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# **The Great Gatsbies**

**A comparative study of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*  
and the film adaptations from 1974 and 2013**

Oskar Kleven  
ENG K01  
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Centre for Languages and Literature  
Lund University  
Supervisor: Birgitta Berglund

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## Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is regarded as one of the Great American Novels, owing to its vivid description of the tumultuous first half of the inter-war period that has come to be known as the Roaring Twenties. This was a period of never before seen prosperity and optimism in America; a time when new money was rife and alcohol was abundant, in spite of the introduction of Prohibition at the turn of the decade (North 43). The novel's title character Jay Gatsby seems to embody the spirit of the period but, perhaps as a precursor to the abrupt end the Roaring Twenties would come to on Black Tuesday four years later, Gatsby's end is sudden and violent. Scholars argue whether *The Great Gatsby* is a parody on the concept of the American Dream, a criticism of the era or simply a love story, but its status as a modern classic is hardly questioned (Stone 77).

*The Great Gatsby* has been adapted into opera, theatre, ballet, and, most importantly for this essay, into film. Given the plurality of possible interpretations of the novel, different filmmakers adapting it for the screen will inevitably have had different views of the novel. If "[a] film adaptation is necessarily a selective version of the original story" (Leddy 8), then it follows that different film versions will depict the novel in vastly different ways, and there have been several. The first one was a silent film based on a stage adaptation, and it appeared as early as 1926. The second adaptation, released in 1949, was partly based on a stage version of the novel in addition to the original text. More recently a made-for-TV film was produced in 2000 and in 2003 a hip-hop adaptation of the novel was released. This essay, however, will deal with the most well-known film adaptations, namely the one released in 1974, directed by Jack Clayton, with a screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola, and the one released in 2013 directed by Baz Luhrmann, who also wrote the screenplay together with Craig Pearce.

This essay will look into the differences between the two film adaptations from 1974 and 2013 respectively and the novel on which they are based. What aspects of *The Great Gatsby* are in focus? Do the novel's complexities remain in the films, or are they lost in the adaptation process? In the time that separates the publication of the original novel and the premiers of the adaptations, the world has seen some of the most important events in modern history, and society has changed a great deal. Is the choice of focus, and the way the 1920s is depicted in the films, influenced by the respective periods in which they were made?

## Adaptation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word adaptation as: “An altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now esp.) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source.” The term is also used for the process of creating such an alteration. This process naturally involves interpretation and creation on the writer’s part, but Linda Hutcheon argues that the audience reception is also part of the adaptation process (8). Hutcheon argues that the explicit connection between the adaptation and the adapted text inevitably shapes the audience’s experience for better or for worse, provided that they are familiar with it, regardless of what other recognisable intertextualities there might be (21). As this essay deals with two film adaptations of a novel this brief summary of adaptation theory will focus on the idiosyncrasies of adapting literature for the screen.

Traditionally adaptation theory has been concerned mainly with the fidelity of the adaptation at hand to the source text (Hutcheon 7). This follows as literature has long been regarded as superior to cinema, a fact that Robert Stam claims can be explained by the notion that older arts are necessarily better than younger ones (4). Stam does concede that an adaptation will be experienced as unfaithful if it fails to capture the most prized elements of the source text, its essence, but he asserts there is a move away amongst critics from this fidelity discourse (14). He argues that “[a] filmic adaptation is **automatically** different and original due to the change of medium” (Stam 17), and Hutcheon makes the same point in saying: “Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication” (7). Perhaps Thomas Leitch illustrates most effectively of all the unsuitability of fidelity as the ultimate criterion in analysing adaptations in his comparison between adaptation and translation: “Like translations to a new language, adaptations will always reveal their sources’ superiority because whatever their faults, the source texts will always be better at being themselves.” (161). Leitch is also critical of the field of adaptation theory as a whole, suggesting that it lacks a general theoretical framework and that most scholars seem to be preoccupied with the study of specific cases (149-150).

That adaptations are intrinsically different from the texts which they are based upon has been established here, but not how they differ. To include every detail of a work of literature would be difficult at best, and nigh on impossible in many cases. Filming a novel like Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *War and Peace* for example, with complete fidelity to every detail, would most likely result in a film with a playtime of well over 24 hours (Stam 15). There is however

no need to include such an excessive amount of detail. A great deal of the information that needs to be described verbally in a novel can in a film be depicted in actions, sets and so on, if it is needed at all (David Lodge in Hutcheon 39). Moreover Leitch maintains that “... readers of novels, unlike viewers of movies, *expect* a certain amount of psychological description and are troubled, even if they do not know why, if it is suppressed”, thus illustrating the need for novels to be more descriptive than screen plays.

The film medium allows adaptations to differentiate themselves not only in terms of subtracting from the original work, but also through the addition of music, props, costumes and so on (Hutcheon 37). A film maker may alter the plot in a way that makes the most of the medium, or use for example music to add impact to a scene (Hutcheon 39, 40). When there is not enough information about visual details in the adapted work, a film maker has to make choices about what to add in order to make the scene filmable (Stam 18). New technology such as Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) opens up new possibilities for film makers. It allows scenes to be made, that otherwise would not have been possible to shoot using conventional film making techniques (Stam 11-12). In film making, factors external to the work itself also affect the final product. Such factors may be the availability and performance of actors or budget constraints, to name but a few (Stam 17). Stam points out that the making of a film, unlike the writing of a novel, by necessity is a collaborative process (17). The success of a film will therefore depend on many more factors than the success of a novel, and in the case of an adaptation, this is even more true.

