

Visual narrative of the movie *The Great Gatsby* (2013)

Zhenglin ZHANG

Liaoning University, Shenyang 110000, China

Abstract: *The Great Gatsby* (2013 version), a movie directed by Baz Luhrmann, basically follows Fitzgerald's novel of the same name in terms of plot structure and has been adapted to be more conducive to audio-visual experience. This movie is like an impressionist painting. Although every second of every frame on the screen is clear and bright, the overall blurring of the aesthetic sense has long been dense, and it is commendable that this work is a more successful literary adaptation.

Key words: color; imagery; adaptation; American dreams

1 Introduction

The movie may seem like an elegy for America's "Jazz Age", but it's not. In 2013, in the rapidly developing economy of Beijing, Baz Luhrmann felt as if he had a real sense of the era in which Fitzgerald lived. So he exclaimed, "It was a time of miracles, a time of art, a time of money-spinning" [1]. Replacing jazz with hip-pop music is an interpretation of the current era, and he did manage to give the contemporary audience the same sense of excitement as the readers of the "Jazz Age" when reading the text in the face of this century-old classic [2]. The film brings us a feast for the eyes and ears, and this paper plans to explain the outstanding achievements of the visual narrative art of the film in terms of photographic techniques, color symbols and special symbols.

The choice of color is especially important to the expression of the theme of the film work, and the color imagery in the novel is even more powerful in the film. Green is always closely connected with the main character of Gatsby, symbolizing his unattainable dream--that is, the dream of love and the dream of getting rich; white is pure and empty, naive and vulgar; yellow is a double imagery symbolizing wealth and danger; grey depicts the hard life of the American lower class people; in addition to this, the mixture of colors highlights the carnival atmosphere unique to twentieth-century America [3].

2 Green - the unattainable dream

Translated and annotated by Zhou Dunren, *The Green Light and the Green Dream* links the color green to the protagonist's remarkable "dream". There are many references in the novel to Gatsby's desire to touch the green light in the darkness of the night. The first shot in the opening of the movie shows the green light in the mist. The second appearance of the green light on the pier comes after Daisy tells Nick about her unhappy married life. And the camera follows the protagonist's eyes as they advance into the distance. Immediately after, the ever-accelerating long shot pushes against the water towards the West Egg, at which point Nick, on his way home, sees a figure on his neighbor's dock and ventures a guess that this is the famous Mr. Gatsby, a gentleman whose hand gropes in the darkness as if trying to touch the green

light. Here the green light is the symbol of the American dream. The American dream, in Gatsby, including two aspects, one is the dream of wealth, the second is the dream of love.

He was a child of a poor Midwestern American family but was convinced that he was a child of God. Five years ago, at a dinner party, the power of love inspired this young man's desire for wealth and status, and a few years later, he was able to build a castle on Long Island with a fortune that rivaled that of the Buchanan family. But as Gatsby holds Daisy in his arms and stares at the green light in the distance, the light is losing its meaning. Gatsby's heartfelt sincerity is not enough to win the heart of the woman. Nick warned him: "You can't revisit the same dream. [4]" Gatsby says, "Why not? Of course you can! [5]" So the cause of this tragic ending also lies in Gatsby's own insatiable greed for wealth and status. "When the green light, which symbolized Gatsby's dream of love, was too much to bear in the face of reality, it already signaled that Gatsby's 'American Dream' was destined to burst like a beautiful bubble [6].

3 White - beautiful and scary

First of all, the color white stands for purity and nobility. Daisy likes to wear white dresses, drives a white sports car, and has short light blonde hair. Daisy's house has white flowers, white windows and doors, white draperies that flutter in the wind in the living room, and a white table and candles at dinner. On Gatsby's first meeting with Daisy, he carefully chooses a white suit for his date with his innocent lover.

In addition, the color white symbolizes vulgarity, ignorance, indifference and selfishness. The girl in the white dress who fell in love with the poor boy a few years ago has already learned how to make the best choice for herself in the school of high society. In front of a love letter from her former lover and a pearl necklace worth a fortune, she chooses Tom Buchanan, who is not truly in love with her but is of high rank, just like her name Daisy, which means "daisy" in English, with white petals covering yellow stamens, a metaphor for Daisy's vulgar personality that is already tainted by money under the appearance of innocence.

