

The Synaesthetic Image of Daisy and the Philistine American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract—Fitzgerald's representative work *The Great Gatsby* depicts the American society in the "Jazz Age" when materialism and consumerism prevail, reflecting the disillusionment of the American Dream. In the novel, Daisy is the embodiment of the American Dream, and her image is of great importance for a deeper understanding of the essence of the American Dream. In shaping and portraying Daisy's image, synaesthesia that combines auditory and visual senses is widely used. Therefore, the theory of synesthesia is applied to analyze Daisy's synaesthetic image from two perspectives of auditory field with colors and visual field with sound, and thus explore the essence of the philistine American Dream under the influence of materialism—it is seemingly beautiful and brilliant, but actually philistine, materialistic, morally corrupted and full of falsity.

Keywords—audition, female images, materialism, synaesthesia, the american dream, vision

I. INTRODUCTION

The Great Gatsby is a great American modernist novel, and also the representative work of Fitzgerald. According to T.S. Eliot, *The Great Gatsby* is "the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James". It tells the tragic story of how Gatsby's dream begins, grows and fails. The disillusionment of Gatsby's personal dream echoes the illusory of the philistine American Dream in the "Jazz Age", which Fitzgerald described in *Echoes of the Jazz Age* as "an age of miracles, ... an age of art, ... an age of excess, and ... an age of satire". The American Dream in *The Great Gatsby* seems brilliant, but indeed it is philistine and illusory. In the novel, Daisy, the heroine, symbolizes the disillusioned American Dream. She plays a key role in Gatsby's dream. Gatsby's love for Daisy is his motivation to pursue his dream which is filled with money, fame and social status. Daisy is the projection of Gatsby's dream, which reflects the American Dream. Daisy is beautiful but shallow, innocent but philistine, passionate but cold, attractive but selfish, longing for love but money first which is very much like the American Dream in the philistine sense. In creating and presenting the image of Daisy, Fitzgerald makes extensive use of synaesthesia especially with regard to the combination of the auditory and visual senses and the cross-mapping of sight and sound.

Synesthesia etymologically comes from the Greek language, meaning "perceiving together". According to J. A. Cuddon's definition, synaesthesia is "the mixing of sensations; the concurrent appeal to more than one sense; the response through several senses to the stimulation of one". In the poem "Correspondance" in *Les Fleurs Du Mal* published in the 1850s, Baudelaire proposed the idea of mutual response and communication among sensory sensations such

as sight, smell, and hearin. Synaesthesia is commonly found in literary works, especially in poetry. Poets often experience things beyond ordinary experience and have a deep and detailed understanding, so they refine new words and sentences [1]. Research on synesthesia metaphors in literary works believes that synesthesia metaphors can fully express the emotions embedded in the author's heart, emitting enormous artistic tension, and helping readers experience the artistic conception and emotions conveyed by literary works. For example, in a journal paper published in *Foreign Language Research* in 2013 by Wang Jingzhi and Zhu Shuhua, "A Study of Synaesthetic Metaphors in Shelley's Poems from the Perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory", it is believed that synaesthesia metaphor is an experience in the interaction between human beings and the objective world rather than a single rhetorical device [2]. In 2004, Liu Bo published a journal article in *Foreign Literature Review* titled "Correspondences and Theory of Correspondences—On the Basis of Baudelaire's Aesthetic Thought" which argued that synaesthesia under the guidance of Correspondences Theory represents not only the object of human senses, but also the whole of human beings including senses and thoughts, making the contingency a symbol of eternal value through artistic means [3]. Among synesthesia phenomena, the combination of audio-visual senses is the most common, because among various human senses, audition and vision are the most detailed, the richest, and the most closely combined. They are the physiological and psychological basis for perceiving the aesthetic attributes of objective objects [4].

Fitzgerald is deeply influenced by the romantic poet, Keats who is famous for the use of synesthesia. In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald depicts his own life through sensation, the "felt understanding of his imagination", making him, as Bloom claims, "the American Keats" who "sought to affirm a High Romanticism in the accents of a belated counter-tradition" [5]. The depiction of various scenes in *The Great Gatsby* creates a sensory atmosphere, with Keats-like distinctive rhetorical features. Fitzgerald makes extensive use of synaesthesia, particularly in the fusion of audio-visual senses and the cross-mapping of sight and sound, which is essential in creating Daisy's image. However, the study of sensory issues in Fitzgerald's works both domestic and abroad focus on the analysis of one certain sense of vision or audition and research on synaesthesia in the novel that combines visual and auditory senses is rare. So, this paper is going to use the theory of synaesthesia to analyze Daisy's image and explore the materialism of the American Dream.

