

## LITERACY AS A WAY TO INTERACT IN THREE FRANCIS SCOTT KEY FITZGERALD'S NOVELS

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**Abstract:** Literacy is no longer seen as a set of skill but as a social practice, something that people do in order to get to their special aims because “what they do with literacy is part of a broader activity they engage in” (Papen, 2005:25). As a social practice, literacy can be used as a tool or a way for someone to make interaction with other. This study aims to explain the depiction of literacy as a way to interact in Three Fitzgerald's novels - *This Side of Paradise (TSOP)*, *The Beautiful and Damned (TBD)*, and *The Great Gatsby (GG)* - using descriptive qualitative research. The theory that is used to analyze in this study is New Literacy Studies (NLS). This study discovers that literacy in the three novels of Fitzgerald is indeed used to make interaction, in which the literacy practices is used by the central characters in the novels to make social contacts, shaping friendships, keeping friendships or even to create romantic and intimate interactions with the female characters in the novels.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Interaction

### INTRODUCTION

People probably think that the word “literate” is specific to the activity of reading and writing but after the late nineteen century that word mentioned also come refers to the skills to read and write a text while keeping its wider meaning of being ‘knowledgeable or educated in a specific field or fields (UNESCO, 2005:148). So today, the definition of literacy is to be said as the ability to read and to write with the aims of gaining knowledge which is very important in order to help people changing their to be better

The theory of literacy no longer sees literacy as a set of skills but sees it more than that. The New Literacy Study or *NLS* sees literacy as a *social practice*, something that people do, people's activity to achieve their specific purposes because what they do with literacy is part of much wider activity they engage in (Papen, 2005:25). It learns how someone can gain power, success, respect, status from other people. It also simply a way of understanding how people able to communicate with others from how they use literacy on their life - how they practice it - which can not be separated with the five basic components that comprised the definition of social practice; social agents, coupling, communication, social knowing and interaction-the movements, behaviors, processes and interdependent actions of social practice, alongside with what will the agents do and the strategies communication of which a social practice is involved (Castellani and Hafferty, 2009:39).

New Literacy Study or *NLS* learns the people's literacy practices and events in their life and then relate it with their social activities. Shirley Heath in Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič (2000:15) defines a literacy event as any occasion in which a part of script is fundamental to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretative processes'. It is a time where a script is used in practice. It is the activities where literacy has a role (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:6). Williams and Zenger (2007:12) say that this concept of "events" - which is drawn from Bakhtin and from sociolinguistic, emphasizes that literacy- is always situated in a cultural context. Yet "literacy events" only tell part of the story. They are only the observable part of "literacy practices" - the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives or the simplest meaning is what people do with literacy (Barton et al., 2000:7). This conception offers a great way of conceptualizing the linkage among the social structures and the activities of reading and writing in which they are set in and which they help forming (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:6).

Literacy practice and events as a piece of human action in life and also culture - which shapes their ability, to achieve their specific purposes – sometimes can be seen in literature because literature reflects human experiences which illustrated imaginatively by using a language and portrays the human life as the results of the writer budding his or her thoughts. Wellek and Warren (1973:94) write that literature represent life, where the meaning of representation itself according to Williams and Zenger (2007:23) is conceived as being a duplication or mirror of an original thing that exists in the world. Moody

(1968:2) explains that literature grows from inborn love of telling a story, of organizing words in pleasing pattern, of expressing in words some special aspect of human experience.

Fitzgerald is an American writer who was regarded as one of 20th century greatest American writer. Many of his works shows literacy practices and events, as he tried to replicate the America 's social life. The male characters in his works are literate men who had a job as a writer or the one who are affected by the writings and make a literate act (reading and writing) in the 1920s.

Based on the cases above, this research attempts to analyze the literacy events presented in Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (which from now on will be abbreviated to *TSOP*), *The Beautiful and Damned* (which from now on will be abbreviated to *TBD*) and *Great Gatsby* (which from now on will be abbreviated to *GG*) using the theory of literacy (New Literacy Studies) in order to know the concept of literacy as a way to interact depicted in the three novels.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative research which means that this study described and interpreted qualitatively the focus of the study and also uses sociological approach, a literary approach which studies literature in cultural, economic and also political context in which it is written and also accepted. It is an approach that "also analyzes the social content of literary works – what cultural, economic or political values of particular text implicitly or explicitly promotes" (Kennedy and Gioia, 2005:770). The sources of the data are Scott F. Fitzgerald's novels entitled *This Side of Paradise* (*TSOP*) printed in 2013 by Orion Books, *The Beautiful and Damned* (*TBD*) which was printed in 2013 by Harper Collins Publisher and *The Great Gatsby* (*GG*) which was printed by HarperCollins Publisher in 2012. The Subjects of the research is the central character of Fitzgerald's *TSOP*, Amory Blaine; the central character of *TBD*, Anthony Patch and the central character of *GG*, Jay Gatsby. The data of this research are the depictions of literacy as a way to interact (seen through literacy practices and events exists in the novels) which are going to be analyzed using New Literacy Studies (NLS)