## **Historical contexts**

### **The situation in 1925**

After the end of the First World War in 1918, America entered into an unprecedented period of growth and change. During the twenties America cemented its standing as the world greatest economical power, while the European economies, still suffering from the strains of war, lagged behind (History “The Roaring Twenties”). Advances in technology and production methods enabled industrial efficiency to rise 64 percent during the decade, compared with 12 percent the preceding ten years (Dumenil “Twenties, The”). This gain in efficiency meant that prices dropped and middle-class consumers were able to afford automobiles, radios and other industrial products that earlier had been beyond their reach (Brekke-Aloise “Consumption”). This was the emergence of mass consumer culture, which brought with it new industries such as commercial radio stations and garages (History “The Roaring Twenties”). This pattern of consumption fuelling economical expansion would continue until the end of the decade, when the Wall Street Crash of 1929 marked the start of the Great Depression (Brekke-Aloise “Consumption”).

Changes were not limited to the economy. Women enjoyed greater freedom than ever before (History “The Roaring Twenties”). Women’s roles began to change in the 1920s and the so-called New Woman, or the Flapper, began wearing short hair and skirts, and started to smoke, drink and have sexual relations outside marriage (History “The Roaring Twenties”; Dumenil “Twenties, The”), although not all women took advantage of these new social possibilities. One of the most important changes, however, was that women gained the right to vote in the United States in 1920, and it gradually became acceptable for women to work (History “The Roaring Twenties”; Dumenil “Twenties, The”).

Another group whose prospects changed for the better in the 1920s was the African American population. A large number of this population group, which had been concentrated to the rural areas of the South, started to move north during the First World War, when labour shortages in the industries in the North arose (History “Great Migration”). This demographical shift, called the Great Migration, continued until the 1970s, and brought with it the rise of new black cultural movements in the such as the literary movement the Harlem Renaissance and the popularisation of jazz music. A contemporary literary movement to the Harlem Renaissance was the Lost Generation, of which F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway were part. This group stood for the dislike of the materialism of the United States, and its

members chose to live abroad, most prominently in Paris (An Outline of American History 251).

On January 16 1920, the Volstead Act, which banned “the sale, manufacture, transport, import, and export of intoxicating liquors” (McGirr “Prohibition”) came into effect. This marked the start of Prohibition in the United States, which would last until February 1933 (History “Prohibition”). This ban did however not extend to the storing or drinking of alcohol, which made the law largely without effect (History “The Roaring Twenties”). Criminal gangs, most famously that of Al Capone, took over the distribution of alcohol through smuggling and illegal manufacture (History “Prohibition”). Underground bars, so-called speakeasies, were common, and simply replaced regular bars and nightclubs (History “The Roaring Twenties”).

### The situation in 1974

In spite of the fact that it was halfway in to the 1970s, the situation in 1974 was more than anything influenced by the decade that had preceded it. The 1960s had been a decade of prosperity, welfare, technological achievement, sexual revolution and idealism in the United States, but by 1974 the optimism that had characterised the post-war period, just as it had fifty years earlier, had waned (History “The 1960s”). The embodiment of the positive attitude of the early 1960s was the newly elected president John F. Kennedy. Before his assassination in 1963, he started the implementation of a welfare program in the United States. He also vowed, in the Space Race with the Soviet Union, that the United States would put a man on the moon before the end of the decade (History “The 1960s”; An Outline of American History 309-310). In the same year that Kennedy was elected, 1960, the contraceptive pill was released on the American market, sparking a sexual revolution fitting perfectly with the hippie, counterculture ideals that started to emerge at the time (Haynes “Sexual Reform and Morality”). This revolution also benefitted the Women’s Movement, which gained strength in its struggle for women’s independence (An Outline of American History 322).

At this time the Civil Rights Movement also gained momentum. Its goal was the equal rights of black Americans and the end of segregation, which was still allowed in the Southern states (An Outline of American History 319). The efforts of the Civil Rights Movement eventually led to the passing of the Civil Rights Act on 2 July 1964, which illegalised discrimination in public places, but failed to remove the laws on voting qualification intended to keep the

numbers of black voters down (Cawthra “Civil Rights Act (1964)”). The act brought with it the founding of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, whose purpose was to “enforce the act’s ban on workplace discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin”, bolstering the Women’s Movement in the process (Cawthra “Civil Rights Act (1964)”).

In the ensuing decade the tide turned on almost all fronts. There was a conservative backlash amongst the working and middle classes, who had tired of the counter culture and the often violent protests of the 1960s (History “The 1960s”). Richard Nixon who became president in 1968 started to dismantle the welfare systems and the economy turned and the United States went into a recession in 1973 (History “The 1960s”; Zaretsky “Seventies, The”). At the same time America was hit by a fuel crisis, which saw the oil price quadruple in a period of three months (History “Energy Crisis (1970s)”). This was caused by a reduction of oil production, and an embargo against the United States by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, in response to American support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War (History “Energy Crisis (1970s)”). The state of the economy in the early seventies caused many to question the use of the space program, and although there were several moon missions the program was cut short (An Outline of American History 310).

The Women’s and Civil Rights movements however continued, and with one supporting the other, this forced politicians to see the relation between sexism and racism (Zaretsky “Seventies, The”). The protests against the war in Vietnam grew louder in America and when Nixon opted to withdraw American troops slowly when he came to power, in order to make it seem like less of a defeat for the United States, hundreds of thousands of people went on protest marches (History “The 1970s”).

