

A Foucauldian Reading of Power Relations and Discourse in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby

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قراءة فوكوية لعلاقات القوة والخطاب في رواية غاتسبي العظيم

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المخلص

تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى استكشاف مفاهيم فوكو حول السلطة والأفكار المرتبطة بها في رواية سكوت فيتزجيرالد "غاتسبي العظيم". تفترض نظرية السلطة عند فوكو أن السلطة حاضرة دائماً، وموجودة في جميع التفاعلات الاجتماعية. القوة منسوجة بشكل معقد في جميع العلاقات الاجتماعية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتم بناء الخطاب من قبل الهيئات الحاكمة، مما يتسبب في تغيير هويات الشخصيات وفقدان استقلاليتها. إن تحويل الحقيقة من واقع ميتافيزيقي راسخ إلى نتاج لديناميكيات السلطة هو بمثابة لعبة. في "غاتسبي العظيم"، تدور أحداث الرواية حول جاي غاتسبي، المليونير الشاب الغامض، وعاطفته الشديدة تجاه ديزي بيوكانان، وهي امرأة خالصة ومتزوجة من شخص آخر. تسلط الرواية الضوء بشكل بارز على أهمية الخطاب والسلطة داخل المجتمع. تدور أحداث الفيلم في عصر الجاز النابض بالحياة، والذي يتزامن مع ظهور أيديولوجية الحلم الأمريكي، ويصبح من الواضح أن الشخصيات تتأثر بشدة بالخطاب السائد في عصرهم. تمارس أيديولوجية الحلم الأمريكي سيطرة كبيرة على أسلوب حياتهم، ويتجلى ذلك بشكل خاص في تحول الشخصية الرئيسية، جاي، من فرد من الطبقة العاملة إلى عضو في البرجوازية. وبالتالي، فإن هويات الشخصيات بعيدة كل البعد عن أن تكون ثابتة، حيث يتشكل تطورها من خلال ديناميكيات القوة الأساسية التي تتخلل تجاربهم. علاوة على ذلك، تقدم الرواية فكرة مشوهة ومتقلبة عن الحقيقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السلطة، الحقيقة، الهوية، الخطاب، غاتسبي العظيم

Abstract

This research paper seeks to explore Foucault's concepts of power and related ideas within F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, "The Great Gatsby". Foucault's power theory posits, that power is ever-present, existing within all social interactions. Power is intricately, woven into all social relationships. Additionally, discourse, is constructed by governing bodies, causing characters' identities to shift and lose autonomy. The transformation of truth, from a solid metaphysical reality, into a product of power dynamics is akin to a game. In "The Great Gatsby," the narrative revolves, around Jay Gatsby, an enigmatic young millionaire, and his intense affection for Daisy Buchanan, a captivating woman now married to another. The novel prominently highlights, the significance of discourse and power within society. Set in the vibrant Jazz Age, coinciding with the emergence of the American Dream ideology, it becomes apparent that the characters

are profoundly impacted by the prevailing discourse of their time. The American Dream ideology exerts, significant control over their way of life, particularly evident in the transformation of the main character, Jay, from a working-class individual to a member of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, the characters' identities, are far from fixed, as their evolution is shaped by the underlying power dynamics that permeate their experiences. Furthermore, the novel introduces a distorted and volatile notion of truth.

Keywords: Power, Truth, Identity, Discourse, The Great Gatsby

1. Introduction

Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896 - 1940), an American author, belongs to the cohort, of prolific writers who emerged in the aftermath of World War I. Commonly referred to as the 'lost generation.' This assembly of writers, was profoundly impacted by the global repercussions, of the war and its aftermath. "The Great Gatsby," authored by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, depicts a cast of characters, residing in the fictional locale of West Egg on Long Island, during the summer of 1922. The story centers on Jay Gatsby, a charismatic millionaire shrouded in mystery, whose profound love for Daisy Buchanan, an alluring woman now married to another, forms the crux of the narrative. At its core, the novel underscores the vital role of discourse in shaping society. Set against the backdrop of the Jazz Age, a period coinciding with the emergence of the aspirational concept known as the American Dream, the characters are profoundly shaped by the prevailing discourse of their era.

