

Conflicts of Colors in *The Great Gatsby*

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The Great Gatsby showcases Fitzgerald's expert writing techniques and is considered the quintessential novel for revealing the extravagant and hedonistic society of its time. With the burgeoning film industry reshaping people's lifestyles to focus on sensual enjoyment, traditional books could no longer meet the needs of the average consumer. To address this shift, Fitzgerald infused his works with cinematic settings and a rich palette of colors. Numerous colors were employed to convey emotions, personalities, and social status. In the novel, red signifies Tom's aggression, white represents Daisy's innocence, green symbolizes hope, yellow stands for wealth, gray denotes poverty, and blue characterizes the old aristocracy. These colors visually draw lines, infusing different scenes and characters with distinct attributes, intensifying the conflict between the traditional aristocracy and the nouveau riche. Interestingly, the same color carries both positive and negative connotations in various scenes. For instance, blue also conveys sadness and loneliness; yellow signifies death and decay; white indicates shallowness and ruthlessness; and green represents greed. The multiple meanings assigned to each color enrich character images and emphasize emotional changes. Initially, vibrant colors depict extravagant parties, opulent attire, and magnificent structures. As the novel unfolds and conflicts between characters intensify, colors are increasingly used to express negative emotions, paving the way for the novel's central themes and the tragic fates of Myrtle and Gatsby. This analysis explores the novel's use of color symbolism to distinguish and highlight characters. Fitzgerald employs these vivid images to portray a society consumed by excess, materialism, and class divisions, where conventional values like morality, wisdom, hard work, and self-improvement fail to bridge the class gap.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, colors, symbolism, imagery

Introduction

The Great Gatsby, considered one of the most significant literary works, has been the subject of extensive academic scrutiny from various perspectives. However, its initial reception was rather tepid. Few showed interest in F. Scott Fitzgerald's exploration of 1920s extravagance, and many critics criticized his dissolute lifestyle and his perceived squandering of his talent on commercial writing. Consequently, the novel did not achieve bestseller status during Fitzgerald's lifetime. Some critics failed to grasp Fitzgerald's intended themes in *The Great Gatsby*, often fixating on what they perceived as sensational content.

It was only after Fitzgerald's death that people began to appreciate the novel's value, leading to a resurgence of interest and deeper analysis. T. S. Eliot famously referred to *The Great Gatsby* as a significant advancement in American fiction, a sentiment Fitzgerald had aspired to evoke. Generally, research on *The Great Gatsby* revolves around four main themes: sensory description, the American Dream, symbolism, and character portrayal.

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Sensory description in *The Great Gatsby* has garnered substantial attention in domestic and international scholarship. This research primarily examines visual depictions in the novel, particularly the symbolism of colors and their relevance to the novel's themes, plot, and characters.

The concept of the American Dream is a recurring theme in *The Great Gatsby*. Various scholars have explored how the novella embodies the social consciousness of the American Dream. This theme has been a subject of analysis since the 1950s.

Symbolism plays a pivotal role in *The Great Gatsby*, with Fitzgerald utilizing multiple symbols to convey the novel's themes and characters' fates. Scholars like Don Seiders had discussed the symbolism related to objects, while Robert F. McDonnell (1961) delved into ocular imagery's significance. Daniel Schneider (1964) meticulously examined color symbols, and Arthur Mizener (1963) emphasized the symbolic importance of houses. Laurence MacPhee (1972) explored the portrayal of automobiles in the novel and their representation of the disorder of the 1920s and the characters' chaotic lives."

Symbolic Meanings of Colors

F. Scott Fitzgerald, renowned for his literary acumen, skillfully employs symbolism as a potent narrative catalyst, with color symbolism assuming particular prominence in his seminal work, *The Great Gatsby*. He adeptly adopts the role of a visual artisan, painting vivid, and insightful scenes through the palette of colors, which provides profound character and thematic insights. Notably, "the green light" at the end of Daisy's dock signifies the boundless promise of Gatsby's dream, which tragically culminates in disillusionment. Similarly, the pervasive use of yellow symbolizes wealth and the materialism that ultimately shatters the dream. However, the subtler intricacies of color symbolism across various settings often elude the casual reader, and this article seeks to delve into these intricate color symbols and their central role in generating conflicts.

To comprehensively grasp the significance of symbolism, it is essential to establish its definition. A symbol denotes a word, phrase, image, or similar element entailing a complex web of associated meanings, perceived as having intrinsic value distinct from the symbolized concept. It functions to represent or stand for that which it symbolizes. In brief, symbols are vehicles—objects, characters, figures, or colors—utilized to convey abstract ideas or concepts. Furthermore, the meaning of symbols can evolve in response to their contextual usage. For instance, "dragon" might signify both "power" and "disaster". Thus, the interpretative value of a symbol hinges on when, where, how, and by whom it is interpreted, creating a subtle, often unspoken, language between the writer and the reader.

