

Critical discourse  
analysis of the movie  
love actually essay  
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Love Actually is the ultimate romantic comedy written and directed by Richard Curtis. This film consist of dozens of different love stories that like a quilt are weaved together to make one story about love. It is about love in its many forms: love between family members, love between husbands and wives, innocent love, undeclared love, and romantic love. The cast has mostly British actors with famous people like Hugh Grant, Colin Firth, Emma Thompson, Kiera Knightley, Alan Rickman, Billy Nighy, Liam Neeson, and Rowan Atkinson. This wonderful movie, with its talented cast, has many great things about it, but like all things, it can be analyzed and criticized deeply. The most important aspect of critical discourse analysis is that we must not accept things just as they are, but consider issues of race, ethnicity, gender, social class status, sexuality preference, religions aspects, and language. Using Huckin's article " Critical Discourse Analysis" and Giroux's article " Politics and Innocence in the Wonderful World of Disney" as guidance I will apply their main concepts to Love Actually to really review and analyze the film.

Before discussing the film, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory must be explained. First, critical means a careful evaluation and judgment - " a critical reading." Secondly, discourse is the extended verbal expression in speech, writing, and visuals that in some cases cannot be seen which is purposely done. Third, analysis is an investigation of the component parts of a whole and their relations in making up the whole. All three concepts together create CDA which helps us to be critical by looking at things through a critical lens. Referring to Huckin, in Critical Discourse Analysis societal issues like race, social economic status, sexuality

preference, etc. may be considered. Also, Huckin writes that CDA, "...Tries to unite at least three different levels of analysis: the text, the discursive practice... and the larger societal context..."(2) In other words CDA may be applied to all aspects of discourse which includes but is not limited to articles, films, pictures, society, work, friends, etc.

In this situation I will apply CDA to the film Love Actually where the article by Giroux is very helpful. Giroux, in his article is concerned more about things like cultural practices, "social gravity", national identity, image of innocence, etc. For example, he says, "By focusing on cultural resistance as a form of political resistance, [theorists] have given theoretical impetus to a new politics of culture that has redefined the range of cultural texts available for critical inquiry while simultaneously making popular culture a serious object of social criticism and analysis"(3). So, Giroux says that by analyzing popular culture – in this case it is a movie – people might find that some aspects of this culture go against their own ideological aspects which might create political-cultural resistance towards it. People must always ask themselves why things are the way they are even though this is hard to do. This is why many people are not critical and this is why the most important aspect of CDA is that the individual must not accept things as they appear to be. As I discuss Love Actually, I will try to show how Critical Discourse Analysis might be applied to this film.

Love Actually begins with a scene in famous Heathrow Airport in London where the director, by using hidden cameras, captures real people meeting their loved ones. This was a really good thesis for such a movie about love because where else but an airport can love be clearly present. "General <https://assignbuster.com/critical-discourse-analysis-of-the-movie-love-actually-essay-sample/>

opinion's starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I do not see that," says the orator in the beginning of the movie. " Seems to me that love is everywhere," he continues. " Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends..." The orator also says that before the planes crashed on September 11th, the phone calls that passengers made from the plane were not messages of hate or revenge. The calls were all messages of love; so the orator comes to the conclusion that if we look for it, that actually, love is all around.

So, even though people lost many relatives and loved ones on September 11th they still have love in their heart and life is moving on. By showing many different people at the airport, the viewer completely understands that this movie is not about one love story but we get the idea that author is about to show many different love stories about people who are in love or about to be in love. In my opinion it is the perfect beginning to such a romantic film. If I look closer at this piece I realize how the director correctly applied CDA to this movie. The first principle of Huckin's article argues that texts are not heard in isolation, but in some real world context.

What we see is that in the airport scene, the director uses hidden cameras to capture regular people who arrive at Heathrow Airport. He does not use professional actors with all their perfect qualities and looks. Instead he uses simple, average people. As the song Love is Actually plays, we can see the camera going around London. On the screen we see how love is everywhere and we start to experience nine or ten love stories that go along with each other and weave together and apart.

As said, relationships in this film are all based on different kinds and levels of love and I will show this by analyzing three main relationships in this film.

The main love story for this movie is between the newly elected Prime Minister of England (Hugh Grant) and his personal assistant, Natalie (Martine McCutcheon). Here we can see that they love each other from first sight.

From the first time Natalie meets the Prime Minister, she nervously tries to present herself to him and it does not go very well because she can not stop swearing. However, because of this, the Prime Minister smiles and he notices that there something special about her. The Prime Minister likes Natalie from the first minute he meets her. " Oh, no...That is so inconvenient," says the prime minister realizing that he may be falling in love with Natalie. Next, when the Prime Minister is having a meeting with his advisors, Natalie shows up with refreshments for him. In this scene, their looks interfere with one another.