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Data Findings

Many literacy events appear in the three novels of Fitzgerald in which the characters always shows literacy activities with books, letters or any written texts as its artifacts. In Fitzgerald's novels *TSOP*, *TBD*, and *GG*, the literacy events can be seen associated to social interactions - the acts, actions, or practices of two or more people mutually oriented towards each other's selves (Rummel, 2002). Literacy is functioning as a means to make people socially interrelated with each other; as a social practice with specific aims in using it. Literacy in the shapes of reading and writing are significant not only as a functional medium in order to identify original consonants but it has a large human functioning implications for examples to initiate or keeping a friendship and to communicate affections or love. Literacy in the three novels of Fitzgerald become tools for the characters to communicate with others, to be close, connected and makes friendship.

In *TSOP* which sets before and after World War I around St. Regis – Minneapolis, New York and Princeton University - a prestigious university which almost always has a rank in the top three universities around the world, Amory, the central character, uses his ability in writing and reading to interact and having a deeper relationship with people around him. He who came from an educated middle class family – a father who has the hobby of reading Encyclopedia Britannica (Fitzgerald, 2013b:3) and a mother who has “Sacred Heart Convent” education (Fitzgerald, 2013b:4)- and has his mind “concentrated on popularity” (Fitzgerald, 2013b:29) is able to initiate a friendship interaction with stranger and even makes friend with him. He is able to use his ability to make social contact and friendship with Thomas “Tom” D’Invilliers, a freshman at Princeton University.

*Moved to address his vis-à-vis, he simulated interest in his book for a moment, and then exclaimed aloud as if involuntarily: “Ha! Great stuff!*

(Fitzgerald, 2013b:57)

The quotation above shows that when Amory is reading at *Joe's* and somehow interested with the image of Tom, a freshman at Princeton University who is very focused in reading *Marpessa* - a book by Stephen Phillips, he consciously using his ability in reading aloud to gain intention. He makes aloud exclamation on the Bernard Shaw's book that he is holding which gained Tom's attention, to be able to make a social contact with

the Tom who he did not even know at that time. Amory starts social contact between two men who barely knew each other after realizing that the man has the same interest in books. Amory knows he will be able to make the strangers look at him and communicate with him using his ability in reading and by showing his literacy practice.

The simple social contact continues to a deeper relationship (a friendship relationship) as Tom D'Invilliers also shows same interest in literature and starts talking about dozen of books that they had read to the books that Amory had never heard. Tom D'Invilliers' status for Amory is changing from only "an occasion" (Fitzgerald, 2013b:59) at *Joe's* to friend and from an awful 'highbrow'- whom his poem he thinks is inappropriate to be put in Literary magazine when he discussed about kinds of poem that should be put in the magazine with Kerry before he met Tom himself - to a clever man as they start to lend each other books and go to Tom's ceiling to discuss about books. They become close to each other because they both have literary literacy and also interested in books. A deeper friendship arise between Tom and Amory when both men use their reading ability to read each other "The New Machiavelli" (Fitzgerald, 2013b:136), a novel about politics and sex, from midnight till dawn in order to be unafraid of the devil that just shows up among them in their room in New York.

Amory is also able to get close to Kerry Holliday, his I2 University Place neighbor with his reading ability and his literary literacy - the knowledge in literature – because of his hobby in recreational reading while he is in Princeton. With the same background of Princeton education, the activity of reading and writing literary works becomes the topic of their discussions besides girls and the university social system as Amory is also trying to be the part of the *Daily Princetonian*, the second college newspaper in America to publish daily which has its own social system in order to fulfill his dream of being admired and popular.

