

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Symbolic Design in *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract

The paper explores the idea that F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896 –1940) is a symbolist who occupies a unique position among his contemporaries. Like a designer or a painter, he follows the rules of some color and light theories in designing his symbolic system, which distinguishes him from other symbolists. Many critics pay no attention to his design of symbols. They discuss his use of colors as symbols, but disregard the major role of such objects as light and electricity as symbols. The paper presents a critical and literary analysis of his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, showing that color and light symbols are an integral part of its plot and structure. The thematic and character developments of the novel are based on its symbolic system. The analysis applies some features of traditional symbolism and rules of the color theory and RGB to the text. The conclusion presents and sums up the results of the study.

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**التصميم الرمزي في رواية 'جاتسبي العظيم' بقلم فيتزجيرالد  
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الملخص**

يهدف البحث إلى إثبات أن الروائي الأمريكي ، سكوت فيتزجيرالد (1896-1940) ، كاتب رمزي يتميز عن كثير من الرمزيين، والمشكلة أن النقاد يشيرون إلى رمزية الألوان فقط في رواياته ويهملون رموزا أخرى مهمة في سرده القصصي و تطوير الأحداث و الشخصوص و عرض الموضوع و المعاني ، و بالإضافة إلى رمزية الألوان توجد عدة رموز خاصة بالضوء والكهرباء وبعض المخترعات الحديثة الأخرى ، والرمزية مكون أساسي في أسلوب الكاتب ، والبناء اللغوي للرواية ، وتتوقف على معناها فهم كثير من المواقف و الشخصوص . ويظهر هذا واضحا في رائعته الفنية، رواية "جاتسبي العظيم" ، ولذلك تم اختيارها لهذه الدراسة، التي نعتمد على التحليل الأدبي والنقدي للنص، وتطبيق بعض المعايير الخاصة بمفهوم الرمز والرمزية في التحليل، ويخلص البحث الي أن الكاتب متأثر بكثير من النظريات الفنية الخاصة بالألوان والأضواء؛ وكثير من الفنانين الذين يستخدمون رمزية الألوان للتعبير عن مشاعر و أحاسيس الشخصوص.

وكذلك يخلص البحث إلى أن فيتزجيرالد كاتب رمزي يرسم روايته بالألوان والأضواء مثل فنان أو مصمم يضع إطارا فنيا للوحة رائعة تتحرك فيها الألوان والظلال في تناسق و تناغم يعبر عن المعاني و الأحداث و يخلق تصميميا رمزيا جديدا خاصا بهذا الروائي.

**Introduction:**

Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) is regarded as one of the greatest American novelists of the twentieth century because he expresses social changes and class shifts in a "clear, lyrical, colorful, witty style" (Brucoli, 1994,p.3). The main themes he tackles in his work are love, as well as success and the aspiration of American young men. Aspiration is the idealism that defines American character. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) seriously deals with this theme, exploring the effects of loss and failure on one's dreams. It directs a penetrating criticism against the moral emptiness of American wealthy classes, which makes some critics call it a "lively, yet deeply moral novel" (Coale, 2007, p.1). Fitzgerald adopted a liberal view of life and saw himself as a liberal writer. After he moved to Baltimore, he read Marx and he therefore "turned away left and stayed there for the rest of his life. He turned against the plutocrats" (Rudacille, 2009, p.8). He believed in the American dream and in the "orgastic future" he expresses in *The Great Gatsby* (2001, p.115), but he became pessimistic about this future in the last years of his life:--"Life will never be very pleasant again" (Fitzgerald, 1993, p.310).

Fitzgerald expresses his narrative point of view in a complex structure and a striking technique qualified with "symbolism, allusion, indirection, irony, ambiguity and mythical dimensions" (Eble, 2009,p.34) as well as "the lyric quality and esthetic soundness" of style(Brucoli, 2002,p.221). His complex structure is utilized for the presentation of an image of the Modern American in "all his complexity of human sympathy, firm moral judgment, and ironic self-possession" (Hizener, 2000, p.7). He seems to have acquired the qualities of his distinctive style through his wide readings:

He picked the periods, the artists, and the genres that were necessary to his own particular genius - the lyric poetry of the English Renaissance (Shakespeare), the nineteenth century (Romantic poets, especially Keats), the late nineteenth early century (French symbolists, Browning, Kipling, Swinburne), the twentieth century (Brooke, Eliot), the novel of social realism (Thackeray, Butler, Norris, Dreiser, Proust, Wharton), the 'novel

of selection' (Flaubert, James Joyce, Conrad, Cather, Hemingway) (Kuehl, 1961,p.78