The Prime Minister and Natalie are falling in love more and more but at the same time they are not sure about it. They keep throwing each other uncertain phrases so they can talk, but both of them still feel shy toward each other. Natalie keeps giving the Prime Minister intriguing smiles so he will realize that she likes him. However, all his attempts to show her his feelings are inconvenient and he says to himself, " Oh, God. Come on. Get a grip. You are the prime minister, for God's sake." Finally he gets a grip and tries to have a conversation with her to find out where she lives and he asks her if she is in relationship with someone. When Natalie tells him that she broke up with her boyfriend because he thought she was fat, the Prime Minister looks at her in shock because he completely disagrees with this

idea; he is in love with her, and for him Natalie is perfect. The real controversy happens when the American president (Billy Bob Thornton) visits England. The President meets Natalie on the stairs and totally thinks about her as sexual object, " My goodness, that's a pretty little son of a bitch right there," the president says.

Here we can clearly see that president has some similarities with former president Bill Clinton who also is very attracted to women that he is not married to. After this scene, the prime minister finds the president kissing Natalie. Next, at a press conference, the president indirectly states that America is better than England, that America is stronger than England, that America will do what is right and that the British had better get used to it. This makes the prime minister even more angry and what he says is a little more harsh than he intended it to be, because his heart is breaking: he has just glimpsed the president flirting with his wonderful girl.

Later, the Prime Minister asks his secretary to " redistribute" her. In the end of this film the prime minister finds a Christmas card from Natalie. Her card tells him that she loves him. The Prime Minister, in no time, gets into the car to find his loved one. He knocks at every door until he finally finds her getting ready to go to see her brother and sister's performance in the nativity play. Natalie is shocked to see him at the door. They get in the car and they explain to each other that they love each other.

From this love story we can tell that every human being has his or her perfect partner in their lives. By developing this kind of love story, the director shows exactly what he means by true love. This does not interfere

with the first principle of Huckin's article where he said that texts should be heard in the real world contexts rather than isolation. First, we see here how the prime minister falls in love not with somebody who is drop dead gorgeous, but has a great personality that the prime minister had always been looking for. Giroux writes, " Cultural practices are produced and regenerated in a variety of social sites and the weight of their " social gravity" is manifested in how they are inscribed on the body, move people to social action, and set limits to the range of possibilities through which individuals negotiate their identities and sense of social agency"(3).

Here Giroux talks about " social gravity" (certain limits within the group of people) and how it relates to cultural practices. Basically, what he is trying to say is that no matter who we are, we all have our own cultural practices such as going to church on Sunday or wearing certain clothes. " Social gravity" works around cultural practices by making us realizing what our societal status is and what limits we might have in society. We can clearly see it in the example of the second couple that is to be analyzed.

The second main couple, in my opinion, is Karen (Emma Thompson) and Harry (Alan Rickman). They are husband and wife and have two kids. Harry is an office manager who is letting himself be seduced by Mia, his spicy secretary (Heike Makatsch). It all starts when Harry asks Mia to find a place for the office's Christmas party. She continually flirts with him and says things like, " I'll just be hanging around the mistletoe... hoping to be kissed." She lets Harry know that she definitely is ready to have an affair with him. On the other hand, Karen - his wife- worries about her long-term marriage and she feels very well that Harry is not interested in her anymore. At the <https://assignbuster.com/critical-discourse-analysis-of-the-movie-love-actually-essay-sample/>

Christmas party she actually sees Harry dancing with Mia. She is beginning to suspect that Harry has or will have an affair with her. Mia is a very sexual attractive woman and Harry is getting in her trap. When Harry goes to buy Christmas gifts for his family accompanied by his wife Karen, Mia calls him on his cell phone and asks Harry if he is going to buy her a present.

When Harry asks her what she needs she says, " No. I don't want something I need. I want something I want. Something pretty," and she adds that when it comes to her, Harry can have everything. So, he buys her a necklace and when he returns home his wife finds it in his coat pocket. Karen gets very happy because she thinks it is for her. In the scene when they are about to open their Christmas gifts Karen wants to open her gift first and she is full of excitement of what she thinks she is about to receive. When she opens it she finds out that there is no necklace but a CD of her favorite songs by Joni Mitchell. Karen is very upset and cries and goes to her room and plays the CD. The song pretty much tells her about her life and expresses how pathetic she feels. She realizes that she was nothing but a loving wife and what she got at the end is just her cheating husband.

The song by Joni Mitchell that plays during this heartbreaking scene creates a feeling of Karen's broken heart and disappointment in love. The culmination of this couple happens after their kids' nativity play. Karen says, " Imagine your husband bought a gold necklace and come Christmas, gave it to somebody else. Would you wait around to find out if it's just a necklace... or if its sex and a necklace or if, worse of all, it's a necklace and love?" Harry tragically realizes, " I am so in the wrong. A classic fool." Karen tells him that he also made fool of her and made the life that she leads foolish. This is all <https://assignbuster.com/critical-discourse-analysis-of-the-movie-love-actually-essay-sample/>



the director shows us of their relationship; he leaves it to the audience's imagination what happens next between them.

In this couple, we can see how cultural practices from Geroux article I described earlier may apply to such situation. We can see what happens very often at the work place when two coworkers (boss and secretary) have an affair while family suffers the consequences. Harry's cultural practice is to be a husband and father but "social gravity" attacks him, facing him with the question: to have an affair with his secretary, or to not have one. I am sure that this happens in real life, so the director was absolutely right by creating such a love story. The director again does such a good job regarding Huckin's article by showing real-time events that can happen anywhere with anybody but he also uses insinuation.