Foucault is associated with various postmodern ideas that challenge conventional societal norms. Among these, one of the pivotal concepts extensively discussed by Foucault is discourse, which he redefines from its traditional interpretation. Carter holds the belief that "Foucault's use of the term 'discourse' is closely related to his concept of power. The power of the human sciences derives from their claims to be knowledge" (105).

In the ordinary and traditional sense, discourse refers to the way of speech in the field of language. However, in the postmodern and particularly Foucauldian sense, discourse is a far more complex concept. According to Foucault, discourse refers to ordered routines that determine different propositions. In other words, these legal and accepted routines are used to justify other ideas and meanings in society. Therefore, the Foucauldian sense of discourse is closely related to social, political, cultural and religious institutions and relations. Accordingly, discourse in society can embed power or put it simply, discourse is the mother of power.

Foucault's theory of power asserts its omnipresence, implying its presence within all social interactions and interwoven within every social relationship. Foucault underscores that 'power' doesn't adhere to a singular institution, structure, or individual capability; instead, it manifests as a intricate interplay of societal forces. He ultimately deduces that power permeates every facet of existence, influencing our daily decisions. According to Foucault, power can affect shaping truth as he says that "I would say that this has always been my problem: the effects of power and the production of truth". (Politics, Philosophy, Culture 118) Foucault's pursuit was to unearth how power dynamics shape our perception of truth. He delved into the impact of power positions on people's interpretation of reality.

Foucault believes that power does not have external reality since "power is not a substance. Neither is it a mysterious property whose origin must be delved into. Power is only a certain type of relation between individuals". (Politics, Philosophy, Culture 83). All relationships inherently involve power dynamics. Power itself isn't inherently positive or negative. Foucault's focus lies in understanding the mechanics of power and its influence on belief systems, particularly how relationships contribute to shaping our beliefs and convictions.

The notion of "discourse" is multifaceted, encompassing diverse perspectives and encompassing various definitions. It emerges as a social construct shaped and enacted by individuals possessing both communication power and resources. The ones in authority determine our identity by shaping the subjects we engage with. Foucault contends that truth, morality, and significance are forged through the medium of discourse. In every society, discourse production is simultaneously regulated, chosen, structured, and disseminated through specific procedures, the role of which is... "to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality" (Weedon 105).

2. Review of Literature

Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby has always been exposed to different criticisms. In his book, Bloom has written his comment on this novel and compares it with other works. It is said that "The Great Gatsby

does combine the lyrical sensibility of Keats and the fictive mode of Conrad, and makes of so odd a blending a uniquely American story, certainly a candidate for the American story of its time" (1). In another essay published by W.J. Harvey in the same book, the writer puts his emphasis on the narrator and believes: **Nearly every critic of The Great Gatsby has stressed the tremendous structural importance of the narrator, Nick Carraway, the character through whom Fitzgerald can achieve that aesthetic distance from his own experience necessary for firmness of control and clarity of perception, through whom he can express that delicately poised ambiguity of moral vision, the sense of being 'within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life' out of which insight into the truth of things must grow. (32)**

Moreover, the writer gives a textual analysis of the book by working on the structures of the book; he concludes that "starting with the idea of restlessness and going by way of its enlargement into the idea of drifting we are brought to face the largest issues that the novel".

Ivan Štrba's inquiry delves into the portrayal of women within this novel. Štrba contends that, in Fitzgerald's works, female characters often appear as ornamental representations of delicate beauty. However, beneath this exterior, they frequently "vain, egoistical, even destructive and ruthless and thus frequently the survivors" (41). As prime consumers, "they are never capable of idealism or intellectual or artistic interests, nor do they experience passion" (41). A feminist critic has charged The Great Gatsby with exhibiting actual hostility towards women: "Another American 'love story' centred on hostility to women and the concomitant strategy of the scapegoat... Not dead Gatsby but surviving Daisy is the object of the novel's hostility and its scapegoat." (Fetterley 72)

Sebastian Fälth has studied social aspects in the novel The Great Gatsby and believes Fitzgerald clearly shows the significance of social class and status in society and the depth of it, "as there are more factors to it than what we can assume by looking at a certain lifestyle. As is shown in The Great Gatsby, no matter how hard a person tries to create a different life or past, stratification by social class is very difficult, if not impossible, to escape" (23).