Fitzgerald admired some French symbolists like Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud and Jules Laforgue, and read such French novels as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Maupassant's *La Maison Tellier*. Nonetheless, some critics suggest that he was greatly impressed by the works of some painters and illustrators like Walter Biggs, Pruett Carter, Howard C. Christy, Harrison Fisher and Coles Phillips, from whom his "world - both fantastic and real - is to be recovered in images...and from whose artistic grip Fitzgerald's style could not have escaped"(Basu-Zharku, 2011, p.1). From Biggs, Carter and Fisher he has learnt how to paint pictures of young, beautiful and well-bred girls. But from Christy he has acquired the tools of presenting images of beautiful but shallow girls, as is shown in the character of Daisy. Like Carter, he prefers light, mellow-toned colors. Carter's colors are "toned down, exhibiting various nuances of yellow, green, grey, and fine strokes of blue and brown. It almost brings into memory Fitzgerald's descriptions which always seem to have a mellow tone in them" (Basu-Zharku, 2001, p.2). The colors used by Carter are the same as those selected by Fitzgerald to design his symbolism, let alone blue, which covers a large area of the landscape, especially Gatsby's garden and parties. A critic, Walt Reed, suggests that Fitzgerald has learnt from Henry Raleigh's paintings the art of combining blue with other colors and using it to design his landscapes:—"an ode of blue and shadows between which the bluish contours of men and women drift away embraced in dance" in Gatsby's gardens ( Reed, 1979, p.122).

The paper aims at exploring the idea that Fitzgerald is a symbolist who occupies a unique position among other symbolists. Most critics concentrate on his color symbols only, paying no attention to his other symbols, let alone light symbols, which are an integral part of his symbolic design. In addition, they do not refer to the way by which he devises his symbolic design, which distinguishes him as a symbolist. The paper presents a critical and literary analysis of the text to find the features of this distinctive design. The analysis illustrates the color and light theories from which Fitzgerald derives some rules of combining color and light

symbols. Some criteria and definitions of symbols and symbolism are taken into account.

**Analysis of the text:**

Various definitions of the term, 'symbol', suggest that it is an object, a character, a situation, a word, a sound, a gesture, a color, or an image used in a certain context to represent a thing or a concept that has a deeper meaning or an indication of a universal truth. In a work of art it is used to "stand for or suggest something else with which it is associated either explicitly or in some more subtle way" (symbol, 2003). Another definition states that a symbol is "an energy evoking, or directing, agent" (Campbell, 2002, p.143). The agent holds both a meaning and a sense which seem to be two distinct things because the symbolic systems of the past "functioned simultaneously on three levels: the corporeal of waking consciousness, the spiritual of dream, and the ineffable of the absolutely unknowable. The term 'meaning' can refer only to the first two...The ineffable, the absolutely unknowable, can be only sensed" (Campbell, 2002, p.153). Zimmer (1969) agrees with Campbell's idea that the thing sensed from a symbol is ineffable and remains inscrutable. He thinks that words concepts, manners and customs of daily life are symbols, through which "a transcendent reality is mirrored. They are so many metaphors reflecting and implying something which, though thus rendered multiform, remains inscrutable". (p.1). In his definition of symbolism, Wilson (2010) points out that a symbol is "an attempt by carefully studied means – a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors – to communicate unique personal feelings" (p.22). The remark that the means of representing symbols are metaphors does not mean that a metaphor is a symbol. A metaphor indicates something different from the literal meaning while a symbol has a deeper meaning and it "often can have multiple levels of meaning" (Womack, 2005, p.6). On the other hand, a symbol is different from an allegory because an allegory "addresses the intellection of the reader and has one clear meaning, whereas a symbol is enigmatic, mystic, and appeals both to intellection and to sensitivity" (Carrez, 2014, p.2). Another difference is that in an allegorical work "the

objective referent is without value until it is translated into the fixed meaning that it has in its own particular structure of ideas" (Harmon, 2003, p.498). A whole work of art can be regarded as an allegory. *Animal Farm*, for example, is an allegory of communism. It is sometimes described to be a satirical allegory. Some critics do not agree with this explanation; Craigl (2010) wonders, "how simply political dogma can be turned into malleable propaganda" (p.79). Soule (2013) points out that allegory has become "a creaking machine for saying in a clumsy way things that have been said better directly" (p.2). An allegory can be meaningful according to two levels of interpretation, "a literal level and an abstract (e.g. moral) level" (Barton, 1997, p.6). A symbol can also have two levels of meaning; the first implies a "universal meaning", while the second represents "a particular meaning" (Harmon, 2003, p.497). However, symbols play a greater role in the human conception of meaning and "serve as vehicles of conception for all human knowledge" (Palczewski, 2012, p.2). They enable writers to arrive at truth "more concisely...more effectively" (Chapman, 2008, p.1). They are multivalent and multifarious. Each writer brings forth symbols and meanings latent in his own culture and time. When symbolism first appeared in French poetry in the second half of the nineteenth century, its pioneers, Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), Stephane Mallarme (1842 –1898) and Paul Verlaine (1871--1945) sought an ideal style and an ideal world beyond the hypocrisy, materialism and utilitarianism of the age. Some critics called for the return into "things that are dying – the whole belle-lettristic tradition of Renaissance culture" (Brooker, 2004, p.73) in order to find such an ideal style. In England, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf sought a distinctive symbolic style for their writings as a reaction to realism and naturalism. In America some writers like Ruben Dario and Scott Fitzgerald sought such a symbolic style in their work.

