

January 2015

## Representations of Gatsby: Ninety Years of Retrospective

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Representations of Gatsby: Ninety Years of Retrospective

by

Christine Anne Auger

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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Date of Approval:  
April 23, 2015

Keywords: Fitzgerald, Gatz, Hollywood, adaptation

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Caroline Lytle Auger, who constantly fostered my relationship with literature, and whose passion for reading was contagious and inspiring.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have nurtured me during the course of this degree, and their support has buoyed me year after year. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Phillip Sipiora, who has taught me about literature, film, pedagogy, writing, editing, confidence, and perseverance since I began studying at the University of South Florida. I am also grateful for my dissertation committee, Drs. Hunt Hawkins, Victor Peppard, and Tova Cooper, for their excellent feedback guided me during the writing and revision process. Countless friends also deserve my gratitude, for they have prevented me from succumbing to any challenges I faced throughout the pursuit of this degree—their support is invaluable. My loving father, Jay Auger, encourages me to follow my dreams and explore the world, and without his boundless faith in me, I doubt I could accomplish many of my goals. I am most grateful for my intelligent, patient, and devoted husband, Michael Dema, whose love has become the anchor of my life, and whose strength has enabled me to finish this project. Finally, this scholarship would not have been possible without the steady companionship of my Basset Hound, Penny Lane, who took my mind on thousands of walks throughout graduate school. Penny's presence in my study and office abated the solitude of my longest writing days, and fortunately, she saw me through the very last revision of this dissertation. Penny Lane will always be sorely missed and fondly remembered by those who loved her most.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
INTRODUCTION – Jay Gatsby: From Fitzgerald to Film.....	1
F. Scott Hollywood: Fitzgerald and the Film Industry.....	2
Nick’s Narration.....	6
Adaptations as Biographies of Gatsby.....	7
The Selection Process.....	9
Related Scholarship.....	11
CHAPTER ONE – Fitzgerald’s Multitudinous Gatsbys.....	14
James Gatz.....	17
“Mr. Nobody from Nowhere”.....	21
Major Jay Gatsby.....	23
The Romantic.....	24
Trimalchio.....	26
“A Common Swindler”.....	27
The Bully.....	30
“All Right in the End”.....	31
CHAPTER TWO – The 1920s Adaptations.....	34
Owen Davis’ 1926 Broadway Play.....	37
Herbert Brenon’s 1926 Silent Film (Lost).....	46
The 1926 Trailer.....	51
CHAPTER THREE – Jay Gatsby in the 1940s.....	55
Fitzgerald Studies in the 1940s.....	56
Hollywood in the 1940s and the Motion Picture Production Code.....	59
Nugent’s Film: An Overview.....	61
Ladd’s Gatsby.....	65
Gatsby as Dan Cody’s Protégé.....	70

Gatsby and Daisy .....	72
Gatsby's Redemption.....	73
CHAPTER FOUR – Jay Gatsby in the 1970s .....	79
Clayton's Film: An Overview.....	79
Behind the Scenes: Clayton, Coppola, and <i>The Great Gatsby</i> .....	83
The 1970s Fitzgerald Revival .....	85
Redford's Gatsby .....	85
The Rumors.....	89
Mrs. Jay Gatsby?.....	94
Gatsby's Personas .....	99
CHAPTER FIVE – Jay Gatsby in the New Millennium .....	102
John Collins' <i>Gatz</i> : An Overview.....	103
<i>Gatz</i> and <i>Gatsby</i> 's Readers .....	107
Luhrmann's Film: An Overview.....	108
The Novel's Revival .....	114
An Institutionalized Nick's Narration.....	115
DiCaprio's Gatsby .....	118
Jimmy Gatz' Gatsby .....	122
Gatsby and the Buchanans .....	124
CONCLUSION – Jay Gatsby: From Film to Fitzgerald .....	130
Gatsby's Evolution.....	133
REFERENCES .....	136

## ABSTRACT

Jay Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald's most famous character, has starred in a variety of stage and screen adaptations in the ninety years since he was first introduced in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). This dissertation explores the Gatsby character as depicted in six important adaptations of the novel, including two Broadway productions, Owen Davis' 1926 drama and John Collins' 2010s play, *Gatz*, and four major motion pictures: Herbert Brenon's 1926 lost silent film (starring Warner Baxter); Elliott Nugent's 1949 black and white film (starring Alan Ladd); Jack Clayton's 1974 color film (starring Robert Redford); and Baz Luhrmann's 2013 3-D film (starring Leonardo DiCaprio). Each adaptation culls a new portrait of the titular character from Fitzgerald's text and shows how Jay Gatsby is really James Gatz, an enigmatic man whose ongoing performance renders him an impostor who is chasing an impossible dream and staging an elaborate production. The major adaptations underscore the elasticity of the Gatsby character, and demonstrate that he is nothing if not an actor. This dissertation interprets these six adaptations of the novel as supplemental biographies of Jay Gatsby that contribute to the evolving legacy of the character in American popular culture. Production teams, at least in some sense, become stewards of Gatsby's reputation, and they are therefore partially responsible for (re)defining the character's enduring role in contemporary society. Each feature-length film revives public and scholarly interest in Fitzgerald and his fiction, and because their releases coincided with peaks in sales of the novel, their relationship with literary studies cannot be underestimated.

## INTRODUCTION – Jay Gatsby: From Fitzgerald to Film

Fictitious characters rarely become as famous as their literary progenitors, their names carrying the cachet of bona fide celebrities and evoking the spirit of an entire generation. F. Scott Fitzgerald's most iconic character, Jay Gatsby, fits the bill, and a portion of his reputation hinges on his extracurricular presence in American culture, particularly in the stage and film adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* that have been produced since the novel's 1925 publication. Directors who work with this masterpiece of modern literature face a certain set of challenges during the creative process of adaptation, challenges stemming, at least in part, from the novel's status as a cornerstone of American fiction. The canonical text is routinely taught in the high school and college classroom, and its nearly systematic inclusion on English syllabi suggests that a number of students and adults have read the novel, or at least been exposed to its characters, plot, and themes during lectures and discussions. These readers-turned-viewers have personal opinions about the novel and its characters, and the existence of such preconceived notions can influence the decisions of the various production teams that have embraced this laborious but rewarding task over the years. Reviewers in the popular media often resort to comparisons between the book and the adaptation, using fidelity as a barometer of success. Other complications arise because the novel is a beloved classic, and some literary scholars and Fitzgerald fans are protective of *The Great Gatsby*, arguing that it cannot be made into a play or film, and that an adaptation should not be produced in the first place. These readers fail to recognize the value of the major *Gatsby* adaptations, which boost sales of the novel and spark a rebirth of interest in Fitzgerald and his work. The relationship between the novel and its various



adaptations is nuanced and complex, and although the plays and films are not in direct competition with the novel. Instead, the film adaptations are particularly lucrative for the publishers, who reissue the novel and often offer movie tie-in editions. Although some instructors worry that their students will watch the movie instead of reading the book, and some students will certainly resort to this dull method of substitution, it is more important to appreciate the many moviegoers who buy and (re)read the novel outside of the classroom in concert with the release of a new adaptation.

### **F. Scott Hollywood: Fitzgerald and the Film Industry**

The significance of the most prominent *Gatsby* adaptations grows deeper when one considers Fitzgerald's unsuccessful endeavors in the film industry. Fitzgerald suffered a series of professional setbacks shortly before his 1940 death at the age of 44, and although he was involved with a number of productions as a screenwriter in Hollywood, he did not earn a single film credit. Fitzgerald died without knowing that *The Great Gatsby*, which was out of print at that time, would become a masterpiece of modern literature, and more surprisingly, a reliable candidate for adaptations.<sup>1</sup> Fitzgerald's fiction has enjoyed sustained success in Hollywood since his death, with a number of production teams and actors achieving the fame and financial security that unfortunately proved destructive when not elusive for the Fitzgeralds themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Graham, a Hollywood gossip columnist and Fitzgerald's mistress, suggests that a fleet of feature-length *Gatsby* adaptations would have likely pleased the author. Graham describes Fitzgerald's respect for Hollywood in *Beloved Infidel*, one of her biographies about him that details their time together in California. Graham stresses the influence of the film industry upon Fitzgerald, and reveals more about his relationship with the genre: "We had spent much of our time going to the movies, Scott watching the screen with the rapt attention of a student. He considered motion pictures a powerful medium for the writer: he was determined to master the technique of screen writing. Twice before he had tried his hand at it in Hollywood, in 1927 and 1931, but only briefly" (161). Sadly, Fitzgerald's real success with the industry has only occurred posthumously. Several of his novels and a number of his excellent short stories have been adapted since his death, however, and audiences are not showing signs of Fitzgerald fatigue just yet.

Cinematic renditions of *The Great Gatsby* revive the novel's presence in contemporary society and improve Fitzgerald's former reputation in Hollywood, where his own work was financially rewarding but artistically disappointing. In addition, *Esquire* published the infamous "Crack-Up" essays in 1936, three self-disparaging non-fiction pieces wherein Fitzgerald damaged his image in the most public of venues. In 1939, Fitzgerald was fired from his job on *Winter Carnival* for "drinking heavily" at Dartmouth with Budd Schulberg, the producer's son, and the mishap purportedly excluded him from several subsequent opportunities in Hollywood as well (Margolies 202). Fitzgerald's relationship with Zelda had deteriorated; she was then institutionalized across the country, and he was also struggling to finance his daughter's education at Vassar. Fitzgerald nevertheless learned the craft of adaptation first-hand during his three stints in Hollywood, where he encountered the same difficulties that the screenwriters of adaptations of his own literature would face in 1949, 1974, and 2013. His general impression of the process of adaptation emerges in the letters the author wrote from California during these trips, which suggest that Fitzgerald might respect the artists who would later rework his fiction for another medium. Fitzgerald described one of his chief frustrations with literary adaptations in a February 1939 letter to his editor, Maxwell Perkins: "It is wonderful to be writing again instead of patching—do you know that in that *Gone with the Wind* job I was absolutely forbidden to use any words except those of Margaret Mitchell; that is, when new phrases had to be invented one had to thumb through as if it were Scripture and check out phrases of hers which would cover the situation!" (Turnbull 284). Fitzgerald's complaint indirectly liberates the production teams that have adapted his work from critics' expectations that they strictly adhere to the language of the text.

Feature-length film adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* are particularly important to literary studies because they trigger a renewal of public fascination with the author and the Jazz Age, and allow Fitzgerald to retain an extraordinary influence over popular culture to this day. A significant revival of interest in Fitzgerald and his fiction is perhaps the bottom line when it comes to appreciating Hollywood adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*, which always boost sales of the novel.<sup>2</sup> Consider the numbers. Only 25,000 copies of the novel sold during Fitzgerald's lifetime, but an estimated 25 million copies are now in circulation, and *Gatsby* has been translated into 42 languages. By the 1940s, when the first talkie adaptation of the novel was released, "more than 100 million people went to the movies each week, [which was] about two-thirds of the total population" (Batchelor 61). Elliot Nugent's 1949 *Gatsby* film resulted in a reprint of the novel, and the publicity likely helped sell several books about the Fitzgeralds in the early 1950s. Another spike in sales of the novel occurred in 1974, when Jack Clayton released his color adaptation of the novel; only 300,000 copies of *Gatsby* were sold in 1973, but the following year, that figure jumped to one million (Batchelor 71). When Baz Luhrmann's film came out in 2013, it too tripled normal annual sales of *Gatsby*, and the novel sold 1.5 million copies that year. In addition, *The Great Gatsby* was the #10 bestseller of 2013, hit number one on *Amazon.com*, and remained on the *USA Today* Best-Sellers List for 403 weeks. These film

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<sup>2</sup> In "Sentimentalizing Daisy for the Screen," Thomas Morgan emphasizes the healthy relationship between a literary source and its adaptations: "one of the most direct ways that film adaptations affect the original written work is by boosting sales (and readership) of the original writing. There is a marketing term that describes this relationship—synergy...the synergy between the product sales also escalates debate about the original writing. It leads to closer study of the films and written texts, analysis of what each accomplished, and argument over what the core meanings of these texts truly are. Film adaptations can also indirectly affect the interpretation of the original source material," which is why it is important that directors consider themselves semi-stewards of the evolving reputation of Jay Gatsby (Morgan 29).

adaptations are obviously extracurricular opportunities for Fitzgerald to attract new readers, and they should be recognized for their contributions to the novel's enduring legacy.

Certain novels are therefore more difficult to adapt than others,<sup>3</sup> not because of their content or structure, but because of their established popularity with the viewing populace.<sup>4</sup> An adaptation's success may depend on the imaginary standards imposed upon it by each reader-turned-viewer, and as Gene D. Phillips notes, "an individual filmgoer's choice in this matter basically says more about his or her personal cinematic taste than perhaps it does about the relative artistic worth of the films themselves" (124).<sup>5</sup> Readers who feel a strong connection to *The Great Gatsby* sometimes fail to recognize its adaptations as independent artistic endeavors, and because of this misunderstanding, these readers often become the adaptations' harshest critics.<sup>6</sup> Again, Fitzgerald's canonical novel is so beloved that some readers deem the major

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<sup>3</sup> In 1984, Alan Margolies found none of the existing *Gatsby* adaptations satisfactory, but instead of faulting Fitzgerald or his fiction, Margolies blames the individual films for various reasons: "Of course, not every novel can be successfully transformed to another medium. Perhaps *The Great Gatsby* is such a novel, but it is impossible to be certain, since the failure of the adaptations [is] derived more from inferior writing, acting, and directing than from any lack of dramatic potential in the original work" (Margolies 187).

<sup>4</sup> Boggs explains how "a unique commercial relationship exists between film and novel. A best-selling novel may virtually assure a profit for the producer making a film version, whether the novel has real cinematic potential or not, because of the public's familiarity with the novel. In turn, a screen version that is a box-office success will increase sales of the book. A first-class film adaptation of an unknown novel may even make such a novel a bestseller. The popularity of a novel may influence the filmmaker in the adaptation" (364).

<sup>5</sup> Iser elaborates upon this theory at length in his 1978 treatise, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, and again in his 1980 piece on the "Interaction between Text and Reader."

<sup>6</sup> In *The Well-Tempered Critic*, Northrop Frye illustrates the basic tenets of this misunderstanding by invoking the simple case of the landscape painter. One could analogize, and extend this metaphor to encompass the relationship between adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* and Fitzgerald's novel: "The form of a painted landscape is a pictorial form. It has a relation to the landscape outside, but the landscape outside is not the source of its form. If it were, the painter would be trying to compete with nature on nature's own ground, or else he would be trying to give us a smudged and oily substitute for a real landscape, designed perhaps to call it up in our memories. This is the Socratic paradox at the end of the *Republic*, and there is

adaptations superfluous or even blasphemous, overlooking the positive impact that the films have upon sales of the novel,<sup>7</sup> proof that the adaptations spawn a renewal of interest in Fitzgerald's novel, and return many filmgoers to the prose.<sup>8</sup>

### **Nick's Narration**

Nick Carraway, our unreliable first-person narrator, seduces readers into sympathizing with the polished Gatsby figure by controlling the flow of information and withholding details about his neighbor's true identity and undeniable criminality from readers.<sup>9</sup> Nick's staggered disclosures about the titular character allow readers to get to know the ambiguous character just as Nick did, first as the construct that is Jay Gatsby, and then as James Gatz. Gatsby's elaborate and intentional misrepresentation of his autobiography also reveals that he is a slippery character operating under two distinct but entangled identities. The novel's frame story recalls contemporaneous texts like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and contemporary films like *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes) and *No Country for Old Men* (The Cohen Brothers). The narrative device also reminds viewers that we are only getting one side of the stories. Yet Nick's account is editorialized, manipulated, and stylized, and the novel is the subjective product of his memories, offering readers his personal interpretation of the summer's events. In addition,

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no avoiding its conclusion that if art is a second-hand copy of external nature, it has no point or place in civilized human life" (Frye 119).

<sup>7</sup> In *What Cinema Is!*, Dudley Andrew supports André Bazin's theory that "the adaptation business...increases sales of the originals and develops what the arts have always sought, "a public"" (127).

<sup>8</sup> In 2013, Random House announced, "We're always looking for new readers, and the transformation of a book into a film can exponentially increase consumer awareness...it begins with early press coverage of casting and shooting, and continues through to a film's pre-release marketing campaign and theatrical run" (Bosman).

<sup>9</sup> In "'A World Complete in Itself': *Gatsby's* Elegiac Narration," Dan Coleman concludes, "By insisting from his narrative's outset on its hero's happy ending, Nick sets for himself an essentially elegiac ambition: to ensure that his readers come to the last page of the novel convinced that Gatsby is "something gorgeous" (6)" (207).

Nick's reserved personality and his own self-interest can color his presentation of the multiple threads and sub-plots in the novel. The first-person narrator renders *The Great Gatsby* a difficult and interesting candidate for adaptation, particularly in the cinema, where the camera naturally provides a third-person point of view. Directors must rely heavily on voiceovers and utilize imaginative narrative maneuvers to relate a story told from a first-person perspective. Nick's portrayal of Gatsby invites speculation about the real nature of the character, who is perceived differently by other characters in the novel as well by as the fleet of directors who have undertaken the challenge of adapting *The Great Gatsby* since its 1925 publication.

### **Adaptations as Biographies of Gatsby**

If Nick's novel functions as the first biography of Jay Gatsby, it follows that adaptations of the novel might be interpreted as supplemental biographies (or perhaps even pathographies) of the same character. Adaptations introduce audiences to new portraits of Gatsby, and provide readers and viewers with new ways to conceptualize Fitzgerald's character. Major adaptations of the novel contribute to the mythic stature of Jay Gatsby, and in the process, directors become partially entrusted with the evolving legacy of their mysterious subject. The *Gatsby* adaptations illuminate the dynamism of Fitzgerald's character, and as companionate biographies of "the same man," they illustrate how readily production teams can develop distinct portraits of the protagonist based upon their different readings of Jay Gatsby (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 75). A director mimics the work of a biographer in that he or she must find a fresh way to present limited material in order to contribute something new and interesting to the field. Production teams therefore magnify and minimize certain traits within their portrayals of Jay Gatsby, providing audiences with multifarious readings of the character. Like Nick and other biographers, directors must decide how to frame Gatsby's life story and relate it to their audiences, and more

importantly, determine which subplots and anecdotes make the final cut—that is, what is included, omitted, altered, downplayed, or exaggerated in the adaptation.

Adaptations benefit from the multi-dimensional creativity of the production team, which incorporates, among other elements, costumes of varying textiles, musical arrangements and sound effects, and props and sets that complement the action of the film. An adaptation can mine all available forms of artistry in its quest to represent a given work of literature, and remakes have a particular advantage in that they can learn from a previous filmmaker's mistakes, and combine different aesthetic components to generate an adaptation that is innovative and a protagonist that is identifiable.<sup>10</sup> The coexistence of so many adaptations of one novel highlights the mesmerizing nature of Fitzgerald's dynamic titular character, a man who piques the curiosity of every character he meets. The distinct renderings of *Gatsby* that emerge in the most prominent adaptations demonstrate the remarkable elasticity of the author's titular character. Directors' conceptions of *Gatsby* are distinguishable, at least in part, because they are defined by a unique combination of the profiles that surface in Fitzgerald's novel.<sup>11</sup> Fitzgerald's multiple portraits of *Gatsby* lead to distinct yet defensible representations of the character in the major productions. Each adaptation generates a new composite character based upon slightly altered proportions of James Gatz vs. Jay Gatsby, bootlegger vs. war veteran, or fraud vs. friend, for example. The protagonist's real name, of course, is James Gatz, and he is a man of poor

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<sup>10</sup> In "A Note on Novels and Films," Susan Sontag describes how "cinema, as a late-comer to the serious arts, is in a position to raid the other arts and can deploy even relatively stale elements in innumerable fresh combinations" (245). Sontag's statement highlights the derivative nature of the medium, wherein a team of artists collaborates to create a production that is unique unto itself.

<sup>11</sup> As Maxwell Perkins acknowledged in a 1924 letter to Fitzgerald, "*Gatsby* is fairly vague. The reader's eyes can never quite focus upon him, his outlines are dim" (5). Fitzgerald revised the novel after receiving this letter, but in both the novel and its adaptations, the character always remains just out of focus.

upbringing, an impostor who plays the part of the wealthy Jay Gatsby every day.<sup>12</sup> At the heart of Gatsby's self-conscious performance is his awareness of the vigilance of his beloved Daisy Buchanan, whose opinion matters most. When James Gatz fashions himself into Jay Gatsby, he becomes a performative character that is reflected differently in each rendering of his eponymous novel.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, James Gatz and Jay Gatsby are merely two roles played by the same character, and as the adaptations reveal, Gatsby is nothing if not an actor.<sup>14</sup> Gatz stages and directs his very own off-Broadway production, but by mistaking a tragedy for a romance, he loses everything he has worked to achieve, including his life.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Selection Process**

This dissertation offers a cultural examination of Jay Gatsby, a famous figure that has transcended the confines of American literature and gone on to star in a variety of adaptations since he first appeared in print. *The Great Gatsby* is arguably among the most commonly adapted American novels, and certain adaptations are necessarily excluded here, including the "Robert Montgomery Presents" mini-series (1955); Robert Markowitz' 2000 made-for-TV movie; Christopher Scott Cherot's 2002 film, *G*; ballets, musicals, and an opera; and countless college or local theater adaptations. Instead, this project focuses on four Hollywood films and

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Anderson disagrees: "you could not exactly call him an impostor; he was himself an artist of sorts, trying to remould himself. His stage was a Long Island summer colony, where he came in contact with the realities of his dream and was broken by them" (16).

<sup>13</sup> In *Terrible Honesty*, Ann Douglas observes that all of "Fitzgerald's protagonists are actors poised in the wings, patting their clothing into line for anticipated movement, noting the smells of the theater, the patterns of body and talk which the other actors are creating onstage, listening for the sharp, blank sound of their cue as it falls on the strangely indoor-outdoors air of backstage space. They are acutely on the edge of "going on," actors whose amateur standing only raises the stakes" (56).

<sup>14</sup> Dan Coleman explains how "the novel sketches out the meanness of James Gatz' life only after it has shown us the grandeur of Gatsby's," indicating that readers must be seduced by a man like Jay Gatsby before they could possibly care about a man like Jimmy Gatz (215).

