



Colour Symbolism in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

An Analysis of the Meaning and Pattern of Colours

Färgsymbolik i F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Den store Gatsby*

En analys av färgers betydelse och mönster

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15 hp

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9/2/2022

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to examine the symbolism of six thematically important colours in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and how they are connected to the characters, plot, and themes. I will demonstrate the significance of colour by making an analysis of the meaning, pattern, and change of the six colours. Utilizing colour symbolism in literature is a method that illustrates and narrates information beyond the literal sense. Colour consists of multiple meanings and has the quality of being ambiguous. The juxtaposition in colour and its symbolism reflects the ever-changing and multifaceted stages in life.

Keywords: *Colour Symbolism, Love, Wealth, Social Class*

Sammanfattning

Syftet med denna uppsats är att undersöka symboliken i sex tematiskt viktiga färger i F. Scott Fitzgeralds *Den Store Gatsby* och hur de är kopplade till karaktärerna, handlingen, och teman. Jag kommer att visa färgens betydelse genom att göra en analys av syftet, mönstret, och förändringen i dessa sex färger. Att utnyttja färgsymbolik i litteratur är en metod som målar och berättar information bortom den bokstavliga meningen. Färg består av flera konnotationer och har egenskapen att vara tvetydig. Juxtapositionen i färg och dess symbolik speglar de ständigt föränderliga och mångfacetterade stadierna i livet.

Nyckelord: *Färgsymbolik, Kärlek, Rikedom, Samhällsklass*

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Introduction

The Great Gatsby is an amalgamation of love, power, and the American Dream. Set in the roaring twenties and largely occurring outside New York City, the novel targets the American Dream while narrating a love story between Daisy Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. Nick Carraway is one of the main characters who narrates the tale as he reminisces about his life, friends, and society. Nearly a century has passed since F. Scott Fitzgerald first published his fourth novel in 1925. Even though the novel initially faced large criticism, resentment, and “did not sell well” (Loeffelholz 1823), *The Great Gatsby* is acclaimed and globally recognized today as a classic novel.

The topic of this essay is colour symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* since it opens up a deeper discussion and presents the links and parallels between the colours, characters, and themes. Colour is an important element in the novel and is used to describe the characters, plot, and setting. Colour symbolism is a tool for analysing the text’s descriptions, patterns, and meanings visually. It is a creative style and expression, which gives freedom to the reader to interpret the symbolism and context individually as the perception of a reader is unique. Nonetheless, colour symbolism is a complicated analytical tool. The meaning and symbolism of colours can vary from culture, country, and religion. Colours in general also tend to be ambiguous and can, therefore, convey contradicting messages. Both green and white, in general, signify life but also death. That means that analysing a passage in which green is a dominant colour requires the reader to be aware of the contradictory meanings and to explore what both sides mean to the reading of the text. Thus, it is important to note that this essay is context-specific and that every colour and symbol has multiple meanings. In my analysis and discussion of the six colours, I will focus on what they symbolize in the context of *The Great Gatsby* by providing several examples of each colour and showing their importance in a scene as well as what they mean to the entire novel.

Colours speak in an explicit and implicit language since they can imply the obvious and visible as well as carry a hidden and complex message. Therefore, colour symbolism is important to the understanding of *The Great Gatsby* since colours are used to enhance a connotation (such as Jordan Baker’s deception and social class, emphasized through her golden arms and yellow hair), an attribute (for example Daisy’s innocence through her white dresses), or a visual image (for example the green light). The essay will begin by addressing the symbolism of six colours: green, blue,

yellow, red, white, and black. I will then discuss how colour patterns and connotations influence the reading of the novel. By examining the patterns of change and meaning in the colours from the novel, I will demonstrate how they denote emotions and character traits (such as hopeful, deceitful, and innocent). This is noteworthy because these emotions and qualities are not only meaningful to the characters but the narration and plot of the novel. In this essay, I will demonstrate how colour symbolism is important in *The Great Gatsby* by discussing six thematically important colours and showing how these colours reflect the characters and central themes.

Green

According to Cooper's *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, green generally signifies a range of meanings: youth, hope, joy, nature, change, and jealousy (40). In *The Great Gatsby*, green is used to accentuate the American dream, envy, hope, nature, and revival. Examples include the "green light" (19) situated at the end of Daisy and Tom Buchanan's East Egg dock, George Wilson's green face (114), and Daisy's symbolization of a flower (102).

