

The Implementation of Symbolism in Baz Luhrmann's Adaptation of *the Great Gatsby*

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ABSTRACT

The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, is extremely well known not only due to its high level of literary excellence but also as a consequence of Fitzgerald's superb usage of literary devices. More specifically, he used symbolism to his advantage in order to enhance the level of his most popular piece. The novel has grown to be well known to the extent that it was adapted into films multiple times. However, little research has been done to determine the quality in which the most recent of these adaptations, directed by Baz Luhrmann, has used symbolism as a part of the film's plot to implement the most characteristics possible from the original novel. Consequently, this paper has been put together in order to fill such gaps in the literary field and answer the question "to what extent is the symbolism in the *Great Gatsby* book accurately represented in Baz Luhrmann's adaptation?". Through the deep analysis of both the film and novel, aside from the creation of a comparative analysis table, it is evident that symbolism is successfully implemented in the newest version of *The Great Gatsby* motion picture, specifically through the use of element positionnement and narration of each scene containing the literary device.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald, Symbolism

Subject: Literature analysis

INTRODUCTION

Considering *The Great Gatsby*'s level of popularity and relevance in the world's literary development, it is clear that it has been widely studied since its time of initial publication. The piece is extremely well known for Fitzgerald's usage of symbolism, and the capacity to which he uses such skill to criticize the American society at the time (Israel, Samardali; 1)³.

Firstly, it is clear that the East Egg as a region serves as a major symbolic feature of the plot. It is evident that, while the West Egg represents the new rich who wish to fit the standards to the American Dream, the East region stands for those who are heirs of their family's richness and do not feel the need to fight for the perfect lifestyle. This is visible through Tom Canahhan's manner of acting, in which he constantly cheats on his wife and does not attempt to have the ideal relationship with her.

Additionally, it is clear that an extremely relevant symbol within *The Great Gatsby*'s plot is Jay Gatsby's house. The fact that the ambiance is constantly full creates the irony that, even though Gatsby always has guests at his mansion, he is somehow always lonely due to Daisy's distance from him (Israel, Samardali; 2)³. At the end of the plot, we discover that his parties were only a way to try to contact her. Consequently, Fitzgerald is able to create a connection to the American Dream, where, to his belief, one was always close out of reach to the perfect lifestyle (Rustum, 2022)⁴. Such a fact is clear during his funeral, another symbol of Gatsby's lack of faithful relationships.

Secondly, it is also of extreme relevance to take into account the usage of the green light near Daisy's house as a symbol. In chapter 1, Gatsby reaches out to the source of illumination, as though in a moment of nostalgia. However, after his death, Nick reflects and concludes that it was his source of hope since he firmly believed in the possibility that he could, indeed, eventually be with Daisy (Israel, Samardali; 1).

In addition, one of the most often known symbols of the piece is the Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg billboard, initially spoken of on the second chapter of the book, but referred to throughout the novel as a whole. The image of the eyes looking over the location in which the plot of the piece occurs is clearly a manner through which Fitzgerald represents

a godly figure, judging the people's loss in morality. The author was raised in a catholic household and therefore represents his views on religion throughout the novel (Hauhart, 2).

Furthermore, it is evident that the representation of Jay's elite positionnement in society is also shown through his automobile. In Chapter 4, it is clear that Gatsby invested in objects of value in order to showcase his worth and financial wellbeing. However, he still always felt as though he did not have the perfect lifestyle, and was not truly happy with his reality (Israel, Samardali; 2).

It is also clear that the narrator's way of representing himself as both an observer and participant of the people's questionable actions is a symbol of the way that individuals at the time frequently bent their morals when exposed to life's deepest pleasures. Consequently, he is the accurate mirroring of those who left aside their beliefs in order to engage in activities that ember their carnal desires.

Lastly, it is possible to highlight the level of significance that the mantle clock shown in Chapter 5 has upon the author's usage of symbolism. The object is showcased while Gatsby awaits Daisy to meet him in Nick's house. Then, it is clear that the character not only wishes that the woman would arrive quickly, but also dreads the extent to which his relationship with the lady has been impacted due to the passage of time. He clearly had been focusing on a variety of different aspects of his life in order to provide her with the best reality, leading to her moving on from their short-lasting love. Once more, it is possible to connect such usage of symbolism to the American Dream, which led Gatsby to believe that he had to achieve a peak in his financial life in order to pursue Daisy, leading to him missing out on an incredible and passionate relationship with the woman.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Through the analysis of the symbolism previously mentioned, it is impossible to ignore the impact that this literary device has upon Fitzgerald's acclaimed *The Great Gatsby*. It is completely plausible to question, however, how such a characteristic has and should have been implemented when the book was adapted into live-action films. Although the novel has been the inspiration to the plot of four motion pictures, the currently most popular version is, without a doubt, the 2013 Baz Luhrmann adaptation, its cast including Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire and Carey Mulligan. As a matter of fact, many individuals tend to have preference in watching the film instead of reading the incredible written piece. Consequently, it is of extreme relevance to analyze whether the symbolism in the novel is well converted into Baz Luhrmann's work, and if it has similar impact on its audience.