<sup>15</sup> In Marcus Bewley's terms, "*The Great Gatsby* becomes the acting out of the tragedy of the American vision" (226).



two Broadway/West End productions, which comprise the six adaptations that have generated the most critical and popular interest in the novel, and represent the evolving cultural legacy of the Gatsby character. This study examines how Jay Gatsby is portrayed on stage and in film—and why the character, as an interior director and actor himself, is able to carry so many adaptations and remakes. The following chapters interpret the major adaptations as fiscally valuable tools that periodically promote a canonical literary text, and explore how adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* invite readers to reinterpret the titular character. Chapter One provides the foundation for the dissertation’s subsequent analyses of the major adaptations by interrogating Nick’s representation of Jay Gatsby in the novel. This first Chapter identifies the different profiles of Gatsby that develop and co-exist over the course of the novel, because part of what makes the novel an interesting candidate for adaptation is the dicey nature of its protagonist, who is an absolute curiosity. Chapter Two combs through the relics of Owen Davis’ 1926 Broadway play and George Brenon’s 1926 lost silent film to surmise how these early productions contributed to Gatsby’s nascent literary fame and burgeoning public reputation. Chapters Three, Four, and Five are devoted to the 1949, 1974, and 2013 big-budget films, which perhaps provided audiences with the most compelling and sophisticated portraits of Jay Gatsby. Chapter Three covers the revival of Fitzgerald scholarship following the author’s 1940 death, and demonstrates how the release of Elliott Nugent’s 1949 adaptation, starring Alan Ladd, impacted the novel’s position in the literary canon. This “talkie” was produced under the strict restrictions of the Production Code, and it depicts Gatsby as a gangster who is absolved of his sins after a series of invented scenes that distort the character’s reception. Chapter Four discusses Jack Clayton’s 1974 color film starring Robert Redford as Gatsby—this time, a war veteran whose romantic inclinations dominate his disposition as a hopelessly doomed optimist. Chapter Five

examines two Twenty-First Century adaptations of the novel. *Gatz*, John Collins' dramatic reading of the novel, showcases Fitzgerald's precise portrayal of Gatsby, and was a resounding success on Broadway and in the West End in 2010 and 2012. Since actors read the novel aloud in its entirety on stage, *Gatz* is the polar opposite of Brenon's silent adaptation, and opens up an interesting avenue for comparison. Chapter Five concludes with a treatment of Baz Luhrmann's 2013 film, wherein Leonardo DiCaprio plays Gatsby, who is simultaneously a bold masquerader and a sympathetic dreamer, and whose disconnect from reality accounts for his undoing. When viewed collectively, these adaptations shape the extra-textual development of Fitzgerald's literary character in the ninety years since the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, and elevate his enduring celebrity presence in American popular culture.<sup>16</sup>

### **Related Scholarship**

Other critics have approached the same material differently, providing valuable yet distinct contributions to Fitzgerald scholarship. Most recently, in 2013's *Gatsby: The Cultural History of the Great American Novel*, Bob Batchelor considers Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* "a novel of ideas, not characters," and situates the novel within its broader socio-historical context (60). Whereas this dissertation focuses on the performance history of the Gatsby character, Batchelor provides a thorough history of the novel and explains why, in his opinion, it "has been so central to interpreting and establishing the themes at the heart of American life," themes not addressed

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<sup>16</sup> My thesis builds upon the work of Thomas Morgan, who finds that the adaptations are worthy contributions to Fitzgerald studies. Morgan writes, "all of these characterizations are sure to alarm some strict constructionists who cannot abide deviations from the original text. This is no cause for alarm, however. Rather, it is an opportunity. We will always have the original written novel and these periodic film adaptations invigorate our discussion of the novel even when they fail to live up to our expectations. It is the task of scholars and educators to make sure that these films do not prime a biased interpretation of the original; rather than shunning the films, we should embrace each new adaptation as an opportunity to open Fitzgerald's novel to fresh debate" (30).

here (234). However, Batchelor's analyses of the 1974 and 2013 films provide an excellent point of departure for more detailed studies of their respective Gatsbys. Gene D. Phillips' book, *Fiction, Film, and F. Scott Fitzgerald*, analyzes film adaptations of Fitzgerald's novels and stories, and traces much of the author's fiction to his biography. Phillips emphasizes the duty of the director to "be true to the original author's personal vision," and therefore relatively faithful to the text (7). Nearly thirty years have passed since the 1986 publication of Phillips' book, and in keeping with current trends in scholarship, fidelity is no longer considered the main indicator of an adaptation's success. Other critics are more specific. In "F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Problem of Film Adaptation," Frank E. Cunningham discusses Fitzgerald's role as a screenwriter in Hollywood and his suspicion toward the film industry more than the adaptations themselves. Irene Kahn Atkins excludes the 1926 silent film from "In Search of the Greatest Gatsby" because when it comes to adaptation of literary works, it "is a self-defeating kind of film-making" (217). Atkins identifies Nick, not Gatsby, as the primary character in the 1974 film, and unlike this study, ultimately judges the adaptations in terms of their faithfulness to Fitzgerald's novel. In "The Three Film Versions of *The Great Gatsby*—A Dream Deferred," Wheeler Winston Dixon emphasizes Fitzgerald's vision and details the ways in which the 1926, 1974, and 2013 cinematic adaptations fail. Dixon concludes that the novel itself is the obviously best place to locate the magic of the Gatsby character—in other words, that everyone should simply read Fitzgerald's book if they want to know about the story. However, these adaptations are opportunities for readers to reconsider their own conceptions of Jay Gatsby, and instead of distracting readers from the prose, the adaptations function as free marketing for the ninety year-old novel.

An adaptation is a multi-dimensional, collaborative production that is situated within its own time period, and is both subject to and representative of the continually changing tides in

historiography and interpretation. The major *Gatsby* adaptations recreate the mood of the novel by mixing the novelist's lines with what lies between them. They provide audiences with biographical portraits that challenge viewers' preexisting ideas about Jay Gatsby, and contribute to the character's fame and reputation. The following chapters explore the boundaries of Fitzgerald's character as it is depicted in the novel and its major adaptations, exposing the rich texture of his composition, and highlighting the traits that make Gatsby great enough to support this series of big-budget productions.

## CHAPTER ONE – Fitzgerald’s Multitudinous Gatsbys

*Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;  
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,  
Till she cry, “Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,  
I must have you!”*

*D’Invelliers*

F. Scott Fitzgerald prefaces *The Great Gatsby* with a poem that anticipates the manipulative and performative tenor of the novel’s major characters and scenes, and reminds readers that as Jay Gatsby, James Gatz is always tailoring his behavior so as to specifically please Daisy Buchanan. In this epigraph, the poet’s voice commands a person suffering from unrequited love do whatever it takes to become irresistible, even if it means wearing a variety of hats and doing a variety of tricks just to impress one’s beloved.<sup>17</sup> Gatsby follows D’Invelliers’ advice in his relentless pursuit of Daisy, and as a result, he develops personality traits and acquires expensive assets with the hope that she might find him desirable. Gatsby designs a magnificent set for the major scenes of his production, a glittering mansion that is decorated to suit Daisy’s taste, and then cultivates a persona that he hopes will prove equally seductive.<sup>18</sup> Fitzgerald releases James Gatz from his real identity, allowing him to become “a son of God,”

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<sup>17</sup> In “Vampires of the Heart,” Phillip Sipiora interprets the epigraph “as an ironic epilogue to the novel. D’Invelliers’ concise guide to seduction crystallizes, in a very specific way, the spirit of *Gatsby*, a novel that chronicles a forlorn wasteland, devoid of natural emotions and bereft of humanity” (216).

<sup>18</sup> For more on settings and imagery, see A. E. Elmore’s 1970 study on “Color and Cosmos in “The Great Gatsby.””

and by extension, the adopted son of a number of esteemed directors, artists who shape the character into newly embodied forms fit for audience consumption (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 98).

Fitzgerald complicates his narrative by depicting Nick and Gatsby, the two characters that tell the majority of the stories in *The Great Gatsby*, as unreliable.<sup>19</sup> Nick's biography of Gatsby is based entirely upon his own recollections of the summer's key events and conversations—and upon the wild stories he hears about *Gatsby*, both from other characters and from the titular character himself. This mode of narration introduces a degree of uncertainty about the novel's plot and characters, and partially accounts for the divergent portrayals of Gatsby that appear in the major adaptations. Nick's first-person retrospective introduces the possibility for bias and revision, enabling Nick to distort readers' reception of characters as he narrates the summer's events. Nick periodically reminds readers that we are, in fact, twice removed from key moments and characters that comprise his biography of Gatsby.<sup>20</sup>

Nick does more than merely talk about his extraordinary summer with a few friends after returning home from New York City, he writes a novel, one that is presumably financed by his family's money. Gatsby, as an interior director of action and a well-known raconteur, co-authors this narrative of his life, and because his invented past and personality are both constructs of his imagination, it is difficult for readers to distinguish fact from fabrication in the novel. Nick's control over the character development of his neighbor also interferes with an audience's ability

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<sup>19</sup> See Thomas E. Boyle's treatment of Wayne Booth's theory of "distance" in "Unreliable Narration in *The Great Gatsby*" (21).

<sup>20</sup> Charles Thomas Samuels evaluates the novel's point of view in "The Greatness of 'Gatsby.'" He evaluates Fitzgerald's point of view as a "great achievement," noting that with "the creation of Nick...Fitzgerald obtained more than objectivity and concentration of effect. Nick describes more than the experience which he witnesses; he describes the act and consequences of telling about it. The persona is—as critics have been seeing—a character, but he is more than that: he is a character engaged in a significant action. Nick is writing a book. He is recording Gatsby's experience; in the act of recording Gatsby's experience he discovers himself" (Samuels 784). Certain adaptations allow Nick to experience more personal growth than others.

to separate truth from fiction, thereby magnifying the mysterious stature of the figure. Dan Coleman argues:

Gatsby is only partially responsible for filling out his Platonic conception of himself. The well wrought creation of Nick's visionary longing, Gatsby is as much a man-made self as a self-made man. In order to become the "something gorgeous" the preface promises, Gatsby needs Nick to fill in the gaps and overlook the failures in his "unbroken series of gestures." For Gatsby to happen, Nick must write a greenhouse around his hero's delicate greatness and persuade both us and himself to believe in it. (223)<sup>21</sup>

Despite the reality of Gatsby's business affairs or the dubious credibility of his biography, Nick believes (in) him, and attempts to convince readers that we should, too. To do so, he presents Gatsby in a way that enables several profiles of him to coexist within the text, providing readers with a character that resists definition, and whose background emerges in stages.

The holographic nature of Fitzgerald's notorious protagonist accounts for the variety of conceptions of Jay Gatsby that unfold within *Gatsby* and its adaptations. While this phenomenon alone might not motivate a director to produce a version of *The Great Gatsby*, each depiction of the character ultimately defines a production by emphasizing certain aspects of Gatsby's personality at the expense of others. In the novel, Gatsby takes on a number of roles that are alternately privileged in the different films. The remainder of this Chapter outlines

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<sup>21</sup> Nick fills in "gaps" in Gatsby's biography in a way that is not dissimilar to Wolfgang Iser's readers, who must individually fill in "blanks" in the text in order to determine meaning. Nick's presentation of Gatsby becomes subjective as a result of this process of interpretation. In a chapter on "Reception Theory," Iser concludes, "Negation and blanks as basic constituents of communication are thus enabling structures that demand a process of determining which only the reader can implement. This gives rise to the subjective hue of the text's meaning. However, as the text does not have one specific meaning, what appears to be a deficiency is, in fact, the productive matrix, which enables the text to be meaningful in a variety of historically changing contexts" (*How to do Theory* 68).

Fitzgerald's portraits of Gatsby in preparation for the following four Chapters, which analyze the major adaptations' representations of the character.

### **James Gatz**

The great Jay Gatsby is, first and foremost, James Gatz, a poor boy from North Dakota who has rejected his past in order to secure a future with a woman who is out of his league. These alter-egos partially explain why the character is so fascinating on film, and why so many adaptations of the novel have thrived both critically and financially. Fitzgerald's disciplined structure gives way to much speculation about James Gatz, and Nick expresses a hint of disdain when he finally realizes the extent of Gatz' act:

James Gatz—that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career—when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior. It was James Gatz who had been loafing along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the *Tuolomee*, and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour. (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 98)

By the time the novel begins, Gatz has been acting the part of Gatsby for nearly half of his life, and so other characters' confusion over his real background, his personality, and occupation is understandable.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the suspicion that surrounds Gatsby's character only fuels his growing sense of grandeur, and he piques the interest of not only partygoers, but that of readers and filmgoers as well.

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Dan Piper acknowledges the impact Gatsby's act has upon characters and readers. He writes, "Gatsby, too, is a puppet figure. It is useless to demand that he approximate the reality of the other characters in the novel, since the question of his reality is the subject matter of the story" (Piper 22).



Gatsby provides Nick with an initial sketch of his background in his car, where he relates his biography with the skill of an actor who has memorized a scripted monologue, and chronicles his life from childhood through the present day in a rushed and rehearsed fashion. Here it becomes clear that Gatsby is attempting to control all of his scenes, and as a result of his manipulation of other characters, to control scenes wherein he is physically absent as well.<sup>23</sup> Reminiscent of the Vice character from medieval morality play, this particular role becomes even more obvious in the *Gatsby* adaptations. In this passage, Fitzgerald provides one of many opportunities for production teams to draw heavily upon his fast-paced dialogue and masterful incorporation of descriptions of non-verbal communication into the text. Nick narrates the scene in a descriptive scene suited for the screen, recalling details that supplement the dialogue itself, including the tone of Gatsby's voice, which "was solemn, as if the memory of that sudden extinction of a clan still haunted him" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 65). Nick also relates his skepticism by describing how Gatsby "looked at [him] sideways—and [Nick] knew why Jordan Baker had believed he was lying" about his past (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 65). Nick "suspected that he was pulling my leg, but a glance at him convinced me otherwise," and Fitzgerald emphasizes the importance of the non-verbal element in this conversation (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 65). Gatsby then introduces two props, a medal from Montenegro and a photo from Oxford, finally convincing Nick that "it was all true" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 67).<sup>24</sup> In the same conversation, a speeding Gatsby

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<sup>23</sup> In "Fiction as Greatness: The Case of Gatsby," Arnold Weinstein also sees Gatsby as a director, although he employs a philosophical lens by utilizing Aristotle's terminology instead of that of the morality play. I agree that Gatsby "is the prime mover in Fitzgerald's scheme, the "Son of God" who is a consummate fiction-maker, acting through the shape he gave to himself and to others" (Weinstein 38).

<sup>24</sup> Props are also featured in Fitzgerald's descriptions of Gatsby's meticulously decorated mansion. James Ellis reminds readers of the magnitude of "the performance of Jay Gatsby... who staged his production elaborately and well, going so far as to buy not only real books but also the right kind of real books" (471).

is confronted by a police officer on the road, but because he “was able to do the commissioner a favor once,” he receives an apology instead of a ticket (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 68). At lunch, Wolfsheim delivers his own prepared speech in a scenario that seems staged to confirm Gatsby’s prominence in New York City. The contiguous scenes suggest that Wolfsheim (and perhaps the officer, too) is merely an actor Gatsby has hired to participate in his great scheme, a strategic move that becomes more apparent in the film adaptations than in the novel.<sup>25</sup> Nick suspects Wolfsheim is an actor, but it is unclear whether he also presumes the character was acting at lunch.

Gatsby intimates that he is an orphaned heir, but because readers are eventually introduced to his ragged father, who arrives in person for his son’s funeral, his story cannot possibly be considered “God’s truth” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 65). When Mr. Gatz appears at the end of the novel, the new character dismantles Gatsby’s invented persona, and calls into question every story he shared with Nick. It is only after Gatsby’s death that Nick introduces readers to Jimmy Gatz (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 167). The notion of Gatsby as an orphan, however, constitutes an intriguing symbol in a novel that emphasizes Gatsby’s severance from his life as Gatz in favor of selfhood and self-invention.<sup>26</sup> Gatsby gains anonymity, liberates himself from the Gatz

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<sup>25</sup> A parallel impression troubles Nick after the Buchanans’ dinner party, at the beginning of the novel, although Gatsby is not in the scene. After dinner, Nick “[felt] uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me,” although he does little more than acknowledge the feeling, and move on (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 17). Nick does not draw a connection between the characters’ obvious performances, and in these scenes, the narrator comes across as a man who could be easily fooled, and whose interpretations of events might therefore be skewed.

<sup>26</sup> Weinstein thematically connects an intentional rejection of one’s impoverished past with the popular notion of the American Dream. He argues, “to be free from constraints of proof or evidence, to alter one’s identity, to be multiple rather than single, to overcome the laws of time and space and background: such are precisely the virtues of fiction, or the American Dream, and of Jay Gatsby” (Weinstein 27). In this sense, orphanhood symbolically constitutes part of the mythology of the American Dream.

lineage, and unscrupulously begins a life detached from his past—and in fact, detached from reality altogether.<sup>27</sup> During the war, Major Jay Gatsby defeats the essence of James Gatz, and when he returns home, the self-proclaimed orphan creates an opportunity to start his life anew.<sup>28</sup> Gatsby fails in his quest to become an orphan, however, and the failure exposes one of the major fault lines in the veneer of this character. As Daisy proclaims, Gatsby “want[s] too much!,” and part of this desire includes Daisy somehow erasing her marriage to Tom in the same way that Gatsby has attempted to delete his childhood as Gatz from his past (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 132). Gatz achieves fame and fortune as Gatsby, and for a brief period of time, he even secures Daisy’s affection—but hubris prevents Gatsby from being satisfied with his accomplishments, and instead of being content, he wants to recreate his past with Daisy, too. It really is too much.<sup>29</sup> Gatsby’s abandonment of his family proves one of his most damning actions, and by claiming to be an orphan, Gatsby tells his most shameful lie, one he cannot survive.

Nick employs a modified confessional tone when finally pondering how Gatsby could lie to his friends and lovers about his true identity yet deem the deliberate deception benign. Gatsby is not a man of unknown origins, and he is not the son of a wealthy but dead family; instead:

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<sup>27</sup> As Gatsby, Gatz’ possibilities for self-creation are endless. Peter Gregg Slater addresses the orphan motif by examining Nick’s suggestion of Gatsby being adopted: “Gatsby possesses no ethnicity of any sort, being a product of his own dreams and conceits” (56). Kermit Vanderbilt reads Gatsby’s Platonic conception of orphanhood differently, finding that “this idealized self-image enabled him to claim his native American heritage of self-fulfillment in this new Western world” (300).

<sup>28</sup> Magistrale and Dickerson also determine that a proclivity for starting over is connected to generational mobility and the American Dream; see “The Language of Time in “The Great Gatsby”” (120).

<sup>29</sup> John Peale Bishop offers a more sympathetic reading of the character: “Yet think, Fitzgerald seems to say to us, of how little Gatsby wanted at bottom—not to understand society, but to ape it; not to compel the world, but to live in it. His own dream of wealth meant nothing in itself; he merely wanted to buy back the happiness he had lost—Daisy, now the rich man’s wife—when he had gone away to war” (Bloom 9).

His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 97-98)

Unfortunately, Gatz dies within hours of admitting all of this to Nick, and it is as if he is unable to survive the revelations. Gatsby cannot mentally recover from the disclosure of his lineage and his real life as a poor boy, a yachtsman’s skipper, and above all else, a fraud. Nick turns out to be a poor choice for a confidant, however, because in the end, he outs Gatz, and sharing all of his most intimate secrets and lies in *The Great Gatsby*.

### **“Mr. Nobody from Nowhere”**

Gatz’ creation of an alter ego initiates a life that operates outside the realm of societal norms, and liberates him from the typically indestructible tethers of one’s family and name. Gatsby really is, as Tom terms it, “Mr. Nobody for Nowhere,” and although it is meant as an insult, Gatsby seems to be just fine with this label, and perhaps even fosters this reputation (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 130). For instance, Gatsby admits that he lost Daisy five years earlier because “however glorious might be his future as Jay Gatsby, he was at present a penniless young man without a past” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 149). Although he becomes immensely prosperous in the time that lapses, the character cannot honorably explain his wealth, and living as an impostor instead of embracing his reality troubles Gatsby for the remainder of his truncated life.

Many characters are plagued with curiosity about Gatsby's background: they wonder who he is, how he amassed such a fortune before the age of thirty, and why he throws such large and extravagant parties. This aura of intrigue propels much the novel forward and provides opportunities for filmmakers to raise the generalized suspicion that particularly affects his representations in the novel's many adaptations. Gatsby's name comes up long before he enters the action, at the Buchanans, when Jordan quickly explains that he is a popular Long Island host:

“You live in West Egg,” she remarked contemptuously, “I know somebody there.”

“I don't know a single—”

“You must know Gatsby.”

“Gatsby?” demanded Daisy. “What Gatsby?” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 11)

Jordan later admits that she did not even recognize him at first—that upon encountering him in New York, she “didn't realize it was the same man” as the officer she knew through Daisy in Louisville (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 75). The question remains the same throughout the novel, and Tom later wonders aloud, ““Who is this Gatsby?”” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 107). Indeed, in spite of the hundreds of guests that come to his mansion every week, Gatsby retains an astonishing degree of anonymity. Nick fails properly to identify the host at the first party, and Gatsby must awkwardly interrupt their first conversation to declare, ““I'm Gatsby”” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 48). Nick grows curious about Gatsby's identity at once, and he “[turns] immediately to Jordan” for answers:

“Who is he?” I demanded. “Do you know?”

“He's just a man named Gatsby.”

“Where is he from, I mean? And what does he do?”

“Now *you're* started on the subject, she answered with a wan smile.” (Fitzgerald

*Gatsby* 48)

A certain degree of interpersonal distance is required for Gatsby to maintain his act over the long term, and the mystery that surrounds him impacts his relationships with other characters; his questionable identity renders him a character that means different things to different people.<sup>30</sup> Wolfsheim reveals that Gatsby really is just a “nobody from nowhere” who had to be “raised...up out of nothing, right out of the gutter” following his discharge from the military (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 130; 171). Regardless, this statement also reminds readers that James Gatz did at least one honorable thing while shedding his identity: he enlisted in the military, and fought valiantly in the war.

### **Major Jay Gatsby**

Indeed, perhaps the most concrete profile of Gatsby that surfaces in this novel is that of a courageous veteran, an image that is confirmed in a number of ways and represents one of the character’s most favorable portraits. Gatsby’s warranted sense of honor and heroism is rooted in his role as Major Jay Gatsby, and by the time he arrives in Louisville, he has already abandoned his previous life as “James Gatz of North Dakota” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 97). Jordan and Daisy’s corroboration that Gatsby was in the war proves more credible than the medal he brings home, and this evidence of Gatsby’s status as a Major becomes the most convincing chapter in his personal history. Unlike other aspects of his biography, there is little doubt that Gatsby fought overseas, and while his bravery and his service to the country is not enough to sustain Daisy’s devotion, the military’s positive influence upon his disciplined character should not be overlooked. Jordan bolsters the image of Major Jay Gatsby by sharing memories about their

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<sup>30</sup> In *Reception Theory*, Robert C. Holub employs Wolfgang Iser’s notion of ideation when describing the conceptualizations of characters that readers develop in their imaginations (90-91). Ideation can become an obstacle for production teams adapt a literary text as omnipresent as *The Great Gatsby*.

time together in Louisville with Nick. Jordan verifies his military background by describing the disintegrating letter she saw on Daisy's wedding day, the one Gatsby sent her from overseas. Jordan recalls how she saw Daisy "sitting in [her car] with a lieutenant [she] had never seen before," a man called Gatsby who was stationed nearby (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 75). Jordan reinforces Gatsby's identity as a soldier and reaffirms his reputation as a man who has changed significantly in a short period of time, something the films capitalize on in their portrayals of the titular character.

