

A Cognitive Study of Color Metaphor in *The Great Gatsby*

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Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* depicts the short and tragic life of Gatsby. The American Dream is the theme of this novel, and researchers have analyzed Gatsby's American Dream from different perspectives. Many color metaphors are employed to imply the disillusionment of Gatsby's American Dream. Guided by conceptual metaphor theory, this study uses qualitative methods. It analyzes color metaphors, finding they shape tragic images and reveal Gatsby's love tragedy. And the findings expand metaphor research scope and enrich expectations.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, color metaphor, *The Great Gatsby*

Introduction

The Great Gatsby is Fitzgerald's masterpiece. It is a classic literary work in the history of modern American literature and has been called "the great American novel". A subtle but impressive theme of this novel is the American Dreams. In the 1920s, when the American economy was developing rapidly, people's pursuit of the "American Dream" was more focused on joining the upper social class and gaining an aristocratic respect and glory. The process of realizing the "American Dream" changed into the process of moving up from the bottom of society to the upper class through money. In "The Great Gatsby", however, what is shown is that even having a lot of money does not allow those who once came from poor backgrounds to gain high social status and respect they desire in society. The spiritual pursuit of the "American Dream" is facing complete bankruptcy. The pursuit of the spiritual aspect of the American Dream is facing complete bankruptcy. The main protagonist Gatsby is a representative of the American Dream and also a victim of it. "His tragic end is a true reflection of the cruel social reality of the time when spiritual emptiness, money was paramount, and dreams were shattered. In the novel, Fitzgerald uses different color symbols to reflect the characteristics of the times and to deepen the theme of the work" (Dong, 2003, p. 78). Fitzgerald uses different color symbols in the novel to reflect the characteristics of the times and to deepen the theme of the work of the American dream. In this essay, three color symbols will be interpreted including green, white and gray, which symbolize hope, emptiness and disillusionment respectively.

Background of the American Dreams

The story takes place in the summer of 1922, when Fitzgerald started writing the book, in the thriving Long Island, New York, which at the time was a typical "modern" American city. The American economy was expanding quickly, new technologies were being developed, and popular culture was thriving. This time period is

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known as the “Jazz Age” because of the rising film and television, music, and automobile industries as well as the huge demand for jazz music. The “American Dream” aroused people’s fantasy of pursuing their dreams, and in the context of the commodity economy, various commercial advertisements swept through American metropolises, and the concept and mode of consumption in American society underwent a radical change, followed by a pervasive consumerism and hedonism in the whole society, and traditional values were impacted and even subverted.

Different Color Symbols in the American Dreams

“When we read, we feel that certain specific characters and things in the novel transcend themselves or hide a greater meaning” (Barnet, 2000, p. 195). Indirect statements are more profound and thought-provoking than straightforward descriptions, making symbolism one of the most popular devices in contemporary fiction. Fitzgerald’s use of color symbols is significant in that they are intertwined into the story and shape of the book, giving them the appearance of actual activities rather than merely abstract forms. They serve to highlight topics, show visuals, and convey emotions.

Green represents hope. A hope to achieve the American Dream. Fitzgerald uses multiple color symbols to give the novel’s green a deep meaning and multiple meanings, green has not only personal meaning but also deep social meaning. It has not only a personal meaning but also a deep social meaning and is used to present the legendary life of Gatsby (Liu, 2015, p. 81). Gatsby’s lifelong pursuit of the American dream, which would bring him love, fortune, and happiness, is symbolized by the color green. There are several descriptions of the color green in the novel. A green light appears at the end of the first chapter, “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, 1925, p. 24). Green is a symbol of hope, beauty, vitality and vigor. And because it is vibrant, it also symbolizes eternity and full confidence. At this point Gatsby believes that as long as he earns great wealth, he can get the ultimate happiness in his heart, that is, to get the incarnation of love Daisy. Gatsby came from a poor family in a distant area of North Dakota, but he was not willing to be poor and desired to join the upper class through his own efforts. It was at Gatsby’s most passionate age, Daisy appeared in his life. Gatsby’s first meeting with Daisy was unforgettable. He thought “She was the first ‘nice’ girl he had ever known” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 158). Daisy was a beautiful girl came from a privileged background and did not look down on him. Gatsby’s brief romantic relationship with her gave him the reverie of being close to achieving his dream of wealth. His only desire, his only quest was to get Daisy’s love, which gave him spiritual comfort. This inspired Gatsby to complete the accumulation of wealth, even if it was through sinful means. Therefore, the green light at the chapter one represents the direction of Gatsby’s efforts, the pursuit of goals and dreams. In the fifth chapter, the green light appears once again. “Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 100). The green light in this scene appears to signify what Gatsby has accomplished, but it also represents the challenges of achieving spiritual fulfillment of prosperity after chasing the American dream. He desperately trying to make money, has a large amount of money, dreaming of poor boy rich back to find the young love to renew the good dream. He bought a large villa near Daisy’s home, and every night the family held a large party, he did all together in order to get