"Insinuations are comments that are slyly suggestive," writes Huckin, "typically have double meanings, and if challenged, the writer can claim innocence, pretending to have only one of these two meanings in mind"(5). In connection to the Harry-Karen love story, the director - Richard Curtis- does not show how they are going to end up in the future. He challenges us to decide for ourselves, which probably makes most of the people come to the conclusion that Harry and Karen got back together, creating an image of innocence for Harry. However, though many people assume that Harry and Karen got back together, the director still insinuates that something could have happened between Mia and Harry.

The third love story, which is my favorite, is between Jamie (Colin Firth) and Aurelia (Lucia Moniz). Jamie is a book writer and after his wife cheats on him

with his own brother he decides to go to France to spend some time alone to work on his book. There he meets his housekeeper - Aurelia. She is Portuguese and does not speak English. It still feels like Jamie has psychological trauma because of his wife, but when he meets Aurelia for the first time some kind of fire starts in his heart and his eyes. Jamie at the first glance tries to speak to Aurelia in French and Spanish but she does not understand what he is saying. He is acting a little bit goofy because he realizes that he is attracted to her. Aurelia seems to be attracted to Jamie too but neither of them speaks each other's language which makes it hard in the beginning of their relationship. The moment breaks when Aurelia accidentally lets the wind blow Jamie's half-done book into the lake and she undresses and jumps into the water to save his work.

Jamie is looking at her while she does that and he definitely likes what he sees of Aurelia. So, he jumps in after her to save his book. Throughout the film, while they act, Jamie and Aurelia both speak their own language and mysteriously it appears that they say the same things as one another. So if they could understand each other, their conversations would make perfect sense. After diving in the lake, they gather together for a cup of hot tea. This is one of my favorite dialogs of the movie because it shows that they think alike and are perfect for each other. Jamie says, " It's my favorite time of day - driving you." In response Aurelia says almost the same thing to him in Portuguese, " It's the saddest part of my day, leaving you."

We see here that two people from two different backgrounds have found each other. Even though they do not know it yet, they do not need language to express themselves because their hearts talk for them instead. So, the <https://assignbuster.com/critical-discourse-analysis-of-the-movie-love-actually-essay-sample/>

next day Jamie leaves to go back to London and Aurelia goes back to Portugal. Jamie realizes that he is in love with Aurelia and he attempts to learn Portuguese. On Christmas Eve, he is about to celebrate with his relatives but he decides to leave and goes to the airport to fly to Portugal. He finds her house but she is not there. Aurelia's father shows him the way to the restaurant where she works and Aurelia's sister calls the whole town to come with them, announcing that Jamie is about to marry Aurelia. When Jamie gets to the restaurant he speaks Portuguese to Aurelia explaining to her that he is in love with her and he asks her to marry him. Aurelia, in response, says yes in English and later says that she has learned English "just in cases".

This love story shows how two people without knowing each other, without knowing each other's language can fall in love. It is clearly said that language is not a barrier preventing two people from falling in love. Applying Huckin's article to this love story, the third concept concerned with societal issues can be applied. "CDA researches and theorists feel that since there are no restrictions on the scope of an analysis, we might as well choose texts that potentially have real consequences in the lives of a large number of people"(3-4) What Huckin is trying to say is that discourse should be addressed in the film to a large number of people that might relate to the same situation. In the Jamie-Aurelia love story we notice that an English-Portuguese relationship was developed.

Nowadays, in the United States of America there are many people who are just like them. For example, my mom married an American man. As I remember she could not speak English when she first arrived in America but <https://assignbuster.com/critical-discourse-analysis-of-the-movie-love-actually-essay-sample/>

my step father and she developed a special relationship so there was no need for language. So, from the example of Jamie and Aurelia we can see how Huckin's argument applies directly to a large number of people in the United States who experience the same kind of relationship in real life.

Love Actually ends in the same lovely way that it began. Many people are waiting at the airport for the arrival of their loved one. The entire cast appears there, waiting for their lovers to return from unknown places. Everyone is full of happiness, joy, and, of course, love. You definitely can find some kind of innocence in this scene. As Giroux sites, "Innocence is not only a face of discursive domination, it is also a pedagogical device that locates people in particular historical narratives, representations, and cultural practices"(4). In other words, Giroux says that innocence is some kind of power that finds people in their daily basic lives or cultural practices. So, in this scene such cultural practices as waiting for loved ones in the airport draws innocence's attention and creates a special atmosphere of happiness that can make anybody smile.

In conclusion, by applying Huckin's article, "Critical Discourse Analysis" and Giroux's article, "Politics and Innocence in the Wonderful World of Disney" I realize the importance of concepts like societal issues, cultural practices, image of innocence, etc. I applied some of these concepts to the film Love Actually and experienced how they work. In my opinion, the director and cast did a wonderful job by making this movie closer to reality and more related to the real-world context. This film was able to fit the standards of Critical Discourse Analysis while still being entertaining and very enjoyable.

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