The green light is a central thread in the novel and is mentioned five times. It is a symbol of the American Dream and the pursuit of happiness. The word light adds further meaning to the phrase "the green light". Cooper claims that "light is [traditionally] connected with the beginning and the end" as well as the "creation and destruction" (96). In the novel, this is demonstrated with Jay as the green light resembles his beginning and end, his ultimate dream and corruption, his rebirth and death. In his younger years, he was "a penniless young man" (139) and better known as "James Gatz of North Dakota" (89). He transformed his life and himself in the pursuit of the American Dream as well as in his endless and sightless pursuit of Daisy, which ultimately becomes his downfall and death.

Another prominent example of green in the novel is the "fresh green breast" (Fitzgerald 168) which is mentioned in the last pages. According to Cooper, the traditional meaning of "the bared breast is humility; grief: repentance; [and] penitence" (25), which resonates with Nick in the text as he is grieving Jay and feels repent for reuniting Daisy and Jay (as this was the beginning of Jay's demise). The phrase highlights five common qualities of the colour green: nurture, new, fertile, rich, and growth. Thus, the fresh green breast symbolizes a fruitful promise and vision of a new beginning. The metaphor is Nick's envision of the Dutch people (their emotions

and perception) as they discover Long Island for the very first time:

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (Fitzgerald 168)

This passage illustrates the reminiscence about the past, contemplation about the present, and hope for the future. The past is shown through the history of Long Island, “the old island” and “Dutch sailor”. In this instance, the green colour indicates growth, fruitfulness, positivity, and hope. In Ameel's article “The ‘valley of ashes’ and the ‘fresh green breast’: metaphors from *The Great Gatsby* in planning New York”, she states that in the novel “the ‘green breast’ is . . . a closing metaphor, summing up the argument of transformation of post-industrial city to ‘green metropolis’, and enabling a measure of closure and moral evaluation” (906-907). The future is linked to a United that is recognized as the land of possibilities, a virgin country that provides a chance for anyone to start over and become and achieve anything they want through hard work. This recalls the idea of the American Dream, described by Ghiotto and Wijanarka as “an idea, which suggests that all people can succeed through hard work, and that all people have the potential to live a happy, and successful life” (57). The trees in the passage reflect three stages in time and life: the past, present, and future. Tresidder argues, in general, “trees are the supreme natural symbols of dynamic growth, seasonal death, and regeneration” (76). This is reflected in the ending with the demise of Jay, Myrtle, and George, as well as Nick's relocation as his move is a radical change and symbolizes growth. The trees are also connected to the early Dutch explorers, because similar to them (in the past) and Nick (in the present), the future is changing. Nick begins to comprehend the magnitude of Jay's loss and the events, choices, and actions that follow can affect coming generations.

Additionally, green represents the polar sides of our existence: life and death, heaven, and earth. Cooper describes the phrase vernal green as a term that embodies and celebrates these existential opposites as “the vernal green of life and the livid green

of death” (40). This is reflected in Daisy as she symbolizes the renewal of life and a flower (in reference to the green nature and growth). Jay’s first kiss with Daisy reminds him of incarnation. “At his lips’ touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete” (Fitzgerald 102). He ultimately knew when sharing his kiss with Daisy, that she is his purpose in life and henceforth he will do anything to win her heart and hand in marriage. Tresidder also claims that, in general, green “is often linked with otherworldliness” (159) which their first kiss in the novel encapsulates. The emotion Jay experiences when he kisses Daisy echoes a sense of holiness, otherworldliness, and revival. From that moment on he was eternally changed and not merely transformed into a new person, but rather into a holy figure. Thus, “He [Jay] knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God” (102-103). The kiss creates a link between the green light and the holy portrayal of Jay. As Nick recalls, “Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, . . . was a son of God” (Fitzgerald 89) which is due to his undying belief, trust, and hope in the green light: “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us” (169).

The green also symbolizes envy and sickness in the novel, which contradicts the previous positive meanings of green such as growth, good health, nature, and nurture. Tresidder argues, “in English idiomatic usage, green represents immaturity but also the hues of envy and jealousy – the ‘green-eyed monster’ ” (158). When Tom is filling his gas tank, he finds George (Wilson) with a green face which can symbolize his envy over Tom’s social status, wealth, and “old money”, in contrary to George’s working-class lifestyle: “[w]ith an effort Wilson left the shade and support of the doorway and, breathing hard, unscrewed the cap of the tank. In the sunlight his face was green” (Fitzgerald 114). George’s green face can also hint at illness and disease as he is feeling unwell. Tresidder suggests that “perhaps this stems from the fact that green is not the skin colour of healthy normality” (159).