*"Well—go ahead. Let your hair grow and write poems like this guy*

*D'Invilliers in the Lit.'*

*'Amory reached lazily at a pile of magazines on the table. "Read his latest effort?'*

*'Never miss 'em. They're rare.'*"

(Fitzgerald, 2013b:53)

In the quotations above, there is an interaction between Amory and Kerry using the activity of reading a literary magazine as they are peers which have the same common reading interest, a poem by Thomas D'Invilliers. With a different perception on what is a good literary work, they are exchanging thoughts on what should and what should not be put into that magazine. Unlike Kerry who is quite calm in accepting that the new writer in the magazine is a freshman, Amory is restless because he wanted to be popular and he thinks that he is much better than D'Invilliers. From the reading of D'Invilliers' poem in *Lit.*, the discussion changes to Amory's ambition and Kerry's opinion about Amory and what actually Amory needs to do in order to be popular.

*"Amory," said Kerry impatiently, "you're just going around in a circle. If you want to be prominent, get out and try for something; if you don't, just take it easy." He yawned*

(Fitzgerald, 2013b:54)

This quotation shows that Kerry is able to express what he actually thinks about Amory. He expresses that Amory is a person who only dreams to be popular yet he is doing nothing to achieve it, unlike D'Invilliers. This discussion eventually the one that makes Amory realizes his mistakes while he is still in Princeton and decides to inaugurate his career in Princeton. The interaction which is shown is an interaction that usually leads to true friendship in which person who is involved in this relationship is able to communicate things in their mind about their friend without being afraid offending them and this interaction is build up from the reading activities they engage in.

Besides friendly interactions with educated men, Literacy in *TSOP* also appears in more intimate or romantic interaction events. The interaction leads to romantic intimacy with women characters with the existence of reading or writing ability.

*He had a snap-shot of Isabelle, enshrined in an old watch, and at eight almost every night he would turn off all the lights except the desk lamp and, sitting by the open windows with the picture before him, write her rapturous letters.*

(Fitzgerald, 2013b:93)

When Amory is in a distance relationship with Isabelle Borgi, a young debutante with whom he first fell in love, Amory always writes letters to her every day in order to still be able to communicate with her, to show his affections and love even though they are not able to meet each other. With letters full of praises and a piece of mind as the medium, Amory and Isabelle are connected in their feeling before Isabelle choose to break up with him because she thinks that he is an egoist man. The quotation shows that order to still communicate and connected with Isabelle, Amory always writes her letters. He is using his ability in writing to communicate what is in his mind and also to tell everything about him to make her curious about him.

The effect of literacy on Amory's interactions with other women besides Isabelle that also leads to romantic intimacy also happens in his interaction with Clara and Eleanor. With Clara Page, his cousin who is a widow for six months, Amory is interested in her poem that he found when he was visiting Clara. A good writing may affect the one who reads it and this is what happened to Amory, the poem that he found in Clara's library affects him deeply even made him feels envious of everything about her.

*She did it constantly, with a serious enthusiasm that he grew fond of watching her golden hair bent over a book, brow wrinkled ever so little at hunting her sentence.*

(Fitzgerald, 2013b:161)

The quotation reveals that while doing a literacy practice Clara, he falls in love with her. The image of Clara reading a book while having a discussion with him makes him interested and slowly loves her as he never met a woman like her who is really enthusiast about books. The literacy practices done by Clara and Amory are able to make both of them understand that they have the same in common, which is reading a poem, and it is able to unify them as a friend even though she rejected him to be her lover.

While with Eleanor Savage , A young girl with a France education whom he met on a rainy haystack in Maryland, Amory gains an intimate interaction as they share their love of literature more than when he is with Clara.

*There was something most passionate in Eleanor's reading aloud. They seemed nearer, not only mentally, but physically, when they read, than when*

*she was in his arms, and this was often, for they fell half into love almost from the first.*

(Fitzgerald, 2013b:265-266)

The quotation shows that the reading aloud activity makes them grow closer, not just mentality - the parallel ideas in their mind which cannot be understood by others- but also physically closer. Eleanor is often in his arm when they are doing the reading aloud activities which make them unconsciously fell in love with each other even though Amory himself thinks that he was still incapable of falling in love again after his latest breakup with Rosalind.