While using symbolism to depict American society and to expose human lust for power and money, Fitzgerald displays his superior writing skills by creating new symbols to stand for more than just one idea or meaning. He is more interested in the design of a symbolic ideal style than in the realism of his own age. His

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symbolic design is shaped by "the world of objects and things in a burgeoning consumer society that affect the language, imagery, and direction of the novel" (Purgozy, 2002, p.25). Symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* is an accurate reflection of new life and inventions in America in the 1920's. Fitzgerald is skillful at the design of his symbolism and "the way in which it is so completely incorporated into the plot and structure. Symbols such as Gatsby's house symbolize material wealth" (Wyatt, 2001, p.1). Most of the symbols, linked to houses, cars, the Valley of Ashes and the Eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, are closely related to color and light symbolism. A combination of light and color creates new types of symbols in the text.

Fitzgerald has benefited a lot from color and light theories in designing and inventing new symbolism. A color theory is "a set of guiding principles that can be used to create harmonious color combinations. These ideas are represented in a variety of diagrams – color wheels, triangles, and charts that help designers understand color interactions, select and combine colors, and construct pleasing and effective palettes" (Morioka, 2008, p.16). The primary color wheel, or the traditional color theory, shows three primary colors: red, yellow and blue, which can be mixed together or with other colors, to produce new combinations and to bring about certain sensual impacts. If blue, for example, is mixed with yellow and red, it would "create high-impact, vibrant designs" and this combination can be "a perfect color scheme for a superhero" (Color-Wheel, 2002, p.1 ). On the other hand, the Modern Color Model, RGB, displays three primary, additive colors: red, green and blue, which correspond to the three color receptors of the human eye. This Model is used to produce different colors and lights on T.V. and computer screens. White, for instance, is created by mixing them at full intensity while brown is resulted from blending red and green in certain proportions. Vincent Van Gogh was "a particular admirer of the color yellow, the color of sunshine" (Zuffi, 2012, p. 96), so he made combinations of yellow and violet (red and blue) in his paintings for "contrast and harmony" (Gage, 2006, p. 51). In his 'Correspondence general', he describes his painting, 'The Night Café' (1888), showing that he

"sought to express with red and green the terrible human passions. The hall is blood red and pale yellow, with a green billiard table in the centre, and four lamps of lemon yellow, with rays of orange and green" (Gage, 1993, p. 5). If green and red are used together to express terrible human passions, a combination of green and blue suggests "harmony and balance" (Heller, 2009, p. 90). In addition, the use of "gentle blue tones can calm a person and bright yellows can lift the spirits" (Bradstreet, 2009, p.1). Colors and their combinations are complex ways of communication and devices for human knowledge because each color "conveys both tone and meaning, which is essential to affecting audiences' judgments and reactions. Color...is a uniquely emotional language and a symbolic tool for all designers" (Morioka, 2008, p.6).

In *The Great Gatsby* the colors red, green, blue, yellow, grey, and white are symbolically used on a particular level and on a universal level. They are integral part of the plot and structure. Each color is intended to build up into the whole symbolic design which offers a harmonious picture of the theme and characters. The selection of these colors in particular shows that Fitzgerald is an admirer of the color theory. He combines red, yellow and blue at a certain density to produce dark grey. Grey is predominant in the text, symbolizing poverty and misery. It first appears when the author describes some poor, uncivilized villages in France during the First World War – "We talked for a moment about some wet, grey little villages in France" (p.31; ch.3). In America, it represents such poor places as The Valley of Ashes and West Egg. The scene moves from West Egg, through the Valley of Ashes, into New York, depicting different standards of living. Comparing between West Egg and New York where she lives, a visitor of West Egg thinks that it is an awful place to stay in. She is appalled by "its raw vigor that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a short-cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand" (p.69; ch.6). However, Gatsby, now a wealthy man, has come to live there, in the hope of finding his last beloved. It is ironical that he has not come to invest his money in civilizing and developing this wild, waste area. This is part of the severe criticism Fitzgerald directs



against American wealthy men. Despite his wealth, Gatsby is not happy. The house he stays in has got grey windows. Grey here symbolizes the state of gloom, hopelessness and reflection he is indulged in due to search for his beloved. When he finally meets her, his gloom turns into pleasure and as a result, the "grey windows disappeared" (p.61; ch.5).

About halfway between West Egg and New York, there is another awful, desolate area of land, the Valley of Ashes, which is a symbol of backwardness, barrenness and solitude:- "Terrible place, isn't it," said Tom, exchanging a frown with Doctor Eckleburg. "Awful" (p.18; ch.2). The word, 'ashes', implies grey, which is the color of a cloud-covered sky, of ash and of lead. Grey stands for the sharp, sour landscape of this valley. The following image shows how dark grey dominates everything in the valley. It is supported by an extended metaphor to convey the meaning intended in the symbol:- "This is a Valley of Ashes –a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (p.16; ch.2). In another image the valley is described to be a waste land – "The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it, and contiguous to absolutely nothing" (p.17; ch.2). Fitzgerald borrows the title of T. S. Eliot's poem, 'The Waste Land' (1922), to set the scene in symbolic and mythic resonance