The negative meanings of green are also reflected in Jay’s struggle between jealousy and ambition. He is intently set on achieving a promising future with great career success and wealth, but at the same time, his highest aspiration and dream is to marry Daisy. The green light is located at the dock of Buchanan’s East Egg mansion. Jay explains to Daisy, “you always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock” (Fitzgerald 84). Thus, the placement of the green light is important as it signifies his love for Daisy and envy over Tom for being Daisy’s husband. Jay’s battle

between dedication and envy is also displayed when he and Tom are quarrelling over Daisy. “Then I [Nick] turned back to Gatsby—and was startled at his expression. He looked—and this is said in all contempt for the babbled slander of his garden—as if he had ‘killed a man.’ For a moment the set of his face could be described in just that fantastic way” (126). Daisy later reveals, to Jay’s sheer disbelief, how she cannot choose Jay as she truly loves both of them (Tom and him). Jay’s killing gaze and jealous behaviour is the result of hearing Daisy’s confession and even though this demonstrates once again that he will not achieve his dream to marry Daisy, he obviously continues to pursue her.

Blue

The blue is emphasized in the original cover (and on so many later covers, too, Google informs me) which also includes Dr T. J. Eckleburg’s blue eyes (20), Tom’s blue coupé (132), and Jay’s “blue gardens” (35). Cooper notes that the common attributes of blue are: honesty, wisdom, revelation, consistency, loyalty but also fidelity (40). He also recognizes blue as a colour of an obscure space and dimension. Blue is “the Void; primordial simplicity and infinite space which, being empty, can contain everything.” (40). Hall argues, “an eye symbolizes God the Father” (121) and is a “symbol of gods as all-seeing, all-knowing” (120). An important symbol in the novel is Dr T. J. Eckleburg’s blue eyes and on the original cover of the novel from 1925, the eyes and the figure (the doctor) are ultramarine blues.

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose. (Fitzgerald 20)

The doctor is compared to God as he is always observing people, society, and the world. After Myrtle’s death, George states “God sees everything” (149) in reference to Dr T. J. Eckleburg’s eyes. George recalls a dialogue with his wife (Myrtle) where he states: “‘God knows what you’ve been doing, everything you’ve been doing. You may fool me but you can’t fool God!’. Standing behind him Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg” (149). The blue eyes signify religiousness since they are always watching, like the Holy Father, and preserving the truth. The

doctor's personification of God shows that no deed goes unseen or unpunished. Hence, his eyes are a visual representation of truthfulness, moral authority, and holiness. Zhang notes, Doctor T. J. Eckleburg's yellow spectacles "indicate that the Jazz Age is an age where everyone shows great worship of money and where the materialism is so fashionable that even God cannot avoid its influence" (42). Thus, yellow is also critical in this passage as yellow symbolizes materialism and wealth.

Blue is also connected to social ranking in the novel. Daisy, Tom, and Jordan are all of the highest social class. A symbol that shows a link between blue and social class is Tom's car which is a blue coupé (Fitzgerald 115). As the police try to identify the car that ran over and killed Myrtle, a policeman keeps a suspicious eye on Tom and later asks him: " 'What color's your car?' ", to which Tom replies: " 'It's a blue car, a coupé' " (132). The high society is reflected in the blue colour as well as in the object (the coupé) since it is a more expensive model compared to regular cars. Thus, the vehicle highlights Tom's "old money" (generational inheritance) and upper-class status.

When Jay reaches for the green light, Nick states, "he had come a long way to this blue lawn" (168). This hints at the void that the colour blue speaks of, the infinite space that can contain or be anything. "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 deck" (84). The distance to the green light resembles a trick and illusion of the eye since this void between Jay and the light seems ever so close. As if he can psychically touch the green light, but instead, it is always out of reach. This indicates that Jay his dream to marry Daisy can never be reached and turned into reality. The green light continues to insinuate that his dream is all it is, a mere illusion where the light has metaphorically blinded him from reality. This is one of the last realizations Nick has as he concludes the novel. "His dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity . . ." (168-169).