### The situation in 2013

Today both differences and similarities to the early seventies can be seen in the social struggles. The Civil Rights Movement has expanded to include other minority groups than African American, such as Asian Americans, Latinos and people of different sexual orientations, but inequalities remain and there is still de facto discrimination against these groups (Hogan “Civil Rights Movement”). The success of the Women’s Movement has meant that feminism has passed into mainstream academia and it is today argued that what is



perceived as typically female is socially constructed rather than ordained by nature (Horan “Feminism”). Just like The Civil Rights Movement, feminism today has diversified, and is not only concerned with the equality of women, but also deals with discrimination on the grounds of race or sexuality (Horan “Feminism”).

The state of the American economy is not without its similarities to earlier periods in history either. When the investment bank Lehman Brothers failed in September 2008 it triggered a financial crisis that, just like the crash of 79 years earlier, triggered a global recession (Dombret 34). A year after Lehman Brothers’ foreclosure, the net worth of American households was 20% lower than what they had been at their peak, with adverse effects on consumption (Young 21). It has even been argued that consumerism, dependent on economic growth made possible by cheap energy, is doomed and that efforts to save the current economic system therefore are futile (Kunstler 49). At the same time the consumption of luxury items is rising, and a recent international study shows that about half of the test group rank the status of luxury products higher than their function or cost (Hennigs et al. 1028-1029). The effects of the crisis were still felt in 2013, and United States is no longer unchallenged as the leading economy in the world. In 2012 China passed the United States as the biggest economy in terms of trade, in spite of the Chinese economy only being half the size of the American economy (Bloomberg “China Eclipses U.S. ...”).

New technology has brought with it both possibilities and problems, never before imagined. Naturally new technology has brought with it new commercial and artistic possibilities, such as the aforementioned CGI, but the advent of modern information systems also means that an infinite amount of information now is readily available at all times (Salarelli 2-3). Content providers have exploited the fact that people use this constant information flow, be it in the form of television, video games, smart phones or the internet, to shield themselves from boredom, to the point that it is almost socially unacceptable to be bored (Salarelli 3). This culture of instant gratification is, according to some, affecting people’s creativity and attention, as there is no time for afterthought (Salarelli 3; March 16).

## Analysis

Both adaptations in focus here take considerable liberties with the original text, but in very different ways, and with very different results. Given the prevalence of the fidelity discourse, it would be fair to assume that the deviances from the original text would be in focus in most criticism of both films. Perhaps surprising then, contemporary reviews of Clayton and Coppola's *The Great Gatsby*, which were generally unfavourable, seem to agree that fidelity to Fitzgerald's original text was the most positive aspect of the film (Jones 229; Rosen 43, 48, 49). The main criticisms against the film have instead been the casting of Gatsby and Daisy, the narration and pacing of the film and the fact that it fails to connect Gatsby's obsession with the American Dream (Cunningham 190). Frank R. Cunningham however meets the criticism against the shallowness of Daisy, as portrayed by Mia Farrow, as representative of her social class and claims that the hesitance and absence of emotion of Robert Redford's Gatsby, is proof of his artificial persona (190, 191). The pacing of the film has an advocate in Edward T. Jones who defends it as an artistic choice which lends the film weight (233). *The Great Gatsby* in Luhrmann and Pearce's guise has received more mixed reviews. The points of criticism ranges from the narration (again) to the anachronistic soundtrack, produced by Jay-Z, and the many film-related products that accompany the film (Pinkerton 66; Polan 399). Positive reviews mention Leonardo DiCaprio's charismatic yet self-conscious Gatsby and the film's striking visuals (Stone 78-79; Pinkerton 67).

Both the 1974 and the 2013 films are high budget projects for their respective periods. Clayton and Coppola's film cost six million dollars (about 28 million dollars in today's money, adjusted for inflation) to make, of which two million was wasted when shooting was held up according to Clayton (Rosen 49). This hold up had the consequence that Coppola, who had written the script in 1972, was not available when the film was shot, leaving Clayton to make changes to the script without his input (Rosen 49). In contrast, the 2013 film was written over a period of several months by long-time collaborators Luhrmann and Pearce (Stone 77). The newer film's budget of over 100 million dollars shows that it is not only the economy that has seen inflation over the past 40 years, but production values too (Pinkerton 66).

To illustrate how the two films focus on different aspects of the source text to tell their unique stories, both visually and content-wise, analyses of four key episodes, present in both films, will follow. They are in chronological order: New in West Egg, which deals with the

introduction of all the main characters except Gatsby; Entering Gatsby's world, which introduces Gatsby and gives a glimpse into his character; Old lovers reunited, where Gatsby and Daisy meet again and his dream becomes palpable, yet loses its symbolic value; and Not waking up from the dream, which covers the downward spiral of Gatsby's dream and the narrative. Lastly there will be an analysis of ongoing themes throughout the novel and films.

## New in West Egg

After having arrived in West Egg to start his career as a bond salesman, Nick is soon invited to the Buchanans, who live in old money East Egg, across the sound. This is where Clayton and Coppola's film starts, with Nick arriving by boat, for no apparent reason, as he does not seem to be a very good sailor. This departure from the novel, in which Nick arrives by car, does however, as Cunningham points out, allow the viewer to get a sense of the Buchanans' immense wealth. Tom Buchanan dismounts a polo pony to greet Nick, telling him that he could have sent a motor cruiser to get him, after which they both get into a car that takes them up to the house (04:52). The novel makes a point of the Buchanans' mansion being "a cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion" (10), the old world connection reinforcing the old money image. The mansion of Clayton and Coppola's film looks not very unlike Gatsby's, so this particular point is missed. It is understandable that finding a mansion that looks just right is not the top priority in making a film, but its dissimilarity to the one described in the novel does stand out when you compare it to the one in the 2013 version, which makes use of CGI to show an aerial shot (05:36) of a strikingly grand brick manor as Tom rides from the polo grounds, jumping hedges, and Nick pulls up to the front of the house. Here the two films show two different solutions to how to depict the description of the Buchanans' affluence, making the most of the techniques available.