This paper addresses the essence of the philistine American Dream by analyzing Daisy's synaesthetic image

from the two perspectives of auditory field with colors and visual field with sound. In the perspective of auditory field with colors, this paper analyzes Daisy's image from the three aspects of voice in yellow, gold and silver, and analyzes materialistic and philistine essence of the American Dream behind Daisy's image. In the perspective of visual field with sound, this paper analyzes Daisy's first appearance with sounds and her last appearance with the presence of sight and the absence of sound, thus reveals Daisy's character and the materialism and consumerism in the American Dream.

II. AUDITORY FIELD WITH COLORS

In many cases, Fitzgerald frequently reveals a lot when describing sound. Many descriptions of sound blend with vision, especially when shaping the image of Daisy, whose voice plays an indispensable role in depicting her character. Fitzgerald blended visual colors when describing Daisy's voice. There are about 20 vivid descriptions of her voice in the novel. Each description of the different colors of her voice reveals Daisy's character layer by layer. Visual images and colors are used to present auditory field. Daisy's voice is described as the last sunshine in yellow, gold and the silver.

A. Voice in the Last Sunshine in Yellow

Nick described Daisy's voice as being full of feminine charm during his first encounter with the Buchanans. Daisy's beautiful voice is "visualized" by Nick, which covered with a hazy halo:

For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened—then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk [6].

Under the light, Daisy's voice is like the dim light of the setting sun, which is soft, gentle and lonely. The visual image, whether the afterglow of the sunset or the street at dusk, is associated with yellow, which symbolizes the sun and light, giving people a feeling of warmth and tenderness. The color of yellow cast a warm and soft halo on Daisy's attractive voice. At this moment, Nick and readers feel that Daisy is gentle, beautiful and full of feminine charm. However, the complex symbolic meaning of yellow itself makes the beauty and tenderness of Daisy's character contain deeper implications and hints. In experience, the basic symbolic meaning of yellow is positive: it symbolizes the sun, light and gold. However, the symbolic meaning with historical imprint is negative: yellow represents the excluded things and the selfish character [7]. Therefore, the use of synaesthesia here not only highlights the attractive characteristics of Daisy's voice, but also subtly suggests the egocentric and materialistic part of Daisy's personality in an imperceptible way. It paves the way for the later text to reveal the essence of Daisy, and also foreshadows the betrayal of Daisy and the catastrophic unfolding of Gatsby's dream as well as the disillusionment of American Dream.

The American Dream is echoed in the nuanced metaphorical meaning of yellow. Tang Sooping once said that "the American Dream describes an attitude of hope and faith that looks forward to the fulfillment of human wishes and desires" [8]. It can be understood that the American

Dream has two basic aspects: one is the spiritual freedom and the other material success. On the one hand, the American Dream encourages people to pursue dignity, success and self-reliance; on the other hand, it also drives people to pursue material wealth and philistine success at all costs, to consume excessively, and to indulge every desire, making consumerism and materialism haunted in the American society.

B. Voice in Gold

In Chapter 7, Gatsby and Nick talk about Daisy's voice. Gatsby describes Daisy's voice as "full of money", which directly reveals the reason why Daisy's voice is full of charm and also the essence of Daisy's character.

"Her voice is full of money", he said suddenly. That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl...[6].

In the conversation with Nick, Gatsby takes the lead in pointing out that Daisy's voice is full of money. The visual image used to describe sound here is gold. N. Davis pointed out that gold stands for "god, healing, money power, and wildlife". Gold symbolizes wealth, power and old money. Here, the use of the visual image of gold depicts Daisy's privileged, superior material conditions and high social status; At the same time, gold, as a kind of metal, is cold, alienated from human being, and has no body temperature which suggests that Daisy is cold and ruthless, alienated by money and social status. Gatsby has done everything for her again and again because of Daisy's charm. The source of this charm is Daisy's beautiful voice, and the essence of this voice is closely connected with money. Therefore, by using synesthesia cross-mapping sight and sound, the author points out the essence of Daisy is "the golden girl", and reveals the social status of her—old money, which is different from Gatsby; And the Daisy's character defects are also directly pointed out under the appearance of beauty and innocence—she is money-worshipping, materialistic, philistine, and greedy. It also implies Daisy's callousness and her alienation by money and social status.

In the context of material and consumer culture, people tend to pay much more attention to material possessions than spiritual satisfaction. Money is seen as the most important item in materialism. Daisy's character reflects the characteristics of American society under the influence of the American Dream. In the 1920s, the prosperity and rapid development of the American economy brought out huge material wealth. Consumerism and economic materialism began to prevail, of which Daisy is undoubtedly a representative character. In the pursuit of the American Dream, private property is seen as a passport to personal freedom. The more property a person owns, the more freedom they have, the less they rely on others, and the less they are subject to the environment [9]. Daisy's image subtly reveals the essence of the American Dream which is seemingly beautiful and brilliant, but actually money-worshipping, material, philistine and actually it is corrupted by consumerism and materialism.

