimaginable: they live in luxurious "red and white villa", "bright Rose House", "deep red house", "Crimson carpet" and "half an acre of fragrant black roses" the various colors of red Nick saw as he drove away from Tom's house and "the brand new red oil pump in the garage" implied cruelty, the bloody and shameless nature of Tom and his wife: after they leave, Myrtle's body is hit and "blossoms", they are free to blame others, kill three people, and "make a mess of things, destroy others, and then return to their own money and coldness"... and let others clean up their mess...

2.5 Yellow

2.5.1 Money, Status and Rights

The yellow in the text symbolizes luxury and wealth. When Daisy, a rich upper-class man, ran into Myrtle, a yellow car appeared. Yellow can be said to be the main tone of the article, a symbol of the rich and the upper class: Daisy the blond girl, Gatsby's blond tie, Jordan's blond hair, and the yellow combination of party girls. Yellow and gold are elegant colors, especially dazzling. On the one hand, they are symbols of wealth, on the other hand, they are symbols of human depravity and social decay under the influence of money supremacy. The Great Gatsby is a modern American in 1920s, both in reality and in his works. Many places are dusty, people are numb, and their hearts are tainted with materialism, only money and interests are supreme. Gatsby firmly believed that money could capture Daisy's heart. In Gatsby's romantic dream, Daisy is the perfect goddess and the source of his happiness. But the real Daisy was far from that. She is the heroine of Gates's purely fictional inner world. She firmly believes that her life must be combined with enough material conditions, married rich Tom, but after marriage, they are not happy. When she came to Gatsby's mansion and saw piles of beautiful soft and precious shirts, she buried her head in the piles of shirts and cried. Although her voice is moving, it is full of the jingle of money. All this suggests that Daisy has a strong desire for wealth. Daisy loves material things, but Gatsby naively thinks that he is the only person in Daisy's heart. This fantasy and obsession led him to a paranoid dream that would never come true, accompanied by a hidden crisis. He tried his best to raise money for his doomed dreams and find the lost love. When he saw Daisy again, he tried his best to show her his wealth: the light yellow luxury car, the first golden tie, the grand and gorgeous luxury banquet, the golden color everywhere, the yellow cocktail music, even the comb is pure gold. Yellow and gold are symbols of money supremacy and material society. In such an environment, the definition of success is closely linked to material wealth. In this story, Gatsby can only approach his goddess with money, and his dream is doomed to be a tragedy. This is consistent with the hypocrisy and disillusionment of the American dream. Nick and Tom come to the valley of ashes. "The only building that comes into view is a small yellow brick on the edge of wasteland..."

2.5.2 Death

In the novel, yellow is also accompanied by death. After his death, his body was placed in a car store, "in which there was only a yellow light hanging from a barbed wire cover over his head". Wilson, Myrtle's husband, thinks vaguely that the yellow cart is the culprit, which also implies and indirectly leads to the tragic ending of Gatsby. Wilson plans to avenge his wife. Gates insisted on waiting for a call from Daisy. He relaxed in the swimming pool. The driver asked if he needed help, but he shook his head. A moment later, he disappeared into the yellowing woods. This is the end of Gatsby's life and the end of his dream.

2.6 Grey—Spiritual Hunger

Grey has important symbolic significance in the Great Gatsby. Gray Valley, a dumping of industrial waste in the gray zone, a symbol of the human spirit of the Wilderness, is the pursuit of human wealth.

"There are only houses and chimneys and rising smoke. At last, with some miraculous effort, they occasionally pile up a crowd of grey people, and a long grey car slowly crawls along an invisible path, creaking to a halt. Then, a group of gray people gathered around with heavy shovels, raising a thick layer of smoke, so that you cannot see what they are doing because gray is the color

of dust, gray gives people a feeling of darkness, desolation, depression and disillusionment. It implied people's moral decline and social corruption at that time, and satirized people's crazy pursuit of material wealth and money and extreme lack of spirit in jazz age. The desolate scenes in the novel herald the coming of tragedy and the disillusionment of the American dream." indicates that Gatsby's fate is not only a personal tragedy, but also a tragedy.

