

WOMEN IN APHASIA REFLECTED FROM THE SYMBOLS IN ‘THE GREAT GATSBY’- TAKING DAISY AS AN EXAMPLE

Wang Wenjing

Research Scholar, East China University of Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Received: 10 May 2020

Accepted: 14 May 2020

Published: 30 May 2020

ABSTRACT

The Great Gatsby, written by famous American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, depicts the flamboyance and excess of the Jazz Age, as well as the decline of fancy American Dream rooted in American people's soul. Although it didn't receive due popularity as Fitzgerald expected when it was published, its value has regained its significant place in American literature as time goes by. Numerous experts and scholars from home and abroad attach much importance to the male protagonists, ignoring the female characters within the work. Even the author Fitzgerald himself acknowledged *The Great Gatsby* as “a man's book”, which throws the female characters into aphasia surrounded by males. This paper will reversely explore Daisy's aphasia reflected from the symbols, so as to indicate that women of Jazz Age are positioned in aphasia and subjected to men though some of them partly shackles off the constraints.

KEYWORDS: Colors, Cars, Green Light, Women in Aphasia

INTRODUCTION

As the representative of Jazz Age, American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) has achieved popular success, fame, and fortune in his lifetime for his novels describing the flamboyance and excess of that time. Considered as a chronicler of the so-called “Lost Generation” of the 1920s, today Fitzgerald is widely regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. This *Side of Paradise* (1920) is his first novel which earns him an instant reputation. His third novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), is highly regarded, but *Tender is the Night* (1934) is considered a failure. The most noted posthumous novel of Fitzgerald is *The Last Tycoon* though it hasn't finished yet even when he meets his end. Four collections of his short stories are published, as well as 164 short stories in magazines during his lifetime. Among his novels, *The Great Gats* by which Fitzgerald deems as a “starting over” to some extent, by fashioning himself as a member of an exclusive, international, modernist literary vanguard while maintaining the commercial and institutional connections that keep him a writer of popular magazine fiction at home. Gilbert Sides once acclaimed that *Gatsby* was far from perfect in many ways but all in all it contains such prose as has never been written in America before. In Fitzgerald his own worries about *Gatsby*, a more basic division of the reading public along lines of gender loomed particularly large: “It may hurt the book's popularity that it is a man's book”. [1]

The Great Gats by is a classic piece of American fiction, narrated by Nick Caraway, a Yale University graduate from the Midwest who moves to New York, where he witnesses a romantic tragedy led by Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, as well as Daisy Buchanan after World War I. Gatsby falls in love with Daisy when they are young and he joins in the army to show his courage for winning Daisy's heart. The problem is that his lower social status and destitute impede his way to

Daisy, his out-of-reach dream. During their separation, Daisy surrenders to Tom who is endowed with a great large of fortunes, higher status and noble origin in society. In order to win her back, Gatsby squeezes his wits to the limits to earn as much money as he can, such as bootlegging, smuggling and the like. Although, Gatsby has decorated himself with luxurious suits, expensive cars, as well as grand mansions, he can never recapture his dream with Daisy. When Tom finds out Daisy and Gatsby's affair, he brutally accuses Gatsby of his fake identity and unlawful money which frightens Daisy to again run into Tom's side. The poor Gatsby has become the innocent lamb being shot by Mr. Wilson, whose wife has been killed by Daisy in a car accident. Even in Gatsby's funeral, Daisy never shows up or sends some flowers for him. Many of scholars blame Daisy for Gatsby's tragic end because Gatsby has pinned all his hope on her of whom it proves unworthy. However, Daisy herself can also be regarded as the victim of Gatsby's obsession based on the discussed papers, or authoritative articles. There are lots of symbols looming in *The Great Gatsby*, which symbolize various aspects of its themes or features of different characters. This paper will mainly focus on the "colors", "cars" as well as the well-known "green light" these three classical symbols within the book, with the aim at exploring Daisy's, even the whole females' aphasia in the male-dominated world at Jazz Age, so as to indicate that Daisy is also a victim of that age.

Daisy's Aphasia Reflected from the Symbols

Although Fitzgerald himself convinces that *The Great Gatsby* is a masterpiece, and his finest work to date, he also worries that its sales will be hurt by the lack of an "important woman character". The narrator and the other main characters, Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, are, of course, men, and the women are defined and characterized primarily in relation to the men. Because of the strong growth of feminist criticism over the past two decades, it is interesting to re-examine these issues, and to determine the roles they play in an overall assessment of the novel. One can readily acknowledge that in general the women characters are quite secondary to the males and they even become speechless in front of men. This paper is going to explore such a point reflected from the symbols like "colors", "cars" and the "green light" in the following parts.