C. Voice in Silver

Gatsby reveals to Nick his relationship with Daisy. In Gatsby's eyes, Daisy's charm is just like the wealth and status she represents, which produces a fatal attraction to Gatsby. Gatsby's love for Daisy is fanatical and persistent, behind which is his yearning for social status and wealth.

She had caught a cold and it made her voice huskier and more charming than ever and Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor [6].

Here, silver is employed as a visual metaphor to represent sound. Like gold, silver is bright and also represents wealth and social status. But compared to gold, silver is colder. Daisy's cold and arrogant heart is reflected in the voice's visual image of silver in this passage. She has always been insurmountably removed from the poor as she is old money. She treats those who live in poverty with coldness in contrast to their hot struggle for survival, and she also has a frigid gaze toward Gatsby who sacrifices everything he has for her. It is clearly pointed out in the text that it is the wealth that imprisons and preserves youth and mystery, making Daisy as beautiful and gleaming as silver for Gatsby. Daisy's values of placing a high priority on money result in a loss of ethical spirit. Daisy's high social status, as well as the ruthlessness and coldness in her heart, are highlighted through the usage of synaesthesia in this scene. Daisy's heart is cold and merciless on the inside, like silver behind the glittering exterior.

Climbing the social ladder is an integral aspect of the American Dream. Under the influence of consumerism and materialism, material consumption is no more a practice of meeting needs for wealthy people like Daisy. They enjoy spending money on frivolous items to demonstrate their superiority over ordinary people and to put an insurmountable divide between themselves and the struggling lower class. Those who subscribe to the American Dream consider gaining enormous amounts of material wealth as a criterion of success and a step toward the upper class. The materialization of value in the American Dream gradually lead to an irreversible decline in morality and emotion. In the pursuit of their American Dream to win material wealth, people have lost their original moral principles in the society where money is the first. When people's interactions are based on money, they become cold and egotistical. Money renders morality and emotions meaningless, and material pleasure greatly outweighs spiritual comfort. Thus the essence of American Dream is revealed—it is cold and alienated.

III. VISUAL FIELD WITH SOUND

In the portrayal of Daisy's character, the line between sight and sound is blurred. The original pure sound is endowed with specific color, and the original vision is also endowed with sound. The visual and auditory elements frequently overlap in sequences where Daisy is present, clearly illuminating her character. In the scenes of Daisy's appearance and exit, the visual scene with and without sound reveals her character and serves as an epitome, suggesting the

direction of the whole story and fate of the characters.

A. Daisy's First Appearance with the Whip and Snap of the Curtains

Daisy makes her literary debut in the novel during Nick's first visit to the Buchanan's home. To visually describe Daisy and Tom's house, a lot of ink is used in this text. This text employs the cross-mapping of sight and sound in order to provide the visual image a deeper significance than just a cursory description of the environment:

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which 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. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor [6].

Dressed in white, Daisy appears beautiful, pure, and innocent beside the curtain flapping in the breeze. Daisy's innocent and beautiful side is revealed via this stunning visual scene. The cross-mapping of the sound of the whip and the snap of the curtains, however, indicates a cruel and cold core concealed beneath the seemingly neutral picture. It's basically an allegory to the whole story being encapsulated in one visual image with sound—the entire story of *The Great Gatsby* can be seen as Daisy ballooning up and taking flight, and going back to that early romance with Gatsby which is a very short trip. Daisy is going to be brought down to earth by Tom. The allegory makes what might seem a very neutral and casual image into what carries tremendous thematic weight. It is precisely the incorporation of sound into the image that allows this visual image to carry such tremendous thematic weight. It wouldn't have been as full of meaning if there hadn't been sound. The sound of the whip and the snap of the curtains intrudes into the visual image. Typically, curtains do not make snapping sound, but when they do, the auditory image of the seemingly innocuous sound superimposes something brutal and violent. Tom and Daisy's characters are represented by the whip and snap of the curtains, which suggests that the unrealistic romance between Gatsby and Daisy is destined to fail and be brought down to earth by something brutal just as the action Tom takes to close the window to stop the whip and snap of the curtains. It's a forecasting and capsule summary of the whole story. For Daisy, her romance with Gatsby and his pursuit of and affection for her are like going on a short trip with some noise that will soon end in silence. Daisy destroys things and people before retreating back inside her money and social status. Therefore, the visual field with sound here makes the character of Daisy full of profound meaning from the very beginning, showing not only the beautiful and pure side of Daisy, but also the ruthless and heartless side of Daisy.