The tragedy of society is the tragedy of that particular era. In addition, Fitzgerald described Gatsby as "in the moonlight", bright pink suit, pink symbolizes Gatsby's loyalty and sincere desire for sweetness and pure love, but also means that his simple and unrealistic dream is how insignificant and fragile, in the face of the relentless reality, the dream is doomed to collapse. Blue also appears many times in the novel. Such as "Dr. Eckleburg's eyes are blue", Wilson's light blue eyes, Dan Cody's "a blue coat" for young Gatsby, Daisy's a strand of wet hair sticks to her cheek as if it's coated with blue, Gatsby's "light blue" evening dress for Lucille (when Lucille attends the dinner party, The skirt was torn on the chair, "blue smoke from burning dead leaves in the air", "the ghost bird began to sing along the blue leaves" (the ghost bird began to sing in the blue leaves).

Blue Garden and blue-green uniform, Gates's driver. Blue, the color of the sea and the sky, represents tranquility, dreams and unhappiness. "Melancholy, depression and boredom" implies Gatsby and Wilson's depth and kindness, as well as their melancholy mood, illusory and ethereal dreams, and final disillusionment.

Gray also occupies a very important position in his works. In the second chapter, everything in Grey Valley is gray. The people here and the houses here are hazy and fuzzy, as if everything were on the edge of the wilderness. It turns out this is a dump. No wonder the dust here "grows like wheat" but has no life like wheat. Gray symbols also appear in other parts of the novel: the "gray names" of the diners who often patronize Gatsby's dinner, and their schedules have faded; In the first chapter, at a party held at Washington manor in Buchanan, New York City, smoke fills the living room and makes the whole room gray. Wilson and her sister at the party were spiritually empty. It is not difficult to think that gray is not in line with the "Jazz Age" reflected by the author. It can be said that the author uses the gray symbol to reveal the spiritual emptiness and even spiritual death of some people in the "jazz age", "the smell of money" can be seen everywhere. Gray is a symbol of disillusionment. The people who lived in the valley of ashes were pale. Everything they do is about survival. Their life is lifeless and uninteresting. For these people, hope is impossible. They dream of these people, and language is a luxury. Although Jordan has a beautiful appearance, but through Jordan's gray eyes can see her inner emptiness. Jordan's life has no plans and plans to speak of, she is always indifferent to everything, no dream. In *The Great Gatsby*, the description of gray is mostly about Grey Valley, where Wilson lives. At the time, people living in the valley were generally at the bottom of society, and the ashes of the valley symbolized the desperate situation of the people living there. The author described Wilson as "layers of gray dust" covering his dark coat and light hair, as if covering everything. There is no doubt that Wilson is one of the poor people in society—his wife has betrayed him for a long time, but Tom knows nothing about it. Gray's use makes readers feel that Wilson is poor and has no hope for the future.

3. Conclusion

The life of daisy and Gatsby is actually the symbol of the American dream, the epitome of the whole jazz age, and the hypocritical values and moral standards of the bourgeoisie. This illusory so-called American dream made all the blind pursuers like Gatsby die, and Gatsby paid the price of his life for it. Material abundance cannot bring spiritual enrichment, only the desolation and distortion of the soul^[8]. People are in a panic and don't know what they want. Why they work hard

and what is success are the hidden pain and tragedy of this era.

Throughout the full text, Fitzgerald uses the symbol of color words to express his profound ideological connotation in *The Great Gatsby*.^[9] As Hegel puts it, on the one hand, it shows its own characteristics, on the other hand, it shows the deeper and broader universal significance of individual things, not just the individual things themselves. These symbolic meanings seem to be a topic, and we need to explore the inner meaning behind them. Therefore, it is necessary for us to understand the symbolic meaning of English color words. Only in this way can we appreciate Fitzgerald's classic novel *The Great Gatsby* better. In order to make better use of writing skills, we must learn more about color. In addition to knowing what color symbols the author uses and how to use color symbols, we must also know why he chose this color to represent these meanings, and this color expresses these meanings.

Fitzgerald is an outstanding man. His keen insight into life and creativity extends the disillusionment of Gatsby's personal dreams to the disillusionment of the entire American dream. He entrusts all the characters in the novel with universal representative meanings, which make readers realize that Gatsby's failure is not only his personal tragedy, but also the tragedy of life goals and values in American culture. The pursuit of spirit has no place in the materialistic American society.

In the novel, Green, White, Yellow, Red, Grey and other important color images are endowed with rich symbolic meaning, and *The Great Gatsby* with the theme. The use of these images is vivid. It not only reflects the theme of the novel, but also shows the personality characteristics of the characters. It depicts the novel in colorful dream colors, reveals the tragic fate of the hero, and points out the inevitable trend of the disillusionment of the "American Dream" in the jazz era represented by Gatsby.

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