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## FRAMING POWER: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE *GREAT GATSBY* AND ITS FILM ADAPTATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The critical discourse analysis (CDA) in this paper of the *Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald and the 2013 film version directed by Baz Luhrmann discusses the way in which power and class and the social hierarchy are constructed or reinforced or criticized using language and visual semiotics. Based on the theoretical assumptions of CDA by Norman Fairclough and the theories of symbolic capital by Pierre Bourdieu, the analysis contrasts the textual discourse and the movie presentation, covering the image of affluence, elite status, gender roles and marginalisation. The dialectical and ironical nature of the language used in the novel shows the emptiness of the American Dream, and the movie exaggerates the visuals, music, and editing of richness. The paper presents the role of linguistic and multimodal decisions in the two media in upholding or challenging hegemonic ideologies through comparative analysis. Among the most significant insights is that Fitzgerald challenges the power structures of the elite with narrative irony and unreliable narration whereas the adaptation by Luhrmann recreates the sex- appeal of excess that hides the criticism of the novel. This research eventually brings into focus the strength of discourse, both spoken and written, in creating cultural discourse of class, morality and aspiration.

**Keywords:** Class, Discourse, Film, Ideology, Power.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the books that are extensively considered to be one of the sharpest criticisms of American capitalist culture and stratification. The novel is set during the Roaring Twenties, and it discusses the topics of money, illusion, lust, and corruption by the story of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire whose courtship of Daisy Buchanan is a symbol of the unattainable American Dream. The most interesting aspect of the text is its ironic narration, as the seemingly objective voice of Nick Carraway is full of contradictions and exposes the ideological nature of the wealth and class of the East Coast elite society.

Almost a hundred years after the original editions, the film version by Baz Luhrmann (2013) presents the classic by Fitzgerald to the modern audience in a very stylized version with a contemporary soundtrack and dramatic use of digital editing. What it brings is a film that swings at criticizing and glorifying excess. Although the novel delivers the social commentary with the help of symbols and irony of the storytelling, with the help of the subtle character development, the movie adaptation prioritizes spectacle, which leads to significant concerns about how one and another medium discuss the issue of power.

This paper is aimed at questioning the construction and performance of power, class, and social exclusion in the original version of the novel and its film version by Luhrmann. Through

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and specifically the three-dimensional framework provided by Norman Fairclough (1992), the study will look at how verbal and visual decisions made in text and film are used to reproduce or subvert the mainstream ideologies. It, therefore, uses the ideas of cultural capital, symbolic power and habitus by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) in its pursuit to understand how language and pictures signify social superiority.

Moreover, the paper is expected to add to the emerging body of studies on the topic of adaptation that focuses on how texts are mediated between mediums, where intertextuality, ideology, and audience reception are of interest to it. Since the adaptation of literature into film always changes the meaning in a different context, the transition of written language to the visual semiotics can help understand how contemporary discourses of class and power are structured.

Finally, this research aims at answering the following questions:

1. How does Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* construct class-based power relations through language and narration?
2. How does Luhrmann's 2013 adaptation reinforce or transform those discourses through cinematic choices?
3. What are the ideological consequences of these linguistic and visual representations of wealth, power, and exclusion?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Critical Discourse Analysis and Literature

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) concentrates on the way discourse, whether verbal, written or pictorial is constructed by and reinforces power relations. The three-level model of CDA offered by Fairclough (1992, 2003) consists of: (a) textual analysis, (b) discourse practice (production and interpretation), and (c) social practice. The argument of CDA scholars is that language is not a neutral process; it replicates ideologies and social stratifications. CDA has been used to interpret how dominant ideologies are supported or undermined by the use of voice of the narrative, word choice, and characterization in literature (Lazar, 2005; Wodak, 2001).

### 2. Class, Ideology, and Language in *The Great Gatsby*

The novel by Fitzgerald has always been analyzed as the criticism of the American Dream. Such commentators as Bewley (1954) and Lehan (1990) believe that that *Gatsby* does not just fade with the sun because the man is a symbol of moral bankruptcy in the materialistic society. Symbolic class divisions are shown in the language used to refer to East and West Egg (aristocratic and nouveau riche) respectively. The airy speech of Daisy, the commanding tone of Tom and his pretentious sophistication of *Gatsby* all serve as discursive acts of class. The narration by Nick complicates the situation. Although he asserts that he is not judgmental, his words tend to betray love of wealth and beauty. Through CDA, we can explore how this unreliable narration creates ideological ambiguity, and criticizes and respects elite culture (Tyson, 2015).