The ideal American Dream is a widely-held belief that success can be attained by any individual through hard work and honesty in a new world of freedom, equality, and opportunities. The ideal American Dream instills optimism

and confidence in the American community. The reality, however, is far from the ideal. It eventually reduced to nothing more than the pursuit for material wealth and social status, and it became bankrupt in the sense that the wealthy people were materialistic, spiritually disorientated and morally corrupted. The Great Depression of 1929 marked the bleak end of the brilliant Roaring Twenties, also referred to as the “Jazz Age”. The false prosperity of the American Dream is analogous to the above synaesthetic scenario, which is like a short trip at the beginning of the novel. It is a transitory figure on the historical scene. The American Dream is doomed to fail because of the prevalent materialism and consumerism.

B. Daisy's Last Appearance with the Presence of Sight and the Absence of Sound

Throughout the whole novel, Daisy's appearance is always accompanied by her beautiful voice and her charm is largely due to her attractive voice. A lot of ink is used to describe Daisy's voice in the novel. But after Daisy betrays Gatsby and drives into and kills Myrtle, when the story is approaching to its strategic ending, Daisy's voice disappears. Obviously, the author deliberately cancels the synaesthesia, and replaces it with the single visual picture, where the disappearance of sound reflects the deeper thematic meaning.

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table with a plate of cold fried chicken between them and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement [6].

This visual picture without sound is of great significance. Daisy's image becomes cold and Gatsby's dream is no longer alive. After the accident, Gatsby still wants to elope with Daisy. He worries about Daisy's safety and stands outside the house with Nick. Here, Gatsby could not hear Daisy's voice, nor could he know what she is talking to Tom. What he sees is that Daisy and Tom sit close together talking about something like a community with shared interests, plotting to exclude the intruder—Gatsby—from their life. Daisy's voice is the symbol of her charm. It often accompanies with Daisy and becomes the embodiment of Gatsby's unreachable dream. Daisy's charming voice disappears, and Gatsby realizes Daisy's cold, selfish and callous nature. The picture here is silent, as if Daisy and Tom's life should have been so peaceful. Gatsby, standing outside the house, seems like an intruder. He has briefly broken the silence, but at the end of the story, the passion and voice disappear. Daisy and Tom have a “happy ending” for themselves, which is a strategic ending for those who intrude in their world. With the disappearance of Daisy's voice, her strong attraction to Gatsby and Gatsby's dream also disappears. The essence of Daisy and the plot of the whole story are concentrated in the picture of the last appearance of Daisy. Different from the cross-mapping of sight and sound in Daisy's first appearance in the novel, the author intentionally hides the voice here, leaving only the visual description. Silence here is better than sound, which conveys rich meaning. Without the demagogue voice, Daisy's essence is clearly revealed—cold, selfish and callous. The absence of sound and the presence of vision

make Daisy's cold, callous, and selfish nature clear.

Fitzgerald intentionally conceal the sound and no longer use synesthesia. Silence is better than sound at this moment. As Daisy's voice disappears, the attraction of the ideal American Dream disappear. Under the influence of materialism, the American Dream concentrated so much on wealth, on materialism that it ignored the moral values behind it. It magnified the possibility that as long as you are rich, you can be free any oppressive force. The American Dream encourages people to excessively pursue material wealth which makes people disregard interpersonal relationships and morality, becoming indifferent, selfish, irresponsible, and morally decayed. This model of American Dream, is full of falsity, especially under the condition of capitalism developing rapidly, and polarization intensified increasingly. The appealing illusion of American Dream fades, and the essence of the philistine American Dream is fully presented—it is cold, cruel, morally corrupted and full of falsity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Daisy's picture and the essence of the American Dream are made obvious by the use of synesthesia, which combines auditory and visual senses. Daisy is the golden girl who, despite her outward beauty, is callous, cold, selfish, and greedy, affirmed by an analysis of her synaesthetic image. Thus, the core of the American Dream is also made clear: on the outside, it appears beautiful and brilliant, but on the inside, it is material, philistine, corrupt, and full of falsity.

Materialism and consumerism are the most strong forces driving the American Dream farther and farther away from its original meaning. Along with achievement, is also about material wealth and social status. In Fitzgerald's novel, all that is left is the desire for material success and the flimsy glitter that comes with it. The obsessive pursuit of material wealth and a life of luxury and extravagance will harm people's bodies and brains in a time when materialism and consumerism are dominant. Along with immense financial affluence, modern development has also left people spiritually desolation. The philistine American Dream corrupted by materialism and consumerism is doomed to fail. As J. Rifkin wrote in a letter to Chinese readers during the publication of *The European Dream*, “as we age and look back on our lives, we will clearly realize that the important moments in life are those that are not related to material accumulation”. In this sense, the analysis of the materialistic American Dream also provides some inspiration for today's society with rapid economic development.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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