The blue colour also symbolizes sadness and loneliness in the novel and this is heightened with Jay's parties and gardens. Zhang states, "the blue tone of Gatsby's garden reveals Gatsby's loneliness and melancholy in his inner heart" (43). All his luxurious parties take place at West Egg, both inside Jay's mansion and outside in his "blue gardens" (35) which includes a "blue lawn" (169) and "blue leaves" (141). The single reason why Jay hosted his lavish parties was because of Daisy. Unawares, she

was his inspiration all along. Nevertheless, Jay remained hopeful as he “half expected” (70) Daisy to one day “wander into” (70) his extravagant party, to witness first-hand his reinvention (such as his new social class, wealth, and success) and at last reunite with him, alas “she never did” (70). Zhang further argues that “the reason why Gatsby does not take part in his parties . . . may be that the real Gatsby cannot merge himself with those wealthy people and the tranquillity in his inner heart is contrary to the noise scenes” (43). After hosting many festivities in Daisy’s honour only to realize she never attends any. The solitude, sorrow, and failure overwhelm him and, therefore, his only way to remain hopeful is to shelter himself from reality and the parties.

Yellow

The novel uses yellow to accent “old money”, high society, and deceit. The yellow is exemplified by Jay’s yellow car, Jordan’s yellow hair and golden arms, and the yellow dresses of the high society girls. “Old money (generational inheritance) and “new money” are key concepts in the novel. Jay’s car is yellow to symbolize his attempt and desire to be perceived as a member of the upper class and specifically with “old money” (since he inherits “new money”). In the novel, Fitzgerald uses predominantly pure colours, although he does include several specific shades which could hint at the aim and wish to deliver an even more distinctive message. Jordan’s yellow hair is described with a darker shade of yellow, “autumn-leaf” which is a medium-dark shade. Thus, the darker hue is significant as it can imply deception and untruthfulness. “The lamp-light, bright on his boots and dull on the autumn-leaf yellow of her hair, glinted along the paper as she turned a page with a flutter of slender muscles in her arms” (Fitzgerald 15-16). According to Tresidder, in general, the symbolism of yellow fluctuates in terms of meaning, therefore, it depends on the nuance and saturation: yellow changes “from positive to negative symbolism according to context and range of hue” (159). Cooper strengthens this statement by linking the darker shades of yellow denote treason, privacy, deceit, and avarice (41). This draws a parallel to the novel since Jordan can be described as a figure of lies. Nick defines her as “incurable dishonest” (Fitzgerald 52) in his narrative. Her insincerity and rumours helped and benefitted her rise in career, social prominence, and success. One example is her cheating scandal, as she won her first prominent golf tournament she was accused of changing the position of the ball to gain a better angle and spot for her next shot: “At her first big golf tournament there was a row that nearly reached the newspapers—a suggestion that she had moved her

ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round. The thing approached the proportions of a scandal—then died away” (52). Outside her professional life, Nick discloses how Jordan lied about when she abandoned a borrowed and topless car during rain: “When we were on a house-party together up in Warwick, she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then lied about it” (52). She also exposes the story of how Daisy and Jay met and consequently fell in love when she and Nick share afternoon tea at the Plaza Hotel (66).

Nick also held an admiration for Jordan: “I wasn’t actually in love, but I felt a sort of tender curiosity” (52). During the entering of Jay’s massive party, Jordan takes his hand disinterestedly and focuses instead on the roaring girls wearing yellow dresses. “She held my hand impersonally, as a promise that she’d take care of me in a minute, and gave ear to two girls in twin yellow dresses, who stopped at the foot of the steps” (37). Samkanashvili states the girls cited in the passage represent “old money” (34) and “beauty” (34). Hall also affirms, that typically “[dresses and] royal robes, like the crown, are a symbol of sovereignty” (119), which hints at the girls’ upper class and privileges. The scene as a whole symbolizes Jordan’s carelessness and this attribute is also apparent in Tom and Daisy who are likewise members of the upper class. Nick recalls, “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made....” (Fitzgerald 167). This passage and the scene between Jordan, Nick, and the upper-class girls, emphasizes the apathy and disinterest people of the upper class has and show towards people of the lower class. Even though Nick inherits “old money” he still belongs to the middle-upper class. The inconsiderate way she holds his hand confirms her lust for public prominence and negligence, she does not give attention to Nick.

Red

According to Tresidder’s *Symbols and Their Meanings*, red broadly symbolizes a variety of meanings: “fire, war, energy, aggression, danger, political revolution, impulse, emotions, passion, love, joy, festivity, vitality, health, strength, and youth” (156). In the novel, red is used to emphasize war, sins, death, sensuality, and danger. Examples include “the red circle on the water” (151), the character traits of Myrtle (such

as sensual, sinful, bold), and Buchanan's red home objects and design (such as room, mansion, and rug).