In addition to providing a respectable occupation for Gatsby, the military is an attractive option for him because he is actively seeking out a lifestyle that is dependent upon the deliberate depersonalization of his own identity. Gatsby dons "the invisible cloak of his uniform" to mask his poverty, and perhaps more importantly, to gain entrance into the higher rungs of society, and in turn, into the life of a socialite like Daisy (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 149). Wolfsheim also describes Gatsby as a veteran concealing his pre-war identity: "'A young major just out of the army and covered over with medals he got in the war. He was so hard up he had to keep on wearing his uniform because he couldn't buy some regular clothes,'" let alone afford to marry a girl like Daisy (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 170-171). Since fabrications comprise the bulk of Gatsby's autobiography, his role as a soldier constitutes a significant and verifiable chapter of his past, and this profile becomes the foundation for the personality he invents after the war.

### **The Romantic**

The third profile of Gatsby to emerge in *The Great Gatsby* is that of the devoted lover and eternal optimist, a romantic whose undying love for Daisy compels his every action. This image of a sentimental Gatsby dominates his role in the novel and the films, as his performance in them is designed solely to impress the object of his affection. Fitzgerald builds an aura of

pathetic nostalgia around his protagonist, and Nick's impressions of Gatsby proffer audiences a sentiment of his irrationally romantic disposition.<sup>31</sup> Gatsby's obsession seems fixated upon superficial qualities that have little to do with Daisy herself, and Nick recounts how, on the surface, "he found her excitingly desirable...It excited him too that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 155-156). Gatsby, however, fails to recognize that he too is one of the "many men" who had once "loved Daisy," and unfortunately, he suffers grave consequences as a result of this miscalculation. Because he is so focused on his own performance, Gatsby does not pay attention to Daisy's own words and actions. Had Gatsby detected Daisy's passive indecisiveness earlier, or at least noticed her inescapable attachment to the well-bred Tom and their peerless lifestyle, he might have not agreed to accept responsibility for Myrtle's death in a romantic gesture that proves both futile and fatal.

Gatsby clearly misunderstands Daisy because he believes their relationship will survive the admittedly large obstacles of the Buchanans' marriage and child and Myrtle's death. Nick and Gatsby's final conversation highlights Gatsby's most damning vulnerability, his extraordinary belief that in spite of his reality, his dreams can come true. The most prominent symptom of this syndrome is his belief that he can "repeat the past" and "fix everything just the way it was before" the war (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 109-110). Nick notices Gatsby's "appalling sentimentality" when confronted by the absence of emotion in the novel's other characters, and the presence of desire becomes one of Gatsby's more marked attributes in each adaptation of the

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<sup>31</sup> As John Kuehl explains, "Gatsby inspires "romantic speculation" in the reader as he does among the people who surround him; neither they nor we ever learn so much about him that this "sense of mystery" vanishes" (Bloom 15).



novel as well (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 11). Daisy can, in fact, be bought, but unfortunately, she prefers old money over suspicious fortunes, and Gatsby cannot compete with Tom in this regard.

### **Trimalchio**

Gatsby's role as an ostentatious entertainer outshines his other parts in *The Great Gatsby* because so many characters know Gatsby because of his infamous "career as Trimalchio," an imitation of Petronius' extravagant host (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 113).<sup>32</sup> Even after Nick is introduced to Gatsby, he refers to him impersonally as "the host": "A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 55). When Jordan explains, "Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay," Nick begins to comprehend the significance of the host's magnificent set. The narrator realizes that "it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 78). When Nick leaves Gatsby's mansion for the last time, he "thanked him for his hospitality. We were always thanking him for that—I and the others" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 154). Because very few people respect him, Gatsby's generous performance as Trimalchio yields very little in return—although it does manage to make him a local celebrity, and therefore impress his beloved Daisy,

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Way elaborates on Gatsby's role as Trimalchio in his chapter in *Bloom's Major Literary Characters: Jay Gatsby*. Way explains, "Trimalchio's banquet, the longest episode in the *Satyricon* of Petronius, is one of the great comic scenes of classical literature, and has certain obvious resemblances with Gatsby's parties" (58). For more on the similarities between the characters, see Way 58-59. Nevertheless, W. M. Frohock indicates that Gatsby's connection to Petronius' Trimalchio is limited: "Trimalchio shares with Jay Gatsby the condition of having more money than taste and the faith that enough lavish display will make him admired. But right here the comparison ends" (Bloom 21).

which is, of course, his main goal.<sup>33</sup> Gatsby's mansion continues to draw guests posthumously, revealing that many people knew him only as an impersonal host, and not as an individual.

When Nick's crowd realizes that the party *is* over—that the host is dead, and that it is partially their fault—the group naturally disbands. Nick flees the chaos goes home in hopes of reinstating his former dignity in a way that Gatsby, with his poor family and unrespectable past, would never be able to do.

### **“A Common Swindler”**

Not all representations of Gatsby are as honorable as that of the war veteran or as intriguing as that of the host, however, and the most unflattering profile of Gatsby that emerges in *The Great Gatsby* is that of “a common swindler,” a criminal who has gone to great lengths to amass his fortune, and who will do anything to garner Daisy's attention (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 133). Gatsby's overt displays of wealth are impossible to ignore, and without a dignified career or a large inheritance, Gatsby cannot account for his money, and his unlawful underpinnings heavily color his reputation as a result. Several characters choose to focus entirely upon his corruption, distilling fragments of gossip about his illegal activities into competing interpretations of Gatsby's criminal involvement. Time and time again, Gatsby's overindulgence generates two important questions: how did he acquire such a fortune before the age of thirty, and why is he spending so much of it on strangers? Few answers are suitable for Daisy and other residents of East Egg, and although Gatsby's earlier jobs are not exactly prestigious, his professional endeavors since the war are downright suspicious.

Gatsby's path to criminality also demonstrates his proclivity for using short cuts to attain his goals and support his ambitions. He performed a number of odd jobs before becoming

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<sup>33</sup> George Monteiro explains the significance of this mistake when discussing Gatsby as a failure in “Carraway's Complaint” (see 168).

involved with Wolfsheim, and his professional experience reveals that his difficult upbringing could not be more different from that of socialites like the Buchanans.<sup>34</sup> The earliest record of his unemployment reveals his lowly stature as James Gatz, who “for over a year he had been beating his way along the south shore of Lake Superior as a clam-digger and a salmon-fisher or in any other capacity that brought him food and bed” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 98). However, a young Gatz was not content with such a meager lifestyle, and “an instinct toward his future glory had led him, some months before, to the small Lutheran college of St. Olaf in southern Minnesota. He stayed there two weeks, dismayed at its ferocious indifference to the drums of his destiny, to destiny itself, and despising the janitor’s work with which he was to pay his way through” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 99). Gatsby’s brief collegiate attempt is not included in the 1949, 1974, or 2013 film adaptations, and the detail is often underappreciated in discussions of the character. The failed scholastic endeavor demonstrates that, even as a teenager, Gatsby did not always want to accomplish his lofty goals the regular or honorable way. Instead, Gatsby quits work and begins an influential apprenticeship on the seas with Dan Cody, and was “employed in a vague personal capacity—while he remained with Cody he was in turn steward, mate, skipper, secretary, and even jailor...He was left with his singularly appropriate education; the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man” who was ready to make money fast, and then emulate the behavior of the upper class (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 100). Gatsby finally admits, “I was in the drug business and then I was in the oil business. But I’m not in either one now,” but he never offers any substantive details about his current employment

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<sup>34</sup> Maxwell Geismar observes, “Gatsby is also a new *social* character—one who has no proper education and not the slightest pretense to breeding, who never grew up in Geneva and never went to Yale” (Bloom 12).

(Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 90). Characters wonder about Gatsby's profession and his past, and their suspicions tend to hinge on the criminal element of Gatsby's persona.

The rumors that circulate about Gatsby contribute to characters' confusion and confliction about the character, and although the majority of the rumors appear to be false, the fact that they could be believable only heightens Gatsby's mysterious nature. He remains largely unknown to his guests, whose stories render him unsavory, and rumors about Gatsby's violent past pepper the flow of conversations at his events; depending on the adaptation, these rumors solicit a measure of fear among his guests. To avoid facing the reality of Gatsby's involvement with the underworld, Daisy simply chooses to believe he owns drug stores, although as Tom reminds her, "you can buy anything at a drug-store nowadays" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 121; 70). In fact, Tom's exposure of Gatsby's business affairs ultimately ends Gatsby's romantic affair with Daisy. In this scene, Daisy finally comprehends that if she leaves Tom for Gatsby, she will be abandoning an honorable and enviable (albeit unhappy) life to become a divorcée, and then, potentially, the wife of a fraudulent criminal. This scene also interrogates Daisy's motives for her affair, calling into question whether she would have even been interested in getting involved with Gatsby had Tom not been unfaithful to her. In the end, even if Tom's accusations are inaccurate, they are troublesome enough to convince Daisy that Gatsby is an unsuitable long-term candidate for a romantic partner.

The rumors become a major part of Nick's narrative, and in the adaptations, they supplement the overwhelming curiosity about Gatsby that drives the plot forward. Although Nick writes Gatsby's biography "with the idea of exploding those first wild rumors about his antecedents, which weren't even faintly true," the narrator also admits that he had once "reached the point of believing everything and nothing about" Gatsby, a state of mind that could influence

his presentation of the character in *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 101). Tales about Gatsby's nefarious background abound, and because they feed into the mystery that surrounds him, Gatsby does little to correct them or make himself seem more upright. He is accused of having killed someone, but ironically, is murdered in retribution for a homicide he did not commit (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 44; 61; 131). Gatsby is, in turn, deemed "the underground pipeline to Canada;" "just short of being news;" "a nephew or cousin of Kasier Wilhelm;" a "sinister" and "despicable" man; a home wrecker; and a scapegoat (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 97; 97; 32-33; 65; 142-143; 129; 156). Other characters call Gatsby "a crazy fish" who "got what he deserved;" "a cheap sharper" who "doesn't want trouble with *anybody*;" an impoverished man who "takes Daisy" without presenting himself in good faith; and finally, just "a God damned coward" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 103; 169; 152; 133; 43; 143). Most of these rumors are told by guests inside Gatsby's own mansion or on his lawns, guests who are clearly not above associating with a supposed criminal who is, in reality, affiliated with enough illegal deeds to warrant a measure of suspicion.

### **The Bully**

A dictatorial facet of Gatsby's personality also surfaces early in the book, rendering him a bully of sorts who dominates his staff, and attempts to control the other characters as well. Gatsby also orders around his boarder, the capable pianist and nomadic loafer who is spending much of the summer at the mansion. The host treats Klipspringer like another one of his servants, and after awaking the reluctant musician from a nap, Gatsby makes a firm demand: "'Don't talk so much, old sport,'" commanded Gatsby. "Play!"' (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 94-95). Gatsby is just as ruthless as the master of his many domestic servants, and one day, he fires all of them because he "wanted somebody who wouldn't gossip;" he promptly replaces them with

“some people Wolfsheim wanted to do something for,” presumably people he can mold into subservience before Daisy’s eyes (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 114). In what proves to be an ineffective effort to secure a more prominent position in Daisy’s life, Gatsby even attempts to exercise a degree of control over her. At one of his parties, he commands Daisy to “look around...you must see the faces of people you’ve heard about,” and later, at the Plaza, he demands that she “tell [Tom] the truth—that [she] never loved him—and it’s all wiped out forever” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 104; 132). James Gatz tries to regulate his surroundings too tightly, and his performance as Gatsby is compromised as he grows more overbearing. Gatsby’s authoritarian personality can be traced to a young James Gatz, who reportedly bullied his own father as a child. Mr. Gatz explains, “Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he’s got about improving his mind? He was always great for that. He told me I et like a hog once, and I beat him for it” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 173). This final story about filial denigration and violence is meaningful, especially because Mr. Gatz is ultimately proud of his son, regardless of whether the ends justify the means.<sup>35</sup>

### **“All Right in the End”**

In spite of his negative attributes, Gatsby alone earns Nick’s friendship, in part because he is excluded from the vacuous social circle led by characters such as the Buchanans. Our

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, it could be argued that Gatsby, as a construct, loosely subscribes to several of Machiavelli’s guidelines in *The Prince*, wherein rulers are advised to sometimes operate outside the norms of morality in order to achieve their goals for the state. Gatsby’s goals, however, are self-serving, and few would deem Daisy a worthy enough end to account for his immoral and illegal means. Amid his strategizing, Machiavelli explains, “the wish to acquire is no doubt a natural and common sentiment, and when men attempt things within their power, they will always be praised rather than blamed. But when they persist in attempts that are beyond their power, mishaps and blame ensue” (7). Like the ideal Prince, Gatsby chooses war over pleasure (Machiavelli 37) and would rather appear good than be good (Machiavelli 40; 46); in general, Gatsby “doesn’t want trouble with *anybody*” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 43). However, Gatsby falters, never realizing that “there is no quality so self-destructive as liberality” (Machiavelli 42).

narrator determines that “Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 2). In the aftermath of the summer’s events, it is clear that this observation is a relative assessment and not an objective compliment. Nevertheless, Nick diverts attention away from his neighbor’s misdeeds, instead placing blame upon the company they kept on the Eggs. The narrator ultimately excuses Gatsby’s flaws as symptomatic of his unnatural initiation into the upper echelons of society, transgressions that stem from his ill-fated performance as the alter ego of James Gatz. A proud Mr. Gatz convinces Nick that Gatsby was, at the very least, a generous and self-made man. Mr. Gatz’ anecdotes about his son’s childhood provide evidence of Gatsby’s true background, providing proof of his determination to succeed, and relating biographical details that predate any of Gatsby’s stories or lies.<sup>36</sup> Nick does not hesitate to tell Mr. Gatz that the neighbors “were close friends,” but it is with a measure of guilt that Nick reluctantly plans the man’s funeral, eagerly moves back home, and eventually pens *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 176).

Fitzgerald presents readers with a multitude of Gatsbys within this slim novel, and directors have seized upon this dimension of the novel when adapting *The Great Gatsby* for stage or screen. The ambiguous character is ripe for interpretation, and although there is plenty to dislike about Gatsby, he remains a largely sympathetic character whose blind devotion to Daisy deprives him from enjoying his own reality. Directors of *Gatsby* adaptations envision the elusive titular character according to their own interpretation of Nick’s biography, and each

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Brauer addresses the novel’s nearly Machiavellian allusion to James J. Hill at the end of the novel in “Jay Gatsby and the Prohibition Gangster as Businessman,” where he argues: “Fitzgerald’s use of Hill does not merely serve as a suggestion of the greatness that Gatsby might have achieved; it is part of a larger rhetoric of self-making that is very much at the heart of the novel, a Machiavellian rhetoric that suggests that the means to success do not matter so much as the results” (52; see also 55).

representation of Gatsby explores the complex character by emphasizing certain traits and roles over others. Fitzgerald sets the stage for a series of *Gatsby* adaptations by creating a captivating protagonist who is operating under a false identity and acting out a fatal fantasy while pursuing his beloved. The following Chapters explore the ways in which production teams have approached *The Great Gatsby* in the ninety years since its publication, and examine the distinct yet recognizable portraits of the character that have emerged over time.



## CHAPTER TWO – The 1920s Adaptations

It is a redoubtable task to discuss two adaptations of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* that are unrecoverable, yet Owen Davis' 1926 play and Herbert Brenon's 1926 lost silent film are relevant to the performance history of the novel because they signify the early popularity of Jay Gatsby, a prominent and adaptable character whose presence in American society looms larger than his literary footprint. These productions establish Gatsby as a character who can command the attention of an audience, and confirm Fitzgerald's status as a serious Jazz Age novelist whose influence over contemporaneous popular culture cannot be underestimated. Owen Davis' 1926 play and Herbert Brenon's 1926 silent film contribute to the development of a character whose influence in American culture is undeniable. Since the 1926 productions directly followed the publication of Fitzgerald's 1925 novel, they signal the book's immediate capacity to captivate an audience's attention, and indicate the instant popularity of the intriguing figure. In this Chapter, I recover traces of these two representations of Gatsby to deduce how these adaptations interpreted the character in the year following his introduction to the world via Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In 1974, Irene Kahn Atkins defends her decision to exclude the 1926 dramatization and film from her pro-fidelity quest to find "The Greatest Gatsby": "It is my intent to deal with two sound film versions of *The Great Gatsby*, not with the play or the silent film. The adaptation of a novel by Fitzgerald into the silent film medium, thus reducing dialogue and evocative word-patterns to title cards, is, I believe, a self-defeating kind of film-making. When reading *Gatsby*, one can *hear* the inflections and the rhythms. There is time for a synthesis of the sounds of church bells and taxis, of the pitch and timbre of voices. When viewing a silent film and reading a title card, the filmgoer is afforded no time for such luxuries" (217). Atkins does not recognize the important role both of these early productions play in the adaptation history of *The Great Gatsby*, and by avoiding any discussion of the 1926 dramatization or silent film, she deprives her

Fitzgerald's correspondence from the period reveals that he hoped a Hollywood adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* might supplement the underwhelming sales of his novel, but the 1926 adaptations were not very profitable, and sadly, he would not live long enough to capitalize upon the box office success of subsequent adaptations.<sup>38</sup> The 1926 Owen Davis play, which largely provided the foundation for the 1926 Herbert Brenon film, impacted the author more financially than artistically.<sup>39</sup> The disappointing financial outcome of the 1926 film adaptation launched Fitzgerald's long but largely unsuccessful relationship with Hollywood. Hook explains:

The other potential source of income from *Gatsby* was of course the film industry. From the beginning Fitzgerald had high hopes of what the movie rights might bring—and a figure as high as \$70,000 did at one point seem possible. Fitzgerald's optimistic thinking is suggested by his mentioning to Ober that Erich von Stroheim would be an ideal director for the film, but in the end the rights were sold to Famous Players, who made a silent movie version without Fitzgerald's involvement, for around \$50,000; but after the

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audience of the chance to consider the influence these adaptations had upon the developing reputation of its titular character.

<sup>38</sup> Winston Wheeler Dixon agrees with *Motion Picture News*' view that sex sells: "Paramount was clearly hoping for a significant box office return above all other considerations, and as might be expected, played up the party scenes at Gatsby's mansion for all their scandalous potential" (288). Indeed, since the trailer emphasizes the party lifestyle of the Jazz Age, alcohol and Prohibition are obviously a controversial component of the movie. Later adaptations are not subject to such criticism because Prohibition and bootlegging are no longer real concerns for filmgoers.

<sup>39</sup> Owen Davis' 1926 Broadway script functioned as a supplementary source for the adaptation. For an interesting overview of "Adaptations of Plays," see Boggs's *The Art of Watching Films* (pages 365-374). Boggs explains, "the similarity between the film adaptation of a play and the play itself is likely to be greater than the similarity between the film adaptation of a novel and the novel itself" (365).

various agents and agencies involved got their share, Fitzgerald's payment was only \$13,500.<sup>40</sup> (77)

This is a relatively small sum, especially when compared with what motion picture moguls and actors have since reaped, especially from the 1949, 1974, and 2013 Hollywood productions.<sup>41</sup> Fitzgerald briefly mentioned the two ongoing *Gatsby* adaptations in a 1926 personal letter to Ludlow Fowler:

There's no news from us. Zelda had her appendix out in June at the American hospital in Paris and for the first time in a year and a half is really well. We sold the movie of *Gatsby* for \$50,000 (sic) of which I got a third. We have rather a nice place here on the Riviera (sic) between Antibes + Cannes and half the Americans I know have been or are hereabouts this summer—Gerald Murphys, Archie McIishes, Marice Hamilton, Deering Davis, the Wymans, Grace Moore, Ruth Goldbeck, Anita Loos, John Emerson, Hemmingway (sic), Picasso, Mistinguet, Ben Finney, Don Stuart, the Debt Commission + so many others I can't enumerate. I've been slowed up in my work with parties but I'm getting along at last. *Gatsby* reopens in Chicago this winter..." (Bodeen 199-200)

Fitzgerald devotes more space to a discussion of his friends than he does to both 1926 adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*, jumbling these remarkable professional feats among mundane personal news. The *Gatsby* productions seem to be of little critical importance to Fitzgerald, at least in a letter such as this one.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the 1926 *Gatsby* adaptations helped sear the

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Severo notes, "Fitzgerald made no more than \$60,000 in total from the book, his share of the play, and his share of the movie proceeds" (36).

<sup>41</sup> Unlike later adaptations, in 1926, "the stage and screen versions of *Gatsby* did nothing to help the sales of the book," and by the time they were produced, "*Gatsby* was commercially dead" (Tredell 32).

<sup>42</sup> The author's impressive list of acquaintances echoes Nick's disinterested list of *Gatsby*'s guests—a list that goes on for pages in Chapter IV of *The Great Gatsby*: "From West Egg came

character into the consciousness of American popular culture, and established the novel as an attractive candidate for adaptation to this day.

### **Owen Davis' 1926 Broadway Play**

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was published on April 10, 1925, and just three and a half months later, the *New York Times* announced that "a dramatization of Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," by Owen Davis," was "proposed" for the "next season" ("Next Season's Proposed Plays"). Davis was a talented and established playwright who had recently won the 1923 Pulitzer Prize for his adaptation of *Icebound*, and his adaptation took Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* straight to Broadway. Davis candidly discusses the process of adapting *The Great Gatsby* in "Making a Play from a Novel," wherein the playwright admits, "it is, for me at any rate, more difficult to make a play from some other person's novel than it is to build one out of my own fancy, and instead of being a never-failing adventure, it is simply a weary grind of the two or three hundred hours necessary for the job" (Davis X4). Davis describes how he ensures his "mind is a blank" at night, and then "[wakes] up in the morning with a dim picture kicking around in my mind—it doesn't mean anything—a girl, perhaps, or an old barn, a farm landscape, or a handsome library. Then other pictures begin clicking in around it and sentences form, and slowly a story develops" (Davis X4). One of only three sets featured in Davis' play is Gatsby's "handsome library," a set that symbolically represents a place of imaginative exploration and

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the Poles and the Mulreadys and Cecil Roebuck and Cecil Schoen and Gulick the State senator and New Orchid, who controlled Films Par Excellence, and Eckhaust and Clyde Cohen and Don S. Schwartze (the son and Arthur McCarty, all connected with the movies in one way or another" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 62). Fitzgerald creates fictitious characters that are somehow affiliated with the film industry, revealing an early appreciation for the stars of Hollywood. References to the cinema also confer a degree of respect unto the novel's adaptations, which invite Gatsby to brush shoulders with the industry once again.

introspective self-discovery (Playbill). In the interview, Davis goes on to discuss the personal relationship he developed with the source material during the adaptation process:

Here is a story. If it's a bad story I grow furious as I study it, furious with myself for having agreed to work on it. If it is a good story I grow furious with the man who wrote it, because, of course, I should have written it myself. When I was at work on "The Great Gatsby" I hated Fitzgerald with a deadly hatred. I couldn't for the life of me see why this boy, half my age, should be able to write a better yarn than I could possibly write. At last I made up my mind to get even with him by spoiling his story, but in spite of the fact that I am quite a good "spoiler" when I get started, the thing insisted on coming out all right. It really would take a very clever man to make a bad play out of "The Great Gatsby."