Lovisa Lindberg examines the role of the American Dream in the context of Fitzgerald's work, highlighting how he employs it as a tool for societal critique. Fitzgerald utilizes the American Dream to shed light on the moral consequences associated with immense wealth and excessive materialism. This is portrayed in the characters of The Great Gatsby. Based on the findings illustrate "how four characters act as either representative or opposite of the American Dream" and, in light of this, "how their relation to the American Dream criticizes the state of American society. Tom and Daisy, representative of old-fashioned aspects of the American society, highlight certain aspects of the American Dream" (2).

Lihua Zhang and Liying Cui have done a feminist reading of Winter Dreams. According to the critics, the story "exposes misogyny in Fitzgerald's text" (513). Judy's transformation from a beautiful fellow, "a rebellious young girl, and a luring Circe, into a meek creature of "angel in the house", indicates that even in the 1920s American society, women still have no ways out except to surrender to the dominant patriarchal ideology" (513).

3. Discussion

The central theme of the novel revolves around the American Dream, evident in the trajectories of various characters such as Jay Gatsby, George Wilson, and Myrtle Wilson. Jay Gatsby, positioned as the central character, epitomizes the American Dream wherein an individual's ascent to success within society is envisioned as attainable, irrespective of their inherent social and political circumstances: "and as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually, I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes..." (Fitzgerald 187). Nick observes that the island was previously devoid of life and opportunity, serving as a haven for soldiers. However, a profound transformation has occurred due to the pervasive influence of the American Dream ideology. In essence, the potency of this ideology has been instrumental in converting a derelict landscape into an esteemed locale inhabited by the wealthiest individuals.

Money emerges as a crucial instrument within societies structured around power dynamics, conferring advantages upon the privileged group possessing it. Fitzgerald underscores the importance of wealth in the novel, mirroring its relevance in his personal life, as posited by Radeljković. "Fitzgerald liked money, for him money was how he could attain the romantic, alluring life of rich people, witty and beautiful women" (52). This advantage becomes evident in the narrator's life, reminiscent of Nick recalling what his

father used to tell him: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had" (Fitzgerald 3). Nick's economic condition has given him a powerful stance in society so the other mechanism in this system works for his benefit.

The novel replete with depictions of societal conflicts among diverse classes within the ideal American society, where politics and the hierarchical influence of varying classes hold significance. However, this notion is implicitly woven into the narrative. Right from the outset, the separation between individuals of varying societal classes is apparent. Tom's portrayal symbolizes the authority of affluence as a sanctioned benchmark for American households:

Her husband, among various physical accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven—a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savours of anti-climax. His family were enormously wealthy—even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach—but now he'd left Chicago and come east in a fashion that rather took your breath away. (Fitzgerald 8)

Throughout the novel, a prevailing theme emerges wherein personal relationships hinge upon material gains, thereby wielding power and social mobility. Tom, despite his marital status, engages in an affair with Myrtle, who is wedded to a labor-class individual. Myrtle's lack of affection for her spouse and her betrayal stem largely from financial motives; her marriage to a working-class man falters due to this. Therefore, she says: "I married him because I thought he was a gentleman," she said finally. "I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe" (Fitzgerald 38-39).

In the relationships between Myrtle and Tom, power usurps other essential components typically inherent in a relationship. Initially, Myrtle entertains the notion that her spouse could embody gentlemanly qualities. However, later, she finds out the reality of the working class group; because of power relationships, nothing good can be found about them and there would be no value in their personality. Betrayal becomes Myrtle's avenue of dissent; as a working-class individual, she seeks to challenge the established norms and regulations within capitalist society. The reason is mostly that Myrtle has been placed in the economic relationship of production which Foucault believes "the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in very complex power relations. Now, it seemed to me that economic history and theory provided a good instrument for relations of production" (Politics, Philosophy, Culture 778).

