

# THE CHROMATIC SEMIOTICS OF THE JAZZ AGE: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF COLOR LEXEMES IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S PROSE

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**Abstract:** *This research explores the stylistic and semiotic functions of color lexemes in the prose of F. Scott Fitzgerald, with a primary focus on *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night*. The study examines how the author employs a “painterly” style to construct a sophisticated symbolic architecture that reflects the socio-cultural tensions of the Jazz Age. By analyzing four pivotal leitmotifs—gold, white, green, and grey—the paper demonstrates how Fitzgerald transcends simple description to create a “Double Vision,” juxtaposing material prosperity with spiritual disillusionment. The analysis incorporates perspectives from literary critics and linguistic scholars to illustrate that color in Fitzgerald’s work functions as a vital bridge between concrete imagery and abstract national myths. The findings suggest that the American Dream is rendered as a vibrant, color-coded linguistic construct that inevitably dissolves into the “grey” reality of moral decay.*

**Keywords:** *F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jazz Age, color lexemes, semiotics, stylistic analysis, chromatic symbolism.*

## INTRODUCTION

The historical endurance of literary masterpieces is often predicated on their unparalleled capacity to encapsulate the essence of a specific era with remarkable vividness. This aesthetic objective is frequently realized through the strategic deployment of symbolic systems, which reinforce the organic connection between the narrative and its historical zeitgeist. While F. Scott Fitzgerald authored several significant novels, it is *The Great Gatsby* that solidified his legacy as a definitive voice of American modernism, offering an incisive representation of the “Jazz Age” and the moral fissures within the social elite.

Consequently, the primary aim of this research is to examine the stylistic mechanisms through which Fitzgerald constructs this symbolic architecture, evaluating how these features enhance the reader’s cognitive impression and ensure the work’s status as a precedent phenomenon in world literature. The linguistic fabric of his prose is distinguished by a profound “painterly” quality, where color lexemes transcend their primary denotative function to become a sophisticated semiotic system. By scrutinizing the interaction between traditional associations and authorial subtexts, we can uncover how the author creates a “Double Vision”—a state where the shimmering allure of prosperity is constantly balanced by a cynical awareness of spiritual decay.

## MAIN PART





The stylistic integrity of the novel is anchored in the ambivalence of its chromatic palette. Fitzgerald's individual style is most vividly manifested through four pivotal leitmotifs: gold, white, green, and grey.

Leading literary critics, including Andrew Turnbull and Arthur Mizener, highlight Fitzgerald's unique ability to encapsulate the traumatic experiences of the "Lost Generation"—a demographic defined by the scars of World War I and the subsequent economic collapse. This historical backdrop led to the inevitable disintegration of the American Dream. As noted by Yu.K. Kazakova and A.P. Pikkar [3], Fitzgerald's artistic significance lies in his capacity to transcend personal tragedy and document the collective farewell to national illusions. This process of shedding idealism is viewed as a pivotal element in the spiritual history of the United States during the 20th century, providing a profound subtext for the symbolic architecture of his prose.


In a broad cultural context, green is universally recognized as the color of spring, embodying vitality, confidence, and optimism. In *The Great Gatsby*, this chromatic motif is woven into the very fabric of the narrative, closely mirroring the protagonist's brief and tragic life. As noted by researcher I.A. Barkova, green in Fitzgerald's prose functions as a multifaceted symbol of Gatsby's aspirations and his relentless pursuit of a dream, while simultaneously foreshadowing the ultimate disintegration of those ideals [1].

From a lexical-semantic perspective, gold and yellow represent a deceptive duality. While "gold" is stylistically aligned with the established, ancestral wealth of the elite (the "old money"), "yellow" often serves as a marker of ostentation and moral jaundice. Gatsby's "yellow car" and his "golden tie" are not mere descriptive details; they are semiotic indexes of his desperate attempt to purchase social legitimacy. Using epithets and personification, Fitzgerald suggests that in the Jazz Age, the brilliance of wealth is frequently a mask for corruption.

In his most influential work, *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald presents a tragic depiction of the American Dream's evolution—from its idealistic ascent to its inevitable collapse. The protagonist attempts to quantify happiness through material accumulation, utilizing lavish parties and ostentatious spending as tools to secure his "paradise." A parallel thematic structure is found in *Tender is the Night*, where Doctor Dick Diver eventually rejects the European social elite, viewing it as a manifestation of a "corrupted paradise." According to researcher Jinan Abdulla Shafiq [4], these narrative arcs illustrate Fitzgerald's critique of the Jazz Age, where the pursuit of a shimmering, idealized reality often masks an underlying moral decay.

The stylistic application of the white color spectrum is further nuanced in Fitzgerald's later prose; specifically in *Tender is the Night*. Here, the author employs white lexemes not merely to signal social detachment, but to accentuate the ethereal beauty, fragility, and grace





of the female protagonist, Nicole Diver. As researcher E.V. Sidorenko [2] observes, white serves as a tool for aesthetic idealization. This is vividly illustrated in the scene where Nicole's physical presence is described through a synthesis of "white" attributes—cheeks, teeth, and a "cool brow"—creating an image of radiant purity that overwhelms the observer. This linguistic choice highlights the character's delicate nature and her romanticized, almost porcelain-like allure.

However, the symbolism of white undergoes a tragic inversion. Traditionally a symbol of purity, in Fitzgerald's lexicon, it denotes a profound moral vacuity. The "white palaces" of East Egg and Daisy Buchanan's "white girlhood" are stylistically rendered to emphasize coldness and detachment. This "chromatic irony" reveals a class that is emotionally frozen, shielded from accountability by a wall of curated elegance.

The iconic green light functions as the novel's macro-symbol, materializing the American Dream. Through a syntax defined by distance and yearning, Fitzgerald elevates a simple harbor light into a "receding mirage." This green imagery bridges the gap between Gatsby's romantic idealism and the "green breast of the new world," connecting individual desire to a collective national myth.

Finally, the grey desolation of the Valley of Ashes provides the essential tonal counterweight. Fitzgerald utilizes a specialized lexical layer of industrial waste and "powdery air" to construct a dystopian wasteland. This grey topography serves as a visceral indictment of the human and environmental wreckage produced by unbridled consumerism, effectively subverting the glittering "gold" of the Eggs.


#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the stylistic analysis of color lexemes in Fitzgerald's prose proves that the author's "painterly" style is a fundamental engine of narrative meaning. Color functions as a bridge between the concrete image and the abstract theme, creating a multi-layered subtextual dialogue with the reader. Through the strategic use of antithesis, leitmotif repetition, and chromatic inversion, Fitzgerald demonstrates that the American Dream is not merely a social concept, but a linguistic construct—a vibrant, color-coded illusion that eventually collapses into the grey soot of reality. This semiotic depth ensures that the novel remains a resonant precedent phenomenon, offering a timeless critique of the relationship between material pursuit and spiritual integrity.

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