The novel's Tom Buchanan is described as "... one of those men who reach an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savours of anti-climax", in reference to his football prowess in college. In Clayton and Coppola's film Tom comes across as a nonchalant adulterer more than anything else, which is of course a vital part of the character, but in spite of his greeting Nick fresh off the back of a polo pony he does not immediately seem like the sportsman of the novel. Deliberate or not, the downplaying of Tom's athleticism, the one aspect of his personality that an audience might find appealing, makes him seem like even more of a villain. There is on the other hand no mistaking that Luhrmann

and Pearce's Tom is a jock as he takes Nick to his trophy room on their way through the house, where he boasts about his sporting achievements, and shows him into the next room by tackling him through the doors (06:40).

At the other side of those doors is a scene which in the novel is one of the most vividly described. The nautical imagery with which Fitzgerald describes the billowing curtains and the two birdlike young women is certainly over the top, and the 2013 film matches the vision. Nick is initially blinded by the light reflecting of the white fabric that fills the air, only hearing the giggling of an unknown origin. When Tom, assisted by several servants, manages to close the windows, the cloudlike curtains settle and Nick is faced with his cousin Daisy Buchanan slowly rising over the back of a couch. She welcomes him, immediately asking if they miss her in Chicago, and when Nick acknowledges that the town is in mourning she physically drags him over the couch, giggling. Jordan Baker, who is sitting next to Daisy, remains coolly uninterested and gets up without shaking Nick's hand. The difference in the two women's personalities is striking, and Daisy's gaiety seems to know no limits until Gatsby's name is mentioned, noticeably making her more pensive.

The same scene in the 1974 film lacks the build up of the more modern counterpart, as Tom and Nick step directly into the sitting room (05:55). Here the curtains flutter rather than billow and the view seems rather underwhelming, in contrast to Fitzgerald's bombastic language. Daisy cheerfully welcomes Nick from across the room, rather than drawing him close like in the novel, and the way Jordan engages Nick in conversation is more accurately described as friendly than the book's contemptuously. The impression the viewer is left with is that the two women have been waiting for Tom and Nick rather than languidly wasting the day away. As in the newer film, Daisy is cheerful, only here it seems more affected, and the mention of Gatsby leaves Daisy momentarily startled rather than thoughtful, as Cunningham notes (190).

Later in the scene, at dinner, Tom asks Nick if he has read the book *The Rise of the Coloured Empires* and when Nick answers in the negative, he offers a lecture on the superiority of the white race (18; 08:10; 09:20). Both film versions stay largely true to the novel, in regard to what is said, but what sets Luhrmann and Pearce's version apart is that Tom delivers the speech in front of his staff of African American footmen. Here his bigotry seems like a much more sinister, thought through ideology, which cannot be brushed off as lazy stereotypes. Just like in the novel Daisy goes on to mock her husband, saying that "[h]e reads deep books with

long words in them". Remarkably, this response is missing in Clayton and Coppola's version and Tom's words are left hanging when he excuses himself to take a telephone call from his mistress. Daisy's failure to even jokingly stand up to her husband underlines his domination in the relationship and makes Clayton and Coppola's Daisy seem more submissive than the character of either the book or Luhrmann and Pearce's film. How outrageous Tom's behaviour seems in the 2013 film, especially when compared to how it is just accepted in the 1974 film, powerfully illustrates the progress of the African American struggle.

When Nick leaves the Buchanans, both films use the same techniques as when he arrives to illustrate one of the most important symbols of the novel, the green light at the end of the pier. In Clayton and Coppola's version, the light is clearly visible as Nick sets off in his boat into the setting sun and when he reaches the other side Gatsby stands on the dock reaching for that same light with his hand. Luhrmann and Pearce again use CGI to make a sweeping shot from East to West Egg, to the same effect as in the earlier film. The connection between the green light and Gatsby's object of desire, Daisy, is thus made more obvious at this stage than in the novel.

The next time Nick meets Tom, their planned lunch at the Yale Club turns into something entirely different when Tom, on the spur of the moment, decides to introduce Nick to his mistress. The two depictions of this scene start off in a similar manner, showing Tom take joy in manipulating George Wilson with empty promises of the sale of a car, and ostentatiously telling Myrtle Wilson to follow him into town when her husband's back is turned (28; 15:00; 15:47). The two films however focus on very different aspects of the scene when the company reach Tom and Myrtle's love nest in New York and decide to have a party.

In Clayton and Coppola's film the scene is quite the opposite from the novel. In the novel Myrtle comes across as an exceedingly shallow person, only concerned with gossip and shopping, affecting a haughty manner. Tom is as overbearing to Myrtle as he is to Daisy and it is obvious to Nick that he has lied to Myrtle about Daisy being Catholic, when Myrtle's sister Catherine says to him that that is the reason Tom cannot get a divorce (36). In Clayton and Coppola's film Myrtle comes off as much less vulgar, even if her dress is ostentatious and she is a bit contrived in her role as hostess of a large party. The scene mainly deals with Myrtle telling the story about how she and Tom met, and when she does so she seems genuinely affectionate. The line about Daisy being a Catholic is kept in the film, but Nick's

assertion to the reader that she is not left out (23:30). As Tom seems to reciprocate Myrtle's feelings, and the viewer learns nothing about Daisy's religion, it seems at least possible that Tom genuinely wants to leave Daisy. He does not show any tendencies towards being a bully either until the end of the scene, when he is enraged by Myrtle slamming a door in his face after him having accidentally stepped on her dog. When he strikes Myrtle in front of a room full of guests for saying Daisy's name, it is obvious that Clayton and Coppola make this relationship more complex than it would seem at first.

