
The Use of Color Throughout The Great Gatsby and The Grapes of Wrath

In both *The Great Gatsby* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, color is used in order to reflect the atmosphere or mood. This allows Fitzgerald and Steinbeck to illustrate the events in a more sophisticated style and intensify the clarity of actions; therefore allowing the audience to envisage the episodes in a very refined manner. Whilst the use of color is equally effective in both novels, its function in *'The Great Gatsby'* tends to be mainly for materialistic features - in order to reinforce the theme of conspicuous consumption throughout the book, yet in *'The Grapes of Wrath'* color is used more to describe the atmosphere or the time of day, rather than objects. Nevertheless, certain colors (notably white and grey) still have alike connotations and create a similar mood in both of the novels.

The purpose of color in *'The Great Gatsby'* is often for describing objects and highlighting certain aspects of their appearance. The use of color in this way strengthens the theme of materialism and highlights the shallow nature of the characters and particularly Nick - as it is he who narrates the tale and constantly uses color in his descriptions. One of the key examples is the use of the colors gold and silver, which often represent wealth and prestige, as at one of Gatsby's parties it's noted that the turkeys are 'bewitched to a dark gold'. This indicates his great wealth, as it's implied that his richness is so excessive to the extent that it's almost magical - his money effectively transforms his food into gold. Gatsby is also said to possess 'golden and silver slippers' which again hints at his sophisticated bourgeois lifestyle, as even the smallest, most inane objects that one would not usually associate with wealth, are still a symbol of his affluence. In contrast, the use of color in *'The Grapes of Wrath'* is less focused on physical objects, and more concentrated on the description of the surroundings. For example, Steinbeck uses different colors in order to capture the mood at different stages of the day; in the morning 'the sun was as red as ripe new blood'. This provides the reader with a sense of hope and conveys a sort of freshness for the sunrise, as a new day often signifies promise. Nevertheless the use of the color red may also be interpreted as a warning sign, and therefore creates a sense of uncertainty, as it's unclear as to what danger may lay ahead in the course of the day. The landscape of Oklahoma is often described with golds and yellows; 'the yellowing dusty afternoon light put a golden color on the land'. This conveys a sense of warmth and comfort but it could also be viewed that the reference to gold links to money - as if the land is reminding the reader of how rich, lush and profitable it used to be.

Despite the difference in use of colors in each of the novels, both Fitzgerald and Steinbeck use certain colors to create similar effects. In *'The Great Gatsby'* white is often used to reflect

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purity and innocence - it is normally associated with Daisy, ironically. She lives in a 'white palace' and when Nick first meets her and Jordan they are 'both dressed in white'. Daisy also refers to her 'white girlhood' with Jordan. All of these examples hint at the supposed virtue of Daisy and the integrity of both her and Jordan. The fact that Daisy's home is white and even her youth is white highlights her perfect, idealistic background and therefore adds to the irony of her immorality. At the end of the novel Fitzgerald suggests that all innocence is lost as on the 'white steps' of Gatsby's house there remains 'an obscene word, scrawled by some boy'. This reinforces the idea of corruption as it's clear that the once flawless, white life of Gatsby and Daisy is now soiled. Likewise in 'The Grapes of Wrath', white symbolizes peace and purity - as Ma imagines 'little white houses in among orange trees' in California. This dreamlike description highlights her faith in the American Dream as the white houses symbolize new beginnings and create an image of paradise. This shows that white has connotations of divinity and honor in both writings.

Grey is another color which has similar effects in each of the stories, as it is widely used to convey a sense of misery and emptiness. In 'The Great Gatsby' this color is often associated with the 'valley of ashes' as the Wilsons always seem to appear in a grey light. This captures the desperation of the family as their lives are overshadowed by misfortune and depression. Fitzgerald also mentions 'grey little villages in France' which again depicts the image of a small, gloomy town. Similarly, in 'The Grapes of Wrath' the houses are said to be 'grey' and 'paintless' - this suggests that the neighborhood is empty and neglected due to the severe impacts of the Dust Bowl. It could even be viewed that the Valley of Ashes and America's dustbowl of the 1930's are linked through Fitzgerald's and Steinbeck's presentation of the atmosphere - as both authors effectively incorporate dark colors of grey and black to reflect the deprivation and misery of the characters and their lives.

Overall it is evident that the use of color is very effective in terms of deepening descriptions in both 'The Great Gatsby' and 'The Grapes of Wrath', as certain colors have alike impacts in both novels, despite the fact that their purpose is slightly different. Whilst Fitzgerald mainly incorporates color to describe physical objects, Steinbeck uses color to illustrate the atmosphere. One may interpret that this is a consequence of the main contexts of each of the novels - as the extravagant 'Roaring 20's' lifestyle of the characters in Gatsby is reflected by the fact that the color description is orientated around items of wealth, yet the Joads basic lifestyle is suggested by the fact that color is only used to describe their surroundings - as they don't really have anything else. This epitomizes the drastic difference in backgrounds between the Joads and characters such as Daisy, Tom and Gatsby.

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