The only building to be seen in the Valley of Ashes is George Wilson's garage. It is made of yellow brick. Yellow is the first of the primary colors combined to produce grey in this vicinity. Yellow is commonly associated with warmth, energy and brightness because it is the color of sunshine. Owing to its brightness it is sometimes the color of things or places to be seen from a distance. Yellow can make Wilson's garage visible for travelers who may stop to fill their car tanks with oil. In addition, yellow is associated with "envy, jealousy and betrayal" (Heller, 2009, p. 33). Wilson's wife, Myrtle, has a relation with Tom Buchanan. When Wilson discovers her

betrayal, he imprisons her into the house. But, she escapes. While crossing the road a "yellow car" hits her (p.89; ch.7). On the night of the accident, Wilson's house is "lit only by a yellow light" (p.88; ch.7), which is a symbol of her betrayal. Wilson is informed that the yellow car is Gatsby's, so he shoots him and disappears "among the yellowing trees" (p.103; ch.8), where he shoots himself. Yellow is then a symbol of punishment.

Nonetheless, yellow is used to "signify corruption. Gatsby, though he had noble intentions, allowed his desire for wealth to cause him to become a part of the world of organized crime. His world was filled with the yellow of corruption", as Bradstreet notes (2009, p.2). His car is yellow and his parties include yellow cocktail music and girls in yellow dresses. Yellow stands for corruption and illegal acts dominating the life of wealthy men. Tom Buchanan is another wealthy man who leads a life of debauchery though he is married. He holds a relation with Myrtle, Wilson's wife, and meets her in an apartment in New York. The windows of the apartment are yellow, which is a symbol of illegal acts and corruption happening behind them. In the Valley of Ashes, the advertisement of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg shows blue and gigantic eyes whose "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" (p.16; ch.2). The yellow spectacles are a symbol of corruption in American consumer society. The eyes are a witness of this corruption, so they have a "persistent stare" (p.17; ch.2). As a result of this corruption, the eyes are "dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground" (p.16; ch.2). The absence of paints and colors results in dimness, as is the case when a T.V. screen is dimmed if colors or lights are not sent on it.

The color of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg's eyes is blue and so is the color of Wilson's "light blue eyes" (p.17; ch.2). Fitzgerald here presents the second color of the combination of primary colors that produce grey in the Valley of Ashes. This color stands for refusal of corruption in this world. Wilson is the only person in the novel who realizes the fact of the existence of God and belief in Him though he has not followed a certain church; Nick asks him, "Have you got a

church you go to sometimes, George?", which he replies, "Don't belong to any" (p.100; ch.8). He warns his wife of betrayal and God's punishment:- "I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God...God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing" (p.102;ch.8). Blue eyes represent watching and reflection.

Red is the third of the primary colors combined to produce grey in the Valley of Ashes. It is the color of gas pumps, including Wilson's garage pump:- "Already it was deep summer on road house roofs and in front of wayside garages, where new red gas-pumps sat out in pools of light" (p.15; ch.1). Red here is a symbol of danger. It is also a symbol of death, for this valley witnesses Myrtle's murder and the color of her blood increases the grey of the place. The combination of the three primary colors of the traditional color theory: yellow, blue, and red, produces a new color, that is grey, which is the most symbolic of life in this region.

With the shift in the scene and landscape, the colors change, creating new symbols. The transition of events and characters from the Valley of Ashes into New York is accompanied by color change: grey is replaced by white and some light colors like cream and caramel, which represent high life and material wealth. Myrtle is traveling by train to New York, wearing a dress, which is "lavender-coloured with grey upholstery...slid out from the mass of the station into the glowing sunshine" (p.18; ch.2). On arriving there she changes into "a brown-figured muslin"(p.18; ch.2). The glowing sunshine suggests a mood of pleasure and happiness Myrtle enjoys in New York. This image is supported by the description of the apartment she stays in with Tom; the apartment is "full of cheerful sun" (p.20; ch.2). With the glowing and cheerful sun of New York grey and other dark colors disappear. As a result, Myrtle in the apartment has "attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream-coloured chiffon" (p.21; ch.2). The change of colors symbolizes a change of personality and passions:- "With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions become more

violently affected moment by moment" (p.21; ch.2). Cream and caramel are symbols of material wealth. Gatsby has a Georgeous car with "a rich cream colour, bright with nickel" and wears a "caramel-coloured suit" (p.41; ch.4). To show off how wealthy he is, Gatsby takes Daisy into his bedroom where he opens a wardrobe full of "a pile of shirts...in many-coloured disarray...in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue"(p.59; ch.5). These colours have such high impact on Daisy that she sobs, "They're such beautiful shirts.... It makes me sad because I've never seen such – such beautiful shirts before" (p.59; ch.5). It is ironical that she does not sob for the loss of a faithful lover.