The scene ends in the same way in Luhrmann and Pearce's version, but that is the only real similarity between the way the two films depict this scene. Most of the elements described in the novel are hinted at, the apartment is garishly decorated, on the table lie gossip magazines and the dog that has been purchased on a whim in both the novel and Clayton and Coppola's version sits on a chair eating dog biscuits, looking a little forlorn. The theme of the scene however is summed up in the line: "I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon ...". Luhrmann and Pearce have evidently interpreted being drunk as meaning uncontrollably so. When Nick is given an alleged nerve pill by Myrtle's sister Catherine and gulps it down with whisky, the rest of the scene turns into an alcohol fuelled blur. In the middle of this debauchery Nick, looking out the window, seeing himself in the street, has a moment of insight, realising his role in the story: "I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life." (22:00). This excess is a caricature of the failure of Prohibition, and Nick's eventual alcoholism is indicative of the, in hindsight obvious, unsustainability of the era.

### Entering Gatsby's world

Nick's first visit to one of Gatsby's parties is one of the pivotal scenes of the novel, as it gives the reader the first real insight into Gatsby's world, and it also has the potential to be the perhaps most visually striking scene in both of the two films. The scenes are vastly different from each other however, and deviate in varying degrees from the original text. After hearing Gatsby's name pop up time and time again, and having watched his parties from the sidelines of his own porch, Nick is one day greeted by a driver in a robin's egg-blue uniform, carrying an invitation. Fitzgerald stresses the exclusivity of this invitation by having Nick comment: "People were not invited [to Gatsby's parties] – they went there" (43) and points out the formality of its wording. This is omitted by Clayton and Coppola, while Luhrmann and

Pearce take it a step further by having Nick claim that he was the only guest that was ever invited, suggesting that Gatsby sees him as special from the start.

Luhrmann and Pearce's and Clayton and Coppola's Nicks react quite differently to being let into Gatsby's world. Where the former looks on in wide-eyed wonder, the latter is more tentative. Luhrmann and Pearce's Nick enters Gatsby's mansion through the front door, together with the masses of uninvited guests, vainly trying to show his invitation to the doorman, but is swept away with the crowd converging on the party. This deviation from the original text serves to show the viewer what is already known: Gatsby's parties are where to be, if you are (or want to be) somebody. Clayton and Coppola's Nick enters the party, as in the novel, through the garden. This makes sense, not only because it is convenient, but also because he feels ill at ease being invited by a stranger to a party where he knows no one. Just like in the original text he attaches himself to Jordan as soon as he spots her, but whereas in the original text she is initially more or less indifferent to having run into Nick, in Clayton and Coppola's version she almost seems to have been waiting for him. In Luhrmann and Pearce's version Nick solves his awkwardness in a different way, saying: "Alone and a little embarrassed, I decided to get roaring drunk" (25:36). Here Jordan shows a little more initiative by seeking Nick out, not seeming interested in her escort for the night.

Differences between the two films fit with the advance of both consumerism and feminism in the 39-year period that separates them in time. The modern Nick is awestruck by the conspicuous consumption, while the Nick of forty years ago simply feels uncomfortable. Luhrmann and Pearce's Jordan actually takes the initiative pursuing Nick, suggestively luring him away to the library, rather than the other way around, ignoring the man she came with in the process.

Luhrmann, who as Stone points out has a reputation for making flamboyant over-the-top productions, gives the audience a blinding display of tinsel and colourful clothes (78-79). The anachronism of pumping modern music, that is present throughout the film, but which is especially salient when accompanied by choreographed dancing, and the blinding visuals are not the only striking aspects of the scene. Everything that is conveyed to the audience is over-explicit. In the novel there is a false rumour that one girl at the party is the famous dancer Gilda Gray's understudy (42), and in the film the conductor announces that Gilda Gray herself will perform (26:52). Rather than just being vulgar and presumptuous (46) Jordan's escort

plainly says to Nick, pulling Jordan away from him: “Look around you! Rich girls don’t marry poor boys” (29:20). Klipspringer, Gatsby’s reluctant pianist lodger, is elevated to “[d]ubious descendant of Beethoven” (25:18). It could be argued that such over-explicitness is symptomatic of the fact that the flow of information of today makes it necessary to be loud to be heard. This very deliberate sense of showmanship is however used to great effect when Jay Gatsby is finally introduced. The focus remains on Nick as Gatsby speaks off camera, and when Gatsby reveals himself to the audience (29:52) he smiles a smile “... with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life.” (49).

Clayton and Coppola’s version on the other hand offers a much more believable depiction of a 1920s garden party, with the guests dancing the Charleston to a live band. However, only the key elements of the scene, needed to move the plot forward, are in the film. The widespread gossip about Gatsby is condensed to a quick exchange between a dozen people around a table. Comical elements, such as the episode with the owl-eyed man in the library and the fact that Nick holds a conversation for some time with Gatsby without realising who he is talking to, are left out entirely. More emphasis is placed on Gatsby’s dubious nature. Instead of meeting his host in the crowd, Nick is lead to his office by an armed bodyguard and the meeting then ends abruptly when a business connection telephones about a shady deal in Philadelphia. Clayton and Coppola’s interpretation of the scene seems unnecessarily different from the original text, and it gives the impression of being rushed through in order to save money on the large number of extras needed for the party. As a third of the budget of the film was spent before filming even started, it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume the director, Clayton, was under pressure to make high cost scenes as effective as possible.

