

'The Window' as an Emoticon in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: an Analysis of the Cinematic Adaptation

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Abstract

The flamboyant Nouveau Riche to whom the tall buildings, the cars, the parties belong to and the dirty, hardworking working class are the two polarities one gets to understand in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Loyal to the book, with little portions omitted which do not directly contribute to the main plot; the cinematic adaptation brings to life from a vast two-dimensional narrative into the concise, rich and detailed narrative. The narration is by Nick Carraway and he chooses to tell the story as a man who doesn't really fit in with either of the classes. This tragic story is a representative of early 1900's America, brings forth images which stay with us even after we finish assimilating the book. These images are carried into the cinematic adaptation to retain the flavour of the times. Some images are what we started the abstract with. The

palatial houses, the vast lawns, the extravagance of those times in terms of dresses, trophies, connections and the splurge in general. Amidst these material excesses, Scott Fitzgerald brings in one image, in the background, not so flashy, but becomes demonstrative of the emotional tumult the characters undergo. It is the window. Windows are everywhere, witness to some of the defining moments of the novel and the cinematic adaptation. This paper is an effort to decipher these emotional representations the windows stand for. There are nearly 38 mentions of the window as an icon of representation in the novel and equally an important role does it play in the unfolding of the cinematic adaptation.

Keywords

The Window emoticon, *The Great Gatsby*, Scott Fitzgerald, digital emotional representations

Introduction

The flamboyant Nouveau Riche to whom the tall buildings, the cars, the parties belong to and the dirty, hardworking working class are the two polarities one gets to understand in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Loyal to the book, with little portions omitted which do not directly contribute to the main plot; the cinematic adaptation brings to life from a vast two dimensional narrative into the concise, rich and detailed narrative. The narration is by Nick Carraway and he chooses to tell the story as a man who doesn't really fit in with either of the classes. This

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A **formalist** approach looks at the film itself, its structure and form. Thus, while other approaches often use some degree of external evidence to analyze a film, a formalist approach will focus primarily on internal evidence. This approach might analyze how the way the plot presents the story material forces the viewer to see things at certain times and have reactions that might be different if presented some other way. A narrative analysis will examine how a film employs various narrative formal elements (such as character, setting, repetition/variation, etc.) to convey meaning to the viewer. Analysis of specific formal techniques might concentrate on a film's use of *mise en scene* or photographic composition, camera movements, editing choices, sound in relation to the

image, etc., noting the effect of those techniques on how the viewer perceives the scenes and interprets what they mean.

The Windows have fascinated writers and their symbolism has been analysed in various frameworks. The symbols of windows are commonly used by writers from Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights*, Gustave Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* to contemporary authors such as Stephen King and Dan Brown to capture symbolically psychological issues of central characters in their stories.

The Window emoticons

There are nearly 38 mentions of the window as an icon of representation in the novel and equally an important role does it play in the unfolding of the cinematic adaptation. Some poignant emotions represented by windows are

Dejected emoticon

The film begins with the narrator Nick Carraway seeking medical intervention for his health condition of morbid alcoholism. He is in a sanatorium, talking with the doctor who is prying through his experience trying to fathom a problem to which a solution can be sought. Nick starts to narrate the events which lead on the rest of the film. He is surrounded by cold, foggy windows and he stands in front of them trying to recount. The image is not a happy one. It literally sends shivers down our spines. He tries to make sense through the depression and dejection that surrounds him. His time with the doctor is demonstrated

twice with him surrounded by cold, foggy, plain, unfurnished with the colour scheme of greys accentuates the mood of the scene as a dejected emoticon would.

Atti-'dude' emoticon

In the scene when Nick Carraway is amused at the activities next door, we also have the reclusive host Jay Gatsby watching Nick from his palatial abode. He peeps from behind his huge windows adorned with expensive fabric. It is a one sided view like a Hijab. You get to notice and see everything but it cannot be reciprocated. This particular window of the distant attitude cannot find a mention in the book. But reiterates the fact that Jay Gatsby stays reclusive till the moment when he can find a way through Nick to reach Daisy.

When Jordan and Nick walk into a library by accident in Gatsby's house, when he is hosting one of those extravagant parties, they meet an old man who is browsing through the books. The movie has this scene depicted through the psychedelic lights flashing on the window and three of them peer out curiously to see the madness of the celebration. Nick and Jordan are the more sensible of the set of characters of *The Great Gatsby*. This scene cleverly brings them as an insider and they get to view things from the view of the host himself. This is the point of view of Gatsby. He is not part of the party but he gets to see everything that goes on.

Clearly both the windows reflect Gatsby's attitude!