Similar with *TSOP*, Literacy in *TBD* is also related to social interaction. But, if in *TSOP*, the reading and writing are used to initiate interaction and to make friends, in *TBD*, the literacy skills possessed by the central character, Anthony is only for keeping his friendships, to stay not lonely. Anthony Patch, the grandson of a very rich man in the United States, Adam J. Patch is actually someone who had enough skills in reading and writing which can lead him to the knowledge in order survive from the financial problems he is facing as he is actually going to Harvard and had a proper education in that place. He has literary literacy which he developed from his habit of reading literary works when he lost both of his parents but similar with Amory, he failed to do it. The quotations below show that Anthony is trying to keeps his friendship with Richard Caramel (Dick) using his literary literacy in his interaction with Dick:

(1).*Let's walk up to the Plaza and have an egg-nog," suggested Anthony.*

*"Do you good. Air'll get the rotten nicotine out of your lungs. Come on—I'll let you talk about your book all the way.*

(Fitzgerald, 2013a:30)

(2).*Out of a crevice of his mind crept the vague but inevitable spectre of the night before—but it proved in this case to be nothing but a seemingly interminable conversation with Richard Caramel, who had called on him at midnight; they had drunk four bottles of beer and munched dry crusts of bread while Anthony listened to a reading of the first part of "The Demon Lover.*

(Fitzgerald, 2013a:47)



In those quotations, Anthony is bored of Dick's activity in writing, but because he still considers him as a friend who in need to talk about his works on a novel, he still willing to discuss Dick's book. Anthony realizes that by listening to his friends' reading aloud and discusses his writings will make his friend feel secure in publishing his work. We can also see clearly from the quotation that listening to Dick's reading aloud is a side activity for Anthony as his real activity is having leisure such as drinking alcohol. The quotation above also shows even though he has a Harvard education background, he also has a hedonistic attitude, an attitude that leads to his life downfall in the end of the story.

Anthony's reading activities always to appear in Anthony's interactions with his other friends in the novel not only with Dick as the activities become a culture in America at that time. Anthony and his friends' conversation are almost similar with Amory's which is about literature.

*Then they were off for half an hour on literature*

*"A classic," suggested Anthony, "is a successful book that has survived the reaction of the next period or generation. "*

(Fitzgerald, 2013a:43)

The quotation shows that Anthony and his friends have the hobby of reading classic literary work and that hobby connects their mind. Anthony and his friends mainly talk about the books that they had read and also compares its similarities with the condition of their society. From discussing the books that they had read, the activities of reading eventually goes to the "curiosities of each other's day" (Fitzgerald, 2013a:43). This proves that the same common hobby which is reading can get people close to one another. It can create a deeper bond among people rather than just communicate to each other.

Literacy in *TBD* also relates to intimacy, a more intimate interaction. Just like in *TSOP*,

*He wrote a long letter to Gloria, a glowing letter, full of the sentimental dark, full of the remembered breath of flowers, full of a true and exceeding tenderness—these things he had learned again for a moment in a kiss given and taken under a rich warm moonlight just an hour before"*

(Fitzgerald, 2013a:43)

When Anthony went to war and left Gloria, his wife in their house, he wrote letters to her in order to know each other condition but Anthony's letters become different as their relationship got distance because Anthony thought that his wife no longer understand him and then he made an affair with Dorothy. The quotation shows that Anthony is actually trying to have an intimate relationship again with Gloria through letters that he wrote an hour after having an affair with Dot but unlike Amory in *TSOP*, this writing activity becomes his way of releasing his guilt over his affair and in a way to get her unsuspecting of that affair.

In *GG* reading is also related to an interaction that leads to intimacy, in the novel, Jay Gatsby mentioned to Jordan that he “read the Chicago paper for years to get a chance of see Daisy's name on it” (Fitzgerald, 2012:59) when he interacted with her in order to be able to meet Daisy, his past lover. Jay wants to attract her sympathy by mentioning his literacy practice so she will be willing to be a medium for his meeting with Daisy without doing any physical force.

The quotation below shows that Jay is showing his literacy practice to Daisy in order to attract Daisy's attention.

*'Look at this,' said Gatsby quickly. 'Here's a lot of clippings about you.'*

(Fitzgerald, 2012:71)

The clipping that Gatsby shown to Daisy shows that He is waiting for Daisy., he thinks that by showing it to her it will be able to make her to be with him again and also will give an image that he is a very romantic person and willing to do anything for her. As for daily interaction with the upper-class people, Gatsby is unable to use any reading except about the weather that he read in the daily newspaper. He rarely read anything besides the newspaper and motivational book even though he had a library in his mansion.

## **Discussion**

The existence of literacy events (and literacy practice) in the three novels itself is in line with Barton's first concepts of literacy as social practice, “Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts” (Barton et al., 2000:8). Literacy events in the three novels are mediated with the literary books which the characters read, hold or display and also letters which are written

by the characters. In the three novels, the depictions of literacy is clearly connected the social interaction.