Daisy again. But when he actually does, he finds “her voice is full of money” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 24) and the goddess Daisy for many years is not the perfect fairy, the green light at this time lost its original meaning, the gap between dreams and reality let Gatsby feel disappointed (Zhao & Yin, 2014, p. 94). At the end of the novel, the green light is redefined again. “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 193). He was confusedly framed by Tom when he was daydreaming and wanting. Without realizing why, he was made the scapegoat by Tom and Daisy. He didn’t realize that his American ambition had killed him until after he had passed away. Gatsby himself was overly blind to the pursuit of love. He started out by steering the American Dream in the wrong direction. He had always believed that he was seeking true love, but he was unaware that it is difficult to quantify and cannot be purchased with money. He lost his life as a result, ending his American dream.

White represents emptiness. “Daisy” in English refers to a flower with golden stamens and white petals. Fitzgerald mostly uses white to highlight Daisy’s personal characteristics. The color white represents Daisy’s hollowness, superficiality, and perhaps a tinge of horrifying apathy. The opening section of the novel describes Daisy’s place with “the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 8). Then describes the scene where Nick and Daisy meet is also dominated by white. “Sometimes she and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 15). Both Daisy’s palace and the dresses are white, from the external features, Daisy gives a sense of indifference to strangers, while white also represents Daisy’s first impression of purity. “She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young offers from Camp Tay-lor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night, ‘anyways, for an hour!’” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 80). However, as time passes, Daisy begins to pursue money and social status, and she turns from the original image of innocence and purity into utilitarian. This is reflected in her numbness to Tom’s cheating and her disregard for spiritual pursuits. When she saw that Gatsby could give her more high-end clothes, “her face was smeared with tears” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 95). But she was also stingy not to shed even a single tear for Gatsby when she made amends and paid the ultimate price of life. Such a cold and heartless Daisy with the beginning of the image of innocence is very different from her. In order to continue to live a rich life all the feelings related to Gatsby abandoned totally, she turns around and leave with Tom. This stunning reversal to Daisy adds the role a touch of horror.

Grey represents disillusionment. The color gray is mentioned multiple times in the book. Daisy makes several appearances in the dark and at dusk; smoke fills Tom’s mistress’s sitting room; and the names on Gatsby’s party list are also described in gray. Even the car accident that led to make Gatsby the scapegoat happened in the twilight and in the Valley of the Ashes, “a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 26). The desolate scenes in the novel foreshadow the tragedy and symbolize the destruction of the “American Dream”. Gray is associated with darkness, depression, and intrigue, all of which have unpleasant connotations that indicate impending catastrophe and disaster. This color evokes a sense of hopelessness and emptiness as well as depression and misery in people. Gatsby is killed by an “ashen, fantastic figure” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 172).

Everything ended tragically and hastily in this desolate atmosphere, Gatsby became a victim of American high society, and the wonderful American dream was utterly shattered with his death.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Fitzgerald's use of color symbolism plays a very critical role in advancing the theme of Gatsby's American Dream coming to an end. This essay focus on three color symbolisms including green, white and grey. Green represents hope. It indicates Gatsby's lifelong pursuit of the American dream. White symbolizes the emptiness and superficiality of the utilitarians represented by Daisy, and maybe a little terrible indifference. Daisy's empty existence implies that the collapse of the American Dream is inevitable. Grey represents disillusionment. It indicates that Gatsby's pursuit of the American Dream was doomed to failure. Fitzgerald skillfully incorporates symbols into the story's structure and plot, showing a man's zealous pursuit of the "American Dream" and its inevitable death while also reflecting on American culture in the 1920s. The lack of faith and distorted values represent the weakness and emptiness of American society at that time, when people were struggling to achieve material success.

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