(Davis X4)

In April 1934, John Chamberlain acknowledged a similar envy of Fitzgerald as a writer, describing himself "as one who would have rather written "The Great Gatsby" than any other American novel published in the Twenties" (17). Widespread admiration of the novel has, in fact, inspired a number of esteemed directors to transform *The Great Gatsby* into various adaptations since 1926 with varying degrees of success.<sup>43</sup>

Fitzgerald's own reaction to Brenon's play surfaces briefly in his letters from the period, and while the author expresses a financial interest in the production, he does not seem particularly concerned with the stage adaptation itself. In a May 1926 letter to his literary agent

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<sup>43</sup> In "The Written Scene: Writers as Figures of Cinematic Redemption," Paul Arthur poignantly observes, "on the surface, it is hard to imagine an activity less given to cinematic representation than a writer's struggle to transform observations or ideas into a finished manuscript," as Nick does in *The Great Gatsby* (Stam 331). Arthur continues: "Writing is mostly solitary, static labor performed in dull locations over excruciating stretches of time; its dramas, such as they are, tend to be internal matters of confusion, frustration, and the pressures of the unconscious" (Stam 331). The narrative structure and the novel's first-person point of view provide challenges for production teams, but as these adaptations demonstrate, they are not insurmountable.

and friend, Harold Ober, Fitzgerald directly acknowledged the stage adaptation, albeit primarily in economic terms: “Well, it’s rather melancholy to hear that the run was over. However as it was something of a *succès d’estime* and put in my pocket seventeen or eighteen thousand without a stroke of work on my part I should be, and am, well content” (Turnbull 392). The Fitzgeralds benefitted financially from the play’s success, but “because [they] were in Europe all the time that they play was on the boards, they never saw it” (Hook 76; Phillips 109).<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the productions generated quite a buzz within Fitzgerald’s social circle. Ring Lardner, a famous humorist and close friend of the Fitzgeralds, sent them an informal review of the performance in a February 23, 1926 letter.<sup>45</sup> Lardner updated Fitzgerald on his recent travels before mentioning, parenthetically, that he had just seen *The Great Gatsby* on Broadway:

On the tenth of February, if you are still interested, we set out for New Orleans, stopping fifteen minutes in Montgomery, where we shed a tear. (But I almost forgot to say that while in New York, Ellis and I saw “The Great Gatsby.” It was a matine (sic) on a day of the worst weather ever seen in the city or anywhere else; yet the house was over three-quarters full. The blizzard was so bad that all the schools were closed and the commuters had a terrible time getting to New York at all. The man who plays Buchanan lives on Long Island and arrived during Act 2. But we thought the show was great and that Rennie was just about perfect. I regretted that they left out the drunken apartment scene, but I presume Davis figured that one party scene was enough. Every now and then

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<sup>44</sup> Arthur Mizener explains: “The sales of “Gatsby” [did not] suggest any general recognition of its nature; by October, when the original sale had run its course, it was still short of 20,000. In 1926 Owen Davis’ dramatic version had a successful run in New York, and in the same year Paramount issued a sentimentalized movie. Both brought Fitzgerald money that he needed, but they did not bring him what he needed more, the kind of recognition that would make real for him the serious novelist he dreamed of becoming” (46).

<sup>45</sup> Riley V. Hampton locates traces of Lardner in a character from *Gatsby*: ““Owl Eyes” is a nickname at one time applied to Ring Lardner” (“Owl Eyes in *The Great Gatsby*” 229).

one of Scott's lines would pop out and hit you in the face and make you wish he had done the dramatization himself. (Brucoli *Correspondence* 188-189)

Lardner's treatment of the play conferred a sincere compliment upon his friend Fitzgerald, whose 1925 creation bears his signature no matter its medium.<sup>46</sup> Ernest Hemingway also mentioned the Broadway *Gatsby* play in a March 1926 letter to Louis and Mary Bromfield. He wrote, "Gatsby [play] done by Owen Davis pretty darn close to the book—is a hit. I had to pay to get in. Would have paid to get out a couple of times but on the whole it is a good play. Understand it's been turned down by the movies as immoral" (Hemingway 196). Fitzgerald reflected on this adaptation of *Gatsby*<sup>47</sup> (in another parenthetical comment) in a 1936 letter to Maxwell Perkins, and when discussing possibilities for someone "to do an efficient dramatization" for a potential cinematic adaptation of *Tender is the Night*, Fitzgerald reminisced about Davis' version of *Gatsby*, but rejected any notion of doing the work himself: "(I know I would not like the job and I know that Davis who had every reason to undertake it after the success of *Gatsby* simply turned thumbs down from his dramatist's instinct that the story was not constructed as dramatically as *Gatsby* and did not readily lend itself to dramatization)" (Turnbull 268). Fitzgerald was clearly considering the art of adaptation, and he obviously deemed it one way to potentially earn more money for his writing.

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<sup>46</sup> In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon explains, "stage audiences...are an active dimension of the meaning-making of any play, not only in their interpretive work but also in their physical and emotional responses at the time of viewing. Stage conventions distance audiences, even as the live presence of actors on stage makes for more intense identifications" (134). Hutcheon grounds this analysis in the work of "Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Michael Riffaterre" (134).

<sup>47</sup> Gene D. Phillips writes: "Fitzgerald's own specific comment on the artistic merits of the dramatization was that the script 'read pretty badly'...Max Perkins wrote Fitzgerald that in his judgment the novel's plot had been adhered to as closely as one could expect, given the physical limitations of the stage" (109).

The 1926 *Gatsby* Broadway show garnered a significant amount of public and critical attention, and since it opened only one year after the novel's publication, it benefitted from its reputation and Fitzgerald's fame. George Cukor, who went on to win the 1964 Oscar for *My Fair Lady*, directed two established actors for the stage performance: Canadian James Rennie as Jay Gatsby and Florence Eldridge as Daisy.<sup>48</sup> *The Great Gatsby* opened on February 2, 1926, and after a 112 show run at the Ambassador Theatre in New York City, moved on to Chicago (Margolies 187). A short piece in the "Amusements" section of the *New York Times* predicted that the play would be one of the leading productions of the season ("Brady to Produce Six New Plays"). An October 10, 1926 *New York Times* advertisement for *The Great Gatsby* describes the play as a "thrilling drama of love, passion, and romance," a blurb that would appropriately summarize Fitzgerald's novel as well (Display Ad 113).

Relics from the production identify the play's key characteristics and sets, and more importantly, outline Davis' script and hint at his representation of Gatsby, a man whose boundless love for Daisy Buchanan is grounded in their courtship in Louisville. The Broadway Playbill reveals more about the show's plot via a "Synopsis of Scenes," a feature that defines the play's structure and briefs audience members on the content of each act. The play's Prologue is set on Daisy "Fay's Porch In Louisville, Kentucky" in "1917," and presumably provides details about the foundation of Gatsby and Daisy's romance and the premise for their later affair. (*PlaybillVault.com*). This setting is outside the parameters of the novel, but a Prologue set in

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<sup>48</sup> Fitzgerald and Cukor would cross paths again, this time in Hollywood, when Cukor was directing *The Women*, which Fitzgerald worked on briefly. In *George Cukor*, Gene D. Phillips writes, "little of the material that Scott Fitzgerald devised for the screenplay found its way into the final shooting script, but Cukor retained a personal admiration for the writer that dated back to his directing the stage version of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in 1926" (103). Phillips also recounts a later encounter between the men wherein the pair went out to lunch shortly before Fitzgerald's death. Cukor said the two "had nothing to talk about...Fitzgerald looked grim and ate in silence" (Phillips 103-104).



Daisy's hometown provides a logical alternative to awkward flashbacks or extended exposition in this stage dramatization. Act I takes place at "Nick Carraway's cottage, West Egg, Long Island" in "August, 1925," which is a few months *after* the novel's publication date, and is therefore a particularly contemporary play for theatergoers. The change also dictates that the gap between Gatsby and Daisy's break-up and their teatime reunion at Nick's house surpasses the five years denoted in the novel itself (*PlaybillVault.com*). Act II occurs in "Gatsby's library, West Egg, Long Island. One week later;" the set of Act III is described as "the same. About 10 days later" (*PlaybillVault.com*). The plot and structure of the play obviously differ from that of the book, and the Louisville setting indicates that Daisy and Gatsby's backstory might occupy more space in the play than the novel. This maneuver might validate the couple's relationship by emphasizing its length and focusing on how Daisy and Gatsby's love was real yet impossible. The strategy could also garner Gatsby the sympathy of viewers, who are perhaps more inclined to support him in his romantic quest after having seen their affection grow in Louisville.

The 1920s reviews of the play provide clues about the first incarnation of Jay Gatsby, and establish him as an interesting character to portray in adaptations.<sup>49</sup> J. Brooks Atkinson suggests that while many of the play's characters are careless, Gatsby is not. He responds favorably to the performance, especially in comparison with similar literary adaptations from the period (Atkinson 22). Atkinson concludes:

Of the several attempts to portray on the stage these restless moderns, whose cynicisms and infidelities keep the calamity-howlers hoarse, none has been more able or moving than "The Great Gatsby," mounted last evening at the Ambassador...As a novel from the facile pen of F. Scott Fitzgerald it found immediate favor last season; the dramatic

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<sup>49</sup> In *Fiction, Film, and F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Gene D. Phillips argues, "there is no doubt that the success of the Davis play sparked special interest in *Gatsby* as a promising film property" (109).

version by Owen Davis retains most of the novel's peculiar glamour. Both the novel and play subordinate the meretricious cleverness inherent in this material to the task of telling a story and keeping the characters in true focus. In spite of certain rough edgings in the play composition, awkwardness in the exposition, looseness in some of the scenes, "The Great Gatsby" provides something more substantial than an evening's entertainment. (22)

James Rennie's *Gatsby* is significant to this study because it is the first dramatic interpretation of the character, and Atkinson's review details why the earliest adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* might have succeeded. Atkinson's analysis reveals his appreciation of the separate art forms that are the novel and the stage, arguing, "if the play loses some of the perfect nuances of the novel's comedy and character that cannot be translated in terms of the theatre, that are essential properties of literary style, it gains distinctly in criticism of the material" (22). Atkinson also highlights how class differences become obvious in the production: "By use of people in the flesh, speaking and acting, the play accents the telling contrasts between Gatsby, the romantic swindler, positive and honorable according to his precedents, and the Buchanans and Bakers and people who have a high sense of honor and cheat it continually" (Atkinson 22). This depiction promotes Gatsby to a higher position than the other characters in Davis' play, and renders him sympathetic before a live audience. Here Gatsby is seen more favorably—not as a saint, of course—but as a savior of sorts who tries to rescue a sympathetic Daisy from a decaying marriage. Atkinson explains:

Driven to desperate extremes by the blatancy of her husband's amours, Daisy flies to Gatsby as the one way out. But since his affection is more substantial than any familiar in her society, he is not content with the easy compromise she suggests. In fact, his

idealism places her in a tremendously exalted position. In the final act, she is on the point of leaving her husband for good, has, in fact, made her choice deliberately between the two, when Buchanan exposes Gatsby as a bootlegger, a forger and criminal in general. (22)

It is interesting to interpret Gatsby as “the one way out” for Daisy, which implies that she needs to escape her life with Tom, and emphasizes the heroic tendency in Gatsby’s composition.<sup>50</sup>

Although the illicit element of Gatsby’s character seems to outweigh the charm or wealth that might otherwise attract Daisy, the portrayal situates Gatsby in a more upright position than Tom, who is engaging in yet another extramarital affair, and who has shown very little concern for his wife throughout their marriage. In this stage adaptation, it seems as though Daisy might have left Tom “for good” had he not ultimately exposed that Gatsby has acquired his wealth through illegal endeavors. Gatsby is portrayed as a character whose curious behavior may render him more endearing to audience members, but unfortunately, not to the object of his affection.

Nevertheless, Atkinson includes a direct quote from the play that echoes Fitzgerald’s prose:

““[Gatsby] was the best of the lot,” says one of those present as the epitaph” (22). The inclusion of this modified phrase is significant because it elevates Gatsby’s status above that of the other characters, potentially influencing the way audiences might receive the protagonist in this adaptation.

Gatsby is a self-made man whose redemptive qualities transcend his base desire to be rich enough to seduce Daisy, his beloved, into leaving her husband—and in Davis’ play, Gatsby’s quest for wealth and his beloved reinforces this essential part of the plot:

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<sup>50</sup> It is important to keep Daisy’s character in mind when evaluating Gatsby and his dream. Glenn Settle highlights Daisy’s manipulative characteristics in “Fitzgerald’s Daisy: The Siren Voice,” wherein he acknowledges, “an overview of the story of Gatsby himself is also not without evidence of Daisy as wrecker-temptress...” (118).

“The Great Gatsby” is also a romance. By cherishing his essential ideal Gatsby is forgiven his career of crime. To become the social equal of the woman he loves he has lifted himself by his bootstraps, and all that he has done he justifies by the reality of his affection. The virtue of the play is that it makes this new alignment of social values creditable for the time being as the pawns of characterization. (Atkinson 22)

In the production, Davis seems to suggest that in spite of Gatsby’s background and behavior, he is worthy of forgiveness. Gatsby needs to have redeeming qualities on stage, and he benefits from a general softening of the character that garners him the approval of both Daisy and theatergoers. Reviews of Rennie’s performance offer clues about Davis’ interpretation of the character and his lover:

Mr. Rennie gives plausibility to the part of Gatsby in the roughness and fullness of his voice and in the solidity of his presence. It is the truest portrait in the first act when he covers these qualities with a slight film of social uneasiness in the presence of suaver people. In the emotion of the last two acts he plays a “straight part” that gives Gatsby a polite equality not strictly in keeping with the role. (Atkinson 22)

Davis’ “polite equality” of characters situates Gatsby in a social position where he is perhaps better received than in the novel, and where he might not seem so out of place. This rendering makes sense for a Broadway production because it accommodates the restrictions of the medium; it is more difficult to convey the complex depths of a character’s interiority on stage than in fiction.

Owen Davis’s adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* convinced production teams that the feat was possible and profitable, and because the play became the textual basis for the 1926 and 1949 film adaptations, its role in the performance history of the novel is inestimable. Although

directors have staged countless productions of *Gatsby* since this 1926 adaptation, another performance would not hit Broadway again until 2010, when John Collins directed *Gatz*, a dramatic reading of the novel in its entirety.

### **Herbert Brenon's 1926 Silent Film (Lost)**

The 1926 play was quickly followed with the first film adaptation, but unfortunately, Herbert Brenon's 1926 cinematic adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* is among the silent era's many lost films, and a minute-long trailer is the only surviving footage (Dixon 288). A close study of the remaining scenes—a minute-long trailer—suggests that the film provided audiences with an opportunity to imagine the scale of Gatsby's life and the scope of his tragedy. The trailer indicates that the adaptation was likely situated within the emerging genre of gangster cinema and suited to fit the culture of a Prohibition audience.<sup>51</sup> In a silent film, the role of the author is naturally minimized, and although Fitzgerald was alive and writing in 1926, he was largely left out of the adaptation process.

Herbert Brenon's 1926 film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* established the text and Fitzgerald's famous literary character as worthy projects for production teams. The film's cast and crew include some of the major stars of the period, represent the caliber of the production, and confirm that the adaptation was a desirable project for some of Hollywood's finest players. Brenon was already famous for his vaudeville work when he directed three films in 1926: *The Great Gatsby*, *Beau Gest*, and *God Gave Me Twenty Cents* (Hall). Warner Baxter, the popular

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<sup>51</sup> Criminals such as bootleggers and gamblers were sometimes conflated in the movies of the period (this happens in Brenon's 1949 *Gatsby* adaptation). In *Film History*, Thompson and Bordwell relate how "the gangster genre had not been particularly important in American filmmaking before the mid-1920s...It was the rise of organized criminal activity associated with Prohibition, however, that helped make the flashily dressed, heavily armed gangster a prominent image in Hollywood films" (142). For more on Hollywood in the Jazz Age, consult Lucy Fischer's collection of essays in *American Cinema of the 1920s*, and see page 115 in Phillips' *Fiction, Film, and F. Scott Fitzgerald*.

actor who portrays Jay Gatsby in this film, went on to win the 1929 Academy Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role as the Cisco Kid in *In Old Arizona*. Other prominent actors in the film include Lois Wilson, the prolific actress who plays Daisy, and Neil Hamilton, who stars as Nick, and decades later, would achieve fame as Commissioner Gordon in TV's *Batman* series.

Marketing materials from the 1926 publicity campaign forecasted the film's popularity, and included a range of advertisements that usually referenced Fitzgerald's novel. Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, the precursor to Paramount Pictures, produced the 1926 adaptation, and a promotional poster touts the motion picture as "a Herbert Brenon production" (Poster). The film is also identified as "one of Paramount's 15<sup>th</sup> Birthday Group," and its poster features four symbolic still frames: a woman with a bob; a dapper couple; a man in a tuxedo; and of course, an image of Jay Gatsby, who is easily identifiable because of his colorful tie and golden monogram, "JG," which is apparent in the picture (Poster). The caption on the poster reads:

Jimmy Gatz (Warner Baxter), a poor boy, works his way to wealth and luxury after changing his name to Jay Gatsby. The lavish entertainments, beautiful homes, gorgeously gowned women was nothing compared to Gatsby's unfailing love for Daisy (Lois Wilson).

To watch this great drama unfold to a tremendous climax until at last Jay can truly be called "THE GREAT GATSBY"—is something you should not miss. (Poster)

Note the inclusion of the Jimmy Gatz figure in the briefest of print advertisements, a hint that his former identity is significant in this portrayal of Gatsby, who has transformed himself into a new man following his encounter with Dan Cody. Descriptions such as this offer a glimpse of the film's characterization of Gatsby as a romantic man who acquires his status through hard work, and who is, above all else, defined in terms of his unwavering dedication to Daisy. A one-

dimensional portrayal like this is not uncommon in the genre of silent film, wherein viewers are limited in terms of their abilities to grasp the depth of a muted character's interiority.

Brenon's *Gatsby* is also imbued with a measure of honor, which is particularly noticeable after the fatal hit-and-run accident, when he volunteers to "confess responsibility to the police" (*AFL.com*). Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, of course, does not turn himself in to the police, but the addition of a confession enhances the Baxter Gatsby's dignity, and would perhaps render him more respectable for moviegoers. *Gatsby* is ostensibly a more upright character in this 1926 silent than he is in the novel, perhaps so as to satisfy a moralizing viewing populace or to abate the demands of the industry standards.<sup>52</sup> Brenon includes Gatsby's background as a soldier in the production, which contributes to his sense of self-respect, but apparently, the director also excludes much of the titular character's corrupt past. Omitting details about Gatsby's obscure background and suspicious income behooves him, as his menacing mysteriousness in the novel is heightened by the unidentifiable source of his new money.

*Gatsby*'s past is not the only component of Fitzgerald's novel that is altered in Brenon's film—significant changes to Daisy's character might also impact how the audience receives the titular character. In "Sentimentalizing Daisy for the Screen," Thomas Morgan reviews Elizabeth Meehan's "extremely thorough forty-nine page treatment" of Brenon's film, noting how the adaptation "emphasize[s] the sentimental and domestic elements surrounding Daisy," perhaps in an effort to make her seem more respectable (15). Morgan identifies some core differences between Fitzgerald's novel and its first cinematic adaptation. For instance, "in the first act of her treatment, Meehan portrays Daisy as living in fear that Gatsby will return to break up her

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<sup>52</sup> According to John C. Tibbetts, "the script hewed closely to the novel, [but] Gatsby's shady past was omitted and much of the action was purportedly slowed down by wordy intertitles" (159).

family...this ominous portrayal of Gatsby's effect on Daisy is combined with a tender mother/daughter moment that never existed in Fitzgerald's original" text, and introduces a new dimension to the story (Morgan 16). These details frame the story for filmgoers, who must rely upon silent actors who convey emotion and plot through expression and action. Filmgoers are exposed to a more sympathetic Daisy, a conflicted woman who attempts to resist her lover for the sake of her family. Fitzgerald's Daisy hardly seems concerned for her marital obligations or her daughter's well being, but in the movie, there is "the presentation of Tom [as] a gentler, family man. This enables a more easily accepted domestic resolution to the Buchanan family at the end" of the film (16). Morgan notes, "instead of Nick's attendance at Gatsby's funeral or Fitzgerald's rumination about the green light, we end with a note of domestic triumph and the happy Buchanan family in their new home. Meehan writes about how Daisy shows pangs of remorse for letting Gatsby take the blame for Myrtle's death, implying that she and her husband have no idea that Gatsby has been murdered" (16-17). In this adaptation, the Buchanans are therefore spared this major plot detail, which presumably allows the couple to continue their lives with a cleaner conscience. Omitting the funeral scene not only removes the Buchanans from the compounded tragedy, it also deprives viewers of witnessing the revulsion Nick finally feels toward so many of the other characters. If Fitzgerald's Daisy feels any guilt over her involvement in the accident or for permitting Gatsby to serve as her scapegoat, she does not show it.

Coming on the heels of the novel's publication, the 1926 film reveals how one contemporaneous production team interpreted Fitzgerald's relatively new book. Fitzgerald's wife described her personal reaction to the production in a letter "to the couple's then six-year-



old daughter, Scottie”: “It’s ROTTEN and awful and terrible and we left, ”” she wrote (Allen).<sup>53</sup>

Author John O’Hara countered that the movie was “a resounding success,” and based upon the credits, it certainly had the potential to be one (Dixon 289). Hall provides one of the most complete professional critiques of Brenon’s 1926 lost motion picture, and offers some of the only clues as to the relationship between the character in the film and the one in the novel.<sup>54</sup>

Brenon upholds Gatsby’s image as a character that is entirely devoted to his beloved, a man who loses everything to protect Daisy from the repercussions of Myrtle’s accidental death. *Motion Picture News*, another major publication, applauds the actors for their parts in this adaptation:

Every good job has been done by this picture — an adaptation of the novel and play.

It offered material which necessitated the intelligent handling of characterization so as to keep its spirit intact. In other words, it depended upon the director emphasizing the central figure as he was emphasized in the novel and play to approach a “nearly perfect gentleman.” This Herbert Brenon has done and so well has Warner Baxter responded that his performance is quite the best of his career and one of the best of the season. (Kramer)

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<sup>53</sup> However, “Fitzgerald cut out numerous reviews of the film and pasted them in his personal scrapbook, perhaps tacitly suggesting his approval of the project,” or at the very least, suggesting that he derived a measure of pride from its production (Dixon 289).

<sup>54</sup> Hall explains, “Gatsby is unknown to most of his guests, and some of them are surprised that any one should want to meet the host. They are a hard lot, satisfied with the entertainment offered to them—modernists who have no gratitude or affection in their souls. Daisy, who had been in love with Gatsby before he went to fight, marries Tom Buchanan (Hale Hamilton). When Gatsby appears as the mysteriously wealthy individual she goes to Nick Carraway’s house to meet him. Here one perceives a regular movie deluge of rain. The reckless driving that results in the death of Myrtle Wilson serves to bring out a sterling trait in Gatsby’s character.” Hall takes the opportunity to not only critique the movie, but to criticize all of the so-called “moderns” by lumping the revelers who attend Gatsby’s parties into one distasteful group without stratification.

This reviewer emphasizes the positive and upstanding qualities of Gatsby's character, and credits Baxter with an excellent performance that initiated the series of solid actors who would come to assume the role of Jay Gatsby over the next ninety years.