White on a particular level is a symbol of civility and high life. But, on a universal level it is a symbol of purity, innocence, beauty and prime. These qualities are represented in Daisy when she is eighteen, "dressed in white, and had a little white roadster" (p.48; ch.4). Daisy is the name of a white flower, which supports the meaning of the symbol. However, white in this novel is not a symbol of goodness, as is the case in many novels where white and black are symbols of good and evil. The role Daisy plays does not present her as a good character, due to her moral corruption. Also, moral and material corruption is latent in these white apartments of New York– "the car stopped at one slice in a long white cake of apartment houses" (p.19; ch.2), where illegal and immoral actions take place. White in this novel is contrasted to grey in the sense that high life is contrasted to low life.

Fitzgerald employs another combination of the three primary additive colors of the Modern Color Model (RGB): red, green and blue to describe the social system in West Egg, a village adjacent to the Valley of Ashes. Red in this combination is used to symbolize murder. Gatsby is shot in the pool of his garden, and the servants discover his murder through "a thin red circle in the water" (p.103; ch.8). The whole situation is expressed in color symbol. However, red can also stand for "love and sacrifice", from the Greek point of view (Dreyfuss,1984, p.239). Also, it is a symbol of "martyrs and sacrifice" in Western countries (Feisner, 2006, p.127). In this context, red is a symbol of Gatsby's sacrifice; he sacrifices his life to

rescue his beloved from prison. Although Daisy drives his car and hits Myrtle, he declares that he will bear the responsibility. Daisy's husband plays a trick on George, Myrtle's husband, telling him that the car is Gatsby's and he therefore is the murderer. So, George kills him. Red here represents two cases of murder with different significances; Gatsby's is a symbol of a faithful lover while Myrtle's is a symbol of a disloyal wife. Daisy and Myrtle are two deceitful girls, which displays an aspect of American modern life

Blue in this combination is used to symbolize Gatsby's anxiety, restlessness and reflection. In West Egg he is looking forward to meeting Daisy and reflecting on his plans for the future. His house and garden are lighted with different "coloured lights" (26; ch.3), of which blue is the predominant. It offers Gatsby calmness and relief. There is the blue of the sky and of the sea around his blue gardens so that many men and girls are attracted to his summer parties "like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars" (26; ch.3). This simile shows a quality of the blue, that is, attraction; many people are attracted to his parties, dancing, drinking and eating while he is standing alone, watching the guests coming in and out, in the hope that Daisy would one night be one of those attendants. Blue creates a thrilling, vibrant, high impact on the guests who "glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light" (27; ch.3). It can be said that blue in both West Egg and the Valley of Ashes is a symbol of corruption, watching and reflection

The third and most important color of this combination is green which plays a major role in the symbolic design of the novel. If it is added to the other two colors of the RGB in various ways, they "reproduce a broad array of colors. ... The main purpose of the RGB color model is for the sensing, representation, and display of images" (Color Model, 2010, p.1). Green is located between blue and yellow on the spectrum of visible light, so green light can be produced by a combination of blue and yellow in a certain density. In the text green appears in the dock of the green Sound around Daisy's house, the green breast of the Island of East Egg, the green seats in Gatsby's car, and the green card Daisy uses in certain

situations. There is a green light radiating from the dock, penetrating into the vicinity between West Egg with its many-colored lights and the Valley of Ashes with its dark colors. This may explain John Gage's remark that "Green is the median color between light and obscurity" (Gage, 2006, p.151). It carries the light of civility to such uncivilized areas as the Valley of Ashes.

Green has got various associations in this context. On a particular level it is a symbol of 'sickness' (Heller, 2009, p.87). For example, when Wilson discovers his wife's betrayal, he gets so sad that he looks ill:- "With 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" (78; ch.7). It is also a symbol of permission. Daisy and Nick are invited to one of Gatsby's parties. She says to Nick, "If you want to kiss me anytime during the evening, Nick, just let me know and I'll be glad to arrange it for you. Just mention my name. Or present a green card" (67; ch.6). In England where "racing green was the official colour for British racing cars" (Mikkelson, 2007, p.2), green cars are seen to be unlucky. Fitzgerald benefits from this symbolic association in Myrtle's accident. A witness, relying on this association, reports the police that the car is green, although he has not seen the car. Yet, the police proves that it is a yellow car. Inside it there are green seats, which Gatsby regards as the symbol of love and reunion, so he suggests to Daisy, "Shall we all go in my car.... He felt the hot green leather of the seat" (76; ch.7). Daisy and Gatsby are reunited with hot passions on the hot seat after a long separation.

The green light, radiating from Daisy's dock into Gatsby's garden, is associated with love, dream and hope. It dominates the plot from beginning to ending, carrying these meanings. Gatsby is all the time watching this green light on the chance of seeing Daisy. The narrator, Nick, recounts how Gatsby is on watching it:- "he was content to be alone – he stretched out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way, and... he was trembling. 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" (16; ch.1). This is the first mention of the green light in the text. It is single, minute and far, which suggests that Gatsby is still away from

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his dream of winning over Daisy. The word, 'single', means that Gatsby has only one dream ahead of him. He thinks that his dream is possible as long as the green light is radiating. He plans for the fulfillment of his dream till he succeeds in inviting Daisy to one of his parties. During their meeting they talk of many things, including the green light:

'If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay', said Gatsby. 'You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock. Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him Daisy it had seemed very near to him, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock (60; ch.5).

