Najla Al-Yabis

Dr. Ahmad Al-Shtaywi

American Literature

19th, May, 2009

**The Green Color Symbolism in *The Great Gatsby***

Colors can symbolize many different things. Artists use them in their  
paintings to express their intentions. If an artist is trying to express sorrow or death he often uses blacks, blues and grays; basically he uses dreary colors. On the other hand, when he uses bright colors he conveys the impression of warmness and happiness. In fact, one of the most important uses of colors can be found in fiction because they can accentuate the meanings of a story and explain certain actions of a character. Also, Colors can often affect the mood and emphasize the importance of certain events. Color symbolism is really popular in novels written during the 1920's. One such example is Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* which is a very colorful novel.

In *The Great Gatsby*, colors are employed throughout the pages to convey impressionistic, but important, images to the reader and allude to the personality of the characters. The colors given are repeated multiple times so that they can be established. To fully understand the characters of the story, one must recognize the associated colors that are given because they reveal their true intentions. However green is the most important color in this book because it embodies Gatsby's hope and the American dream he strives to attain with money. Green shows many thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and choices that Gatsby has throughout the story.

Thinking of the color green reminds us of hope, nature, spring and youth. In *The Great Gatsby*, green is associated with Gatsby’s character. It is used to emphasize his desire and his unfulfilled wish to win his love Daisy back. As he has already achieved everything in life concerning material success, wealth and power, Gatsby’s only aim left is to reach Daisy’s heart. Therefore, the color green stands for his never-ending hope for her love as it is mostly associated with the green light at Daisy’s dock. The use of a green light at the end of a landing stage to signal a romantic reunion, is intriguingly similar to the green light at the end of Daisy’s Buchanan’ s dock, which becomes a key image in this novel. Gatsby watches it almost every night from his lawn across the water as the reader can guess from his utterance towards Daisy: “You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock” (Fitzgerald 85). However, it is too far for him to reach and will always stay out of reach although he “stretched out his arms toward the dark water” (Fitzgerald 31) and tries to come closer to the light, as Nick observes the first time he sees Gatsby.

Indeed, the narrator even realizes the forlornness of Gatsby's dream when he says “I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away” (Fitzgerald 31). Here the emphasis is to be put on “far away”. However, “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us” (Fitzgerald 152) and consequently never gives up his hope for Daisy’s love and the fulfillment of his desire. The color itself represents serenity, as in everything is perfect. This warns Gatsby that he should not pursue his dream for getting Daisy back, because his chance has passed and everything is as it should be. This is shown with Nick's insight, "...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..." (Fitzgerald 189). For Gatsby, the green light stands for the reunion with his love. However, Daisy could never live up to his expectations as her love cannot be as ideal as Gatsby imagines. The color green betrayed Gatsby, insinuating that hope is not always reality.

Eventually, Gatsby's dream is crushed down and this change is also symbolized by the light green car that runs Myrtle down. When this happens the hope is completely lost. The demise of Gatsby is also shown by color. He no longer looks towards the green light, since hope is lost. The green light enters as hope and exits as murder. The rise and fall of Jay Gatsby is shown by the leaves surrounding him in the pool. The narrator imagines that Gatsby, before his moment of death, must have had his "realization" of the impossibility of his dream:

. . . he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. (Fitzgerald 190)

Gatsby's quest for Daisy is broadly associated with the American dream; the green light also symbolizes that more generalized ideal. Nick hints at it when he wonders what the old Dutch sailors coming to America thought when they laid eyes upon "the fresh, green breast of the New World" (Fitzgerald 182) and how it held such seductive hopes and promises for them. Fitzgerald deliberately inserted this thought of Nick's into the novel in order to further hint at the mysterious symbolism of the color green, and its significance to Gatsby.

In like manner, green is also used to symbolize money. In the story, money controls the life of the people. Gatsby is a “new money” person and feels that he needs green money to live and to impress Daisy. Symbols of Gatsby’s money included his large green lawn and the green ivy growing up his house. Also, in his car, it depicts the passengers sitting “in a sort of green leather conservatory.” All of these symbols depict Gatsby’s money.

Another symbolization of the color green is the meaning "go." As in a traffic light signal, most people associate green with the word and action "go." This can be interpreted as meaning Gatsby should go for his dream without hesitation, implying that he and Daisy are meant to be together and nothing should stop him from his destined happiness and love with Daisy. It acts as a safe haven for Gatsby; telling him that it is safe for him to reach out and obtain his goals. In fact, Gatsby lived by the green light day in and out; it was a way of life for him because he was driven by ambition. The green light inspires hope for Gatsby that he is on the right path, heading towards the best years of his life. He believes that things will soon be as they once were, only better. ""I'm going to fix everything just the way they were before," he said nodding determinedly, "She'll see.""(Fitzgerald 117). So, the green light was symbolized by Gatsby to keep on going forward, and reach for his ambition.

One of the possible meanings of green in this story is envy and jealousy. Gatsby can be seen as an envious man for a few reasons. For one, he is extremely envious of Tom Buchanan because of the fact that he has the one thing he can’t buy; Daisy. He spends all of his time and effort in an attempt to win her back. Also, Gatsby is enormously jealous of the people around him who are invited to his house. He wishes that he is an old money person like the people he invites to his parties in order to win Daisy's heart. Accordingly, he throws all of those parties only to hide this inferiority complex and give people, especially Daisy, an impression of his enormous wealth. This makes him a man with whom Green is associated with envy and jealousy.

The last symbolization the color green has in this novel is an urge to strive ahead in life, to do better in life and succeed. Gatsby changes his entire persona for a better, more sociable, image and status. He is constantly striving to be a more successful figure in society. Ever since he was a boy he put himself on a schedule with hopes for becoming a highly respected, well-known person. "He knew he had a big future in front of him" (Fitzgerald 181), his dad says about him. "Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this... (Fitzgerald 182).

Throughout the novel Fitzgerald uses many other images or symbols. At first, it may seem very basic, but when the symbol is closely studied, one may see the deeper meaning found within it. Fitzgerald uses these symbols to make a point across to the reader. He then uses this point and converts it into a deeper meaning, into a myth about America. The green color mentioned in the novel clearly represents and is a prime example of this. It is represented as a promise of hope.  Through Gatsby this promise is corrupted by the means that he tries to attain it.  By attaining material wealth to win Daisy, Gatsby also shows the corruption of the American Dream. To conclude, Fitzgerald hoped for a great book; perhaps this is why the cover was originally green.

**Works Cited**

Bloom, Harold. Gatsby. New York: Chelsea House Publishers 1991.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

Gross, Dalton, and MaryJean Gross. Understanding *The Great Gatsby*: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.

Mizener, Arthur. F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

Raleigh, John Henry. Time, Place, and Idea: Essays on the Novel. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968.