In order to have the authority to make such conclusions, one must critically analyze both pieces and compare the most significant usages of symbolism in the written novel to its representation in the film. Consequently, as the author, I engaged in an analysis of secondary sources and the piece itself in order to form a list of the most impactful employments of this literary device, in addition to uncovering their respective meanings which are shortly explained above. In sequence, I completed a similar process by creating a comparison chart and contrasting the extent to which symbolism was clear in the motion picture when taking into consideration its limpidity and foreground in the original piece. After doing so, I created a table (shown below) that showcases the difference in the usage of this literary device between both mediums.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Through the table below, it is evident that the film is able to transmit extremely similar ideas to the book in terms of symbolism. Although some scenes are not as deeply explored due to the need of reducing the length of the motion picture, the clearness of the literary device increases, as the audience is well-guided in terms of which details to pay attention to (Rustum, 2022). Additionally, in some cases, the viewer is given a clearer hint to the meaning behind the characters' actions, movements, and placement. When the Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg billboard is first showcased in the film, the narrator directly states that the image resembled the eyes of God, leading to the connection that a divine figure was silently judging as individuals bent their morals to enjoy the world's pleasures. This conclusion definitely takes more reflection and analysis when reading the book. Consequently, according to the analysis presented below, the movie ensures that the largest part of the audience will truly capture the essence behind Fitzgerald's storytelling.

Tables and figures:

Comparative analysis of symbolism usage between *The Great Gatsby* novel and Baz Luhrmann's film adaptation

Main usages of symbolism in the book (further explained above)	Is the literary device present in the film?	Main similarities between the film's interpretation and the original piece	Main differences (if any) between the film's interpretation and the original piece
East egg	Yes	The representation is extremely accurate and effective, considering that the narration present in the book is almost transcribed into the film's script. Plus, the Buchanan house is showcased visually and allows the audience to compare the reality between the East and West Egg regions.	The film deeply exposes the reality in the Buchanan estate through the quick showcase of the different parts of their land, which aid the audience to understand the difference in priority between the new rich and the family heirs.
Gatsby's house	Yes	The film showcases the plot extremely accurately, since not only is Gatsby's house constantly full, but Jay is also clearly not interested in the celebration itself. Actually, he is simply looking to meet Daisy again.	None
Green light	Yes	The motion picture showcases the green light accurately, as it is shown at multiple points of the plot. Nick's reflections after Gatsby's death regarding the light are also present in the film.	None
Valley of Ashes	Yes	The Valley of Ashes is showcased in the exact same way as the book, including Nick's narration over the images of the region.	None
Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg billboard	Yes	It is extremely well portrayed, especially due to its constant presence in the scenes where individuals are somehow bending their morals. Considering the explanation present above, it is evident that such a portrayal of the billboard is done purposefully.	None
Gatsby's car	Yes	It is accurately represented in the film, including the way Gatsby drove it carelessly.	None
Mantle clock	Yes	It is reasonably well represented, especially when it comes to Gatsby's way of questioning if the passage of time has destroyed his relationship with Daisy or not.	In the book, Gatsby was pressing his head against the clock, leading it to fall. The way he entered in contact with the clock led to the reader's further interpretation of his thoughts' connections to the passage of time. The film's interpretation is a bit less literal, making it harder for the reader to view the symbolism within the scene.

Rain when Nick arrives	Yes	It occurs in the exact same way as in the original piece, leading it to be simple to connect the change in weather to the shift in the mood of the room.	None
Gatsby's Funeral	Yes	The funeral still represents the vainness of Gatsby's life, but Baz Luhrmann leaves aside a few details of the scene.	In the book, Jay's father makes a very relevant appearance, where a few new details are added to his storyline, leading the reader to have a clearer image of the way Gatsby attempted to give Daisy the perfect life. Consequently, the audience is encouraged to, once more, think about the tone of loneliness post his death. Such an event does not occur on the motion picture. This may be due to the need to shorten the film as a whole. It does not, however, deeply impact the effect of the symbol on the audience
Nick as an observer	Yes	The film's interpretation adds to the plot through the placement of Nick as an observer and participant in the shot. Consequently, it not only adds to the scene, but also represents the main ideas behind it efficiently.	None

Through the results above, it is clear that Baz Luhrmann's adaptation is extremely successful when adapting a vast selection of literary devices from the original *The Great Gatsby* novel to the film. The comparison of the adaptations between the film and the book is relevant, therefore, not only to film enthusiasts who wish to understand more about cinematography and its specific aspects but also to directors who are interested in adapting well-developed written pieces into motion pictures.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is clear that Baz Luhrmann's adaptation is nothing but faithful to the original *The Great Gatsby* piece. Not only does it represent the storyline accurately, but also successfully attempts to implement the novel's symbolism. The director utilizes the visual advantage in order to push the audience to be more analytical and focus on all details of each shot. Luhrmann's attempt to fulfill the challenge of implementing symbolism to a motion picture is concluded through the clear statement of what he wished the audience would pay attention to through narration or placement of elements in the scene, in addition to the usage of the original novel as a base script to all dialogue and monologues present in his adaptation.

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