

“Death of the Author” and “The Great Gatsby”

Barthes initiates his perspective in the essay “The Death of the Author” about the several interpretations of the texts and the role of the author and the reader. He begins by giving an example from the story *Sarrasine* by Balzac, and then counter questions the intention of the text and the style in which the text has been portrayed. He questions the voice and asks whose ideas are being portrayed in the text. He attempts to make the readers realize that there is no assurance about where the text is coming from and whether it is the individual idea of the author coming from the character’s voice or some other entity. He then concludes by saying that there is no specific origin of literature or text. It is wide, connected, subjective, and a kind of trap where every identity is lost and the loss of identity begins with the one who writes. Once the writer has written a text, he has lost the ownership over it, in a sense that the text can be interpreted in many forms. He argues that the author’s identity and background and his experiences should not limit the reader’s experience and interpretation. There should remain this ambiguity to avoid imposing one single interpretation of a text. Barthes believed that if a text is to have a corresponding single interpretation, it is the act of imposing a limit on that text which is flawed in its orbit.

Barthes believed that the readers must separate a literary work from its creator to liberate the text from the domination of one interpretation. Each piece of writing has multiple layers of meaning. A text like “*The Great Gatsby*” has been the basis for numerous films by the same name. The movie has been adapted for about five times in the years 1926, 1949, 1974, 2000 and 2013. And every movie has some or the other thing in common and dissimilarity in the way it has been adapted.

“*The Great Gatsby*” is a novel written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, published in 1925. This novel is F. Scott’s third novel and it is considered to be one of the greatest American Novels of the 20th Century. This is a story about a young man from Minnesota, Nick Carraway (the narrator of the story) who studied at Yale and who moves to New York, Long Island to live on West Egg, after the War. He is going to work in the bond business there. And, Jay Gatsby is the protagonist of the story who is the kind of person who idolizes wealth and luxury. He falls in love with a beautiful young woman named Daisy. She is married to Tom and the story develops in many dimensions. As the story progresses, Nick’s perspectives towards life, Gatsby, and the lost American dream changes with the harrowing events that take place in the story.

The very recent movie adaptation was done by the director Baz Luhrmann in 2013 with the title “*The Great Gatsby*” who is famous for his different style in adapting movies. The movie “*Romeo+Juliet*” is his other work which is a very fun interpretation of William Shakespeare.

Now, when you read the text and watch the movie, you will come to realize that there are lots of similarities and differences. The similarities being that the lines in the movie were used from the novel cut-to-cut, like Gatsby saying “Of course you can repeat the past”

There is the passage about the curtains - in the white house - that are flowing and whirling in the wind. It is the symbol that the wind brought together, Daisy and Gatsby, crashing in each other’s lives and Tom, who shuts the window is the symbol of taking control over Daisy’s and Gatsby’s love affair. And this scene is shown in the movie just how it is described in the passage.

The storyline was however presented differently through the medium used. The movies use actions as their device and the novels are more inclined to get into the head of the characters.

The difference in the movie adaptation was quite not much. Some of the evident differences can be seen in the way the story has been told. Nick, in the movie, is seen to have a conversation with a doctor, more likely a therapy session, where he is being asked to write down his experiences and thoughts as a way to recover. He is seen to have been suffering from depression. He is seen writing, and that is how the book, *The Great Gatsby* is produced. While the narration in the book is nothing like that.

The time when Gatsby is to meet Daisy, after five years, in the movie, he is visibly anxious. Gatsby’s anxiety to see Daisy was evident in both, i.e. in the novel and in the book. However, it was

differently presented through different mediums. In the movie, the way he orders a large amount of flowers and also hires dozens of servants to help in the redecoration of the house. There is a scene where he's sitting on the chair waiting for Daisy, and the time ticking in the background and the camera rolling closer and closer to the clock, represents the anxiety in Gatsby's mind.

“I can't wait all day, I am leaving.” Gatsby says and stands up. Now after this, he listens to the sound of Motor approaching. Daisy arrives.

The novel does the same scene differently. There is no delivery of lots of flowers. And there is only one servant who comes along.

The movie adaptation is focused too heavily on the visuals of the story rather than the emotions of the story. And that is how Luhrmann's style is. The book is more about the parts of Gatsby's internal conflicts, his worn, ugly parts but then, in the movie, you can see that it is largely focused on Hollywood glamour. The movie misses out on the edgy shades of Gatsby's World, unlike the book. The film stands complete on its own by the flashy productions and visuals but in a way, it does not do justice to the book. For it is difficult to represent some heavy imagery in the films.

Now, Barthes says in his essay something about art and separating the art from artists. Barthes mentions Van Gogh, Baudelaire, Tchaikovsky, all of them famous for their art. The explanation of their art is derived from the people who have produced it. But, Barthes states that everything is a mixture of everything.

In a stand-up show “Jigsaw” by Daniel Sloss on Netflix, Daniel mentions something about art, modern art to be precise. He talks about Jackson Pollock who was a famous painter back in the 1930s. He says that Pollock was bad at painting so he made his way to Modern art where bad paintings have meaning. Further, J. Pollock had his works exhibited around 1935 where he presented a piece, a canvas with black paint smeared all over it with two red dots. There was a critic who was asked about his thoughts over the art piece to which he said it was the self-portrait of Pollock himself. He expresses the black as humanity in all and the two red dots are the significance of Pollock himself. Moments later, Pollock arrives, the artist, and is asked about the two dots. What comes next is funny because Pollock says; ‘it might have been splashed on the canvas while he was painting’. Daniel Sloss then says, “Just because you can find meaning in art does not necessarily mean that was the meaning the artist necessarily intended to be there.”

And that just proves Barthes' point about the possibility of the meanings and interpretation of a text. Barthes encourages readers to interpret the texts based on their own understanding.