After this first glimpse into Gatsby’s world the novel tells us that Nick casually meets his neighbour about half a dozen times, before Gatsby one day decides to take him to lunch. In the car on the way into town Gatsby tells Nick about his extraordinary but, as is revealed later, in part made up background. At lunch Nick is introduced to Gatsby’s shady business connection Meyer Wolfsheim. The depiction of Wolfsheim in the films clearly shows how Fitzgerald’s anti-Semitic description of him has become increasingly unacceptable. Clayton and Coppola’s Wolfsheim is a white man who can be Jewish, as his name suggests that he is, but he is not the caricature of Fitzgerald’s novel. In Luhrmann and Pearce’s film Wolfsheim is played by the Indian Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan, which, as Stone observes, at the same time wipes away any trace of anti-Semitism and makes the film more commercially



attractive in one of the most important economies in the world. Anti-Semitism has of course never been acceptable, and the suffering of the Jewish people in the Second World War opened the eyes of most people who might have thought otherwise, but the fact that it is unthinkable today to even allude to the bigotry of the original text probably owes more to the influence of the Civil Rights Movements on political correctness. The 2013 film deviates further from the novel by setting the scene in a speakeasy rather than a restaurant. In the illegal club Gatsby exchanges pleasantries with the police commissioner and a senator, underscoring the corruption of Prohibition and Gatsby's position.

### Old lovers reunited

The reward for Gatsby's struggle to get into a position he assumes will enable him to repeat the past comes when he finally gets to meet the woman who the green light has symbolised for him. The convoluted way in which Gatsby asks Jordan to ask Nick to ask Daisy to tea is shared by both the two films and the novel. So is Gatsby's concern with making sure that Nick's cottage and garden is fit to receive his lost love. In Luhrmann and Pearce's version the man with a lawn mower sent over by Gatsby is joined by an entire staff of gardeners, again showing Gatsby's and Luhrmann's taste for excess.

The scene of the novel is both drawn out and comical, and the two films take away one of these elements each. Luhrmann and Pearce choose to focus on the almost slapstick-like awkwardness of Gatsby, who knocks down the clock from the mantelpiece while desperately trying to seem casual (84; 55:50). Not until Nick assures him that Daisy feels no less awkward, as he leaves to give them some privacy, do the couple warm to each other. Clayton and Coppola's version of this scene instead seizes on the drawn-out silence between the former couple in the scene of the novel. When not punctuated by Gatsby's fumbling, the silence makes him and Daisy seem confused rather than embarrassed, neither knowing what to do or what to say. When Nick returns inside to inform them that it has stopped raining, neither of them seem to have moved (53:44). The drawn out pacing of the scene, combined with the use of photography, showcases both the artistic ambition of Clayton and Coppola's film as well as Daisy's incapability to deal with emotion and Gatsby's insecurity when faced with the subject of his dreams.

By giving Nick and Daisy a tour of his mansion, Gatsby tries to show that he is now on the inside and thus eligible for Daisy's affections. Here the novel focuses on Gatsby's mixed emotions about his dream starting to come true, perfectly summed up in the line: "There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his own illusion" (92). In Luhrmann and Pearce's film the explicitness of Nick's narration makes sure that it is not lost on the audience that Gatsby is not the only one who has difficulties expressing his emotions. When Gatsby shows off his wardrobe by showering Daisy in shirts as she jumps up and down on his bed, she breaks down in tears, faced with the realisation that she need not have spent the past five years with a man she does not love, but can only bring herself to say that "... she has never seen such beautiful shirts before" (1:01:53). This scene, while present in both the novel and Clayton and Coppola's film, does not credit Daisy with having any such emotions. Much like Gatsby's party mentioned above, in the 1974 film, the episode does little more than move the plot forward, and misses the significance both of the lost symbolic worth of the green light for Gatsby and Daisy realisation that she has married the wrong man.

### Not waking up from the dream

It is after the climax of the story in the suite at the Plaza Hotel that everything begins to unravel. When Tom confronts Gatsby and Daisy refuses to say that she has never loved her husband, it starts to become clear to everyone except Gatsby that his dream is not going to come true. After Myrtle is killed by Gatsby's car on the way back to the Eggs the two films differ from the novel, and from each other, not so much in what happens, but in how the events reflect on the different characters and ultimately on how the story is perceived.

An increasing level of openness concerning explicit material over the years can be seen in the scenes surrounding Myrtle's death. In the 1974 film, the accident is not shown, as Clayton argued that it is more frightening to suddenly see a dead body than a crash (Marjorie 49). In this film Tom, though visibly shocked, does not say a word to Wilson and shows less emotion than in the novel, when he, Nick and Jordan reach the garage. This contrasts with his affectionate behaviour towards Myrtle earlier in the film, which combined with his unfazed behaviour at breakfast with Daisy the next day, makes him seem even more cold and calculating than the novel suggests. When Wilson turns up at the Buchanans' Tom wastes no time in manipulating Wilson into thinking that it Gatsby is the man who has had an affair with

his wife, and that he is the one who has killed her (2:04:31). In the novel it is only implied that this is what happens. Daisy, though at first as composed as her husband, breaks down when she is informed who Wilson is. However, just like earlier in the film, her reaction seems to come from her inability to deal with what has happened, rather than any real guilt. In the 2013 film the accident is not just shown, but its circumstances are rather different as well. In this version Myrtle escapes from an aggressive Wilson (1:44:35), only to be killed in the street. Tom, who comes across as angry at what has happened more than anything else, only has to point Wilson towards Gatsby. As in the novel, Nick later that same night sees Daisy being calmed by her husband.