This passage presents some metaphors and images which show how powerful and bright the green light is. It is 'close as a star to the moon', an image that suggests that Gatsby has nearly fulfilled his dream of meeting Daisy again. The green light is supposed to switch off if its significance is her meeting only. Yet, it is still radiating because it means something else; Gatsby thinks his dream will be fulfilled if Daisy is separated from her husband and gets married to him:--"He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say, 'I never loved you'. After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as it were five years ago" (70; ch.6). However, his dream is lost when he is killed. The lights in his house and the green light in Daisy's dock are switched off, to indicate this tragic ending:

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. 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 (115; ch.9).

The use of such phrases as 'shore places were closed', 'hardly any lights', 'melt away', 'vanished trees', and 'the last...dreams' enforces the image of the tragic ending. The word 'Sound' is here used without the adjective, 'green', which has always accompanied it before. On the other hand, Gatsby is likened to the explorer who had discovered this island; both were attracted by the green light to explore a new world. The explorer fulfilled his dream of this discovery but Gatsby could not. Gatsby was attracted by the green light to this island where he thought his dream should be fulfilled- "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes by us" (115; ch.9). The green light symbolizes the ideal world he imagines, and the dream of building new civilizations. The green light recedes year by year, owing to material and moral corruption. Gatsby's dream is the dream of all humanity but it is "tarnished by his material possessions, much like America is now with our possession with wealth" (Millett, 2013, p.1). This is the universal significance of this symbol.

In the 1920s, electric light was one of the great technological inventions that became common in America. Fitzgerald makes use of this new technology in creating new light symbols. Light symbols in the text are derived from natural and artificial sources. The sunshine, for example, is associated with pleasure, happiness and beginning. Nick, the narrator and Daisy's cousin, visits her in West Egg after many years of her marriage. She is pleased to see him. He expresses her pleasure, using this light symbol – "For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened – then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk (11; ch.1). The sunshine and dusk are used to express two contrasting feelings: pleasure and regret. Some words and images related to light like her 'glowing face' are also employed to support the meaning; her face is a source of light that radiates in the room. The phrase 'each light deserting her' refers to two sources of light: her face and the sunshine. The metaphor here suggests that her face is a source of pleasure and happiness. Moreover, the simile in which Daisy is likened to children shows her innocence and purity. Like the sunshine, the light of the moon is a symbol of pleasure – "A wafer of a moon was



shining over Gatsby's house making the night fine as before, and surviving the laughter and the sound of his still glowing garden" (37;ch3). Like Daisy's glowing face, Gatsby's glowing garden symbolizes pleasure and happiness. Lights in Gatsby's house and garden are so glowing and bright that they are reflected on West Egg and the "whole corner of the peninsula was blazing with light, which fell unreal on the shrubbery" (52; ch.5). The word 'unreal' recalls T.S. Eliot's description of London as 'Unreal city' in his 'The Waste Land'. London is described to be dark and foggy but West Egg is lit up with the lights reflected on it from Gatsby's house. It is 'unreal' light in the sense that the vicinity around Gatsby's house is not supplied with enough electric light, which is considered to be an aspect of wealth and high life. Light is used to suggest civility in big cities like New York and high-class houses like Gatsby's and Daisy's --"Inside, the crimson room bloomed with light" (14; ch.1) and outside, there is "a cheerful square of light" (15; ch.1

Light is symbolically used to express the characters' passions and affections. When Gatsby meets Daisy after a long period of separation, he is so exalted that "he literally glowed; without a word or a gesture of exultation a new well-being radiated from him and filled the little room" (57; ch.5). The metaphor suggests that Gatsby is a source of light. Pleasure radiates from him and fills the room where he meets Daisy. Like Daisy's glowing face, Gatsby's is glowing out of joy and happiness. His passions and sensations are expressed in the light symbol, which is supported by some metaphors and images that build up into the whole meaning; Gatsby is so happy that he "smiled like a weather man, like an ecstatic patron of recurrent light" (57; ch.5). He expects that his coming life will prosper in love and happiness. Light is a symbol of happiness and beginning of a new life.

