

# American Dream: The Concrete Embodiment of Symbolism in "The Great Gatsby"

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**Abstract:** "The Great Gatsby" written by American famous writer Fitzgerald is known as a masterpiece in novels throughout the world. In this novel, he described the social life of the American Jazz Age very well. The characters are meticulous and lifelike, which has become a hot topic in novel critics. What impresses people in this novel is not the distinct theme, but the use of symbolism to expose the theme to readers, which deepens the theme and makes the novel more profound. The significance of symbolism to the theme and the artistic effects it displays are revealed through the analysis on the specific application of the symbolism in the paper.

## 1. Introduction

"The Great Gatsby" is the best work of Fitzgerald. The author's higher artistic achievements are reflected in both the thought and art. The novel mainly tells the story of a young man in the western United States. He came from the bottom of the society and tried to achieve true happiness and love through his own personal struggle, but his dreams were shattered under the pressure of reality eventually, and he was conspired against to death at last. In the novel, the author designs a double protagonist image - Nick Carraway. In the novel, he not only acts as the narrator and commentator of the story, but also plays an important role. The main characters in the book have a lot to do with him. He is a neighbor and friend of Gatsby, a cousin of Daisy, and a classmate of Tom. He is the matchmaker who allows Gatsby and Daisy met again five years later. He is also a commentator on the disillusionment of Gatsby's old dreams, and a sympathizer of Gatsby's tragic death. Although he lives in the eastern part of the United States, he has the traditional ideas and moral principles of the central part. Through Nick's first-person narrative perspective, the novel unfolds the story from what Nick saw, heard and felt, summarizes the social life of the Jazz Age in which Fitzgerald lived, and exposes the ruthlessness and hypocrisy of the society at that time. In the novel, Fitzgerald made a major breakthrough in the lack of connotation and typical refinement of the previous novels, which made the language of the novel clear, concentrate and expressed more profoundly, and achieved a degree of relaxation. And the theme of the disillusionment of the American dream was expressed thoroughly through the art form of symbolism. In the novel, Fitzgerald uses a technique of expression of fusion and alienation to make the hidden image more complete and concrete, and to express the thoughts and feelings of the characters thoroughly to be of many different meanings and levels at the same time. Different readers will have different experiences on the novel and different interpretations on the characters. Fitzgerald's description of the characters does not show people the image, but captures the thoughts and spirits of the characters through impressional techniques.

## 2. Symbolism

Symbolism emerged in France at the end of the 19th century and is an important trend and genre of literature. On the eve of the First World War, symbolism was popular in European countries and involved a variety of art departments. The writers of this genre explain that symbolism is a kind of profound idea and meaning that can be found to correspond to everything. The world of the human

mind and the things of the outside world are mutually responsive and mutually compatible. People can dig out the deep meaning and symbolic meaning hidden in each species. Therefore, it emphasizes to reveal the inner world through external things and to show the subtle changes in the inner world. Thereby connecting the external world with the inner world. Baudelaire, a pioneer in the development of symbolism, believes that color, contour, sound and smell all have profound symbolic meanings. And this meaning needs to be expressed in the work by the author's imagination. In the novel "The Great Gatsby", Fitzgerald uses his rich imagination to show the charm of color and display the artistic image thoroughly. In the concept of people's normal thoughts, green represents vigor and vitality, often associated with the words such as spring and life. In this novel, however, Fitzgerald gives green a new meaning and a new symbolic meaning. There is a green light at the dock of Long Island where Daisy lives. The author wrote it as a symbolic image in the book. Gatsby's dream is on the green lamp. This includes all his longing for love and firm belief. Gatsby often looks at it lonely. The lamp that symbolizes love and youth makes Gatsby want to embrace it. Therefore, it also became the incarnation of Daisy. Although the green light gradually drifted away, Gatsby is still obsessed with trying to catch him. Gatsby holds a big ball in the luxurious white marble villa on the West Egg Island that is opposite to Daisy every weekend. Wade is just trying to see Daisy. Far away guests are attracted to the place. Gatsby is also to show off his wealth and status, and then make Miss Daisy return to him. But Gatsby ignored the most important point. The love that was exchanged for wealth and status seriously violated the true meaning of love. He tried to exchange money for women, but the reality is that the woman who is exchanged back will have only false display of affection. So his persistence was wrong at first. It also doomed that his American nightmare was an unachievable mistake, which also led to his tragic fate. He can sacrifice his life for Daisy. At the end of the novel, Nick said that the green light that Gatsby had been eager to catch seemed to be close at hand, but he just couldn't catch it. It is an illusory dream that can't be achieved. Therefore, this dream is also getting farther and farther away from him, and eventually it is gradually ruined.