Daisy's Aphasia Reflected from the Symbol-Colors

As the female protagonist in *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy seems poorly realized as a character that always lives in men's discussions or imaginations. Susan Korenman points out that Fitzgerald makes purposeful unsure of the colour of Daisy's hair, describing it 'in contradictory ways'. Within the book, Daisy's hair color has constantly changed according to other characters. For example, the color of Daisy's hair is invoked as 'yellowy' one when she is with her daughter, who has 'yellowy' hair. Whereas her hair is also described as 'dark', and is compared to 'a dash of blue paint'. Tom, who is blond, only hesitantly includes her with Nick and the blonde Jordan Baker as 'nordic'. Korenman, interestingly suggests that most readers though think of Daisy's hair as blonde, mainly because Fitzgerald associates her so strongly with gold and wealth. The point here is not only that Fitzgerald sketched Daisy lightly, but also that her actual role in the novel is somewhat ambiguous. Hair is traditionally a symbol for fertility, and in literature a division between dark-haired and fair-haired women is often maintained, particularly in the nineteenth-century novel. The fair-haired woman is considered desirable, aloof, idealized; the dark-haired is considered sexually active and therefore more 'available'. [2] Fitzgerald's vagueness about Daisy reflects his confusion about her role. She is the idealized woman of Gatsby's dream. In having her fulfill both roles, Fitzgerald simply confused her hair colour. Such an elaborate arrangement rightly reflects Daisy as a female character has no say confronted with males in her own life. The color of

her hair which should be the commonest thing for people to recognize, however, is mistaken for many times, which confirms Daisy's aphasia in the male-dominated surroundings.

Despite of the colors of her hair, Daisy usually wears white dress and drives a white car, and even their curtains are all as white as snow.[3] This is what Nick describes when he meets his cousin Daisy and her friend Jordan: "Two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house." White is well acknowledged as the typical symbol of the purity and innocence in spirit according to the human cognition. Here Fitzgerald arranges for Daisy the white dresses and car to reflect her purity in mind and kindness to others. However, more than this it can also be interpreted as that Fitzgerald is much more inclined to criticize Daisy's blankness in mind as well as emptiness in soul on the basis of the comments made by Nick. "Sometimes she and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering in-consequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire." What Nick asserts is not meant for praising their innocence in nature, but for charging of their meaningless life and nothingness in mental world overwhelmed with pettiness and material things. Nick's standpoints in some way represent Fitzgerald's attitudes toward Daisy and her friend Jordan. It is for sure that Daisy has been dehumanized into object in Nick as well as Fitzgerald's mind's eye. Therefore Fitzgerald never gives Daisy any chances to speak for herself.

Daisy's Aphasia Reflected from the Symbol-Cars

In *The Great Gatsby*, car as an important symbol is the epitome of individual identity and glorification which symbolizes man's material power, social value and superior dominance in the world. At Jazz Age, when the American economy hasn't degenerated into the Great Depression, the mobile industry develops rapidly and becomes more and more prosperous. Owning a private car at that time is common to everyone. What's more, cars have replaced the tradition way of transportation that plays an irreplaceable and necessary role in American's daily life. The booming of mobile industry has brought America the Laurel wreath of "Country on Tire" and the "Deadly Killer" in the meantime. Within the book, not only Tom, but Gatsby seems to have the talent for driving. Tom has taken charge of Mr. Myrtle's car factory as well as his wife which indeed shows his ability to control both cars and women. Besides, it is the car accident that eventually lets Tom win back Daisy and get rid of Gatsby. It is no doubt that car in *The Great Gatsby* has become the spokesman of powerful and brutal man, like Tom. On the contrary, women in the book like Daisy, Jordan and Mrs. Swift all are portrayed as unqualified drivers. For example, Jordan is accused of being a careless driver, and Mrs. Swift drives car to run over someone's hand. What's worse, Daisy drives Gatsby's car to deprave of Mrs. Myrtle's life.[4] Considering such an awkward situation of women in the book, cars have transferred from a kind of transportation into men's particular belongings which women have no right in them. That explains why the cars are distorted into the representative of social power and status in a money-worship society like America's. Mr. Myrtle is in charge of selling and repairing cars and Tom and Gatsby each owns their extravagant cars. Cars for men become the perfect decoration just like beautiful women. Men's overwhelming role in cars perfectly proves women's inferiority to men in regard of such material things. Women of Jazz Age haven't achieved their independence of money and that's one of the most significant reasons why women lose their right to express their own attitudes. Through the symbol of cars, it can be concluded that men's superior position in society while women are just subordinate to men in material world.