Playful & flashy emoticon

We walked through a high hallway into a bright rosy-colored space, fragilely bound into the house by French windows at either end. The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding cake of the ceiling—and then rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea. (Pg. 10, TGG)

This description of windows and their adornments is exactly depicted in the movie. The show of abundance in wealth, space, indulgence, frivolity and abandon is represented. The surroundings are an indication of the people's psyche. Daisy and Tom are rich, arrogant, troubled marriage, irresponsible about their actions and all of this is seen in the widows where Nick sees daisy for the first time. He is awestruck with the flamboyance and the flamboyance also becomes the ruse under which Daisy and Tom hide their personal issues.

Existential working class emoticon

Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without,

simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the
inexhaustible variety of life. (Pg. 39-40, TGG)

Nick Carraway is the primary narrator of the book and we get to look at the narration from his perspective alone. In one of Tom's escapade away from home, he takes Nick along with him. Tom meets with his mistress Myrtle and has a crazy party with his newly made friends which is clandestine and irrational. After partying wildly for a while, Nick has this moment of epiphany when he looks out of the window of the secret apartment. The setting is different. This part of the town belongs to the working class. Nick who doesn't really belong either to the rich class or the working class is able to understand how the rich are seen by the working class who occupy the other extreme end of the chasm. So, Nick is 'enchanted' by it and 'repelled' by it simultaneously. He also sees himself which reminds us of the existential 'the look'. The extreme divide is illogical where the hardworking class live a meagre existence and the rich who many times resort to illegal businesses live lavishly.

Trouble brewing emoticon

Gatsby has wooed his sweetheart to his home. He is showing around and showing off trying to rekindle her love for him. He shows his music instruments, the volumes he compiled for Daisy with snippets of news that was ever published and as they both try to rekindle their love the telephone rings bringing them back to reality. Nick watches Gatsby take the call. The tall French widows of the

room suddenly open bringing into the room dried leaves. A symbolic indication of the death and decay Gatsby is shutting out in his efforts to present a rich and sophisticated exterior.

We come to know about his journey of big dreams and seizing opportunity when he finds it, cheating the old man of his wealth, anointing himself as the heir to the his property and bootlegging to mention a few. This polished facade he builds for himself forcibly restraining the dark past that wants to catch up with him is depicted in this scene with windows from the movie which was not present in the book.

Distraught emoticon

In one of the windows over the garage the curtains had been moved aside a little and Myrtle Wilson was peering down at the car. (Pg. 132, TGG)

The window in the film is depicted as a crudely finished, unpainted window and it doesn't have any adornments unlike the excessive adornments Tom Buchanan has at his home. It also represents a 'window' through which Myrtle Wilson always finds the rich people of the town fascinating. This window also restricts her from venturing out. Myrtle's husband finds out that his wife is having an affair and restricts her to their home. She is distraught, apparently crying in the film with mascara running down her cheeks like the drab window from which she looks out at Tom Buchanan her only hope driving away.

Break up emoticon

The room was large and stifling, and, though it was already four o'clock, opening the windows admitted only a gust of hot shrubbery from the Park..... 'Open another window,' commanded Daisy, without turning around. (Pg. 134 & 135, TGG)

This window is carried a little into the hotel window when Tom Buchanan, Daisy and their friends want to ride out into the city as an activity that would offer relief from the scorching heat. At the hotel, Gatsby confronts Tom Buchanan telling him that Daisy doesn't love him. Daisy doesn't back him up. Gatsby is embarrassingly fighting alone for a love that even Daisy, herself doesn't acknowledge.

The film has a scene near the window, against the backdrop of growing commercial city, huge buildings and construction sites; Daisy doesn't take the side of Gatsby, choosing to be in a loveless marriage with Tom Buchanan.

Ultimate love emoticon

He might think he saw a connection in it—he might think anything. I looked at the house: there were two or three bright windows downstairs and the pink glow from Daisy's room on the second floor. (Pg. 155, TGG)

After taking on the blame for the accident that Daisy caused and resulted in Myrtle's death, Gatsby makes sure that Daisy reaches home and waits in shadows outside her

house mutely ensuring her safety. He keeps looking up at the windows of her house emitting a soft pink glow, not bothered about what might happen to him and concerned about his love of life, Daisy.

That extreme loyalty to a person who has blatantly denied him the love and respect is extremely painful and stands for love that Gatsby lives and dies for.

Conclusion

Some windows were not included from the novel while some windows were added when the film was adapted from the novel. Usually an adaptation takes into account the coding of the message through the characters, their performance, the camera angles, the settings of place and time not digressing into the technicalities of film making. In this limited purview, the windows play a very prominent role in helping us decode the mood of the scene accentuating it for the audience.

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