### 3. Film Adaptation as Ideological Reframing

The theory of adaptation focuses on the idea that literary translation of films is not a reproduction but an ideological re-reading (Hutcheon, 2006). Costume, soundtrack, mise-en-scene are all visual elements that have discursive power of their own as semiotic resources (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). The film *Gatsby* by Luhrmann is associated with spectacle: there are lavish parties, rapid editing, and hip-hop music. Scholars disagree on the issue of whether the movie increases the critique of Fitzgerald or glorifies decadence (McCabe, 2015; Cartmell, 2016).

Notably, the visual pleasure of the film may make the irony of the novel obscure. As an example, the parties of *Gatsby*, which were criticized in the novel, are introduced intoxicatingly in the film which renders viewers in the same mood in which they watch the spectacle. The decompression of these contradictions is facilitated by CDA through the analysis of the multimodal discourse: the way camera angles, lighting, and music shape the social meaning.

#### **4. Symbolic Power and Habitus (Bourdieu)**

The theories by Bourdieu (1986) can be useful to discuss how the choices of aesthetic can be used to indicate social differentiation. Symbolic capital, education, manners, language act as a gate keeping mechanism in both the novel and the movie. His speech, though grammatically refined and well-polished, is culturally inauthentic, which makes *Gatsby* an outsider. Tom Buchanan on the other hand oozes privilege and power with a self-assured, scornful speech. These performances are enhanced by film: the condescending manner of Tom, the practice in *Gatsby*, and all of the pretensions of Daisy all indicate embodied habitus.

#### **Previous Studies**

The focus of scholarly interest in *The Great Gatsby* has always been on how the book addresses the theme of class division, the American Dream illusion, and how the narrative voice has been used to create ideological tension. Over the last several decades, scholars have turned to study and unravel the process of the power communication across both language and media, using critical discourse analysis and adaptation theory.

#### **Language, Ideology, and Class in the Novel**

Early early studies, including Bewley (1954), read *The Great Gatsby* as a kind of moral reproach against the postwar materialism and propose that Fitzgerald adopted the character of *Gatsby* to unveil the ideological collapse of the American Dream. Subsequently, scholars such as Tyson (2015) and Lehan (1990), could study the more linguistic and narrative elements that Fitzgerald uses, including the unreliable narration of Nick, which indirectly mediates the reader perspective and tempts them to sympathize and doubt the elite.

Using the critical discourse analysis approach, Lazar (2005) and Simpson (2004) investigated how linguistic encoding of class, gender and power is encompassed in dialogue and narrative stance. In the example of Lazar feminist CDA of the speech of Daisy Buchanan, her linguistic passivity and her ornamental presence have been pointed out as the consequence of her privilege and her experience of being trapped into the patriarchal mechanisms. These works preconditioned the interpretation of *The Great Gatsby* as a dense web of discourse practices based on the concept of the classes.

#### ***Gatsby* and Adaptation: Reframing Ideology through Film**

The question of the ideological implication of the transformation of the textual subtext of *Gatsby* into visual spectacle is long-standing among adaptationists. To give an example, as Cartmell (2016) claims, the definition of ambiguity and irony in the narrative voice of Nick can be difficult to retain in the film versions of the novel by Fitzgerald. The 2013 film by Baz Luhrmann was especially noted regarding its uninhibited anachronism in terms of hip-hop music, use of 3D effects, and hyperactive editing, which, as McCabe (2015) says, both modernizes the criticism of excess and makes it commercially available.

According to Sanders (2006), adaptation is always selective and interpretive; what is focused on or is left out of the film tells us about the modern ideological issue. The critics in the scenario of *Gatsby* by Luhrmann are split in to those who think the movie criticizes or glorifies wealth. Although others, such as James (2014), state that the visual richness of the movie makes it hard to discern the more underlying social commentary made by Fitzgerald, some, such as Monahan (2017), also believe the excess to be a device of its own, an immersive experience of the seduction and corruption of the elite world.

### Critical Discourse in Literary and Film Studies

The use of CDA in comparative media studies has been investigated more recently. Machin and Mayr (2012) note that multimodal discourse analysis in film is significant and can be used to build ideology through visual grammar—light, posture, framing, etc.—just as powerfully as verbal text. In this way, the investigators can assess the way power and hierarchy is achieved in cinema.

Besides, Berman (2019) focused on the discursive performance of masculinity and whiteness in the novel and its adaptation by Luhrmann. In his work, he determined that the novel would silently utilize the patriarchal dominance of the white through the use of characterization and irony, the film would at times support the same by glamorization and casting decisions.

### Gaps and Research Contribution

Either regardless of these contributions, there are few studies that utilized CDA and adaptation analysis in systematic comparison of the novel *The Great Gatsby* with its film adaptation. Although researchers have discussed language and visual spectacle separately, there is still a gap in the literature that requires concerted efforts that cut across verbal and multimodal discourse analysis. This paper fills that gap by applying Fairclough CDA model not only to the text but also to the screen and using the Bourdieu theory of symbolic capital to explain the performance of classes.