Daisy's Aphasia Reflected from the Symbol-Green Light

The symbol of "green light" has appeared three times in the book. The first time is at the end of the first chapter where Nick watches Gatsby stretching his arms to the dark sea 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." And the second time is when Gatsby has reunited with his beloved Daisy and confides his secrets to her by saying that he can always see the green lights in the dock of East Egg without the mist. The third one echoes the first chapter which appears in the end of the last chapter: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us." Undeniably, "green light" symbolizes the protagonist Gatsby's persistent pursuit of happiness and hope [5]. Within the book, it seems that Gatsby's happiness only relies on Daisy, to whom he holds countless prodigal parties to appeal. Even though Daisy has married Tom and been a mother now, Gatsby still insists on his happy reunion with Daisy. There is no denying that the "green light" acts like the lighthouse in Gatsby's Dark Age, which has inspired him to move forward and earn as much as possible to get his true love back. The touching of the green light is the great achievement of Gatsby's final happiness. However, the moment Daisy stands in front of him, Gatsby begins to question whether Daisy is as the same as before and his dream for Daisy falls into a much more unreal and nameless world. In this sense, Gatsby objectifies the "green light" based on his own needs without slightest thinking of Daisy's feelings. As for Daisy, she shall never realize that there is a man in the world who will watch over the "green light" from her side every day if Gatsby hasn't confided to her. It explains why she eventually chooses to abandon Gatsby and run away with her husband. That is because she has never taken part in Gatsby's unrealistic "career" of their romantic reunion. Through the "green light", it reflects Daisy's silence in her relationship with Gatsby, another powerful man who forces his own fantasy on the woman he has crazy crush on. Gatsby just places his own sweet dream of being united with Daisy in a supreme position regardless of Daisy's own will. What Gatsby does indeed hurt Daisy to some extent, like her husband Tom?

CONCLUSIONS

Based on what we discussed above, the colors on Daisy's hair and her belongings all reflect her non-recognition in such a male-dominated society. Her existence in the book acts much like the delicate decoration of men's boring life. Even though Daisy is the fantastic dream of Tom and Gatsby, she has no say in any romantic relationships. Fitzgerald arranges Daisy to wear in white and drive white car which reflects her innocent nature on the one hand and emptiness in mind on the other hand. Besides that, the symbol of cars evidently reflects men's controlling role in fortunes as well as in women's life. There is no doubt that female has no power for such a manly-like commodity at that time. In the end, the green light has always depicted as "hope" or Gatsby's unreachable "dream". However, it can also be characterized as the incarnation of Daisy. Gatsby desperately longs for touching the green light, but he fails every time he wants to. It is Gatsby's own fantasy of Daisy, and Daisy plays no part in it according to her will. She has no idea that Gatsby has spared no effort to become rich and live so near to her, with the purpose of rebuilding their fascinating love relationship. Undoubtedly, Gatsby has forced his own will upon Daisy and never taken her thoughts into consideration. That is to say, Gatsby has always been dragging Daisy into his dream unilaterally. Although Fitzgerald mentions about women's changes of Jazz Age, such as women drinking alone in the outside, bobbing their hairs and earning their own living, etc., there are still lots of women like Daisy, who has no choice but to depend on the men only. Within the book, Nick straightly criticizes Jordan's dishonesty and Mrs. Myrtle degenerates into Tom's lover to catch the sight of upper class. Through these three symbols, it is obvious that Daisy and other female characters such as Jordan and Mrs. Myrtle never share the equal position as the

men. They are definitely subject to men not only in men's mind within the book, but also in Fitzgerald's view with-out the book. Even in today's world, we cannot nod that women is completely equal to men. Through reflections of women's journey to real equality, independence and freedom in the past, can we modern people acquire much more meaningful and useful enlightenment to direct our bright future of women?

REFERENCES

1. A. E. Dyson, *Faith among the Ashes: Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby [J]. Between Two Worlds* © A. E. Dyson 1972, 101102.
2. S. Matterson, *a Man's Book: The Great Gatsby and Women, The Great Gatsby*© Stephen John Matterson 1990, 5758.
3. Guliyeva, U. (2015). "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald: stylistic devices and their interpretation into the Azerbaijani language (Doctoral dissertation).
4. Xue, Z. H. A. N. G. (2013). "Aphasia" in the American South Depicted in Hellman's Dramas. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (3), 20.
5. Nyström, M. (2006). *Aphasia—an existential loneliness: A study on the loss of the world of symbols. International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 1(1), 38-49.