The 1926 silent film has one flaw, however: it omits the Dan Cody subplot, a component of Gatsby's story that would be incorporated into later adaptations of the novel.<sup>55</sup> Bodeen writes:

No explanation in any version was given as to how Gatsby became the richest bootlegger on Long Island; three times he is embalmed as "a man of mystery." Yet, read the sixth chapter of the novel and you'll see how expertly and with what cleverness Fitzgerald in a flashback tells exactly how Gatsby became "great." Without the character of Dan Cody, and the knowledge of what Gatsby learned during those five years when he served Cody as steward, mate, skipper, secretary, and even jailer, you don't know the essential background for the tragedy of *The Great Gatsby*. (xvii)

It seems that the key to Gatsby's greatness is indeed the experience he accrues while working aboard Cody's yacht. This narrative thread takes precedence in the 1949 film, and Dan Cody's boat even appears in one of the 2013 trailers, perhaps signifying directors' renewed appreciation for the significant Gatz backstory in Fitzgerald's rendering of the character. Bodeen's concern for this omission is justified, and although it might be difficult to represent the history of the relationship within the silent film, without those details, The Baxter Gatsby is missing one part of his composition.

### **The 1926 Trailer**

Although the majority of the "eighty minutes or 7,296 feet" of film is lost, an extended examination of the trailer facilitates a better understanding of the film's approach to Fitzgerald's

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<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, Dixon values the production because "it seems that this first version, made in 1926, might have been the most authentic adaptation the novel received" (287).

novel, and the preserved fragments provide the only remaining channel for speculation about the film at large. The spliced scenes of the 1926 trailer represent Gatsby's story, and despite the staccato rhythm, they hint at the domestic unrest, unchecked lust, unbridled revelry, and unwarranted murder that transpire in this first cinematic adaptation. It is important to remember, however, "the film was designed as lightweight entertainment...a popular film, nothing more," and the film's goal is therefore larger than merely replicating the novel on the silver screen (Dixon 288). None of the trailer's written phrases is a direct quote from *The Great Gatsby*—Fitzgerald's words did not make the final cut. The trailer opens with a still frame, a "title page" of film credits superimposed upon the blurry and haunting image of Francis Cugat's "Celestial Eyes," the amorphous face made famous by the book's dust jacket. Thus *The Great Gatsby*'s cover functions as the first set of the 1926 trailer; in addition, it is the background for many of the marketers' taglines, and the move obviously pays homage to Fitzgerald's novel. Imposing piano chords accompany the advertisement's text and scenes, with the music conveying a sense of urgency and importance to viewers. The ominous soundtrack demands viewers' attention, and soon, a series of phrases written in a variety of whimsical fonts appears on the screen: "A record-selling novel—a theatre-packing play. Now a marvelous picture—*The Great Gatsby*" (*Gatsby* 1926). These choppy phrases summarize the book's incredible journey from novel to play to film in a few short lines. The camera then focuses in on one eye from the iconic dust jacket, and it is positioned just underneath the words, "No need to talk about THIS feature—Just look at these sample scenes!" (*Gatsby* 1926). The advertisement emphasizes the word "look" by coupling it with Cugat's vigilant eyes, symbolically recalling T. J. Eckleburg's billboard and inviting passive viewers to become active voyeurs when viewing this adaptation.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the trailer is, in fact, the stark contrast between its portrayals of the rich and the poor. Luckily, some of the film's most important sets are on display within this single minute of film, and the footage confirms the grand scale and expert quality of this 1926 movie. The trailer also provides a glimpse of a contemporaneous interpretation of the novel's imagery, and displays a variety of the cast's elaborate and authentic Jazz Age costumes, with everything from male and female bathing suits to formal cocktail attire featured in its scenes. The more fashionable men are dressed in smart, crisp suits while the affluent women sport a mixture of textiles in modern flapper cuts that perfectly complement their dates' social standings. On the other hand, George and Myrtle Wilson's rickety, wooden abode above their garage in the heart of the valley of ashes emphasizes their low class lifestyle. The apartment is small, with an open floor plan that owes all of its rough features to functionality, not luxury, and it is obviously decorated much more modestly than Gatsby's sprawling mansion. Daisy and Jordan's acutely erect posture is contrasted with that of the homely Wilsons, who slump toward the ground, weighed down by the gravity of each day's work. Their body language suggests the fatigue of the working class lifestyle, and captures the relaxed sense of propriety that comes with their lowly position in New York society. Posture is more important than it might seem, for Fitzgerald paints a vivid picture of Gatsby's perfected poise in the novel:

He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand. (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 64)

In all likelihood, Gatsby himself is posturing in this passage, but as this example demonstrates, Fitzgerald's attention to non-verbal body language is as relevant to this silent production as the novel's verbal exchanges and narrative exposition.

The first scene of the trailer portrays the unrestrained gaiety of one of Gatsby's extravagant parties and offers viewers a contemporaneous view of the revelry of the Jazz Age. This quintessential *Gatsby* scene is reinvented in essentially the same way in every subsequent production: guests race through Gatsby's mansion, chase each other up and down its majestic staircases, swim gleefully in his ill-fated pool, and dance to the orchestra's majestic music. The trailer's remaining stills and scenes feature moments of shock and death, images that round out its representation of the lost film. In its conclusion, the trailer returns to the image of the book cover, recalling Doctor T.J. Eckleburg's centrally looming presence, and reinforcing the status of the film as a literary adaptation based upon Fitzgerald's masterpiece. The text then urges prospective viewers to "Come and see it ALL!" (*Gatsby* 1926). This suggestive phrase arches seductively over the eyes, forming a raised and furrowed brow that towers over the orphaned features that stare out blankly from the screen. The advertisement invites moviegoers to "...enjoy the entertainment thrill of your life!," and before the trailer ends, the film's marketers reassure us that "The Great Gatsby is great!" (*Gatsby* 1926). An unexpected movement on the screen then strips the trailer of any conviviality: Cugat's haunting pupils, stationary hitherto, roll down into their sockets before vanishing into the darkened screen altogether. This final scene conveys the eerie aura of the novel's ending, compounding the public's general disappointment that the film is currently listed as lost.

### CHAPTER THREE – Jay Gatsby in the 1940s

The earliest adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* that can be viewed in its entirety is Elliott Nugent's 1949 film starring Alan Ladd as Gatsby and Betty Field as Daisy. Nugent's black and white "talkie" is the first cinematic interpretation that could incorporate passages of Fitzgerald's language into the film's conversations and voiceovers, and the addition of sound to film adaptations meant that Fitzgerald's novel was no longer limited to supplying a film with merely a plot and characters—it could provide passages and dialogue as well.<sup>56</sup> The film was highly publicized, and its release contributed to a rebirth of scholarly and popular interest in both Fitzgerald and his novel, including the publication of a flurry of books about the author, his life, and his craft. In Nugent's adaptation, Fitzgerald's story is resituated within the film noir style of the 1940s and the harsh censorship of Hollywood's Production Code Administration, and the novel's criminal underbelly becomes an integral component of Nugent's production. This adaptation identifies Gatsby as a gangster, but the film's magnification of the Dan Cody subplot and treatment of Gatsby's relationship with Daisy Buchanan softens Ladd's portrayal of the character. The most interesting aspect of Nugent's film is the moralization of its conclusion, wherein an invented conversation with Nick virtually redeems Gatsby, who takes responsibility for his misbehavior and seeks absolution for his misdeeds.

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<sup>56</sup> In *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film*, Joy Gould Boyum (like Fitzgerald) considers the significance of the addition of sound to film: "When one considers that the silent film had a lifespan of a mere thirty-five years, its accomplishments are staggering. Still, even in the hands of a Griffith or an Eisenstein, it remained extremely limited as a storytelling medium...movies now quite literally had the language of literature at their disposal," and adaptations were suddenly able to represent their source material in a different way than before (6-7).

## Fitzgerald Studies in the 1940s

Fitzgerald lived through this cinematic transformation; his appreciation of silent films influenced his early fiction, and his work in Hollywood shaped his later fiction, especially the Pat Hobby Stories and his last (unfinished) novel, *The Love of the Last Tycoon*. Filmic adaptations of *Gatsby* were on the author's mind in the 1930s, when Fitzgerald was certainly in a position to benefit from selling the rights to his work to studios. A remake of the 1926 *Gatsby* silent film had the potential to promote Fitzgerald's professional reputation and supplement his personal coffers, and he discussed the possibility of another production in his correspondence with his colleagues. In a December 6, 1939 letter to Leland Hayward, his new literary agent, Fitzgerald fantasized about the prospect of filming a sound version of *Gatsby* with Paramount, explaining that he had recently "worked with Griffith, who has always wanted to do "The Great Gatsby" over again as a talkie" (Bodeen 555-557). D. W. Griffith, who directed *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, was a respected figure in Hollywood and would have been among the best candidates for the job. The deal never came to fruition, and sadly, both Fitzgerald and Griffith were dead by the time the first "talkie" version was released on July 13, 1949.

The 1949 *Gatsby* adaptation effectively signaled the reemergence of Fitzgerald's cultural influence and introduced a cinematic *Gatsby* to a new generation of viewers.<sup>57</sup> The Fitzgeralds were both deprived of experiencing the revival of interest in them that surrounded the 1949 film, for Zelda perished in a March 1948 fire in the Highland Hospital for Nervous Diseases, and also missed out on the flurry of attention that surrounded the production ("9 Women Patients Die in

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<sup>57</sup> Kristen Reach describes how, "between 1941 and 1949, seventeen editions of *The Great Gatsby* were published, Viking Portable and Bantam editions among them, with a wide range of new covers. By 1946, *The Kenyon Review* and *The Sewanee Review* were publishing long articles devoted to *Gatsby*. In 1951, two full-length books of criticism were published on the subject. The book enjoyed a revival when new movie, starring Alan Ladd, was released in 1949" ([mhpbooks.com](http://mhpbooks.com)).

Hospital Fire”). Fitzgerald’s position in the American literary canon was not yet solidified at the time of his death, and in his December 23, 1940 obituary, *The New York Times* declared, “Mr. Fitzgerald in his life and writings epitomized “all the sad young men” of the post-war generation...Roughly, his own career began and ended with the Nineteen Twenties” (“Scott Fitzgerald, Author, Dies at 44”). The obituary, perhaps understandably, prematurely misjudged the longevity of Fitzgerald’s influence in American culture, and underestimated the enduring popularity of his fiction as a result.<sup>58</sup> The obituary also misrepresented the span of Fitzgerald’s career, for he published *Tender is the Night*, a masterpiece in its own right, in 1934, and he turned out many excellent short stories, including “Babylon Revisited,” “Crazy Sunday,” and “The Lost Decade” in the 1930s. These literary works represent some of Fitzgerald’s finest writing, but his obituary failed to recognize these later accomplishments.

The reemergence of public interest in Fitzgerald that followed his death and accompanied the 1949 film confirmed the author’s status as one of the nation’s leading modernists, and secured *Gatsby*’s position as a canonical text that would soon become required reading for high school and college students across the country. The public and critical attention surrounding the Fitzgeralds that engulfed the 1949 production “was not only a harbinger of what was to come; it also was a reprise, if abbreviated and more limited, of the sort of coverage Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda received during the 1920s and early 1930s, when they were among the most famous couples in the world” (Bryer 210). Nugent’s film firmly established Fitzgerald’s presence in American popular culture, and the author even posthumously influenced fashion, with the movie prompting flapper trends and Jazz Age parties. In 1949, it was “1920s all over again, except that

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<sup>58</sup> However, the obituary accurately reflected the status of Fitzgerald studies in the United States: “his final royalty statement of 1 August 1940 recorded sales of seven copies” of *Gatsby*, and although it was a critical success, the novel had sold fewer than 25,000 copies at the time of Fitzgerald’s death (Tredell 32).



these dresses were invariably belted, in contrast to the unbroken line of that earlier period” (*RetroWaste.com*). The revival of Jazz Age style seeped into hairstyles, too: “Kerchief-pointed skirts, wavering between knee and ballet length, were another aspect of hem-line uncertainty and another reminder of the ’20s also recalled by the ever receding length of hair...Of course, this short hair went along with head-clasping hats” (*RetroWaste.com*). The 1949 *Gatsby* adaptation not only reacquainted society with the liberated spirit of the 1920s, it persuaded many of them to return to the literature of the era as well.

Each *Gatsby* adaptation induces a burst of critical and cultural fascination with Fitzgerald and his oeuvre, and the 1949 production is no exception: it generated reprints of the novel and reinvigorated appreciation for the author’s fiction. The *New York Times* recommended the reissue of *Gatsby* in its 1949 “Christmas Guide for the Reader,” confirming that the book’s popularity was climbing after the film’s release (BR 45). Indeed, “between 1941 and 1949, seventeen editions of *The Great Gatsby* were published, Viking Portable and Bantam editions among them, with a wide range of new covers” designed to attract new readers to the novel (Reach). A December 1950 *New York Times* blurb announced that a number of upcoming books about Fitzgerald and his fiction would be published in concert with the film’s release: “F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose life is the basis of Budd Schulberg’s novel “The Disenchanted,” is the subject of two forthcoming books. Houghton Mifflin will issue on Feb. 1 a biography by Arthur E. Mizner (sic), entitled “The Far Side of Paradise.” Scheduled for April 20 publication by World is “F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work.” It is a collection of criticisms and a selection of his work edited by Alfred Kazin” (“Books and Authors”). These authors and biographers took advantage of the publicity that surrounded the 1949 film, and the link between Hollywood’s 1949 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* and the publication of the 1951 books is hard to deny.

## Hollywood in the 1940s and the Motion Picture Production Code

Elliot Nugent's 1949 film is the only *Gatsby* adaptation that was subjected to the regulations of the Production Code, which tightened moral standards for films from 1934 until 1968. Historically, the 1949 production came in the midst of postwar cinema, when the world was recovering from the horrors of the Second World War and struggling to find its moral compass.<sup>59</sup> Hollywood productions were highly censored during this time, and "with social issues more hotly debated and the movies gaining more influence than ever, the messages of films came increasingly under scrutiny" in those decades (Corrigan). More recent adaptations, which were not produced under such strict moral scrutiny, can hardly be compared with the first sound version of *The Great Gatsby*, especially in light of the immoral actions displayed in the novel, including infidelity, bootlegging, murder, suicide, and many other indiscretions.

Nugent and his crew decided to work around the censorship issues, and regardless of the many alterations that would be required in the process, they went forward with the project under the restrictions of the Code.<sup>60</sup> The process of finding a suitable way to adapt *Gatsby* under such conditions involved a degree of creative liberality, but the efforts reveal the production team's determination to bring it to the silver screen for a new generation of viewers. Susan King describes the lengthy process of adaptation from pitch to production: "the green light to write the script came as early as 1946, but the Motion Picture Production Code rejected the draft of the story because of its inclusion of immorality "without sufficient compensating moral values"" (*Los Angeles Times*).<sup>61</sup> Richard Maibaum, the film's screenwriter-producer, recalls in an

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<sup>59</sup> For an overview of postwar cinema, see the Introduction to *American Cinema in the 1940s*.

<sup>60</sup> The 1949 *Gatsby* film was made "despite discouragement from the Production Code Administration, which advised the studio that the basic story was unacceptable" (McGettigan).

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Morgan situates the film in terms of the Motion Picture Production Code, "or the Hays Code as it was commonly called, after Will H. Hays," in "Sentimentalizing Daisy for the

interview decades later that the Production Code “said *The Great Gatsby* had an unpunished murder, illicit sex, extramarital affairs, and so on,” and was therefore not suitable for the screen (McGilligan 280). These themes presented very real challenges for the project’s production team, which had to either work around the strict guidelines, or risk having the project scrapped altogether. Fitzgerald’s novel features several pivotal scenes that would not be proper for adaptation under the Code, which “strictly enforced a conservative list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” primarily governing the depiction of crime and sex,” both of which occur in Fitzgerald’s novel (Corrigan 296). The artistic compromises were significant, but then again, they were typical of 1940s films, which were obviously all operating under the same conditions. George Bluestone identifies this aesthetic maneuvering as a trademark of the times: “The conflict between artistic freedom and thematic control has had the practical effect of taxing the ingenuity of directors, writers and cameramen who try to evade the Code’s specific strictures” (37). These problems stifled the 1949 production and account for the alterations that keep the film adaptation from aligning itself more closely with the novel’s motifs of unchecked decadence and hedonism.<sup>62</sup> The era’s cinematic modes made the production particularly sensitive to the audience’s reception of the film.<sup>63</sup>

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Screen.” Morgan writes, “as a result of the Code, producers and writers were forced to re-envision the tale of *Gatsby* as a morality tale where adultery, bootlegging, and manslaughter were eventually punished, and the remaining characters were reconciled to the idea that crime does not pay” (17).

<sup>62</sup> Joan McGettigan explains, “under the code...the movie would have to identify *Gatsby* as a crook and therefore ensure that the audience knew it was not supposed to sympathize with him,” a facet of the production that forced filmmakers to manipulate viewers’ impressions of the protagonist and his moral dilemma from beginning to end (*BrightLights.com*).

<sup>63</sup> David Riesman and Evelyn T. Riesman provide an interesting study of intergenerational responses to films in their 1952 article, “Movies and Audiences.” See pages 200-201 for a case study on Nugent’s film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*.

Some of the major plot changes are therefore easily attributable to the Code, and producer-screenwriter Richard Maibaum, who ardently supported the picture in its infancy, explains that certain scenes were changed or added to ameliorate the studio's concerns about propriety. Maibaum had to find strains of morality within Fitzgerald's novel or create them himself—so he placed a verse of scripture, Proverbs 14:12, “right in the opening where Nick and Jordan, now married, stop at Gatsby's grave and quote the chapter and verse from Gatsby's tombstone: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”” (McGilligan 281). Maibaum eventually regretted this decision, admitting in an interview that the addition detracted from the picture: “I had to do it, which I now think was all wrong and very un-Fitzgerald-like. To moralize like that was something he never did; he was always indirect” (McGilligan 282). The film was therefore a product of the social climate of the 1940s, and as Atkins proclaims, “that it fails in its goals can be explained not so much by the difficulties inherent in the dramatization of Fitzgerald, but by a consideration of a bygone way of life in Hollywood movie-making” that typifies the postwar period of heightened cinematic censorship (217).

### **Nugent's Film: An Overview**

Regardless of the limitations imposed upon the film as a result of the Production Code, the 1949 *Gatsby* has a recognizable cast, crew, and title, and the black and white Paramount Pictures film, which is only 91 minutes, was largely successful in the theaters. Cyril Hume and Richard Maibaum collaborated as the adaptation's screenwriters, and over the course of their Hollywood careers, the pair worked on nine productions together, including *Bigger than Life*

(1956) and many other major motion pictures (McGilligan).<sup>64</sup> Hume later worked as a screenwriter for two of the *Tarzan* films, and Maibaum remained a Hollywood magnate for more than 50 years, writing screenplays for the James Bond series, and working steadily until his death in 1991. Together, Hume and Maibaum provided Nugent with a screenplay based upon Fitzgerald's 1925 novel, Davis' 1926 play, and Brenon's 1926 film that was also acceptable for 1940s studio standards. The bulk of the criticism of the 1949 adaptation centers on the film's uncreative direction, which was a problem before production even began. Nugent, in fact, was not originally slated to direct the picture—John Farrow, director of 1956's *Around the World in 80 Days* (and coincidentally, the father of Mia Farrow, who stars as Daisy in Clayton's 1974 adaptation), resigned from the project in February 1948 after "a disagreement over casting with Richard Maibaum," who was also one of the film's producers ("Nugent Replaces Farrow on Movie"). Years later, "Nugent admitted publically that his version of the novel leaves much to be desired, and that he did not want to be assigned to the project in the first place" (Dixon 290). At least he had a huge star in Alad Ladd, who presents today's viewers with the first complete Hollywood portrayal of Fitzgerald's iconic Jay Gatsby.

The 1949 version was largely marketed around Ladd, who had gained fame in 1942 as the star of *This Gun for Hire*, was named Photoplay's "Most Popular Male Star" in 1953, and won a Golden Globe in 1954. Betty Field earned a lukewarm reception as Daisy Buchanan, although Dixon suggests it was largely Nugent's fault: "Nugent, never known for his literary or thematic perception, instructed Field to play Daisy in a strictly one-dimensional manner, which she certainly did" at the film's expense (291). Field, who married playwright Elmer Rice in 1942, earned a solid reputation on Broadway before making her way into Hollywood, and she

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<sup>64</sup> For interviews with both Hume and Maibaum, see Pat McGilligan's 1986 collection, *Backstory: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age*.

was also “an F. Scott Fitzgerald fan” whose praise of the novel was featured in an interview that coincided with the film’s release. Field said, ““They made me a good offer...and “Gatsby” is the kind of story I can’t resist. I never could,” she added firmly” (Thomson X3). Macdonald Carey, who stars as Nick Carraway, “is also curiously miscast; rather than a sympathetic observer, for most of the film he is portrayed as a censorious bluenose, scandalized by Tom Buchanan’s affair with Myrtle Wilson, and also by Gatsby’s obsessive desire for Daisy” (Dixon 291). Shelley Winters, who achieved fame decades later as Charlotte in Kubrick’s 1962 adaptation of *Lolita*, portrays a compelling Myrtle Wilson in this adaptation. Howard Da Silva plays George Wilson in 1949, and interestingly enough, he joined the 1974 cast as Meyer Wolfsheim. Other prominent figures in Nugent’s production include “history’s most prolific movie costumer, Edith Head, [who] made the wardrobe for this black and white interpretation,” and John F. Seitz, the film’s cinematographer, who had already shot *Double Indemnity* in 1944 and *The Lost Weekend* in 1945, and went on to film *Sunset Blvd.* in 1960 (Muther).<sup>65</sup>

Nugent’s film also benefitted from an aggressive advertising campaign and the public’s ongoing fascination with the novel and its author. The film’s *New York Times* ad was the largest on the page by far; it featured two busty women, a shirtless Gatsby, and the following caption: “Ladd guns his way to power in “The Great Gatsby”...a love story that matches the tension of the times!...A GREAT CAST in A GREAT MOTION PICTURE from A GREAT NOVEL” (Display Ad 29). Other marketing materials played up the same elements of lust and greed, and in the official poster for the film, Ladd is outfitted in a tuxedo, a trench coat, and a hat—and is

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<sup>65</sup> Although the film had a skilled cinematographer, the production is limited by its sets, “and to make matters worse, practically the entire film is shot indoors, even the exteriors, which was a common Hollywood practice of the period, in order to avoid the possible delays that location shooting sometimes produced (changes in sunlight, rain, obnoxious tourists cluttering up the set)...Thus, the 1949 Gatsby is confined to the elegant simulcric prison on an overlit Hollywood sound stage, and thus lacks both visual substance and reality” (291)

surrounded by four gorgeous women in suggestive evening gowns. An image of the climactic accident is shown in the corner; since it displays the moment Gatsby's car strikes Myrtle, the poster highlights the film's various tragedies. Together, the drawings represent the film's sexual charge and criminal undertone, and in the centerpiece of the poster is Ladd's Gatsby.