Symbolism, a profoundly significant tool in artistic creation, enhances the sensory richness of literature. First, symbols introduce dual meanings, both literal and figurative, allowing authors to convey more with less. Second, symbols infuse emotional resonance into a narrative, leaving a lasting imprint on readers. Third, they inject a visual dimension into complex themes. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the recurring use of green signifies the financial and materialistic ethos of life on Long Island's North Shore, and it also serves to express character attributes.

In essence, symbolism serves as a pivotal device in modern literature, enabling indirect, nuanced expression, often surpassing direct description in its import. The study of symbolism in literature aids in deciphering its intended meanings. Through symbolism, authors evoke readers' specific emotions by utilizing various symbols, settings, and color descriptions. However, this imagery seldom rigidly confines itself to a single interpretation,

as the personal perspective of each reader colors their perception. Nevertheless, this interpretive diversity enhances the richness of the reading experience, endowing it with profound meaning and joy.

The color green, which appears 18 times in *The Great Gatsby*, is typically associated with themes of spring, hope, and youth. One of the central symbols in the book is the green light on Long Island, which embodies Jay Gatsby's lifelong dream. This green light is closely intertwined with Gatsby's tragic life and is mentioned three times in the novel.

The first occurrence of the green light is when Nick first sees Gatsby in front of his mansion, arms outstretched towards it. This light symbolizes Gatsby's yearning for a reunion with Daisy, although it remains distant and unattainable, as depicted in the quote, "Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock" (Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 19).

In Chapter five, the second appearance of the green light symbolizes the romantic reunion with Daisy and serves as a pivotal image in the novel.

Moreover, the color green also represents Gatsby's unbridled pursuit of wealth, rooted in his belief in the American Dream. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes evident that this dream is disillusioned, especially with Gatsby's tragic demise, marking the disillusionment of the American Dream.

The green light also conveys themes of new hope and the relentless pursuit of one's dreams. It adds depth and significance to the novel's grand settings. For Gatsby, the color green is inextricably linked with his notions of love, wealth, and ambition. His unwavering dedication to Daisy, an aloof upper-class woman, contrasts sharply with the turbulent society of the Jazz Age, ultimately dooming his dream.

Central Conflicts Conveyed by Colors

Yellow Limos

From its inception, the automobile has borne social and cultural connotations beyond its utilitarian role. Particularly in the United States, the automobile serves as both an economic cornerstone and a symbol of social status and moral values. F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, employs various car descriptions to underscore these themes. Cars are central to the narrative, symbolizing characters' social standing and critiquing the adverse consequences of the relentless pursuit of wealth and status. For example, Tom Buchanan, a member of old money with a stable of polo ponies, views cars as mere accessories. However, he fears that the increasing popularity of automobiles and wealthy car owners will challenge his status. In contrast, Jay Gatsby seeks to flaunt his newfound wealth, prominently featuring his opulent yellow car, which symbolizes both wealth and moral corruption. Fitzgerald cleverly assigns distinct cars to individual characters to convey their personalities and aspirations. Tom's blue coupe represents aristocracy and indifference, emphasizing his disdain for cars as a symbol of nobility. On the other hand, Gatsby's extravagant yellow car symbolizes wealth and personal achievement, signifying his pursuit of Daisy's love. Fitzgerald does not critique the automobile as a mode of transportation but uses it as a symbol of a larger societal issue. Through these car symbols, he accentuates the division between old and new money, revealing an unbridgeable gap.

Red Mansion

The settings of East Egg and West Egg in *The Great Gatsby* draw from Fitzgerald's own experiences, offering a commentary on the distinctions between old and new money. Tom Buchanan's residence in East Egg

symbolizes privilege and nobility, while Gatsby's mansion in West Egg, though grandiose, lacks a sense of heritage and sophistication. Tom's Georgian Colonial mansion represents his inherited power and the privileges that come with his noble lineage, aligning with the American Dream. He resists any intrusion on his social superiority. Tom's character is reflected in the design of his red and white mansion. "Red" signifies his recklessness, especially after his affair with his mistress, while "white" reflects his stance on racism. Although the Buchanans lack titles, they are the American equivalent of aristocrats. Gatsby's mansion, covered in "raw ivy", symbolizes youth, vulnerability, and the desire for concealment. It aligns with Gatsby's mysterious persona. The social barrier between East Egg and West Egg, depicted as "indiscernible barbed wire", underscores the separation between old and new money.

Myrtle's Grey Life

Myrtle Wilson, married to George Wilson, a mechanic and used car salesman, desires wealth and status that she believes she deserves. Despite her mundane life, Myrtle aspires to refinement and propriety, maintaining an affair with Tom Buchanan, whom she hopes will leave his wife for her. During a party at her apartment, Tom's impatience leads to violence, leaving Myrtle disillusioned about her relationship with him. In another instance, she is drawn to a dog, but Tom's derogatory remark reveals her humble background. Myrtle's pursuit of a lavish lifestyle leads her to New York, where she insists on choosing a specific taxi. The discrepancy between the lavender exterior and the grey interior of the taxi reflects her own unfulfilled aspirations, mirroring the bleakness of the Valley of Ashes. Myrtle is associated with both grey and lavender, symbolizing her desire to elevate her social status. Yet, her vain and discriminatory behaviours ultimately lead to her tragic fate.