In *TSOP*, literacy is used by Amory who is a lonely, self – preoccupied and hard a difficult time making friends in his first year at school and university able to gain friendships and even love on his way to maturity. The findings show that the ability of reading is used by Amory to initiate social contact with Tom, a fellow colleague, a freshman whose poem is put in the *Lit* magazine. For daily use of literacy in life, Amory uses his reading ability to do leisure reading in a form of reading aloud with his friends; Kerry, Burne and Tom. The actions of reading aloud and discussion on books which they had read made their friendship getting tighter while they have their education in Princeton. Similar with Amory, Anthony's literacy in *TBD* is used in his daily life among his friend, it becomes a theme to do conversations or a side activity beside doing parties, girls and drinking alcohols, a way for him to keep his friendship and avoid him from loneliness. Yet, for Gatsby in *GG*, the literacy practices in his daily life which related to friendship is hardly found along the novel, there are only some quotations which mention that he do the reading activity which he uses to communicate, to initiate interaction with Nick but the initiation do not continue for further discussion as it is only about the weather.

According to Bloom (2010:14), from Fitzgerald's career starts, he always associates the act of reading with physical proximity, even intimacy. For Fitzgerald, the skill of reading is used to be able to communicate or to interact with people around him. The connection between literacy practice and interaction especially the interaction with physical proximity provides one of the initial and simplest examples of a repeated motif in Fitzgerald's work as he uses it as continuous reminders to the themes of his novels; women and love. Beside for friendly interaction, literacy in the three novels leads the main characters to their romantic interaction with women. In *TSOP*, Amory has many relationships, and the women are significant characters as part of his expedition on his road to maturity. The reading and writing activities in *TSOP* is used by Amory to get close to the women characters in the novel, mentally and physically. In his relationship long distance relationship with Isabelle, Amory always writes her letter every night to communicate his opinion and feeling to her. This activity eventually makes both of the couples seems to understand each other, but because of his habit to talk about himself to her, she then considers him egoist and breaks up with him. In his relationship with Clara,

Amory also performs literacy practice. In their activity of reading books, Amory eventually falls in love with Clara's image which is he read in her poem. As they do the reading activity, he fell in love with Clara who is holding a book. While with Eleanor, the activity or reading aloud making Amory and Eleanor gain a physical intimacy, they are close to each other physically like a lover. In *TBD*, Anthony the central character of the novel performs a literacy practice in order to be close with his wife Gloria, he tries to repair his relationship with Gloria which seems almost broken because of their financial and habits using letters during the war. While in the *GG*, the act of literacy cannot be seen clearly except that Gatsby collecting newspaper clipping which he shows to Daisy. With this clipping, the image of Gatsby's reading a newspaper in order to find news about Daisy also can be seen. By showing the clipping to Daisy, Gatsby actually shows his literacy practice to Daisy in order to attract her.

## CONCLUSION

Literacy practice and events as a part of in their daily human life activity which is used to achieve their specific purposes sometimes can be seen in literary works because literary works reflect human experiences. Fitzgerald's novels *This Side of Paradise (TSOP)*, *The Beautiful and Damned (TBD)* and *The Great Gatsby (GG)* shows many literacy depictions in it as there are many literacy events happens in the stories. The literacy practices which is shown in the literacy events such as writing, writing or even displaying a book become a motif for Fitzgerald's story as it related to the theme in the novels; relationship, woman and love.

This research reveals the depictions of literacy using "The New Literacy Study" or NLS. It reveals the depictions of literacy events which are related to the interaction (friendly and romantic / intimate interaction) The depictions of literacy with interaction in *TSOP* shows that literacy is able to make the central character, Amory, to initiate a social contact, make his friendship with Kerry, Burne, and Tom tighter. It also makes Amory's relationship with some women characters in the novel more intimate. The literacy practice is able to connect Amory's feeling with Isabelle using letters, make him interested with Clara after reading her poem and also gaining physical intimacy with Eleanor with their reading aloud activities. In *TBD*, Literacy is used by the central character, Anthony, to keep his friendship with Dick and Maury as Dick is a writer who needs their opinion in his novel. It is also used to repair his relationship with his wife Gloria with the medium of

letters. While for Gatsby in *GG*, literacy with the media of clipping is used to make Daisy, a woman who he really loves, interested in him.

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