

Silver and gold: color symbolism in the great gatsby essay

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Color symbolism plays an important role in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). The author uses various colors to accentuate different aspects of life in the United States in the 1920s. In particular, a great deal of attention is paid to representing differences in social status while emphasizing richness and prosperity with the help of gold and silver. Although the color palette presented in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is rich, the problem of differing social status is most vividly described in the novel through the use of golden and silver colors that stand for wealth, success, the Golden Age, and the American Dream.

From his first days in the city, Nick Carraway begins to associate life in New York with gold and money. Carraway plans to spend his time reading on "banking and credit and investment securities," and these books stand on his shelf "in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets" (Fitzgerald 4).

When Carraway comes to Tom Buchanan's house, he also associates the mansion with prosperity and success while noting that its French windows glow with "reflected gold" (Fitzgerald 6). Thus, Fitzgerald represents Carraway as a person of lower social status than Buchanan but also as someone who wants to achieve success in his life and learn the secrets of the bond business.

When Fitzgerald tells the reader about Jay Gatsby, the use of gold and silver adds to Gatsby's image as a prosperous man and a person who represents the wealthiest class of the Golden Age in the United States. Indeed, when Carraway sees a silhouette of his neighbor for the first time, Gatsby is "

standing with his hands in his pockets regarding the silver pepper of the stars” (Fitzgerald 15).

Silver is also used in the novel to accentuate the unique sparkle of the moon in New York: “ A silver curve of the moon hovered already in the western sky” (Fitzgerald 120). The silver shining of the moon and stars is also associated with the sparkling jewelry worn by women from upper classes of society and only dreamt of by poorer people.

Gatsby uses silver and gold in order to emphasize his status and add gloss to his image and appearance. When he prepares for his date with Daisy, he chooses “ a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-colored tie” (Fitzgerald 54). He wants to draw Daisy’s and the public’s attention to his wealth. This intention can be observed even in Gatsby’s parties, which are so glamorous and showy that turkeys are “ bewitched to a dark gold” (Fitzgerald 26).

Moreover, the author describes Gatsby’s house as a luxurious mansion, and the man’s bedroom, though the “ simplest” in the house, is also full of gold. From this point, gold and money help Gatsby distinguish himself from the other people around him. His wealth is accentuated so vividly that no one can doubt Gatsby’s success and status in New York.

However, not only Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby are represented as having a high social status; Jordan Baker and Daisy Buchanan are other characters who have wealth and status in line with these two men. Fitzgerald refers to Jordan as having a “ slender golden arm” (28) and a “ golden shoulder” (51).

The accentuation of this color is important to demonstrate her status as a rich professional golfer and celebrity in New York social circles. It is significant to note that Fitzgerald uses both silver and gold to present his visions of Jordan and Daisy. In this way, both women are associated with “silver idols” (Fitzgerald 79). At the same time, these rich women seem to shine in their high social circles like gold.

From this perspective, much attention is paid to accentuating the difference between other women and Daisy, who is “the golden girl” with a voice “full of money” (Fitzgerald 84). Thus, Daisy’s high status is presented as an inherited feature that is reflected in her appearance and all of her actions, as well as in her voice. These details are important because they highlight a key difference between

Daisy and Gatsby: even though Gatsby has a high social status today, he has no such voice, and his silver shirts are only outer covers that are typical of the Golden Age. The conflict between Daisy’s and Gatsby’s statuses is also observed with reference to Fitzgerald’s representation of Daisy’s memories about the sounds of saxophones.

When the characters return from their thoughts to reality, they observe that the house becomes filled with “gray-turning, gold-turning light” (Fitzgerald 96). This combination of gray and gold, as well as dust and shining, demonstrates the contrast between the glamorous cover of Gatsby’s life and reality.

Despite the fact that Fitzgerald uses many colors in his writing, gold and silver seem to play a unique role in the author's palette. The distance between the rich and the poor in 1920s America is accentuated with the help of some colorful strokes. Indeed, Fitzgerald uses the expressive combination of colors to demonstrate differences in the characters' statuses, as gold and silver represent both their real wealth and their attempts to give off an impression of success.

Fitzgerald, Francis Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Wordsworth Publishing, 2013.