On the other hand, switching-off lights is a symbol of ending. The author employs this symbol to represent Gatsby's tragic end. His glowing life begins to recede after Tom pays him back due to his advances towards his wife. Tom reveals that Gatsby has had some illegal dealings with a bad man, Meyer Wolfsheim, who sells grain alcohol in side-street drug stores. He defames him for Daisy so that she would dislike him. As a result, his reputation as a great man has collapsed and the "lights in his house failed to go on one Saturday night – and as obscurely as it had begun, his career as

Trimalchio was over" (71; ch.7). The light symbol is supported by a metaphor which makes the meaning intended clear. Trimalchio, the central character in Petronius's *Satyricon* (C.54 –68 AD), is a freedman. When he becomes a great man, he holds decadent parties. As a result of his evil actions, he has a tragic end. The love affair between Gatsby and Daisy comes to an end after a severe argument between Gatsby and Tom in New York. Gatsby, Daisy and Tom decide to come back to West Egg and to let "all their tragic arguments fade with the city lights behind" (87; ch.7). Fading lights is a symbol of the collapse of this love affair. Daisy and Tom escape from the house after Daisy hits Myrtle. She turns out the lights and leaves home:--"about four o'clock she came to the window and stood there for a minute and then turned out the light" (93; ch.8). Although turning out lights stands for the final moment of this love affair, Gatsby cannot realize the fact of the situation. He thinks that Daisy has always loved him:- "Of course she might have loved him just for a minute, when they were first married – and loved me more even then" (97; ch.8). In fact, Gatsby adopts a misconception of his love affair, which brings about his downfall. The narrator addresses the reader to share with him the idea that Gatsby is mistaken:- "What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured!" (97; ch.8).

Human misconception of meaning can result in some failures and downfalls in one's life. Gatsby has not realized that Daisy before marriage is a person different from Daisy after marriage. The main defects of the novel are latent in "its failure to achieve recognition", the recognition of the fact of Daisy's affections towards him, and "its failure to represent the relation between Daisy and Gatsby, a failure he admitted was the result of his own unwillingness to face the sensuality of the only relation that was possible for them" (Hizener, 2000, pp.3,5). Gatsby's misconception of the symbols in the text is an outcome of a false conception of himself; he is "a Son of God", a belief his imagination has formulated since his childhood:

His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people– his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a Son of God– a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that–and he must be about His father's business, the service of vast, vulgar and

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meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby.....  
and to this conception he was faithful to the end (63; ch.6).

As a Son of God, Gatsby thinks that he has the right to have everything – beauty, love, money, cars, houses and clothes. He even believes in his right to win over Daisy. As a result of this misconception, he has lost everything, even himself. Fitzgerald presents the character of Nick, the narrator, as a man able to understand the symbols and to make a proper conception of meaning in order to illustrate the significant role of symbols in the human conception of meaning. Contrasting to the character of Gatsby, Nick has learnt to compose proper conception of meaning since his childhood when his father gave him some advice:- "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone – just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had" (3; ch.1). Nick remarks, "I understood that he meant a great deal more than that" (3; ch.1), referring to the deep meaning of the sentence. He understood that he should be "inclined to reserve all judgments" (3; ch.1). He has also learnt to pass proper judgments on events and characters. For example, he thinks that Tom and Daisy are "careless people – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or what it was that kept them together" (114; ch.9). He realizes that Tom and Daisy have common personal qualities that bring them together. They represent a generation of Americans who have strong lust for money and sensuality and pay no attention to morals or values. A critic, Golgotha Press, suggests that Fitzgerald "brilliantly portrayed an over-indulged segment of his generation that had no direction and would ultimately go nowhere" (Press, 2012, p.15). Unlike Gatsby, Nick can infer coming events from symbols. For example, he has expected Gatsby's tragic downfall from such symbols as "the fading ale,...Doctor T.J. Eckleburg's faded eyes and Gatsby's caution about gasoline" (78; ch.7). Reflecting on these symbols Nick feels that he "had been warned of something behind" (79; ch.7). At the night of the car accident, Nick does not sleep all night because he expects that something bad will befall Gatsby, "something to warn him about, and morning would be too late" (93; ch.8). He

immediately goes to Gatsby's house to inform him of this feeling but he finds him killed. This shows the importance of proper conception of meaning behind symbols.

Fitzgerald relies a lot on the contrast between characters and landscapes to make his meaning clear. Gatsby believes in the realization of the American dream, while Nick looks upon it with suspicion. Gatsby is so dazzled by this dream that he follows illegal ways to fulfill it whereas Nick strongly adheres to morals and values. This contrast between the protagonist and the narrator is a technique used in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to express two contrasting views of European imperialism in Africa. Mr. Kurtz, the protagonist, represents the White Man who exploits and enslaves the Black Man while Marlowe, the narrator, stands for the White Man who refuses oppression and tyranny. Like Nick, who leaves West Egg for Middle West where people still stick to morals, Marlowe leaves Africa where bestiality dominates. Middle West and East Egg symbolize primal culture and unfettered emotions whereas West Egg stands for refined culture. Also, the Valley of Ashes is contrasted to New York, or low life is contrasted to high life. The contrast between landscapes is also clear in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) where Wuthering Heights, a farmhouse, is a symbol of low life and simplicity while Thrushcross Grang, the Lintons' house, stands for high life. Like Daisy, Catherine is "torn between a socially acceptable super ego, represented by Linton, and the much stronger drive towards a forbidden alter ego, embodied by Heathcliff" (Cristina, 2010, p.3). In George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861), Lantern Yard, a symbol of Silas's loss of faith in God and love, is contrasted to Raveloe, where he restores this love. This technique is often used because many "social and moral concerns are reflected in the presentation of landscape" (Witemeyer, 1979, p.100).