White or deadly poison. Based on the director's deliberate plotting and omitted shots, the audience is led to determine that it is Gatsby who drove a car and killed Myrtle, but in the end, the truth is revealed, Gatsby was in the emotional loss of control of Daisy and took the blame for Daisy's murder. At this time, the white Daisy is like a deadly poison. She cruelly conspired with her husband to design a frame-up of Gatsby, who was deeply in love with her, and packed her bags, and the family went on a trip.

On top of that, the color white is also tense and suffocating at times. The white telephone that is always ringing harshly, besides suggesting Tom's infidelity after his marriage, also keeps the audience on edge and alert. Again, Gatsby, for his first reunion, has completely manicured the garden of Nick's house, with huge white flower beds, green leaves and white flowers coiled on the eaves, and the living room is so stuffed with white bouquets of all kinds of flowers that it's almost impossible to find a place to put them down. The overabundance of white at this time also gives an almost suffocating feeling.

4 Yellow - breathtaking wealth

The yellow symbolizes the sun, light and gold. The movie uses yellow many times to render the main character's wealth. For example, the car Gatsby drives is yellow, the tie he wears is gold, the villa where the party is held looks like a golden castle, and the two dancers standing in front of the pool are wearing yellow dresses; there are also mountains of oranges when Gatsby demonstrates to Daisy how to use the advanced juicer.

However, the color yellow is more often used to represent things that are rejected and symbolize selfishness [7]. In Chapter 7 of the novel, Gatsby describes Daisy's voice as "full of money": "It was this infinite charm contained in her

melodious, silver-bell-like tinkling, cymbal-like voice ... as if she were a high princess in a white palace, a lady made of gold ... she was a princess high in a white palace, a damsel cast in gold ... [8]"

5 The gray - the misery of the underclass

Gray symbolizes a gray life, unfair treatment in life. The gray scene brings to life an America where the gap between rich and poor is wide. The author has carefully chosen to contrast Wilson, a car mechanic in the Valley of Gray, with Tom, an upper class man who has nothing better to do than party all night. Wilson is a tired-faced mechanic wearing a grease-soaked undershirt. In front of the suited, well-dressed representatives of the upper class aristocracy he also seems to be stupid, he did not know his wife was the mistress of the man in front of him who he thought was his friend, and finally he did not figure out the murderer who killed his wife. In the end, he was misled by Tom, and was willing to be the blade of someone else's retaliation, wrongly killed his enemy and drank a bullet to kill himself, and thus ended his gray life.

The gray color also symbolizes a purgatorial life. Located near the "West Egg" and "Downtown" neighborhoods, the Valley of Gray is a giant furnace that burns itself out to energize the upper class, but is considered the dumping ground of New York. The existence of the Valley of Gray seems to symbolize that this gray area is what the "rich" in West Egg, who now seem to be in the upper echelons of society, went through in order to gain the wealth and respect that they have today - a journey that was as painful as "purgatory".

6 Multi-color reflection - carnival atmosphere

At the beginning of the movie, Nick describes the social situation in the United States in the 1920s: soaring stock prices, the prevalence of prohibition, and all sorts of wild parties and dances. In keeping with this carnival atmosphere in the real world, the movie puts a lot of effort into the costumes, accessories, and lighting that best reflect the original setting of the novel. This is why the movie won the "86th Academy Award for Best Costume Design and Best Art Direction" [9].

The most obvious way to show the carnival atmosphere is to intermingle the various offending pigments, such as the brilliant fireworks display at Gatsby's party, the tidal wave of people who don't know each other but talk to each other; the small barbershop with its hidden secret, the underground carnival gathering people from all walks of life; Myrtle's head-to-toe red color and the same color in her apartment; the green Catherine stimulating the senses; the various colors of shirts in Gatsby's home...; shirts of every color... All of these things make the audience feel the advanced economy of America and the empty souls of the people at that time.

7 Conclusion

To sum up, the 2013 film version of *The Great Gatsby*, while basically restoring the description of the literary text, also highlights and emphasizes the repetitive imagery in the text. The transmutation from text to movie does not necessarily mean that "beauty" is missing; on the contrary, excellent film adaptations such as *The Great Gatsby (2013 version)*, with its superb visual narrative art and modern sound combination, make it easier for the audience to pass through the barrier of the text, and empathize with the author who lived in the 1920s, who was faced with economic prosperity and the emptiness of his soul. The author's helplessness in the face of the coexistence of economic prosperity and the emptiness of the soul is also easier to be experienced by the reader. In this sense, the movie is undoubtedly a successful literary adaptation.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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