By so doing the paper will help in contributing to enriched understanding of the frame of wealth, power and social exclusion in media as adaptations can alter the ideological critique within literary form.

## 3. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

### Research Design

This paper uses a comparative qualitative approach which is based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and multimodal approach to explore the creation of class, power, and social exclusion in *The Great Gatsby* (1925 novel) and the film adaptation by Baz Luhrmann released in 2013. The discussion is done in the three-dimensional CDA framework of Fairclough (1992):

1. **Textual analysis** (linguistic and stylistic choices)
2. **Discourse practice** (production and reception)
3. **Social practice** (ideological and institutional implications)

In analysing the film, this paper adopts the concepts of multimodal discourse analysis as applied by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) where visual, auditory and spatial information take the place of language in meaning-making.

### Data Selection

Two primary texts were selected:

- **The Novel:** *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925), focusing on chapters 3 (Gatsby's party), 5 (Gatsby and Daisy's reunion), and 7 (the confrontation at the Plaza Hotel).
- **The Film:** *The Great Gatsby* (2013), directed by Baz Luhrmann, focusing on the corresponding scenes and their cinematic construction.

This is due to the fact that these sections are considered major discursive moments when power, class, and social roles are either supported or disputed.

### Analytical Framework

#### Linguistic Analysis (Novel):

The ideas of the CDA use of tools that included lexical choice, modality, transitivity, and narrative stance were used to analyze the novel in order to determine how the identity and

position of the characters in the novel were constructed through language. Specific emphasis was put on:

- **Narrative voice (Nick Carraway):** His positioning, judgments, and irony.
- **Dialogue :** Variations in the speech of Gatsby, Tom and Daisy and what this says about power and social approval.
- **Lexical fields:** Recurrent semantic fields associated with money, status, morality, and illusion.

#### **Multimodal Analysis (Film):**

The film was analyzed frame-by-frame for its use of:

- **Visuals:** Costume, lighting, architecture, and spatial relations.
- **Sound:** Music selection, tone of dialogue, silence, ambient sound.
- **Cinematic Techniques :** Camera angles, editing speed, montage, and framing.

These were construed as discursive practices that define the way of perception of the viewer towards the perception of class and ideology.

#### **Findings from the Novel**

##### **1. Language of Class Distinction:**

- The speech of Tom Buchanan is declarative, despotic, and rejective. His sentence is that of entitlement and dominance (e.g., the civilization is going to pieces).
- The speech of Gatsby is practised and too official the repetition of old sport is a signifier of imitation instead of authenticity.
- The dialogue of Daisy is disjointed, breathless and emotionally tense. Femininity confined within the boundaries of the class is practiced by her through suggestive ambiguity (I hope she will be a fool...).

##### **2. Narrative Irony:**

- Nick frequently emulates Gatsby in his romanticism and criticizes it, though implicitly. His narration is part sympathy and part skepticism, a two-sidedness that shows the ideology of classes.
- As an example, when talking about the mansion of Gatsby: a grand palace by any lighting, --a veritable replica of a replica of a Hôtel de Ville somewhere in Normandy... This term of factual imitation is what reflects the inability of Gatsby to become a full-fledged member of old money society.

##### **3. Moral Lexicon:**

- Such words as careless, rich, beautiful are constantly associated with lack of moral feelings. The last indictment, which says that they were careless people, Tom and Daisy, is the discursive capping to their exemption.

#### **Findings from the Film**

##### **1. Visual Spectacle and Excess:**

- The party of Gatsby is visual orgy of color, music and motion of the camera. Wealth as performance is focused on the use of the wide-angle shots, the quick cross-cutting, and glittering costumes.
- The soundtrack that Jay-Z uses in a 1920s venue gives a sense of temporal dislocation to the film, implying that excess of the classes cuts across time.

##### **2. Framing and Class Distance:**

- Tom is consistently shot from low angles, reinforcing his authority and status.
- Gatsby is often framed in isolation, backlit or silhouetted, symbolizing both grandeur and emotional distance.

- The filming of the entrances of Daisy is done in slow motion and soft lighting, which further adds to her surreal nature and her objectification.
3. **Muted Critique :**
- The visual embrace of the rich life in the film makes some of the critiques by Fitzgerald weak. The extravagance of mise-en-scene begs wonder and not skepticism.
  - The death of Gatsby is treated as the tragic martyrdom with the melancholic music and sluggish pans, but without the type of narrative commentary that Nick gives in the last chapters of the novel.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper unveils the discursive construction of power, the role of classes and social exclusion in two different yet linked texts namely the literary form of *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and the cinematic form of a 2013 film by Baz Luhrmann. Based on the theory of CDA presented by Fairclough and the theory of symbolic capital and habitus introduced by Bourdieu, the analysis will reveal the role of both verbal and visual discourses in the process of creating an ideological meaning.