The red circle in the water refers to Jay's death as it illustrates his pool of blood when he was fatally shot by Wilson. The phrase speaks volumes as it resembles the expression of blood being thicker than water. How one drop of red (blood) can stand out in a pool of thousands of clear (water) ones. Hall suggests blood "symbolizes new life arising from death" (114). In the novel, the blood informs danger, but moreover warning and alert as Jay's death hints to dreadful and abominable consequences. The blood also references war. George is blinded by vengeance after the demise of his wife Myrtle and seeks out to kill him. Hence, Jay's needless death epitomizes the sense of the unfairness and meaninglessness of war. Whereas George illustrates the enemy's mindset; the never-ending cycle of revenge and killing.

Myrtle is a significant character since she embodies the meanings and qualities of red. She is a character who encapsulates the bold, intense, sinful, and sensual attributes of red. Even though she is Tom's hidden mistress she stands out like the colour red (with her attire, makeup, attitude, voice, and gestures) and without fear of judgment, she embraces her sensuality. Nick notes, "[she] carried her surplus flesh sensuously as some women can" (22). He also describes her as follows: "her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air" (26-27). Blood is a traditional symbol of red and in the novel, her nose is broken and bleeding after Tom assaults her: "[Myrtle] had come from the city with her face bruised and her nose swollen" (146). She was also covered in "thick, dark blood" when she was found on a road at the murder scene (129).

The red details in the décor and objects in Tom and Daisy's mansion suggest their hostile and warlike relationship. Similar to the red connotations, their relationship is based on love but also sins. The "crimson room" (16) can be a symbol of danger and alertness as red connotes the hostility and unease between the main characters in the room (Jordan, Tom, Daisy, and Nick). The dark red of wine is used to symbolise transformation. "A breeze blew through the room . . . and then rippled over the wine-coloured rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea" (6). This passage allows us to see how the rug is transformed, the ripples making it seem liquid. The room dominated by the rug has a single stationary object which is a couch occupied

by Daisy and Jordan. Here, it is not only the redness that is important but the association with wine. This suggests the girls are the focal point and, hence, the wine red symbolism is targeted at them. Tresidder observes the traditional symbols of wine and describes how “wine is a symbol of transformation” through its relation both to the transformative fermentation process and the way wine changes the drinker (86). Tresidder further states, “a subsidiary symbolism of wine is that it produces truth, either by ‘opening the heart to reason’ . . . or by loosening the tongues of liars and hypocrites” (86). Jordan is established as a liar and takes advantage of her deceitfulness (for example in her golf tournament scandal and when she ruined a borrowed car). Daisy follows the same pattern as she continues to lie and hide the truth of Myrtle’s murder.

One of the most classical uses of red and white is sinfulness and innocence. The “cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion” (5) is an example that shows how colours with possible opposite symbolic meanings are juxtaposed, hence, creating a complex symbolic meaning. Tom embody sinfulness, while Daisy represents innocence. Hence, the mansion is a symbol of Daisy and Tom as a couple, as white and innocence are predominantly associated with Daisy, and Tom represents sinfulness as he demonstrates many red attributes such as anger, hatred, hostility, and passion. According to Samkanashvili’s diagram that shows the “color distribution per major characters” (39), Tom is the one who uses and is connected to red most. Cooper claims that typically, “red with white denoted the Devil; Purgatory; death” (41). Thus, pairing this colour combination with the adjective “cheerful” creates conflict and can suggest that the couple still tries to find happiness amid all their sins.

The novel uses the colour red to visually illustrate warning flags, to ignite alarm, and show different nuances of hurt, sins, and hatred. Hence, the similarity between the examples of red is the meaning of sin, warning, and danger. A warning of danger and harmful events. Additionally, red points out the current dangerous situations and damages, such as the cracks in Tom and Daisy’s broken marriage. Even their love is connected to danger, as it shows how dangerous love can be and become. The unthinkable limits a person would cross when in love such as Daisy not confessing her murder of Myrtle and allowing Jay to take the blame. Notably, red can warn about the future, as well as show the present danger.

Black

The black in *The Great Gatsby* is shown and enhanced in Daisy's black tears (from her running mascara), Tom's black and blue hand, the "black morning" (98) and "black beach" (100). Tresidder claims that, in general, "black has almost inescapable symbolism as the colour of negative forces and unhappy events. It stands for the darkness of death, ignorance, despair, sorrow, and evil" (157).

A singer at Jay's extravagant party is singing for the guests and cries black tears. "The tears coursed down her cheeks - not freely, however, for when they came into contact with her heavily beaded eyelashes they assumed an inky colour, and pursued the rest of their way in slow black rivulets" (Fitzgerald 46). The black colour is used to inform that her makeup is running down (her face) because of the abundance of tears. Furthermore, her tears do not run freely because they are disrupted by her eyelashes. Nick recalls her performance and claims "everything was very very sad—she was not only singing, she was weeping too" (45-46). As a consequence of the running mascara, the black tears become factually heavier and hinder her eyesight. The black tears symbolize a deeper form of melancholy and depression, which is emphasized through the colour contrast of the teardrops (instead of regular clear drops, they are black).