Nick comprehends that the operation of power has engendered disparities among individuals, stemming from an absence of inherent dissimilarity between them. Instead, it is power that bestows superiority upon one group, inducing feelings of misery and guilt within the other. Power and the American Dream, as intertwined ideological constructs, exhibit a profound connection. This interplay between power and material circumstances is exemplified in Gatsby, a character who challenges societal inequality and power dynamics. In accordance with the novel, a central facet revolves around Gatsby's impoverished origins and his affection for Daisy, hailing from a respectable family. At the war's outset, Gatsby enlists in the army, but upon his return, he discovers Daisy's impending marriage to Tom. This circumstance fuels Gatsby's resolve to attain wealth. To achieve this goal, he embarks on a struggle against the prevailing societal power. However, since the idea of the American dream is common, its power work for Gatsby and becomes so rich that Jordon tells Nick: "I was down there at a party about a month ago. At a man named Gatsby's. Do you know him?" "I live next door to him." "Well, they say he's a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's. That's where all his money comes from." "Really?" (Fitzgerald 36). The power of this ideology is so strong that in a short time, Gatsby, from the bottom of poverty, changes into a rich man who is assumed to be a relative of 'Kaiser Wilhelm.

According to what is known about him, it can be said that power plays a significant role in Gatsby. From the beginning of Gatsby's life, he wishes to show he is special and he is a usual man from a low-class family. He is so mesmerized by the function of power that he attempts to create a life for himself which is beyond the material condition of his class. Throughout the novel, he describes his parents as "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people," and "his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (Fitzgerald 98). This description of his parents prepares the reader for the importance of the American Dream as a type of power; the transformation from ordinariness to the condition of wealth and fame can prove the effectiveness of this power on every aspect of an American person who is willing to bring about drastic changes in his life and change illusion to the reality.

Within this novel, Gatsby endeavors to convey honesty to others, disclosing truths about his multifaceted relationships, responsibilities, and identities. This underscores that truth lacks an absolute and universal nature; rather, it can be shaped and manipulated by those in positions of power. Each character constructs a subjective interpretation of what they deem truthful and fitting. In the context mentioned, Gatsby's truth takes form through diverse avenues.

Foucault introduces the notion of a power-driven logic that influences various cognitive frameworks. This prompts the exploration of novel prospects in contemplating the multifaceted facets of Gatsby's life. The narrative elicits extensive discourse and disparity concerning diverse iterations of truth and Gatsby's position within the novel:

And it was from Cody that he inherited money—a legacy of twenty-five thousand dollars. He didn't get it...He told me all this very much later, but I've put it down here with the idea of exploding those first wild rumours about his antecedents, which weren't even faintly true. Moreover, he told it to me at a time of confusion, when I had reached the point of believing everything and nothing about him. So I take advantage of this short halt, while Gatsby, so to speak, caught his breath, to clear this set of misconceptions away. (Fitzgerald 108)

In the above statement, the role of truth gets highlighted as it starts to make confusion for other people and all proves that there is no absolute version of the truth.

Gatsby has to go through a change of identity since identity is not a fixed concept. Subjectivity has a deterministic condition which depends on different elements of society. The deterministic condition is upon Gatsby and Nick recalls:

When he was gone I turned immediately to Jordan— constrained to assure her of my surprise. I had expected that Mr. Gatsby would be a florid and corpulent person in his middle years. 'Who is he?' I demanded. 'Do you know?' 'He's just a man named Gatsby.' 'Where is he from, I mean? And what does he do?' 'Now you're started on the subject,' she answered with a wan smile. 'Well,—he told me once he was an Oxford man.' A dim background started to take shape behind him but at her next remark it faded away. (Fitzgerald 53-54)

Nick and Jordan's remarks about Gatsby's identity align with Foucault's notion of identity, wherein Gatsby's persona is more than just a name and is molded by various formative elements. This underscores the pivotal influence of circumstances on Gatsby's subjectivity, heavily influenced by diverse societal values inherent in American society. Gatsby forges his own identity, pursuing wealth to fulfill his dream of assuming a different persona and realizing an alternate identity.

Gatsby asks Nick to provide an account of his own identity, driven by the fact that Gatsby himself is an enigma composed of intricate layers. Gatsby seeks insight into how his persona is perceived within society, recognizing Nick's objective standpoint as a member of that community, enabling him to offer an accurate portrayal of Gatsby's identity. However, Gatsby knows that his identity has been shaped and recreated in the relationship of power in society so he attempts to give Nick a picture of himself; in other words, Gatsby likes to give Nick what he wants regarding his identity since he spends his younger years dreaming up the perfect identity for himself, "and to this conception, he was faithful to the end" (Fitzgerald 98).