### 3. Symbol of colors

When Nick first met Daisy at Tom's house, Daisy was dressed in white. The radiance and temperament radiated from the Daisy made the house full of soothing tones and atmosphere. Therefore, white is a symbol of Daisy's identity. The purity, beauty and innocence of Daisy's appearance deeply attracted Gatsby, making him fascinated with Daisy. The girly look of Daisy's white clothes left a deep mark on Gatsby's inner heart, it became a lifelong fascination of Gatsby and the lifelong pursuit of love. But it became an unattainable fantasy eventually. Gatsby and Daisy met again five years later with Nick's arrangement. Gatsby finally saw his sweetheart whom he dreamed of. But it is not the Gatsby's persistence that awakens Daisy's feelings, but the luxurious villa and Gatsby's luxurious life. The Daisy at that time has ceased to exist. The environment eroded Daisy's heart and made her a greedy, empty and selfish vulgar woman. Her eyes are filled with money and status. But the wealth of Gatsby can't save the lost soul of Daisy. Therefore, it can be seen from the Daisy that white symbolizes purity while symbolizing greed, degeneration, ignorance and shallowness. It is also the essence of the Daisy's changes. Gatsby's American dream is destined to be satisfactory and complete. In order to get the love of Daisy, Gatsby worked hard to earn money. But after getting a lot of wealth, he was extravagant and wasteful. The luxurious life can't hide the loneliness and emptiness of his heart. The purity and innocence of Daisy's past became the spiritual pillar of his survival. But the cruelty of reality has bruised him all over, thus deepening the theme of the American dream.

The mansions of Tom and Daisy are red and white respectively. White symbolizes the character of Daisy. Red highlights Tom's selfish, arrogant and cruel personality. Tom's family background is excellent. Therefore, his character appears to be very arrogant. In the novel, Fitzgerald describes Tom like this. He always pushes the person in front of him arbitrarily, and stands proudly in front of people. Although he married Daisy, he often has a tryst with his lover. But when noticing the affair of Daisy and Gatsby, he took Daisy to Gatsby justly and forcefully to prove his injury. His

selfishness and hypocrisy are thoroughly expressed. When he known that his wife had crashed his lover to death, he even provoked his lover's husband to kill Gatsby. His cruelty caused others to die one by one, and also painted a complete period for the red.

In the novel, yellow is also a color to be mentioned. It symbolizes money, wealth and power. There is a certain connection between yellow and death in the novel. Daisy crashed Tom's lover to death with a yellow car in her panic. Fitzgerald described the picture of Gatsby falling into the swimming pool when he was killed by Wilson as a leaf falling into a yellow jungle. The author wants to tell readers through this connection that money is sometimes the biggest source of evil that leads us to death. In the novel, the greatest artistic feature is the combination of the plot of the story and the symbolism in the novel, which constitutes the structure of the work. The symbolism technique makes the work whirling, and it seems to be the feeling of admiring the flowers while it is foggy. It allows the work to show the unique style of poets and dreamers, and also provides an important foreshadowing for the reader to better understand the work.

#### **4. Symbol of things**

The symbolic meaning of a house is usually wealth and status. In the novel, Gatsby's house is a replica of a certain guildhall, indicating that Gatsby imitates the nobility and wants to integrate into the upper class of the United States. It also shows Gatsby's vanity. Tom's mansion of Georgian Era is a symbol of his hereditary aristocracy. While, Nick's house is a wooden bungalow eroded by wind and rain, which shows his humble identity and low status. Gatsby's mansion and Tom's Ivy have a metaphor for their common pursuit of money. In the novel, the moon, moonlight and other things with hazy beauty represent the unreality of things. Gatsby's house has a dreamlike feeling when the moon is shining on Gatsby's house. The rise of the moon has a lot to do with the American dream. The rise of the moon represents the rise of the American dream. But the moon will eventually disappear as the sun rises. Just like the unrealistic American dream, Gatsby's dream and hope will eventually be shattered.

#### **5. The embodiment of the American dream in the works**

The plot of the story depicts the triangular love relationship among Gatsby, Tom and Daisy. But in essence it is the process of the pursuit and disillusionment of the American dream. The dream that Gatsby has always adhered to is the love for Daisy. The green light on the dock is a symbol of dreams, symbolizing the young people's relentless pursuit of dreams. However, the idea of money worship in the Jazz Age erodes the American dream. People become greedy and selfish. But Gatsby still sticks to his dreams. In the pursuit of dreams, Gatsby held a lavish banquet to meet with Daisy. This also represents the illusion of the American dream. In the desolate wilderness of Ashenvale, he regards illusion as the essence of pursuing dreams. The American dream is impossible to come true. Although he pursued his dream relentlessly, it was wiped out by the cruel society and eventually became a victim of an era.

#### **6. Conclusion**

"The Great Gatsby" became a classic in the pursuit of the American dream. It reproduces the social scene in The Jazz Age and highlights the theme of the novel with symbolism, allowing readers to deepen their understanding of the work.

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