In the novel, "black beach" (100) and "black morning" (98) symbolize despair, sombreness, and desolation. The words beach and morning are also typically associated with light, sunshine, and calmness. The sand on a beach is commonly fair coloured with white, beige, and light yellow hues. Similar to a morning, which regularly includes sunlight of a warmer tone in illuminance. Therefore, using black to define these bright connoted words creates a juxtaposition and conflicting symbolic meaning. "It was dark here in front: only the bright door sent ten square feet of light volleying out into the soft black morning" (Fitzgerald 99). In this passage when Nick describes the black morning, he sits on the front steps and is joined by Tom and Daisy. The black morning denotes Nick's despair and resentment over Daisy. Nick also utilizes several contradicting adjectives (dark, bright, light, and soft) in his narrative to add more colour contrast.

Equal emotions continue on the next page when "black beach" is mentioned. The phrase indicates desolation, sadness, and impossibility as Nick awaits alone for Jay's arrival late in the night only to encounter his profound disappointment and humiliation. Jay's depression shows such hopelessness as if he is already aware of his losing game to win Daisy's heart: "I stayed late that night. Gatsby asked me to wait until he was free and I lingered in the garden until the inevitable swimming party had run

up, chilled and exalted, from the black beach” (101). Nick continues the dialogue between him and Jay: “ ‘She didn’t like it,’ he said immediately. ‘Of course she did.’ ‘She didn’t like it,’ he insisted. ‘She didn’t have a good time.’ He was silent and I guessed at his unutterable depression” (101). Depression is predominantly connected to the colour black, as this colour illustrates and captures this intensely dark, lonely, and sorrowful mental state. Chiazzari argues, in general, “[b]lack can also prevent us from growing and changing” (20), which is reflected in Jay’s behaviour, response, and depression.

The black and blue knuckle is an example that demonstrates chaos in *The Great Gatsby*. In the following scene, Daisy accuses Tom of hurting and beating her: “ ‘Look!’ she complained. ‘I hurt it.’ We all looked - the knuckle was black and blue. ‘You did it, Tom,’ she said accusingly. ‘I know you didn’t mean to but you DID do it” (Fitzgerald 10). However, she still views his harmful actions as accidental, which brings attention to her constant ability and choice to forgive him. According to Cooper, this colour combination commonly symbolizes turmoil, utter confusion, and hell: “blue-black is the colour of chaos” (39). In the novel, Tom consistently abuses his privileges and “old money” inheritance. This is a reflection of his vulgarity, oppression, physical and emotional abuse towards women. The scene also shows that colours and their symbolism have the ability to provide a timescale of events. When Daisy accuses him of assaulting her, his bruise is visibly blue and black which indicates the strike occurred recently, about 1-2 days ago.

White

White is displayed in *The Great Gatsby* through white (wedding and informal dresses) dresses (Fitzgerald 67), white powder (105), Daisy’s “string of [white] pearls” (68), and her (and Jordan’s) “white girlhood” (17). Traditionally in literature, white has long been connected to femininity, innocence, and purity (Chiazzari 1998). In the novel, the leading female character is Daisy and she is closely associated with the colour white. She is regularly dressed in white, during formal and informal circumstances and often reminisces about her “white girlhood”. Her childhood indicates innocence (due to the meaning of the colour), youth, and being a child. Her close friend Jordan is, like Daisy, a part of the high society and uses white powder on top of her tanned skin. Nick notes “Jordan’s fingers, powdered white over their tan, rested for a moment in mine” (Fitzgerald 105). The milky white powder she applies shows her deception, fabricated

portrayal, and pretended innocence. The makeup application refers to beauty but also privilege as this exhibits Jordan's desire and admiration for white skin complexion. This can also suggest a fair skin tone is more preferred and acceptable for a woman and a member of the upper class in this Era.