Nick and Gatsby's relationship is also shown in different lights by the two films. In Clayton and Coppola's version Gatsby does not immediately let slip that it was Daisy who was driving his car when they hit Myrtle. Before Nick learns this, his less judgemental attitude towards Gatsby and willingness to share a cigarette with him seem strange. Here Gatsby, perhaps subconsciously, makes the connection between the dreams of the Dutch sailors first coming to the area and his own dream slipping away saying: "They must have held their breath. Afraid it would disappear before they could touch it." (1:59:40). The newer film makes more of the friendship between Nick and Gatsby. As in the novel Nick is appalled by the fact that Gatsby speaks only of how Daisy feels when he learns that Myrtle was killed, until it transpires that she was the one who was driving. After this, their friendship seems to grow over the course of the night. Nick feels unable to tell Gatsby that he has seen Tom and Daisy speaking in amity, and Gatsby finally lets Nick know the truth about his background. The implication of this is that Nick's compliment: "They're a rotten crowd. You're worth the whole damned bunch put together" (146; 2:07:09; 2:00:15) emphasises different concepts in the different film versions. Luhrmann and Pearce's film underlines Gatsby's worth, whereas Clayton and Coppola's version focuses and puts emphasis on Tom's and Daisy's, or perhaps their entire class', rottenness.

The friendship between Nick and Gatsby is given different degrees of prominence in the two films. In Luhrmann and Pearce's version it becomes the defining feature for the ending of the film. When Gatsby dies, looking into the green light, thinking that Daisy has finally called, it is instead Nick who is calling to check up on him. When viewer sees Daisy picking up the telephone, hesitating, but then putting it back down again without making a call, it is clear that Nick is, for all intents and purposes, the only one left who cares about Gatsby.

In Clayton and Coppola's version the significance of Nick's and Gatsby's friendship is somewhat diminished by the scenes following Gatsby's death. Nick is left to make Gatsby's funeral arrangements and to get any of the people who had gone to the parties to pay their respects, although in vain as few answer and the ones that do claim that they do not have the time. He is, however, not the only griever. In this film, as in the novel, Gatsby's father turns up to attend his son's funeral. The focus here is on the father's grief, rather than the fact that he is proud of his son's accomplishments, which Coppola felt was the most important aspect in the novel (Marjorie 45). The novel's short scene at Wolfsheim's offices is reduced to a sentence over the telephone in the 1974 version, a fact which no doubt in part can be explained by the unfortunate name of his company, "Swastika Holding Company". After the funeral Clayton and Coppola compound two scenes of the novel. The scene where Nick meets Jordan to discuss their failed relationship, the significance of which is downplayed in both films, is combined with Nick's chance meeting with Tom in the street. Here Clayton and Coppola go to further lengths to illustrate the carelessness of the rich by having Tom, Daisy and Jordan talk as if nothing had happened.

Both films end with modified versions of the same line, taken from the novel:

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...And one fine morning— So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (171-172)

In Clayton and Coppola's film the line ends after "[h]e did not know that it was already behind him", which leaves the viewer with the impression that Gatsby's dream had been doomed from the beginning, and that such vain aspirations as his will never come to fruition. Luhrmann and Pearce on the other hand choose to include the line in its entirety, to the effect that Gatsby may have failed, but his dream lives on, because it is the American Dream.

## A wider perspective

Some aspects of *The Great Gatsby* do not lend themselves to being compared on a scene-by-scene basis, one of which is the narration. In the novel Nick narrates retrospectively in the first person point-of-view, without addressing any particular implied reader, giving the distinct impression that what we are reading is the written account of his experiences. A film maker adapting *The Great Gatsby* must then choose how to represent this in the film. The use of voiceover in films has been deemed disruptive as it takes away the focus from the visual (Hutcheon 53-54). And yet, Linda Seger who argued this point, also says that “[m]aterial that is internal and psychological, will be difficult to express dramatically” (quoted in Hutcheon 58). This leaves the film maker with little choice other than leaving the narration out completely, to the cost of the story, or using voiceover, potentially hurting the visual.

The two director/screenwriter pairs have dealt with the problem of adapting first person retrospective narration for the screen in two different ways, both of which have been criticised. Clayton and Coppola have gone down the traditional route, using voiceover rather sparsely during non-critical episodes, so as not to take away from the action on screen, yet keeping Nick as the centre of the narrative, to the cost of the amount of psychological description. Luhrmann and Pearce have dealt with this problem by adding flashforward scenes where we are faced with Nick, after the events of the novel, committed to a sanatorium with a range of emotional problems and severe alcoholism, evidently broken by his experiences in West Egg. In these flashforward scenes he retells his experiences to his therapist who encourages him to write down his story to help him deal with his problems. The flashforward scenes splice together the story, with the sound of Nick talking to his therapist or reading his manuscript trailing into the following scenes, thus creating a smooth transition from flashforward scene to voice-over.

Another overarching feature of the novel is that the pace of the story follows the weather. Nick arrives in West Egg in the spring and as the plot gains pace spring turns into summer. The climax of the story takes place on the warmest day of summer (109) and as it becomes clear that Gatsby’s dream is not going to come true the weather begins to cool, rapidly turning into autumn when Gatsby is killed. This, it would seem, is something that is hard to convey in a film, without drawing undue attention to the weather. Both Luhrmann and Pearce and Clayton and Coppola, however, seem to have tried to make the symbolism of the weather work, but in neither case the results are entirely satisfactory.