Ladd's casting as Jay Gatsby stemmed from a serendipitous and interesting interaction with Maibaum. In a 1980s interview with Pat McGilligan, Maibaum recounts an encounter with Ladd that convinced the screenwriter-producer that the actor was destined to play the part of Gatsby on the silver screen. Maibaum explains how an unexpected experience became the impetus for the production:

Paramount had Alan Ladd pegged as a dubious actor, but I didn't believe them. I was at his house, and he took me up to the second floor, where he had a wardrobe about as long as this room. He opened it up, and there must have been hundreds of suits, sport jackets, slacks, and shoes. He looked at me and said, "Not bad for an Okie kid, eh?" I got goose pimples, because I remembered when Gatsby took Daisy to show her his mansion, he also showed her his wardrobe, and said, "I have a man who sends me clothes from England every spring and fall." I said to myself, "My God, the Great Gatsby!"

(McGilligan 280)

The pair could not resist interpreting the moment as a sign that the actor was destined to play the part on film, and since Paramount already owned the rights to *Gatsby*, both Ladd and Maibaum lobbied the studio to produce a remake with sound. The romanticized anecdote about the men's inspiration for the film might be part of the problem with its reception, as it was widely considered a star-driven production that placed too much stock in its lead actor. Many reviewers see Ladd in the same vein as Maibaum—as a man who, in real life, “was, in a way, the Great

Gatsby. Success had settled on him as it had on Gatsby. Being a movie star, he had the same kind of aura of success, but he didn't quite know how to handle it," just as Gatsby acquires a great fortune, but never knows how to enjoy it without suspicion (McGilligan 280). This sort of specialized experience with sudden wealth cannot be bought, but it can be translated from a man's life into an actor's role, and Ladd set about doing so in the 1949 film.<sup>66</sup>

### **Ladd's Gatsby**

Ladd's casting, however, contributed to the hardened portrait of the character that emerges in the 1949 adaptation, one that might be influenced by the film noir style of cinema in the 1940s.<sup>67</sup> The film's representation of the protagonist is complex and dynamic, and although Ladd seems like an affluent gentleman for the majority of the film, it is clear that something more sinister lurks just under the surface. Hidden beneath Gatsby's gold hat lies a low-life bootlegger who earns his money dishonorably and whose "business connegtion[s]" are shameful (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 70).<sup>68</sup> Thus the criminal element becomes a defining feature of Nugent's portrayal of the character, with the opening montage establishing him as an emblem of Jazz Age

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<sup>66</sup> Maibaum and Ladd's fortuitous conversation may have led to the project's fruition, but it could not guarantee a successful production. The contemporaneous *Variety* reviewer claims, "Alan Ladd handles his characterization ably, making it as well-rounded as the yarn permits and [faring] better than the other cast members in trying to make the surface characters come to life" (*Variety.com*). Ladd had the confidence to depict the character aptly, however, and the edge to portray him as a criminal, too. Robert S. Birchard argues, "Alan Ladd is a nearly perfect Gatsby, exhibiting great charm as well as the vulnerability tinged with sadism" (*American Film*). Atkins confirms that "Ladd is a believable Gatsby," and compares his charisma and vacuity to Robert Redford's all-American good looks as the 1974 *Gatsby* (220).

<sup>67</sup> In his biography of Ladd, Rob Nixon writes, "with his ability to suggest dark secrets and a quiet pained longing, Ladd seemed an ideal choice for the role of the mysterious Jay Gatsby...but the movie failed to click with either the public or critics," and a combination of minor problems contributed to the weak film (*TCM.com*). Others determine that Ladd's "portrayal is quite in accordance with that stock character he usually plays" (Crowther).

<sup>68</sup> Brauer notes, "although Gatsby serves as little more than the handsome and elegant façade for Meyer Wolfsheim's criminal enterprises—even if he is a well-dressed and good-looking gangster, Gatsby, after all, is still a gangster—he does offer a captivating example of self-making and the pursuit of the American Dream" (53).



corruption, and a crook by anyone's standards—especially the Production Code Administration's<sup>69</sup>. Ladd's Gatsby becomes a sympathetic character, in part because of his rare combination of domineering strength and docile sensitivity. In spite of his redemptive sentimentality, Gatsby's illicit endeavors prevent him from seeming pathetic, and since his epiphany comes before his murder, in Nugent's adaptation, he is absolved of his sins before he dies<sup>70</sup>.

The 1949 film opens with a montage that indicates Gatsby is heavily involved with the underworld, and the adaptation's first scenes establish him as an outlaw and set the tone for the remainder of the movie. The opening credits are superimposed upon a picture of the cover of Fitzgerald's book, and as soon as the film begins, stereotypical depictions of the Jazz Age ensue. The first scenes feature young people dancing the Charleston; adults drinking bootlegged beer at speakeasies; men smuggling barrels of alcohol in a warehouse; and gangsters engaging in high-speed chases and then shooting up moving targets. A voiceover introduces Gatsby, and explains that "out of the '20s and all they were came Jay Gatsby, who built a dark empire for himself

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<sup>69</sup> As Martin Halliwell notes in "Modernism and Adaptation," invented mob scenes "ensure that the stable hierarchy of characters is established from the outset, [and] Jay Gatsby (Alan Ladd) is introduced as the chief character in an opening montage in which he is portrayed in archetypal gangster role, whereas in the novel there is a long delay before he appears enigmatically as a guest at his own party" (93). For more on gangsters and 1940s Hollywood, see pages 111-112 in Thomas Schatz' volume, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s*.

<sup>70</sup> The moralization of the plot interferes with viewers' perceptions of the film's major characters. In "Modernism and Adaptation," Martin Halliwell explains how "the symbolic texture of the novel also suffers in adaptation, with localities such as the Valley of the Ashes losing their dramatic impact (it is quite obviously a film set) and Gatsby's attempt to reclaim lost time (in Fitzgerald's narrative the clock falls from the mantelpiece as Gatsby nervously waits for Daisy, and Nick ruminates on Gatsby's attempt to "beat back time" in the final epic lines) is reduced to the clichéd line "it's time to start over," moments before Gatsby is shot. Rather than an extended epilogue that conveys crucial information about Gatsby's past, the film is bookended by scenes in which Nick and Jordan Baker reflect on Gatsby's life as they visit his grave. This provides a fatalistic account of an individual with vaulting ambition and prevents the viewer from sharing Nick's begrudging respect for Gatsby in the novel" (92-93).

because he harbored a dream in his heart,” a dream that would ultimately determine his destiny (*Gatsby* 1949). Gatsby is the first character to appear in the film, a decision that immediately separates Nugent’s film from the 1974 and 2013 adaptations. Ladd’s Gatsby is first pictured at Wilson’s garage, where he is getting gas beneath the looming eyes of T.J. Eckleburg with a fleet of henchmen in tow (*Gatsby* 1949). To establish his role as an outsider, Gatsby asks Wilson for directions to West Egg, where he spends \$200,000 in cash on a mansion positioned directly across the bay from the Buchanans’ home (*Gatsby* 1949). Nugent’s Gatsby is self-assured and wise, especially in comparison with the lackeys he has in his car. Because the valley of ashes is featured within the first five minutes of the film, its contrast with the elegance of either Egg is startling indeed. Amid much exposition, Ladd positions himself as a wealthy and worldly man who possesses knowledge about a variety of things, from polo stables to crystal chandeliers to love and war.

The opening scenes also introduce viewers to the blend of strategies that Nugent utilizes as he strives to accommodate the novel’s first-person narrative perspective within the restrictions of the inherently third-person cinematic mode. Nugent’s motion picture is “typical of the noir-style films of the day in that the action is fast and flashbacks are employed—in this case to convey Gatsby’s gangster past” (Tibbetts 159). These flashbacks puncture holes in Gatz’ performance as Gatsby, perhaps lessening any sympathy that viewers may be accruing for the character by revealing anecdotal evidence of his undeniable criminality and unseemly background. In addition to depicting scenes outside the chronological scope of the film, these flashbacks also logically fill in gaps in the story where our narrator is not present. The 1949 adaptation adroitly employs voiceovers and added conversations to disseminate information and provide necessary explanations to viewers. In an inventive maneuver, the screenwriters expand

the role of Klipspringer (Elisha Cook Jr.) from that of a nearly anonymous boarder to that of a soldier who served under Major Gatsby, allowing the character to expound upon Gatsby's past and detail the source of his income and his pain.

Although Gatsby appears to be a respectable man with enough money to do as he pleases, he is not what he seems. In the first scene, Klipspringer plays the piano while minor characters ponder the reasoning behind Gatsby's purchase of the mansion.<sup>71</sup> When Gatsby leaves the scene for a moment, Klipspringer sketches out segments of Gatsby's biography for viewers. In the 1949 adaptation, Klipspringer immediately reveals that Gatsby bought his house to impress Daisy Buchanan, a socialite who might finally be within Gatsby's reach, both physically and economically. Klipspringer casually mentions that Gatsby's post-war inheritance, \$5,000 from Dan Cody, grew into a fortune after he met a man at a speakeasy. Although the name of the character has been changed to Lupus, he has clearly replaced Meyer Wolfsheim as Gatsby's underworld connection. Much later in the adaptation, Klipspringer, who refers to Gatsby as "the Major," describes his host's heroism in the military before playing the piano for the guests. In a flashback featuring the Major and Klipspringer after the war, a despondent and impoverished Gatsby learns of Daisy's marriage, and acknowledges that Cody was right: that he lost his shallow girlfriend because he was a poor man without a respectable family name; Gatsby will later change his mind, realizing that Cody's advice led him astray, and that his lustful pursuit of money has proved his undoing. This flashback simultaneously emphasizes Gatsby's powerful role as a commanding officer in the military and his nearly impotent role as Daisy's suitor.

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<sup>71</sup> This study focuses on how the adaptations capture the novel and its protagonist on film rather than how they function within their historical milieu, so an extended discussion of certain cinematic modes is outside the scope of this dissertation. However, Mark T. Conrad edited an interesting collection of essays in his overview of *The Philosophy of Film Noir* that informs viewers' interpretations of this genre, and provides a spectrum of articles from expert critics.

Without any budgetary restraints, Gatsby sets about remodeling his newly purchased mansion at once, and in hopes of attracting his beloved, he hires the same interior decorator as the Buchanans. Gatsby's stint as Trimalchio begins once the renovations are complete, and his house soon becomes the site of gluttony, debauchery, and infidelity—themes the Production Code prohibited, and which the production team mitigated by adjusting the moral framework of the film.

Nugent's Gatsby is a secretive man who is concealing much about his life and livelihood from Nick and Daisy, and therefore from viewers as well. Gatsby wants to protect his reputation, and his projected self-image is essential to his performance as a man who is worthy of the companionship of society's most privileged members. He is obviously a criminal, but Gatsby is deliberately hiding other parts of his personal history from everyone in the 1949 film as well. When Nick first meets Gatsby, an inebriated guest approaches the host and persistently calls him Gatz, revealing his alternate identity and corruption. This scene immediately damages Gatsby's façade, and introduces viewers to the air of suspicion that surrounds the host. Gatsby admonishes the guest for drinking too much, takes him around a corner and knocks him out, and returns to Nick and to his performance as the perfect gentleman. This invented scene damages Gatsby's character and portrays him as an unrefined roughneck, and his subsequent biography sounds more dubious as a result of the encounter.

Nugent relocates Gatsby's introductory life story from his car to his boat, where he relates his fascinating experiences, both aboard Dan Cody's yacht and abroad at war and at Oxford. Some aspects of Gatsby's life story seem a bit off to Nick, who laughs nervously throughout the story; for instance, both men claim to be from Minneapolis, but Gatsby changes the subject when Nick wonders what street he grew up on, and the scene is undermined by

Nick's disbelief. When Gatsby finally asks Nick to invite Daisy to tea, he tries to bribe him for the favor, saying, "every man has his price, Mr. Carraway. What's yours?" (*Gatsby* 1949). Nick just smiles, and says, "let's go back to your party, Mr. Gatsby" (*Gatsby* 1949). This scene replays itself in the 1974 and 2013 adaptations as well, with Nick always declining his neighbor's offer, and Gatsby always coming across as an ambiguous man at best. Gatsby's speech retains a measure of Fitzgerald's prose, and in it, he declares himself a "self-made man," an ambitious and hard worker who is worthy of Nick's friendship regardless of his criminal connections (*Gatsby* 1949). Nugent's inclusion of one of Fitzgerald's most important subplots perhaps becomes the most remarkable dimensions of this production.

### **Gatsby as Dan Cody's Protégé**

Gatsby's romantic sincerity and dignity is exemplified in Nugent's 1949 adaptation because of the director's inclusion the young Jimmy Gatz' experiences with Dan Cody, and in particular, his resistance of the sexual advancements of Cody's wife, Ella. These scenes provide filmmakers with an opportunity to balance out Gatsby's seedier side by representing loyalty to his misguided mentor and his former self-discipline around married women. Dan Cody (Henry Hull) plays a curiously important role in Gatsby's life, and in this 1949 film, his powerful influence over the protagonist frames the story, and it is as beneficial as it is damning.<sup>72</sup>

Gatsby's background as Cody's protégé is amplified in an extended flashback, with Cody

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<sup>72</sup> Cody's advice frames the moralistic nature of this film, wherein Gatsby is somewhat redeemed of his wayward ways by finally rebuking what he learned from his old mentor at sea. Gene D. Phillips provides a pithy summary of Cody's Weltanschauung in "Knight without Armor: The Three Films of *The Great Gatsby*": "It was under Cody's tutelage that this teenage lad confirmed his resolution to discard his former identity as James Gatz in order to forge a new personality for himself as Jay Gatsby...Hence the advice this tough old buzzard passes on to his foster son has a ruthless, materialistic ring to it, based as it is on the assumption that one's personal happiness is determined almost exclusively by the size of his bankroll" (114).

providing Gatsby with advice, experience, and money<sup>73</sup>. Cody repeatedly calls Gatsby “Jimmy” or “Gatz,” and Nugent’s film again clearly delineates the poor boy Gatz from the identity he later procures as Jay Gatsby. Cody tells Gatz, “whatever your dream is, the first thing to do is to get some money in the bank. Whatever you want, anything in the world, if you’ve got money, you just take it” (*Gatsby* 1949). This advice becomes problematic for the young Gatz, who heeds it as closely as he does D’Invellier’s, and as moves on from his apprenticeship to pursue obscene wealth and impossible romance, he sets about a path of self-destruction.

Nugent’s film depicts Gatsby as a young man who respects his elders and exercises self-restraint around women, an interesting addition that could garner him the admiration of some viewers early in the film. Cody notices a repressed sexual connection between his young wife, Ella, and Gatz, a situation that allows Gatsby to make a good decision and earn a degree of moral credibility in the process. Screenwriters Hume and Maibaum write in several lines that attempt to evoke the spirit of the novel: “Oh, go right ahead, Jimmy, go right ahead. You’ve got everything I haven’t got: youth, health, strength...Why don’t you try to take her away from me? I don’t think you can, because I’ve got the bankroll, and that’s what counts. Nothing else matters, nothing,” Cody says (*Gatsby* 1949). These words haunt Gatsby during the invented epiphany he experiences before his murder. Gatz works as a deck hand for more than a year, going around the world with the Codys three times as the sexual tension between Gatz and young Ella mounts. Before his death, Cody tells Gatz he is leaving him a small inheritance, but asks him to promise to never touch Ella. Although Gatz has wanted to be with Ella all along, when she tries to seduce him as soon as Cody dies, he honors his promise, rejecting her advances and

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<sup>73</sup> Martin Halliwell also positions the film within its cinematic mode: “The 1949 adaptation reworks Fitzgerald’s novel along the lines of classical Hollywood realism. Rather than having the past revealed in snatches, the film fills in the back story through three carefully orchestrated flashbacks given in historical sequence” (92-93).

losing \$20,000 of his \$25,000 inheritance as a result. By turning down Ella, however, Gatz projects the image of a loyal man, and the admirable act of refusing her sexually becomes an indicator of his chivalrous nature. The juxtaposition of the two betrothed women in Gatsby's life, Ella and Daisy, individualizes Gatsby's love for Daisy, and particularizes his affection for her. In Nugent's film, Daisy is therefore uniquely appealing to Gatsby, a man who fell in love with her when she was single, and who has demonstrated a respect for matrimonial vows in his past. A certain moral ambiguity hangs over Gatsby's relentless pursuit of his beloved Daisy, and viewers are left to determine for themselves whether or not they support the relationship.

### **Gatsby and Daisy**

This story of Gatz's restraint around Ella is contrasted with Gatsby's unchecked lust for Daisy, a vapid and bored mother who doesn't even know her daughter's age. Another flashback reflects the emotional sincerity of Gatsby and Daisy's previous affair, and in it, Gatsby admits that while he is currently "empty handed," he promises to "start a business" after the war so as to "make her family proud" and do things the "right way" (*Gatsby* 1949). Gatsby's forthrightness with Daisy enhances his credibility in this adaptation, and the scene establishes him as a man who is willing to work hard to acquire the fortune he will need to marry a woman like Daisy. Nick is appalled that Gatsby wants to be set up with his married cousin, but as in all of the film adaptations, the narrator grows conflicted after hearing about Tom's multiple affairs, and he begins to sympathize with Daisy. Daisy agrees to leave Tom just hours after the reunion, intimating that she really is miserable, that Gatsby was possibly her first choice after all, and that his poverty was the only thing that had kept them apart. Gatsby and Daisy's rushed tea party is underwhelming in this adaptation, especially considering that the gap between them seeing each other has been extended from five to eleven years. In Nugent's adaptation, Daisy repeatedly

calls her lover, “Jay,” aurally reminding filmgoers of the distinction between the Jimmy Gatz of the Cody years and the Jay Gatsby of today.

The Ladd Gatsby naively misjudges the probability that his dreams will come true, and his self-confidence proves self-defeating as a result. He cannot reconcile the fact that despite his wealth, he is outside of Daisy’s societal realm, and he will never be a suitable match for her hand in marriage. In Nugent’s film, Gatsby loses touch with reality, and does not realize that his dream is slipping away from him, even as he approaches his personal apex. The next time Gatsby sees Daisy is when the Buchanans attend one of his parties as a couple. As soon as Gatsby and Daisy are alone in his library, he begins questioning her about when she will leave her husband, claiming that he “want[s] to start over” properly, but ignoring the fact that she is married and has a child (*Gatsby* 1949). Although Nick warns Gatsby that his pursuit is futile, he is stubborn and has no interest in giving up now that he thinks he “has what it takes,” at least in Cody’s opinion, to win back Daisy (*Gatsby* 1949). For instance, Gatsby foolishly presumes that he and Daisy’s daughter will “like each other a lot,” suggesting that he is willing to take care of little Pam as well as her mother, and that they will all be together in the future. Tom, however, recognizes that Gatsby is a “common crook,” and that despite his immense wealth, as a bootlegger, he will never be respectable enough to marry an old money woman like Daisy.

### **Gatsby’s Redemption**

The remainder of Nugent’s film confirms that regardless of his profession or his background, it is Gatsby who is too good for Daisy, not the other way around. After the accident, when Daisy faints, Gatsby takes control of both the situation and the wheel—granted, he does not return to check on Myrtle, but instead, he focuses on taking care of Daisy, which is, after all, what he has wanted to do all along. Back at the Buchanans, when Daisy is hysterical



and worries about going to prison, a protective Gatsby's words and behavior indicate his sentimental interiority, and his road to redemption begins. He volunteers to take the blame for the vehicular homicide, and makes Daisy repeat after him: "Jay was driving. Jay was driving" (*Gatsby* 1949). Gatsby even tells her, "you're still the best," before leaving to hide the car, and promising to return for her in a couple of days (*Gatsby* 1949). Tom gets home to find Daisy alone in his house, and presumes that she has changed her mind about leaving him, but instead, Daisy suddenly admits, "we had an accident. It was horrible...Near Wilson's garage" (*Gatsby* 1949). Tom assumes Gatsby was driving, and hopes that because Gatsby fled the scene of the accident without stopping to help Myrtle, Daisy will finally understand "what kind of man he is" (*Gatsby* 1949). The accident *does* show audiences the true nature of Gatsby's character: he is a self-sacrificial man whose priority is his beloved. More importantly, it shows audiences Daisy's real composition: she a selfish woman who is willing to let Gatsby go to prison for her mistake. Waiting alone outside of the Buchanans' house, Gatsby eavesdrops on Daisy, Tom, Jordan, and Nick, who all agree to let him to take the fall, although Nick is appalled by their decision. Of course, the narrator could correct this wrong by confessing what he knows, but he admits that he will not tell the police the truth. When Tom wants to know whose side Nick is on, he declares that as of "one minute ago" he has aligned himself with Gatsby, and is ready to leave the group behind (*Gatsby* 1949). Nick tries to persuade Gatsby that Daisy "isn't worth it," but he has made up his mind, and is sticking to the plan he and Daisy agreed upon—he will say he is driving, and she will stay with Tom because she will be safer with him at their house than she will be at Gatsby's. The scene not only changes Nick's perspective of Gatsby, it also enables some viewers to shift their interpretations of the character from a position of ambiguity to that of allegiance.

Gatsby further distances himself from the Buchanans and their carelessness in the adaptation's penultimate scene, when George Wilson confronts his wife's paramour, and Tom's unflattering characteristics prove insurmountable. When Wilson arrives at the Buchanans' house, Tom denies being involved in the accident, and to his credit, he avoids giving up Gatsby directly. Instead, Tom tells Wilson, "go ahead and shoot. I won't be responsible for a murder" (*Gatsby* 1949). Although he is already in the home of the Daisy, who actually is responsible for Myrtle's death, Wilson leaves the Buchanans' house and goes looking for the owner of the car that killed his wife. After a moment's hesitation, Tom decides not to call Gatsby and warn him of the pending doom, thereby becoming partially complicit in his rival's murder after all. Daisy attempts to redeem herself the following morning by confessing to Tom that she wants to go to the police and "tell them the truth...help me," she begs, "don't let me be a coward. I was frightened last night. Don't let me be weak and selfish this time, too. Please. For once in my life, I want to be decent and loyal, to do the right thing" (*Gatsby* 1949). This last sentence reveals the darker side of her emotional interiority, and indicates that a pattern of unflattering behavior haunts her past—although the production team also softens her character in this scene. Tom insists that they both stay out of it, let Gatsby be the scapegoat for the accident, and avoid trouble altogether. Tom proclaims, "that guy had it coming to him," and as he defends his decision to not warn Gatsby of Wilson's pursuit, he too shows audiences his true character (*Gatsby* 1949). Daisy admits, with discernible sincerity, that she will "hate [Tom] as long as [she] lives" if he lets something happen to Gatsby, and it is only then that Tom frantically places phone calls to Gatsby's house—but by that point, it is too late. Both Buchanans fail Gatsby, and their inaction costs him his life. This ethical dilemma elevates Gatsby's moral position above that of the Buchanans, however, and prepares audiences to forgive him for his own indiscretions.

Gatsby is particularly sympathetic in this adaptation because he cannot reconcile his romanticized and idealized conception of Daisy with the woman she really is, or at the very least, the woman she has become in the eleven years since their courtship in Louisville.