White unequivocally mirrors beauty in *The Great Gatsby*. The significance of psychical appearance can be seen in the various descriptions of Daisy's allure. Her beauty is more trivial and focused on in comparison to her illicit choices, crimes, and actions. Precisely like the ambiguous quality in white, Daisy exhibits opposing sides; the beautiful purity of life as well as the corrupt reality of privilege. She proves to be a physical representation of social blindness and the bottomless hunger for materialism. Yet, she is also celebrated as a pure and innocent soul with a beautiful figure and face who can do no wrong. This is exhibited in Jay's unalterable perception of her because to "Gatsby she is still his innocent beautiful bride" (Samkanashvili 39). This only accentuates how comfortable she as well as society are with illiteracy, negligence, privilege, and greed. Loeffelholz further examines Daisy's contradicting representation and finds that she continues and adds to the spiral of corruption and in the process, she depraves Gatsby: "Daisy turns out to be a fantasy in every sense: Daisy belongs to a corrupt society, Gatsby corrupts himself in the quest for her, and above all the rich have no intention of sharing their privileges" (Loeffelholz 1822). Equivalent to the novel, which has its spotlight on the attention-grabbing exterior, as the text portrays a gimmick world full of extravagant parties, heavy drinking, expensive cars, priceless jewellery, and luxury fashion:

I spent my Saturday nights in New York because those gleaming, dazzling parties of his were with me so vividly that I could still hear the music and the laughter faint and incessant from his garden and the cars going up and down his drive. (Fitzgerald 168)

Nick explains that these dazzling exteriors aim to hide and overshadow the selfish transgressions, poisonous lies, shattered marriages, and violations of the law.

Marriage and weddings are heavily influenced by the colour white. Cooper argues that white historically foreshadows reinvention and is commonly associated with life, love, and death: "In marriage, it symbolizes death to the old life and birth into the new life beyond" (41). Thus, funerals and weddings are connected since they both resemble a sign of rebirth. The funeral attire of the deceased and the bridal dress is traditionally white. This is further explored in the text on the days leading up to her

wedding with Tom, as well as the day itself, which are life-altering for Daisy. Besides wearing a white bridal dress, she also is gifted a string pearl necklace by Tom. This jewellery is the centrepiece in terms of white symbolism:

“The day before the wedding he gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars” (Fitzgerald 68). Jordan, who was a bridesmaid, continues her storytelling to Nick:

‘Here, dearis.’ She [Daisy] groped around in a waste-basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls. ‘Take ‘em downstairs and give ‘em back to whoever they belong to. Tell ‘em all Daisy’s change’ her mine. Say ‘Daisy’s change’ her mine!’ She began to cry—she cried and cried. (Fitzgerald 68)

On her wedding day, Daisy receives a letter from Jay after a long interval of no contact or correspondence. Initially, she vowed to wait for him while he was battling in World War I, but ultimately she grew lonely and met Tom instead. Jay’s letter to Daisy resembles a psychical piece of Jay, his letter is all she has of him and the possibility of them together. Thus, dissolving the letter is a sign of reinvention and letting go: “She wouldn’t let go of the letter. She took it into the tub with her and squeezed it up into a wet ball, and only let me leave it in the soap dish when she saw that it was coming to pieces like snow” (68-69). Encompassed by regret, grief, and anguish she tears apart her pearls and confesses she does no longer want to marry Tom. However, after the incident Daisy turns over a new leaf and realizes her sole consolation, her string of comfort and security in life will forevermore be Tom and for this reason, she marries him: “[S]he didn’t say another word. We . . . hooked her back into her dress and half an hour later when we walked out of the room the pearls were around her neck and the incident was over. Next day at five o’clock she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver” (69).

Daisy epitomizes the essence of white and destroying her white pearl necklace represents her desire to reinvent herself. Tresidder claims that, in general, “the pearl is the quintessential symbol both of light and of femininity – its pale iridescence associated with the luminous moon, its watery origins with fertility, its secret life in the shell with miraculous birth or rebirth” (121). Tresidder further explains “they can also symbolize purity and innocence. Their association with tears made them an unlucky bridal jewel – a broken pearl necklace particularly ominous [P]earls were also, of course, straightforward symbols of wealth” (121). The connotations and arguments

Tresidder makes apply and correspond to Daisy and her white pearl necklace. By ripping apart the pearls, she attempts to rewrite history. She tries to erase her past in hope of achieving a blooming future. Daisy continues to choose Tom over Jay because she never wants to jeopardize her content lifestyle in the upper-class and surrounded by luxury, and no matter how much she loves Jay she will never give up or risk losing her social status, privilege, and wealth.