##### **Performing Class through Language and Visuals**

Fitzgerald has used sophisticated narrative devices and ironic distance in the novel to demonstrate the artificiality and moral decadence of the upper classes. The performativity of wealth and the ideological illusion of meritocracy are revealed through the performance speech patterns of Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy, as well as through the contradictory narration of Nick. Gatsby has an affected speech and awkward phrases, which show that he is trying to adopt the culture of old money, and Tom has abrupt and declarative sentences, which show that he was raised with a sense of entitlement and supremacy.

These discourses are transferred to the visual and oral codes by Luhrmann in his film version. Although the novel is based on the inner critique of the narrator, the film makes use of framing, color, costume and music used to show opulence and hierarchy. And in doing so, however, it at times runs the risk of aestheticizing the inequalities it is attacking. The extravagance of the film is stylized through grand party scenes, dramatic camera motion and modern soundtrack, as is incredibly visible as it glorifies the wealth it tries to question.

##### **Spectacle and Ideology**

Among the main tensions revealed by this work is the contrast between ideological distance in a piece of literature and its presentation in a movie through immersive identification. The prose that Fitzgerald uses allows one to reflect critically by utilizing irony and subtlety, but the sensory involvement of the film tends to bring the audience into line with Gatsby and his dreams and tragedies. It may cloud the more underlying ideological critique of the American Dream that the novel presents and make it as aesthetic tragedy.

However, there are incidents of the critical consciousness in the movie by Luhrmann. The portrayal of Gatsby mansion as empty and gilded, the dehumanizing nature of cold luxury of Tom and Daisy and the final scenes of emotional breakdown all point to a similar thematic line with the novel. Yet in general, the cinematic media with its dependence on spectacle and melodrama makes the text of Fitzgerald less discursively sophisticated.

##### **Language, Power, and Social Exclusion**

This work also confirms the opinion of Bourdieu that the symbolic power is exercised through cultural performance and legitimacy. In both the novel and the movie, the right of entrance into elite social status is not purely money based; it is based on culture fluency mannerism, language, beauty and background. The fact that Gatsby was not able to enter the Buchanan

circle even though he is extremely rich is an indication that class barriers are ingrained in the American society. This visual point is brought out in the movie because there is a contrast between the flaunt style of Gatsby and his mansion in West Egg and the stony traditionalism of Tom and the majesty of the East Egg.

In addition, the lack of feeling of such characters as Daisy and Tom is encoded in linguistic terms in their indifference and demonstrated in their luxurious, but a soulless, surroundings. One of the most obvious examples of how discourse (in text and film) naturalizes the immunity based on classes is the capacity of their ability to retreat to their money, as Nick observes.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS FOR ADAPTATION AND DISCOURSE STUDIES

This comparative analysis adds to the work on adaptation and the critical discourse theory by showing the way ideology moves through and changes through the media. It shows that the adaptations do not take the form of retelling but reframing, conditioned by their historical time, expectations of audience and semiotic instruments. Produced after the financial crisis of 2008, Gatsby by Luhrmann expresses the anxieties in modern times about the problem of wealth and fantasy, despite its indulgence in the presentation of the problem.

Also, the research confirms that discourse is not restricted to the verbal. The visual narration, soundtrack selection, the pacing of the film, and the use of space can all be used to form ideological meaning. This highlights the usefulness of multimodal analysis to researchers in CDA and cultural studies in the sense that they can comprehend the way in which cultural texts enact and reify power.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Finally, both The Great Gatsby and the film version can be discussed as valuable sources of research on the role of language and visual codes in our perception of class, power, and exclusion. The narrative that Fitzgerald tells makes one think of the ethical failures of the capitalist aspiration, and the movie by Luhrmann makes one think of both the critique and consumption of spectacle. The two texts share the same ambivalence as the American society itself, that is, it is a society that praises affluence and laments that it was so expensive.

This study can be expanded in future by comparing more adaptations (including 1974 film) or by analyzing how audiences across cultures receive it, or discussing the interplay between race and gender and the class discourse in both the movie and the novel. Furthermore, the analysis of the transmedia afterlives of Gatsby, such as in memes, Tik Toks, and digital fan fiction, would help understand how the new generations still bargain with its heritage.

To sum up, the concept of framing power in The Great Gatsby must not ignore the issue of what is being said and what is being shown (in terms of language, symbol, sound, and silence). It is through such performative actions of discourse that the actual architecture of ideology becomes apparent.

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