At the end of the film, Gatsby has a cathartic conversation with Nick that renders him a pathetic and sympathetic character worthy of forgiveness. In an added scene, Nick attempts to persuade Gatsby to turn Daisy into the police himself, but Gatsby idiotically responds, “she’s still Daisy,” verifying that he either does not comprehend her at all, or is so blindly in love with her that he does not care about the composition of her character (*Gatsby* 1949). Nick tells Gatsby, “you’re a gentleman. A real one,” but Gatsby disagrees, acknowledging that he would “hate to tell you of all the things I’ve been in. I made a mistake somewhere. I thought I was right. I thought old Dan Cody was right. But look what I’ve done to myself and everybody else to get where I am. And for what? To be like the Buchanans?” (*Gatsby* 1949). The scene establishes a new hierarchy among the cast of characters, with Gatsby no longer idolizing the moneyed upper class, and Nick no longer respecting them. Gatsby continues his confession and acknowledges the folly of his ways: “old Dan said a man was a sucker if he didn’t move in and take what he wanted. Well I was a sucker” (*Gatsby* 1949). Nick says, “You’re getting your eyes opened, Jay,” once again reminding viewers of the silent presence of the Production Code in Nugent’s production (*Gatsby* 1949). Gatsby has a lot to atone for, and he believes he deserves to be punished, even if it is for the wrong crime: “I’m seeing it clear from here on. I’m going to pay up. I am going to square myself. I’ve beat a lot of raps in my time, but I’ll take this one. I’ll wait right here until the cops find that car, and if they don’t find it, I’ll call them” and lie to them in order to protect Daisy from the repercussions of the vehicular homicide (*Gatsby* 1949). Gatsby defends his decision to take the fall, declaring that he finally wants to do what he feels is

right: “I owe that to a kid named Jimmy Gatz. Me, Nick, Me. What’s going to happen to kids like Jimmy Gatz if guys like me don’t tell them we’re wrong?” (*Gatsby* 1949). In this scene, Gatsby reconciles the two parts he plays throughout his life, embracing his former identity and privileging it over the one he has labored so hard to construct. Gatsby’s final words intimate his hope for the future, an optimism which has not been diminished by the ordeal. He says, “maybe after I do my time and start over again...”; unfortunately, Wilson kills Gatsby before he can finish his sentence, leaving both Nick and viewers to speculate about what he might do differently if he only had the chance (*Gatsby* 1949).

Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* does not enjoy an epiphany at the end of the novel or in the other major adaptations—instead, it is Nick who enjoys the most significant personal growth, as evidenced by the opening and closing paragraphs of his book, *The Great Gatsby*. The conclusion of the 1949 film adaptation suggest that Gatsby’s illusions are self-destructive and self-defeating, and that his failure to recognize that his dream “was already behind him” results in his untimely. Fitzgerald is ambiguous about whether Gatsby’s dreams are worth striving for, but in the novel’s final line, Nick decides that it is human nature to forge ahead no matter how little progress we make as a result of our struggles: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 180). By the end of the novel, Nick understands that the past cannot be repeated or repressed, but rather, that the past is something that remains a part of us forever. Nugent’s conclusion, on the other hand, does not include the novel’s last line, and because it transfers this gradual enlightenment from Nick to Gatsby, viewers are left with the impression that Gatsby is a largely naïve and sympathetic character whose murder seems entirely unjust. The 1949 film ends with Jordan and Nick heading West together because the narrator has “some writing to do,” a statement that alludes to the narrative

structure of Fitzgerald's novel for the only time in the film, and indicates that Nick needs to create an opportunity to explore his personal growth and moral interiority in the wake of the summer's tragic events.

## CHAPTER FOUR – Jay Gatsby in the 1970s

Robert Redford, with his rugged good looks, peerless deadpan delivery, and convincingly optimistic naiveté, was the definitive cinematic incarnation of Gatsby from 1974 to 2013, when Leonardo DiCaprio gave audiences an updated representation of the character that reaffirmed Fitzgerald's relevance in American culture.<sup>74</sup> Director Jack Clayton's 1974 *Gatsby* is straightly portrayed as an unrealistic dreamer, a charming but unsettling man with a suspiciously amassed fortune and an immoral obsession with a married woman. Whereas Alan Ladd exercised a great deal of control over his actions and emotions in his 1949 portrayal of the protagonist, Redford's Gatsby gains the sympathy of his audience by playing a vulnerable character that is more sinned against than sinning.<sup>75</sup> Cinematically, the Redford Gatsby reigned for thirty-nine years, and because his performance marks the most enduring portrayal of the character seen on screen to date, it is the centerpiece of any study of the performance history of Fitzgerald's novel.

### Clayton's Film: An Overview

On the surface, the 1974 *Gatsby* film had a lot of promise: a successful 1949 version to build upon; an estimated budget of \$6.5 million; an ambitious marketing team; a cast of gifted actors; and a talented crew. The novel had by this point in time become canonical, and was a

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<sup>74</sup> The idea that there is a "Robert Redford Gatsby" is rooted in Star Theory, which Joss Lutz Marsh discusses in "Fitzgerald, Gatsby, and the Last Tycoon: The "American Dream" and the Hollywood Dream Factory." Joseph M. Boggs reviews the challenges of casting other characters around a star like Robert Redford, whose performance would need to be well-matched (see *The Art of Watching Films* 270-271).

<sup>75</sup> Gene D. Phillips compares the two films on pages 123-124 of *Fiction, Film, and F. Scott Fitzgerald*, concluding that an individual's tastes determine his or her preference between the 1949 and 1974 adaptations.

staple on syllabi across the country.<sup>76</sup> Paramount Pictures, which had produced both the 1926 and 1949 adaptations, determined that the public was ready for a new representation of Jay Gatsby, and remade the film in color (Severo 36). Clayton (*The Innocents*; *Room at the Top*; *Something Wicked This Way Comes*) was familiar with the process of cinematic adaptation, and had a fine group of colleagues to help him manage the project. Promotions for the adaptation extended beyond the traditional scope of film advertisements, and “Paramount Studio’s publicists linked *Gatsby* with the sale of clothing and cooking utensils, and made the word “hype” a concomitant of the film. In spite of, or perhaps because of the supersell, critical judgment when *The Great Gatsby* was shown ranged from lukewarm to devastating;” apparently, the actors could live up to neither the film’s hype nor readers’ expectations, and the film suffered as a result (Atkins 216).

The film’s major actors were either already established in 1974 or would go on to achieve fame shortly thereafter, and although some of their performances were disparaged in the popular press, their collaboration and chemistry accounts for much of the adaptation’s success.<sup>77</sup> Casting director Irene Lamb (*Star Wars*; *Titus*) secured several big names for Clayton’s *Gatsby*, and the film’s young and celebrated cast had the potential to bring Fitzgerald’s novel to life in this new adaptation. Redford (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*; *The Sting*; *Horse Whisperer*) plays the hopeful Gatsby, with Mia Farrow (*Hannah and her Sisters*; *The Omen*; *Rosemary’s Baby*) as

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<sup>76</sup> In “Gatsby’s Long Shadow,” Richard Anderson claims that “by 1974 Fitzgerald’s publishers could proudly assert that his works were required reading in more than 2,400 American college and university courses;” by the time Clayton’s film was released, there had been about fifteen biographical studies published on Fitzgerald and “at least five collections of critical essays” on the author had been published, too (26-27).

<sup>77</sup> Cast chemistry, or a lack thereof, might have been responsible for some of the inadequacies of the 1949 and 1974 performances; the major motion pictures featured major stars, but because of their direction or their miscasting, or a combination of both the productions fell flat in some regards. For more on the importance of casting, see Boggs’ *The Art of Watching Films*, Chapter 10: “Acting.”

the beautiful and selfish Daisy Buchanan. Redford provided the production with the star that it would need to drive the marketing campaign, and in this sense, he recalls Ladd's 1949 performance as *Gatsby*.<sup>78</sup> Sam Waterston (*The Killing Fields*; *The Man in the Moon*; TV's *Law & Order*) plays a pensive Nick, and Lois Chiles (TV's *Dallas*; *Broadcast News*; *Moonraker*), with her seductive voice and unwavering confidence, steals the show as the sexy and aloof Jordan Baker. Bruce Dern (*Last Man Standing*; *Monster*; *Django Unchained*) offers audiences a convincing portrayal of Tom Buchanan, who is particularly unpopular in Clayton's adaptation. Karen Black (*Five Easy Pieces*; *Family Plot*) plays a vibrant and uncouth Myrtle Wilson, with Scott Wilson (*Dead Man Walking*; *Monster*; *In Cold Blood*) as a perfectly pathetic George Wilson. Although some performances falter within the two and a half hour film, the production overcompensated for such deficiencies by amplifying the movie's other major features, including its expensive costumes, elaborate sets, and the employment of talented extras.

Clayton's film won two Oscars and a number of other awards that recognized the adaptation's artistic achievements, calling attention to the aesthetic sensibilities that contributed a gorgeous atmosphere to the big budget production.<sup>79</sup> In 1975, Theoni V. Aldredge (*Annie*; *Ghostbusters*; *The First Wives Club*) took home an Oscar for "Best Costume Design." Cartier had loaned the actors their luxurious jewelry, and Ralph Lauren, the style maven who had opened a boutique on Rodeo Drive just years earlier, outfitted the male actors in crisp shirts and

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<sup>78</sup> "The star system," which was actively in place by the 1960s and 1970s, provides additional challenges for filmmakers, who must balance their desire to cast a star against the risk that the actor's established popularity in Hollywood could interfere with his or her artistic performance.

<sup>79</sup> Consequentially, "in his direction of *Gatsby*, Clayton depended solely on the visuals to carry the impact of the story, and perhaps pushed by Merrick, let the film run to 144 minutes, directly in contradiction to the economy and concision of the novel. Jack Clayton knew how to set up and light a beautiful shot, but he seemed surprisingly at a loss with the Hollywood actors the project embraced, all of whom retreated into the various "star personas" with very little variations in their final performances" (Dixon, "A Vision Deferred" 292).



three-piece suits.<sup>80</sup> Nelson Riddle (*Batman; Terms of Endearment*) won the 1975 “Best Music, Scoring Original Song Score and/or Adaptation” Oscar in 1975, with the Academy honoring him for the film’s soundtrack, which painstakingly recreated the aural atmosphere of the roaring 1920s for filmgoers. Orchestral music invites girls to dance the Charleston, while Irving Berlin’s period song, “What’ll I Do?,” serves as an appropriate refrain for the film. Nelson worked diligently on the production of the soundtrack, and as Atkins explains, “the authenticity of the music involved a tremendous amount of research. In addition to listening to old records, Riddle found it useful to study photographs of old jazz and popular bands to learn what instruments had been used. The three-saxophone combination is part of the period. So are the tuba, the banjo and the fiddle section” (226). These instruments are featured prominently at Gatsby’s parties, and provide a visual and musical verisimilitude between the film’s scenes and the historical 1920s. Clayton’s film also won three BAFTAs: Aldredge, again for “Costume Design;” John Box (*Lawrence of Arabia; Dr. Zhivago; First Knight*) for “Best Art Direction;” and Douglas Slocombe (*Jesus Christ Super Star; Close Encounters of the Third Kind; Indiana Jones*) for “Best Cinematography.”<sup>81</sup> Black won a Golden Globe for “Best Supporting Actress,” and Dern and Waterston were each nominated for “Best Supporting Actor.” Waterston also received a

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<sup>80</sup> See page 121 in Phillips’ *Fiction, Film, and F. Scott Fitzgerald* for more on Gatsby’s elaborate parties and the film’s magnificent sets.

<sup>81</sup> Douglas Slocombe’s cinematography was perhaps recognized for its masterful handling of the film’s fused chronology. In “Knight without Armor: The Three Films of *The Great Gatsby*,” Gene D. Phillips describes how cinematography contributes to Redford’s portrayal of Gatsby: “The flashback technique is once more employed to depict the wartime romance of Jay (Robert Redford) and Daisy (Mia Farrow), as it was in the earlier film. The flashback to their courtship is adroitly introduced by the camera gliding almost imperceptibly from the present, in which Jay has donned his old army uniform at Daisy’s behest, to the past, where we see them on one of the dreamy evenings they spent together before Jay went overseas and Daisy subsequently threw him over for Tom” (118). Phillips’ analysis magnifies the impact of Slocombe’s cinematography upon the film’s representation of Jay Gatsby. For more on Slocombe’s camera work, see Phillips, page 121.

nomination for “Most Promising Newcomer” (*IMDbPro.com*). The 1974 collaboration of these major Hollywood figures accounts for the film’s gorgeous scenes, which alternately feature the glamor of old money decadence, the glitz of Jazz Age excess, and the modern wasteland that is the valley of ashes. Collectively, these awards signify the popular success of the adaptation and attest to the critical value of the film.

### **Behind the Scenes: Clayton, Coppola, and *The Great Gatsby***

Nevertheless, the 1974 *Gatsby* film has systemic problems that stem, at least in part, from some of the production team’s decisions.<sup>82</sup> Francis Ford Coppola (*The Godfather; Adaptation; Lost in Translation*) replaced Truman Capote, the adaptation’s original screenwriter, whose script had been rejected. Coppola took on the project to pay the bills, had no particular affinity for the Fitzgerald’s novel, and rushed the screenplay while awaiting confirmation of *The Godfather*’s success. Coppola describes his relationship with the 1974 production in a May 2013 *Town and Country* article entitled, “Gatsby and Me,” wherein he forthrightly explains, “I was asked if I would be able to do a quick rewrite of *The Great Gatsby* when *The Godfather* was a month or so away from release, in 1972. I was pretty young, with three kids, and I had no money, so, as I was not confident of what results *The Godfather* would have, I accepted” (40). Coppola then concedes that although he “had read *Gatsby*,” he honestly “wasn’t that familiar with it,” providing anecdotal evidence that his screenplay was not composed under the most ideal of conditions (40). Coppola checked into a hotel room in Paris and only took “two or three weeks to complete” the script (40). The screenwriter abruptly ends his reflection of the

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<sup>82</sup> As Dixon notes in “A Vision Deferred,” “the 1974 film is slow-paced, verbose, and lacking in visual innovation, despite the visual potential inherent in the text of the novel. Thus, the reasons for the artistic failure of the 1974 version of *The Great Gatsby* have nothing to do with the novel. In fact, the film violated precisely those features of the novel that were most amenable to filmic adaptation, and it is this fact alone that is responsible for its ultimate downfall” (293).

adaptation, and to signal his complete disconnect from the production, he acknowledges, “*Gatsby* was the last script I wrote that I didn’t direct,” and expresses a modicum of disdain for his subordinated and limited role in the production (Coppola 40).<sup>83</sup> Coppola’s commentary reveals his detachment from the script, and if his enthusiasm for the production seems underwhelming, the finished product does, too.

Clayton and Coppola are therefore responsible for some of the film’s shortcomings, and some of their choices are troubling, including the exclusion of the final line of *The Great Gatsby*, and the length of the film, which was extended from 91 minutes in 1949 to 144 minutes in 1974.<sup>84</sup> Clayton purportedly mishandled the project to some degree, and it is hard to overlook the director’s role in the production’s poor reception.<sup>85</sup> Vincent Canby questions multiple directorial decisions, concluding, “if reverence is one part of the problem, the other part is a stunning lack of cinematic imagination” (32). In any case, the 1974 film is critically important because of its impact upon the rejuvenated popularity of Fitzgerald and his fiction, and because

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<sup>83</sup> Coppola’s involvement with the project is subordinated in critics’ biographical accounts of his career and oeuvre. In David A. Cook’s encyclopedic volume, *Lost Illusions*, Coppola’s role as the screenwriter of Clayton’s *Gatsby* adaptation is reduced to parentheses: “(For the record, it should be noted that in 1974 he had also written—in three weeks—the screenplay for Paramount’s disastrous *The Great Gatsby*.)” (136).

<sup>84</sup> Atkins describes the production team’s 1974 introduction of *Gatsby*: “Before Jay Gatsby appears on the screen, Coppola and Clayton, along with establishing the period and introducing the other characters, have teased and tantalized the audiences with references to him, just as Fitzgerald did” (222).

<sup>85</sup> As Edward T. Jones acknowledges in “Green Thoughts in a Technicolor Shade: A Revolution of *The Great Gatsby*,” “Clayton’s *Gatsby* is a sensuous experience which stimulates the “sensory” memory of the audience who waits in vain for the final paragraphs of the novel. . . . At the end of the film Clayton/Coppola choose, correctly I think, to emphasize the carelessness of the rich and their monstrous moral indifference” (236). Roger Ebert writes, “Jack Clayton, having assembled a promising cast, fails to exploit them very well,” and more importantly, in spite of emphasizing that the character is not careless, Clayton does not deliver “a *Gatsby* we care about” (*RogerEbert.com*).

the Redford *Gatsby* defined Hollywood's interpretation of the character for so long.<sup>86</sup> The publicity surrounding Redford's portrayal of *Gatsby* triggered the biggest revival of interest in Fitzgerald and his fiction since the 1940s, and signaled the reemergence of a larger-than-life literary character whose popularity in American culture was undeniable.

### **The 1970s Fitzgerald Revival**

Clayton's adaptation was partially marketed upon Fitzgerald's reemerging status as a prominent modernist and Jazz Age celebrity who lived hard and died young. Clayton's 1974 *Gatsby* made the masterpiece of modern literature relevant to a new generation of filmgoers, and encouraged some viewers to pick up the book and study Fitzgerald's novel again or anew. The publishing industry recognized the opportunity to capitalize on the successful and extensive media campaign that coincided with the film's release, and preparations to print new editions of *The Great Gatsby* began at once. Publishers projected, "Fitzgerald's books are expected to sell nearly a million copies in the United States alone" in 1974, adding, "the interest in Fitzgerald is by no means limited to the United States or to 'The Great Gatsby'" (Severo 36). An increase in sales of Fitzgerald's novel in 1974 represents the symbiotic relationship that is typical within the field of adaptations, and reminds skeptical readers that Hollywood can actually have a positive impact on literary studies.

### **Redford's *Gatsby***

Clayton introduces *Gatsby* to viewers from Nick's first-person perspective, and he narrates a significant portion of the film via voiceovers that incorporate much of Fitzgerald's prose verbatim. Flashbacks also convey anecdotal evidence of *Gatsby* and Daisy's former

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<sup>86</sup> Jones finds that "Paramount's latest *Gatsby* fulfills itself less as art perhaps but as an entertaining advertisement for F. Scott Fitzgerald," and as with the 1949 production, the 1974 film prompted yet another wave of popular and scholarly interest in the Fitzgeralds and *The Great Gatsby*, a fact that reinforces the literary relevance of the novel's major adaptations (236).

romance and his time in the war. The adaptation's reliance on voiceovers allows Nick to seem more introspective than he does in 1949 or 2013, and because the 1974 Nick seems to doubt Gatsby's stories, Clayton's representation of the complex titular character is steeped in suspicion. However, Nick also seems gullible—for instance, when he asks Gatsby if Wolfsheim is a dentist—so the narrator's reliability might be called into question in this adaptation, which presents viewers with a likeable Gatsby who is unable to conceal traces of his true identity from the other characters in the film. The Redford Gatsby is a confident man whose courageous military service is commendable, whose enormous wealth is enviable, and whose sentimental romanticism is peerless.<sup>87</sup> The 1974 Gatsby is, in turn, depicted as a criminal who may have killed a man, a generous host, and a gorgeous home wrecker, but the character is stripped of much of its mystique because viewers never get the sense that Gatsby is, above all else, really an impostor. The film must strike a balance between the more admirable images of Gatsby and the reality of his unflattering occupation as a bootlegger, but curiously, Clayton all but ignores the deceitful character's unrespectable background as an impoverished Jimmy Gatz and his important experience as a skipper on the wealthy Dan Cody's yacht. To do so is to belie the fact that Gatsby's fundamental flaw is that he is trying to be someone he is not—that he is a poor boy from North Dakota who is merely playing the part of the affluent bachelor. Gatsby can emulate the behavior of a dignified gentleman or a gracious host when the film begins, but without a good job, an honest background, or an established family name, his position in society is more than just insecure—it is downright suspicious.

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<sup>87</sup> In “*Gatsby: A Vision Deferred*,” Dixon writes, “Redford, particularly, seems both wooden and unreal as Gatsby, lacking entirely any passion or screen presence in his key sequences with Daisy, Tom, and the others” (292).

The opening credits of Clayton's adaptation suggest that Gatsby is a wealthy man who could quite possibly be stalking a young socialite named Daisy Buchanan.<sup>88</sup> In the film's first montage, the camera focuses in on Gatsby's scrapbooks, filled as they are with clippings about Daisy, before settling its gaze upon a framed picture of her. Daisy's presence in the bedroom, even in absentia, upstages even the finest decor and represents the role the married woman has played in Gatsby's solitary life for nearly eight years. Gatsby's bedroom is noticeably vacant of either the titular character or his beloved, and is populated only by objects that visually reaffirm his presumed position in the world, such as the gold-brimmed, monogrammed rug that sits upon his hardwood floors, or the ornate gold vanity set that rests upon his glossy dresser. These props are obtained with the sole intent of impressing Daisy, as Gatsby hopes that she will one day be in his bedroom and able to appreciate them.<sup>89</sup>

Nick's role as a working man and an outsider is crystalized in Clayton's adaptation, wherein he very rarely fits in with the company he keeps, and seldom seems comfortable in the film's major scenes. Despite his proximity to Gatsby's parties, for a long time, Nick observes them in silence, cooking dinner for himself and eating it alone outside his cottage, marveling at his neighbor's elaborate galas, replete as they are with circus tents, full orchestras, and countless

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas Morgan argues that Clayton "conjures a great deal of sentimentality that is not found in the original text. These sentimental aspects of the film are apparent from the opening scenes. Beginning with a haunting tour through Gatsby's empty mansion, the camera lingers on his scrapbook of Daisy with its newspaper society clippings. Gatsby is established as someone trapped in the past and obsessed," and his infatuation with Daisy in this adaptation is almost frightening (21).

<sup>89</sup> Although Nick's role as author and narrator is stressed in this adaptation, I still see Gatsby as the biographical subject of the film and consider him the movie's most important character. However, in "In Search of the Greatest Gatsby," Atkins argues that the 1974 film "is also an homage to the book and to F. Scott Fitzgerald. What gives the film its quality of respect and reverence without overtones of flattery or obsequiousness is the restructuring of the drama by means of narration. The central character thus becomes Nick, the narrator, rather than Gatsby" (221).

revelers. Nick's earliest impressions of the character are therefore collected from afar, allowing Clayton's characterization of the 1974 *Gatsby* to emerge in fragments. This technique invites the readers to join Nick as voyeurs looking in on an enigmatic stranger's life. Nick first sees Gatsby standing on his balcony, his hand eerily clenched in a fist, but before Nick can introduce himself, his neighbor disappears into the night. Gatsby is not pictured again for some time, and when he does appear, his back is to the camera. It is dusk, and he is staring across the bay at Daisy's mansion, grasping for a dream that never comes true.