However, color and light symbolism plays the major role in the human conception of meaning in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's design of this symbolism distinguishes him from many color symbolists. In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), for example, Nathaniel Hawthorne uses color symbolism to express some passions and actions. Grey is a symbol of sin, so when the Puritans consider

Hester to be sinful, she is distinguished by this color. Black stands for evil in the character of the Black Man. Grey in *The Great Gatsby* is a symbol of poverty and low life while black has no great role as a symbol. Red in the letter 'A' on Hester's breast is a symbol of her glowing passion. The letter 'A' has been given different interpretations: Able, Adulterer and Angel. The symbol in *The Scarlet Letter* has "a syncretistic value: it represents and signifies at the same time; it fuses the object and its secondary meaning" (Carrez, 2014, p.2). However, the three colors: grey, black and red do not mix or combine together to reproduce new color combinations with new meanings.

In *Moby Dick* (1851) Herman Melville uses white as a symbol of evil. The white whale stands for evil and danger surrounding the ship. Ahab, the captain of the ship, struggles to kill it to protect the ship from its horror. This color here loses its traditional association with goodness, purity and innocence. The struggle between the white whale and the ship can symbolize "the power struggles of a world concerned to uphold democracy, and of a country seeking an identity for itself within that world" (Selby, 1999, p.53). White in *The Great Gatsby* has traditional and new associations. It is a symbol of new money or new material wealth which Fitzgerald regards as a source of social and moral corruption. If white dominates *Moby Dick*, black covers the landscape and action of *Heart of Darkness* because every White Man and even Black Man are complicit in the atrocities taking place there. In D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) white and black are symbolically used as "material and focal expressions of the powerful forces of nature and of the emotional attitudes of his characters" (Neopany, 2012, p.3). White suggests cold emotions and black stands for bad attitudes towards life and people. In-between them lies grey, in the Ash-tree, which is a symbol of the disharmony between the two characters, Mr. and Mrs. Morel. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), the American novelist, Harper Lee, uses white and black in a traditional way to symbolize good and evil. A group of child characters – Tom, Dill, Jim, Boo and Raymond are presented as identified with mockingbirds for their innocence but they are ruined by evil. They set up the Snow-Man for

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Miss Maudie from white snow with a base of dark dirt. A mockingbird, which is a Southern songbird, is a symbol of the innocence that is lost due to racial discrimination in the Southern States. The novel is now read as a book "dealing with race in America, and its protagonist, Atticus Finch, the most enduring fictional image of racial heroism" (Crespino, 2000, p.9). Similarly, children in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) lose innocence and turn into savagery and brutality. Both novels represent the loss of innocence in the modern world.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude, Fitzgerald is a symbolist, or a symbolic designer, who selects certain symbolic designs for his novels. Like a painter or a designer, he is well-informed of some color and light theories that form the basis of his symbolic design. He makes certain combinations of primary colors to reproduce new color symbols. He combines, not only primary colors, but also colors and lights to create his symbolic system. Many critics have not observed the relation between his symbols and the color and light theories on which he sets up his symbolic design. The study shows that color and light symbols are an integral part of his technique and play the major role in thematic and character development. Human conception of meaning in the novel is greatly based on their creation and interpretation. His symbols are found to be multivalent and multifarious.

The traditional color theory, or the primary color wheel, shows three primary colors: red, yellow and blue, from which he creates certain combinations to symbolize human passions and offer new meanings. Dark grey, for example, is produced from mixing these three colors at certain combinations. It is used for contrast between low life and high life. It is contrasted to white, which stands for high life. White can be created by mixing red, green and blue at full intensity, according to the Modern Color Model (RGB), which shows these three additive colors. White is not a symbol of goodness in the text but it stands for corruption of high upper-class people. Fitzgerald sometimes uses two colors together to suggest certain meanings. For example, he presents blue and green together to

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express balance between the passions of two characters. He selects light, mellow-toned colors and lights to suggest calmness and relief. Gatsby's garden is lit with different colored lights, of which blue is the predominant, because soft blue tones calm him when he is anxious about Daisy. Blue is a symbol of watching and reflection. Blue and red are included in both traditional and modern color theories, for they are the most additive ones. Red on a universal level is a symbol of danger and murder, but it is a symbol of sacrifice in this novel. The other colors, yellow and green, are symbolically used; yellow is a symbol of betrayal, debauchery and moral corruption in society, while green suggests dream, reunion and hope in a better future. On the other hand, a green light radiates from Daisy's dock into Gatsby's garden, carrying memories of the past and best wishes for the future. When the love affair between Gatsby and Daisy comes to an end, it fades and turns out. Light symbolizes the beginning and ending of some events. The moon and sunshine suggest warmth, pleasure and beginning of a new life. Sunset and dusk stand for regret, sadness and ending. Many light symbols are derived from natural and artificial sources to express various passions and sensations. A glowing face or place is a symbol of cheerfulness. However, switching-off or fading lights symbolize the ending of this happiness. Electric light represents high life and civility. Lights and colors are combined, creating new symbols, moving with the scenes and pushing the events forward.

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