Pink Suite

The protagonist, Jay Gatsby, exhibits unceasing ambition and an ardent yearning for a more illustrious future in the novella. However, he originates from a modest, ordinary family. To escape the constraints of dire poverty and his humble birth, he underwent a transformation, adopting the name Jay Gatsby instead of his birth name, James Gatz. His narrative embodies a paradigm of class envy, driven by a profound unease regarding his social identity, compelling him to cultivate unwavering aspirations for wealth and erudition. Consequently, Gatsby avoided discussing his family background and fabricated a claim of education at Oxford University. In actuality, his Oxford attendance was limited to a brief five-month postwar period as a reward for military service, a fact questioned by several, including Tom Buchanan.

Gatsby's aspiration to infiltrate the upper echelons of society and emulate aristocratic behavior led to the acquisition of a lavish estate in West Egg and the hosting of extravagant soirées. His Rolls-Royce served as a ubiquitous shuttle to these gatherings, while he succeeded in drawing celebrities, politicians, directors, and other influential figures, striving to assimilate into the upper class. Nevertheless, full acceptance eluded him, as persistent rumors and skepticism surrounded his birth and wealth, with speculations ranging from his being a German spy to a murderer or a bootlegger. His sudden affluence and mansion acquisition seemed implausible to most.

The choice of Gatsby's attire, particularly his pink suits, serves as a prominent indicator of his fabricated background, reflecting not his sexual orientation but his class origins. An educated, upper-class gentleman typically refrains from wearing such flamboyant colors. The symbolism of Oxford, an emblem of tradition, decorum, and order, juxtaposed with Gatsby's unconventional attire and conduct, signifies Tom Buchanan's doubt that such a man could have emerged from this esteemed institution.

Gatsby's pink suit further symbolizes his enduring love for Daisy and the hope for a shared future, though it stains the pristine purity of Daisy's character due to her infidelity and deceit. It embodies love and affection in a delicate, yet slightly tainted manner, combining the purity of white with the passion of red. Tom's derision of Gatsby's pink suit conveys an implicit critique of its perceived lack of masculinity, suggesting that Gatsby's choice of attire diminishes his credibility as an Oxford alumnus. Pink, symbolizing love and hope, also highlights Tom's own incapacity for these emotions. Ultimately, Gatsby's nature, akin to the pink suit, betrays his newfound wealth and humble origins.

Conclusions

F. Scott Fitzgerald, a prominent figure in American literary history, offered a critical perspective on the opulence of 1920s American society. Through vivid settings and detailed character portrayals, he illuminated the extravagant and hedonistic lifestyle of the Jazz Age, revealing the disillusionment of the American dream.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald crafted an impressionistic masterpiece, providing readers with a window into the tumultuous era. Through an array of symbols, including color symbolism, he displayed his artistic prowess, enabling a multitude of character interpretations. Green signified the shattered American Dream, blue represented Gatsby's unattained dreams, white conveyed Daisy's dual nature, yellow denoted materialism and dream corruption, and grey symbolized faceless individuals and moral decline. These colors intertwined to create a rich narrative tapestry.

The novel's simplicity in plot conceals profound themes. A systematic examination of symbolism enriches our understanding of the book's themes and the society of the time, showcasing the tragic pursuits of dream-chasers in a dreamless 1920s America.

A study of Fitzgerald's life and experiences is instrumental in comprehending his works, most of which draw from his personal experiences. Current scholarly research primarily centers on the disillusionment of the American Dream, narrative perspective, symbolism, and sensory description, with additional focus on topics like feminism, racism, and egalitarianism.

Fitzgerald's keen sense of imagery, possibly influenced by his early scriptwriting experience, is evident throughout his works. *The Great Gatsby* is narrated through Nick's perspective, allowing readers to witness the protagonist's growth and find traces of Fitzgerald's own experiences and insights. Gatsby's tragic life reflects the hollowness beneath the era's ostentatious exterior and ultimately underscores the disillusionment of the American Dream.

The Jazz Age, celebrated for its cultural vibrancy, revealed itself to Fitzgerald as a time of illusory and hypocritical dreams, laden with underlying sorrow. His novels skillfully employ atmospheric elements to convey this sentiment.

In conclusion, this analysis has explored the symbolism of colors, the essence of the Jazz Age, and Fitzgerald's distinctive narrative style. Through colors, readers gain insight not only into the 1920s but also the concealed aspects of society and human psychology. *The Great Gatsby* transcends being merely a love story; it embodies devotion, dreams, and history, continuing to provoke thoughts.

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