Patterns of Change and Meaning in Colour

Colours aim to capture a distinct mood, emotion, affect, and meaning. Finding patterns in colours and their symbolism helps to determine the quantity and relevancy. According to Samkanashvili, green is mentioned 19 times, blue is mentioned 21 times, yellow 25 times, red 16 times, white 49, and black 13 times (38). Her statistical charts follow and show the colours' regularity throughout. The outcome reveals that yellow fluctuates and oscillates. The increased regularity of green implies a heightened value of the green light. Since Jay is predominantly related to green (the colour is only said by and referred to Jay, never by Tom or Daisy), this may hint at his death towards the end seeing as green symbolizes "the livid green of death" (Cooper 40). Leading to the renewal of life which is illustrated by Nick, since he is deeply affected by Gatsby's death and needed to change (seen in his move to the Mid-West). He also carries much remorse and guilt for organizing Daisy and Jay's long-awaited meeting.

In the aftermath of Jay's demise, Nick becomes repulsed by people. Loeffelholz also examines Nick's repugnance for his surroundings and the stories he recounts: "Nick Carraway, an onlooker who is both moved and repelled by the tale he tells" (1822). He begins to criticize society and realizes that ignorance is bliss, which drives him to the decision to move back to his roots in the Midwest. After making Miss Baedeker's acquaintance in chapter 6, he exchanges a conversation with Daisy where she declares her distaste of West Egg, which confirms her comfortability in and devotion to the upper class. Since West Egg is inhabited by lower social classes, such as the middle-class and people with "new money". "She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented 'place' that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village" (Fitzgerald 98). Concurrently, he observes and grasps her fondness for ignorance. "She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand" (99).

In Samkanashvili's conclusion, she hones in on the importance of patterns in colours, specifically the yellow shades and white. Samkanashvili states, "[w]hat is

interesting, colours symbolizing old money and riches (gold, yellow, white) are used only a few times about Gatsby, as if to say that he may try much, but he will never become a member of the high society, about which these colours are abundantly used” (39). Her final discussion touches on how these colours possess deeper significance together and depends on their quantity, such as how often a colour is used, relates to a character, and reflects a theme. She also emphasizes that Daisy will always be Jay’s unattainable goal because no matter how great success he will achieve, wealth he will possess, or social class he will be a member of, he will never be a part of the quasi-aristocracy and, therefore, never be Daisy’s husband (39).

Another pattern in the novel can be found in the white clothing. When Daisy meets Gatsby for the first time in Louisville she was “dressed in white, and had a little white roadster” (67). Ghiotto and Wijanarka claim that this “white dress is associated with perfection, wealth, and fame” (59). After many years when they meet again at Nick’s house, the roles have now reversed as Jay is wearing “a white flannel suit, silver shirt and gold-colored tie” (Fitzgerald 75). Ghiotto and Wijanarka describe, “he wants to impress Daisy with material achievements” (59). His suit is complemented with silver and gold colours to symbolize materialism and enhance his new newly acclaimed social class, success, and wealth. Gold and silver traditionally represent money due to their metallic shine and quality.

Conclusion

It has been said, there are two sides to every story. I believe *The Great Gatsby* goes beyond this saying by confirming there are also two (if not more) sides to every colour. The novel is a colourful work of literature and encourages the reader to question and re-evaluate the of meaning colours and how they are connected to the text. For example, the green light can symbolize a hopeful future, but also vile greed. Both choices are correct, they merely represent different layers and nuances of the colour.

Colour is far greater and more meaningful than a mere adjective. It is a manifestation of an emotion, object, or a sign. When colours are used in the novel to explain an object, the definition has multiple layers, connotations, and depths. Colours are able to go further because they can hint and give an allusion to the future, the coming events, and choices. For example, Myrtle’s nose blood and her many implications of red can insinuate her approaching death. The meaning, change, and

pattern of the six colours in the novel add layers of value and depth that are necessary for the character development, the evolution of the story, mood, and rhythm. I also view colour symbolism as a tool that helps with world-building, since colours help to lay the bricks for the imagery world the novel is set in. For example, the green light informs the reader there is a space and void between the subject and the object (of desire). The use of white (pearls and the dress) symbolizes Daisy's reinvention of herself, her desire to leave her past life behind to start and grow a new one with Tom. White also emphasizes and projects a society that craves and subsides on materialism, privilege, and ignorance.

The Great Gatsby clearly demonstrates the interpretive value and significance of colours. The text uses colour in specific instances to make the scene, mood, and theme more dynamic and emphasized. This use of colours reflects and enhances the traits of the characters. Although colours entail a sense of mystery due to their ambiguity, this allows and impels the reader to freely create and paint their interpretation and connotation. As I read *The Great Gatsby* through the lens of colour symbolism, the story, environment, and characters become more vivid, colourful, and alive. The art and significance of colour symbolism lies in the eyes of the beholder.

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