The weather of course decides the temperature, which entails that the more intense the scenes are, the hotter the temperature. Temperature does not lend itself easily to be depicted on film, but the effects of heat can be seen in the perspiration of the characters. In Clayton and Coppola's version both Nick and Tom are drenched in sweat already in the first scene and this continues throughout the film. To the viewer this suggests that there is no discernible change in temperature even after Gatsby's death, when the weather is noticeably bleaker. Luhrmann and Pearce's version has the additional complication of the flashforward scenes which start in the winter and end the following spring. This of course adds another layer of symbolic weather, as it gradually becomes better together with Nick's condition. On the other hand, this effect is somewhat spoiled for the viewer as the winter scenes are interspersed with the main plot. Confusingly, the weather also seems to cool a little during the time when Gatsby and Daisy have their affair. In the climactic scene at the Plaza Hotel, however, nobody in the audience can miss the heat either of the arguments or the weather. As Tom confronts Gatsby everyone in the room is glistening, although no one achieves quite the level of perspiration of the 1974 film. This is perhaps indicative of that what is acceptable in terms of Hollywood aesthetics has changed over the past forty years.

The two films also differ in how the comedy of Fitzgerald's novel is portrayed. Luhrmann and Pearce's adaptation keeps many of the comical elements, in contrast to Clayton and Coppola's version which seems preoccupied with being taken seriously. Neither film however manages to convey the more subtle satirical aspects of the original text, where Fitzgerald uses wit to convey serious social criticism. One example of this is when some of the dancers at Gatsby's party are described as "old men pushing young girls backward in eternal graceless circles" (47), in one line summing up his attitude towards the greed and ceaselessness of capitalism.

## Conclusion

As established in the introduction, *The Great Gatsby* can be read in many different ways, and an adaptation is always going to be a reflection of the adaptor's reading of the novel. As is to be expected then, the two adaptations this essay is concerned with are two very different films. Clayton and Coppola's *The Great Gatsby* is a costume drama which has been perceived as a very faithful rendition of the novel, yet in substituting the fast pace of the novel for drawn out scenes and artistic photography, it misses a great deal of its detail. Luhrmann and Pearce's film on the other hand is a visual explosion of a blockbuster, which keeps more of what makes *The Great Gatsby* great.

Clayton and Coppola's film is not so much a critique of the 1920s or the concept of consumerism, as a comment on the upper class' lack of moral and the futility of aspiring to be part of it. To make this point the film not only sacrifices the comedy of the novel or the finer use of symbols, but more importantly it also sacrifices depth of character. As a result the narrative suffers, and love story that drives the plot becomes less credible. Somewhat surprisingly, given the critical tone of the film, there is not as obvious a connection between Gatsby's dream of being reunited with Daisy and the dream of so many people coming to America. The leaving out of the final lines of the novel seems almost like an afterthought of the director, in order not to offend anyone by criticising that most American conception of all, the American Dream. Given the lack of self-irony of Clayton and Coppola's film, it gives the impression of being a morality play more than the nuanced original text.

Luhrmann and Pearce have first and foremost made a love story, albeit one without a happy ending, that has many more good qualities to it. The love story is not only the doomed affair of Gatsby's dreams, but also the friendship between him and the only person that cares in the end, Nick. The film is altogether more positive of Gatsby and his dedication to his dream than either Clayton and Coppola's film or Fitzgerald's novel, which makes it seem more like a celebration of the American Dream than a parody of the same. What criticism can be found in this film is not directed at the rich and idle, or even against conspicuous consumption, but (if anything) against the all-encompassing excess of the era which drives Nick to alcoholism. The film manages to capture the spirit of the decade by caricaturing it, which is why the anachronisms and over-the-top visuals work in the context.

As made clear by the analysis above, the social development over the decades from the publication of Fitzgerald's novel to the launch of Luhrmann and Pearce's adaptation on several occasions shines through in the films. The choices made on what aspects of the novel to focus on in the two respective adaptations may, however, also be motivated by such developments. Clayton and Coppola's film was made just as the political climate and economy hardened in the United States. As the counter culture-movement was failing in face of the conservative backlash, it is not improbable that a film maker would choose to illuminate the perceived indifference of the upper classes. If the aim was to use an American classic to do so it is fully understandable that they wished to lessen the significance of its less than serious aspects. Luhrmann and Pearce's film is a product of its time in an even more obvious way. The high pace of the film makes certain that it could not have been produced in any other climate than that of today, dominated by the heightened media exposure. The lack of criticism towards the conspicuous consumption in the film reflects the tendencies of commercialisation and heightened demand for luxury of today.

The mere passage of time has given Luhrmann and Pearce more creative freedom than Clayton and Coppola ever had. Advances in technology, as we have seen, and rising production values have given film makers the possibility to depict bygone eras, not only as they were, but as they could have been. In 1974 the Roaring Twenties were still in living memory, limiting the freedom Clayton and Coppola had in depicting it. Today only the spirit of the era remains, and Luhrmann and Pearce has taken advantage of that to the fullest.

To conclude, both Clayton and Coppola and Luhrmann and Pearce have made films that are products of their time. Neither film manages to fully do every aspect of Fitzgerald's original text justice, but they do show the greatness of Fitzgerald's work in being so different. That the films were made with different goals in mind is beyond dispute, and it is perhaps to the credit of the novel that they both manage to convey their own vision, while still being unmistakably *The Great Gatsby*.



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