Gatsby's relationship with Dan Cody also provides him with social factors which equip him with "a blue coat, six pairs of white duck trousers, and a yachting cap" (Fitzgerald 100). Such factors, as determining elements of identity constitution, permit Gatsby to recreate his new identity, because they give him the outward appearance to fit his internal desire for ambition and superiority he has always wanted. When he leaves Dan Cody, "the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man" (Fitzgerald 101). Gatsby's desire for material and social factors has created his new identity, and through the collection of possessions, he gets closer to the goal of denying his mortality.

The variety of discourse and the differences of thoughts can be seen in the novel as one of the characters admits such a difference and relates it to the discourse of generation: "You're very polite but I belong to another generation," he announced solemnly. 'You sit here and discuss your sports and your young ladies and your' He supplied an imaginary noun with another wave of his hand 'As for me, I am fifty years old, and I won't impose myself on you any longer" (Fitzgerald 78-79). What this statement means is that since generation has been changed in American society, so have its patterns and discourse.

In other words, American has influenced the rules of the game in which material entertainment dominates throughout society now.

Daisy has been born into such discourse and accordingly, she has been brought up into that discourse in which the material condition presides over other elements; therefore, this type of discourse has been tied into her personality as it has been said that "Daisy is a woman who is born into a rich family and has always lived the luxurious life of the upper class. Obviously, anyone who wants to win her love must have enough money to offer her" (Ahmed 7). This dialogue unveils that Daisy seeks a life that can fulfill her in economic and material terms. Gatsby recalls Daisy from her youthful days and provides a depiction of her. This portrayal signifies the presence of discourse interwoven within her character: "The largest of the banners and the largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay's house. She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville" (Fitzgerald 80-81)

The prevailing discourse has dictated the trajectory of lifestyle. This is evident in how Daisy's life unfolds. Daisy desires to be valued and admired for her physical beauty, a manifestation of the American Dream's impact on her life and the discourse surrounding it: "The officer looked at Daisy while she was speaking, in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at some time, and because it seemed romantic to me I have remembered the incident ever since. His name was Jay Gatsby and I didn't lay eyes on him again for over four years even after I'd met him on Long Island I didn't realize it was the same man" (Fitzgerald 81).

This marriage for Daisy is the result of her strong passion for wealth and there is no love and feeling in it. Accordingly, "to be a woman under such conditions was in some respects not to exist at all" (Rivkin and Ryan 765). In essence, the interplay of discourse and power has influenced her decision to marry Tom. Consequently, her marriage initially appears to be a source of distress. In response, she endeavors to challenge the prevailing discourse. Initially, Daisy succeeds in altering her perspective, signifying a shift in her personal discourse: "I was scared, I can tell you; I'd never seen a girl like that before. 'Here, dear is.' She groped around in a waste basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls. 'Take 'em downstairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em all Daisy's change' her mine. Say 'Daisy's change' her mine!'. She began to cry" (Fitzgerald 82), eventually it is a discourse which wins as "Next day at five o'clock she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver and started on a three months' trip to the South Seas" (Fitzgerald 83)

3. Conclusion

Gatsby's predicament concerning his identity aligns with Foucault's perspective. Initially, Daisy queries Nick about Gatsby's identity, but Nick remains ignorant, as subjectivity remains fluid in relation to power dynamics. Gatsby undergoes a transformation of his identity, reflecting the notion that identity is not static. Subjectivity is subject to a deterministic state, contingent upon various societal factors. Thus, Gatsby's identity is molded and influenced by distinct institutions. As a consequence of societal power dynamics, Gatsby crafts his own identity and endeavors to amass wealth to support his aspiration. This aspiration is rooted in his desire to manifest a distinct persona, effectively embodying a different identity. This dynamic, influenced by varying factors, results in Gatsby assuming diverse subjectivities: He could be "Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God" (The Great Gatsby 98). Discourse emerges as a pivotal element within the novel, serving as the bedrock from which power relationships originate. Prominently, capitalism and the essence of America stand out as influential discourses within the narrative. The presence of discourse engenders the emergence of diverse truths among the characters. Each character constructs their own mental representation of what they believe to be true and congruent with their perception. In light of this, Gatsby's truth is forged through various means. Consequently, Gatsby himself has forged distinct interpretations of truth concerning his own identity, resulting in a profoundly altered perspective.

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