Clayton's film skillfully delineates the rich from the poor, and in particular, it distinguishes Tom's upper class wife from his lowly mistress, Myrtle. Nick meets Myrtle early in the adaptation, "beneath the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg," amid the valley of ashes and the dust of Wilson's garage, and it immediately seems curious that Tom would cheat on Daisy with a woman like Myrtle, whose very efforts to seem sophisticated unveil her base nature (*Gatsby* 1974). The camera zooms in on Myrtle's wedding ring, and when compared with Daisy's Cartier ring, it is quite noticeably nothing more than a simple band. Myrtle's uncouth nature and unappealing traits are also exaggerated as if to emphasize her inferiority to Daisy, who can hold her alcohol and her composure, even around a drunken Tom. The two contenders, as hostesses, for Tom's affection could not be more different. At her small apartment Myrtle's tacky dress, overdone make-up, dramatic behavior, and poor social skills are in stark contrast with Daisy's cultured and confident mannerisms at their manor. When Tom hits Myrtle in front of Nick, however, he compromises his position as a man worthy of devotion or respect. However, since Daisy later hits Myrtle, too, in the end, the Buchanans are equally disgraced. Daisy's affair with Gatsby seems more sympathetic as a result of Tom's brutish infidelity, and despite her lover's

unseemly involvement with the underworld, in 1974, Jay Gatsby is the most desirable of Daisy's two romantic options.

### **The Rumors**

Clayton portrays Gatsby as a moderately unnerving enigma who is obsessed with a betrothed woman—he is also a soldier who has somehow become a celebrated West Egg host, and who hides the source of his wealth. Had Gatsby lived in the more exclusive East Egg, it is unlikely that a character like Myrtle's sister, Catherine, would have been allowed inside his parties in the first place. Instead, it is she who introduces viewers to the mystery that envelopes Redford's Gatsby. Catherine suspects that rather being an extraordinarily successful businessman or a well-bred heir, Gatsby is actually "German. Really. A cousin or nephew or something of Kaiser Wilhelm. That's where all his money comes from. Oh, I'm scared of him...I'd hate to have him get anything on me," she says (*Gatsby* 1949). This conversation hints at the Gatsby's criminality, and more importantly, it initiates the incessant stream of rumors that heighten the curiosity that surrounds the character, rumors that persist after his murder, and that Nick then preserves and perpetuates in his novel. Consequentially, Nick appears to be somewhat fearful of his neighbor, especially after the first party.

Gatsby resists definition, and he remains a mysterious man who is concealing his identity from everyone and pursuing his goals at all costs. This adaptation emphasizes Gatsby's suspicious generosity and secretive anonymity, and allows his personality to develop organically, with his character taking shape long before he enters the picture. When Nick runs into Jordan at Gatsby's mansion, they sit down among strangers and listen to a sample of the rumors that are circulating about the host. The first guest recounts how, after tearing her gown at one of his parties, Gatsby promptly replaced it with a much more expensive dress. After that relatively



flattering anecdote, someone adds, “there’s something funny about a fella who’ll do a thing like that. He doesn’t want any trouble with anybody” (*Gatsby* 1974). Everyone at the table contributes another sordid rumor about the host. One guest declares, “I knew somebody who grew up with him in St. Paul,” while another claims, “somebody told me they thought he killed a man once” (*Gatsby* 1974). Yet another minor character chimes in, suggesting, “You can see it in his eyes...I bet he did kill a man” (*Gatsby* 1974). Nick looks as if he might honestly find these rumors unsettling. A fight breaks out, distracting the gossipers from their conversation, and confirming that the party is not exactly a high-class affair. This is West Egg, and since there is no guest list regulating who attends the party, the crowd is comprised of both noted celebrities and notorious criminals.

These rumors are significant because they surface right before Nick meets Gatsby for the first time, and influence the way the narrator and filmgoers receive the character as a result. A butler interrupts Nick’s night, summoning him to come meet the host, and representing an important departure from Fitzgerald’s account of the pair’s introduction. The narrator responds with a noticeable hint of apprehension, defending his presence at the party by explaining, “I was invited. Mr. Gatsby sent a man over this afternoon with an invitation” (*Gatsby* 1974). Nick follows the butler from the garden into the mansion, where he is escorted into an elevator to go meet Gatsby. The servant is noticeably carrying a revolver, an added detail that confirms Gatsby’s involvement with the underworld, and heightens Nick’s (and viewers’) suspicion about the host. The scene also eliminates the awkward confusion that occurs during Nick and Gatsby’s first encounter in the novel, when the narrator cannot distinguish the host from any of his guests. In Clayton’s film, Nick enters a grand room and Gatsby quickly asks, “How do you do, old sport? I’m Gatsby,” flashing his signature smile before admitting, “I’m afraid I’m not a very

good host. The truth of the matter is I don't like parties" (*Gatsby* 1974). In his den, Gatsby situates himself directly beneath an oil painting of a boat, with the scene alluding to Dan Cody's yacht and that important part of his background.

A suspicious Nick hears more about Gatsby's biography on a ride to New York City, where they will, of course, have lunch with Meyer Wolfsheim. The dialogue closely follows Fitzgerald's prose, and although the scene omits some details, it does provide viewers with a sense of the layers that comprise the construct that is Jay Gatsby. The most revelatory part of this scene remains the demeanors of both Gatsby and Nick, who are embarking on a friendship that, despite the lies, outlasts even Nick and Daisy's kinship. Gatsby offers Nick a job in his "side business," saying, "I want you to meet my friend" Wolfsheim, whose function in the 1974 film is two-fold: he attempts to support Gatsby's sterling reputation as a gentleman, and confirms that the titular character is, in fact, connected to a network of criminals (*Gatsby* 1974).

It is therefore uncertain whether Nick's car ride to New York City and the subsequent luncheon with Wolfsheim improve his perception of Gatsby, but the luncheon does reveal that Nick is out of his element in the speakeasy, which is quite literally underground. Nick seems upright and moral in comparison with his companions—and he clearly finds the unfamiliar atmosphere unappealing. Wolfsheim begins lunch by telling Nick, a stranger, about how Rosy Rosenthal was murdered at the restaurant across the street, noting that they were close friends and that he was there when it happened. Wolfsheim signals that it is time for Gatsby to use the telephone, then the dubious character attempts to elevate Gatsby's reputation by providing an unsolicited account of his life. This scene reveals that Nick has grown suspicious of his neighbor, and is curious about his true identity. Nick, however, is still thinking about Rosenthal, and instead of being impressed by the stories, Nick offers his condolences to Wolfsheim, who

tellingly responds: “Sorry? What’s there to be sorry about? Let us learn to show our friendship for a man while he is alive and not after he is dead. After that, my own rule is to let everything alone” (*Gatsby* 1974). In the novel, this advice occurs after Gatsby’s murder, and when introduced early in 1974 film, the line foreshadows the character’s impending doom.

The scene invites viewers to speculate as to whether Gatsby is capable of manipulating other characters’ perceptions of him as well, and it also indicates that Nick may be too gullible to be trusted as a reliable narrator. Gatsby returns to the table, as if on cue, interrupting the men’s uncomfortable conversation about Wolfsheim’s molar cufflinks, and reestablishing his unique role in the group as the interior director of the action. Wolfsheim gets up from the scene at this point, and shortly thereafter, Tom arrives and Gatsby disappears. Because the film pits Daisy’s husband against her potential lover in this unsavory location, it is unclear which man, if either, viewers should root for when it comes to winning Daisy’s affections. In addition, Clayton downplays the causal relationship between Gatsby’s falsified autobiography and the favor he needs from Nick by moving Gatsby’s request for a tea date to a later scene.

The Redford Gatsby exhibits the troubling characteristics of a stalker, with the character lying in order to gain the physical access to Daisy that he has hitherto been denied, and waiting patiently for a chance to reenter her life. Jordan interrupts Nick at work one day and informs him that Gatsby wants him to invite his cousin Daisy over for tea, not only so she will go to a safe location without knowing Gatsby will be there, but also so she can see his imposing mansion, which is just next door and directly across the bay from his beloved’s house. Jordan describes how Gatsby read the papers obsessively for years just in case he could catch her name in the news, and the anecdote reminds viewers of the somewhat disturbing scrapbooks that

appear periodically throughout the film.<sup>90</sup> Jordan finally persuades Nick to host the tea by arguing that “Daisy ought to have something in her life” and reassuring Nick that if he organizes the liaison, Daisy will “thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you” (*Gatsby* 1974). When Nick arrives home from work that day, Gatsby is ridiculously and almost creepily awaiting his arrival in the rain just because he wants to determine a date for the tea. Gatsby then alludes to “our business relationship,” but Nick reassures him that a favor is a favor, and that he doesn’t “need any payment” in return (*Gatsby* 1974). A drenched Redford is at his best when he portrays an anxious Gatsby asking for Nick’s help in arranging the rendezvous, and as a result, Nick agrees to arrange the reunion that inadvertently leads to the deaths of three people and triggers the unhinging of the narrator himself.

On the day of the tea, a nervous Gatsby leaves the comfort of his mansion, and goes over to his neighbor’s house overdressed in a crisp white three-piece suit. His servants arrive with enormous flower arrangements and large trays of silver, and although Gatsby may be able to bring some of his possessions over to Nick’s house, he cannot seem to gather much confidence outside the perimeter of his property. The introduction of Gatsby’s self-doubt in Clayton’s adaptation is unexpected. Gatsby abruptly says, “I’m going home. There’s nobody coming. This was a mistake. This is a terrible mistake”—but just then, Daisy pulls up with her chauffeur (*Gatsby* 1974). The addition humanizes the Redford Gatsby, whose ongoing performance sometimes prevents other characters from understanding him. When Daisy first sees Gatsby, his image reflected in a mirror, she is stunned. Nick watches as the couple stares at one another, and the triad’s reaction shots show near paralysis of the actors’ features. The formality of the

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<sup>90</sup> Edward T. Jones recognizes the importance of Jordan Baker in this film: “As a means of introducing Robert Redford, superstar and portrayer of Jay Gatsby, Clayton ignores the casual way Nick meets his host, Gatsby, and substitutes a sequence narrated in the novel by Jordan Baker about her command appearance before Gatsby in his inner sanctum” (233).

reunion between Daisy and Gatsby proves so unnerving that Nick must escape not only the room, but the cottage itself. When Nick returns from smoking a cigarette, Gatsby and Daisy are frozen in the same positions and separated by a distance of several feet. Daisy suggests they have champagne, and once Gatsby regains his composure, he invites Daisy and Nick to come see his house. Gatsby becomes more self-assured as soon as he and Nick are alone outside on the cottage porch, his mansion in sight. A crack in Gatsby's veneer appears when he brags that he earned enough money to purchase the mansion in three months, and Nick says with suspicion, "I thought you inherited your money" (*Gatsby* 1974). The discrepancy introduces a degree of mistrust between the narrator and the titular character, and reminds viewers that Gatsby is concealing part of his background from the other characters in the film. Nick finally asks Gatsby about his profession, and Gatsby hastily replies, "that's my affair" (*Gatsby* 1974). Gatsby realizes too late that his poor response was inappropriate for a respectable gentleman and that Nick is noticing his lies. Instead, Gatsby is focused solely on impressing the object of his affection, and moves the party to his house.

### **Mrs. Jay Gatsby?**

The 1974 *Gatsby* projects the image of a rich man who has everything Daisy needs, including champagne, servants, and an on-call pianist. He commands Klipspringer, who is busy exercising, to perform for them at once: "Don't talk so much, old sport," he says. "Play!" (*Gatsby* 1974). This demonstration of authority attracts Daisy's attention, who is equally impressed with Gatsby's collection of shirts, which he tosses about his mirrored wardrobe until she cries out, "I've never seen such beautiful shirts before" (*Gatsby* 1974). In Clayton's film, Daisy provides an illogical reason for her emotions while seated in one of the twin chairs situated in the closet, and the scene is staged to imply that there is enough space for two in the large

bedroom. When a narcissistic Daisy finds the scrapbooks devoted to her, she fawns over them with dismay, indicating that she trusts Gatsby and is not turned off by his interest in “everything that has happened” to her (*Gatsby* 1974). Clayton’s film devotes sufficient screen time to Gatsby’s thick scrapbooks to ensure that Daisy fully comprehends the extent of his serious and obsessive devotion. Instead of shying away from Gatsby, Daisy embraces his advances, and at least temporarily partakes in his dream that they will start life over again as a couple.

A unique combination of heroism and romanticism makes Clayton’s *Gatsby* seductive, especially when compared to a brash and unfaithful man like Tom, but viewers must wonder if he is realistically a potential mate for a vain and one-dimensional woman like Daisy. Clayton’s film soon becomes expository, with Daisy and Gatsby reminiscing about their former love in an extended scene that depicts Gatsby as both a war veteran and a “sentimental man,” and restores the film’s focus on two of the major characteristics of the Redford Gatsby (*Gatsby* 1974).<sup>91</sup> This scene solidifies Daisy’s conception of Gatsby as a soldier, and when she lustfully calls him Major Gatsby, he admits that he still has his uniform. A montage of scenes leads to the conversation wherein Gatsby asks Daisy if she ever loved Tom, begging her to admit that she “didn’t love him” at all (*Gatsby* 1974). Moments later, in an invented dialogue that compromises Daisy’s sympathetic qualities, she becomes defensive and reveals that Gatsby really had no chance of marrying her in the first place. Daisy explains that as a soldier stationed in Louisville, Gatsby was really just “crowding into” her enchanted life, wearing a “romantic uniform that hid who you were or where you came from,” and “breaking my heart with your impossible love” (*Gatsby* 1974). Gatsby recalls their relationship differently, which either

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<sup>91</sup> Clayton’s *Gatsby* is riddled with nostalgia, which situates it within the context of a subset of 1970s films. See David Cook’s Chapter on “1974: Movies and Political Trauma” in *American Cinema of the 1970s* for more about this cinematic trend.

reflects his distortion of events, Daisy's manipulation of his feelings, or both. In lines delivered piercingly, the Redford Gatsby painfully reminds Daisy, "I told you I'd come back for you, in my letter. You said you'd wait" (*Gatsby* 1974). Coppola's screenplay enables the couple to elaborate on aspects of their relationship that would normally be limited by Nick's absence from the action. When Gatsby asks Daisy why she married Tom, she explains that he came into her life and "blinded [her] with excitement," all but acknowledging that with old money and an established family name, Tom was simply a better fit for the Louisville debutante (*Gatsby* 1974). Gatsby and Daisy's conversation about the night before the Buchanans' wedding is so formal and drawn out that it unfortunately breaks the film's tension. Daisy admits that she married Tom reluctantly, and in a futile effort to demonstrate her allegiance to Gatsby, broke the \$350,000 string of pearls Tom had given her and cried until Gatsby's letter disintegrated in her bathtub. The scene forces viewers to recognize Clayton's message, which Daisy articulates for viewers: "rich girls don't marry poor boys, Jay Gatsby...Haven't you heard? Rich girls don't marry poor boys," she utters through tears (*Gatsby* 1974). This theme is overtly conveyed through both images and action in the 1974 film.

Clayton emphasizes the contrast between Gatsby's former status in society as Gatz and his newfound role as an extraordinarily wealthy man who is finally fiscally ready to marry a rich girl like Daisy. The difference between Daisy's suitors is stressed in these scenes, with Gatsby likely emerging as more desirable than Tom, not only physically, but emotionally as well. Daisy and Jordan arrive at Gatsby's next party with an obnoxious Tom, who acts cocky but seems insecure. Looking around in mesmerized disdain, he collectively criticizes the party's guests, determining, "this is mixed company. West-Eggers," implying that he and Daisy are obviously better than the other partygoers (*Gatsby* 1974). Once Gatsby finds the Buchanans, he takes

complete control of the conversation, dominating the scene with the confidence he derives both from having the couple inside his mansion and being the host of the grand event. He talks directly to Daisy, and derisively introduces Tom to other guests as “the polo player” (*Gatsby* 1974). Gatsby captivates Daisy at once, and now that he is successful both socially and financially, she finds him irresistible again. They leave the revelers behind, sneaking into the gardens to savor a rare moment of privacy. In their absence, the party scenes consume the action, illustrating the magnitude of Jazz Age indulgence. When Daisy returns from “dancing” with Gatsby, she finds that Tom is asking Nick if the host isn’t just “some big bootlegger” like a lot of the other “newly rich” (*Gatsby* 1974). Nick firmly says, “not Gatsby,” and instead of being turned off by the host’s rumored profession, Daisy defends her lover, countering that he owns “a lot of drugstores” and is a successful businessman (*Gatsby* 1974). Tom wants to know “who he is and what he does,” but now that he is wealthy enough to support her lifestyle, Daisy happily overlooks any of Gatsby’s potentially illegal business deals so as to continue enjoying her fantasy of being with him in the future. Yet as the debutante from Louisville, Daisy can never be Mrs. Jay Gatsby, because after all, Jay Gatsby is really just Mr. Nobody from Nowhere.

An invented scene provides additional background about Gatsby and Daisy’s earlier relationship, balancing out any suspicion that Gatsby is a criminal by returning the focus to his role as a sympathetic and sentimental soldier who is madly in love with Daisy Buchanan. Gatsby admits that he bought his mansion to be across the bay from her, and then gives her an emerald ring to signify his love. Daisy says, “Oh, Jay,” and kisses the ring before lamenting, “you know I can’t wear it. You wear it for me” (*Gatsby* 1974). The maudlin scene continues, with Clayton depicting Gatsby’s sappy but sincere devotion to Daisy in a fairly sympathetic light. Gatsby promises to love Daisy “forever,” prompting Daisy to say, “kiss me. Be my



lover.” Gatsby honorably replies, “I’ll be your husband.” She consents, countering “husband and lover,” and implying that the combination is something she does not already have at home with Tom (*Gatsby* 1974). Although Gatsby may seem great, because of his real identity and his unseemly lifestyle, he is not a suitable match for Daisy in the end.

Gatsby’s notoriety spreads to the point that a reporter stops by Nick’s cottage so as to inquire about his neighbor’s business with Wolfsheim. This flurry of attention causes Gatsby to end his career as Trimalchio, fire all of his servants, and urge Daisy to tell Tom about their relationship. He does much of this because he “doesn’t want her to go home to him anymore,” and feels that he has secured his beloved and can settle into a normal relationship with her in his mansion (*Gatsby* 1974). Gatsby’s involvement with the underworld, however, is undeniable, and when the topic of gossip comes up yet again in the 1974 film, Nick finally asks Gatsby outright about a rumor he heard, the one claiming that he killed a man. Gatsby smiles, and ambiguously asks, “just one?” (*Gatsby* 1974). While the Redford Gatsby is suspiciously wealthy, Clayton downplays the character’s criminality, especially in comparison with the 1949 characterization of Ladd as a gangster. In Clayton’s film, Gatsby’s immorality is best exemplified by his unrelenting desire to marry the betrothed Daisy Buchanan, an act that would break up a family in the process. But money and lust are not enough to seduce Daisy away from her respectable life as Mrs. Buchanan, and Gatsby’s goal of starting over with Daisy is impeded not only by her marriage to Tom, but also by her role as the mother of a young daughter. When Gatsby meets Pammy in the 1974 adaptation, he is forced to acknowledge the extent of Daisy’s entanglement with Tom. Tom is joyfully bantering with his daughter within earshot of Gatsby, Daisy, and Jordan, and suddenly, when Gatsby is in the Buchanans’ home, Tom does not seem so easily replaceable.

## Gatsby's Personae

The most prominent portrait of Gatsby that emerges in Clayton's film is therefore that of a pathetic man whose irrational worship of the selfish Daisy Buchanan costs him everything. After the accident, it is not the Buchanans' marriage that is in jeopardy, but rather it is Gatsby's life. At his mansion, Gatsby tells Nick the truth: that Daisy was driving, and that he has agreed to take responsibility for the accident that killed Myrtle.<sup>92</sup> He rationalizes his decision by explaining, "Daisy's never really needed me before. Don't you see?" (*Gatsby* 1974). Gatsby has convinced himself that Daisy has always loved him more than Tom, never considering the fact that for eight years, she has lived without Gatsby, mostly as a married woman, and perhaps without thinking about her former lover at all. Meanwhile, Gatsby has been amassing a fortune and making scrapbooks devoted to her memory in hopes of one day winning her back from Tom. Nick, who listens to his neighbor's fantasies in disbelief, suggests that Gatsby ought to go away for a bit to avoid getting into trouble with the police. When Gatsby rejects the good advice and naively counters that Daisy will be coming over soon, his stubborn confidence becomes the most damning feature of the 1974 *Gatsby*. The conversation ends just as it does in the novel, with Nick complimenting Gatsby by saying, "they're a rotten crowd. You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (*Gatsby* 1974). Gatsby then relaxes in his swimming pool, and upon hearing someone in the house, he utters Daisy's name twice—and her name is his final word. After his murder, Nick can only think of Gatsby's "extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely that I shall ever find again"

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<sup>92</sup> Edward T. Jones explains how "Clayton and Coppola make quite clear why Nick respects Gatsby for his willingness to assume responsibility for an action which is not his own in contrast to the rampant carelessness of the Buchanans and Jordan Baker (the latter, for example, we see cheat in a golf tournament), and the moral center of the novel is thereby left intact with the audience ready to accept Nick's lone compliment to Gatsby that he's worth the whole damn bunch of them" (235).

(*Gatsby* 1974). Much like Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, Clayton's *Gatsby* is a sentimental optimist whose detachment from reality leads to his unraveling.

*Gatsby*'s hopeful naiveté is not just a part of his performance—it is one of the few character traits he retains from his former life as James Gatz, an identity that is not fully explored in Clayton's adaptation. It is only when his father surprises Nick by arriving for his son's funeral that his true identity as Jimmy Gatz is revealed.<sup>93</sup> The screenplay therefore deprives viewers of comprehending one complex dimension of Fitzgerald's character, and denies *Gatsby* the opportunity to explain his background to Nick for himself. Instead, Mr. Gatz shares his side of the child's story, recalling how his family “was broke up when he run from home. But I see now that there was a reason for it. He knew he had a big future in front of him. Ever since he made a success, he was very generous with me. He was only a young man, but he had a lot of brain power” (*Gatsby* 1974). Clayton frames the film for viewers by returning the camera's focus to the framed photo of Daisy on *Gatsby*'s bureau, a prop that is prominently featured in the opening scenes of the adaptation as well. In the end, Nick cannot answer Mr. Gatz' simple question, “who is this girl?,” because in reality, Daisy nothing more than a married woman who was briefly involved with his son twice in her life. Clayton therefore avoids defining *Gatsby* purely in terms of his relationship with Daisy, and viewers are instead left with the impression that the

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<sup>93</sup> In *Fiction, Film, and F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Phillips explains that “on the one hand, Coppola had included in his script the scene from the novel in which *Gatsby*'s father, Henry Gatz, comes to town for his son's funeral, although it was left out of the earlier 1949 remake altogether. He did so because he thought it important for the viewer to see that, ironically enough, little Jimmy Gatz had really grown up to be the great *Gatsby*. . . on the other hand, Coppola did not believe that the film should continue on to depict the funeral itself, in spite of the fact that the scene too is in the book, because he felt that by the time such a scene were played out in detail on the screen, it would needlessly protract the running time of a film he was hoping could be kept down to a manageable length” (119). Phillips reminds readers of the multi-faceted nature of film adaptation, wherein textual and editorial decisions are influenced by both aesthetic and practical considerations.

1974 Gatsby is a self-made man whose illusions about heritage, wealth, and love lead to his demise.

## CHAPTER FIVE – Jay Gatsby in the New Millennium

Adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* explore the boundaries of the novel and its characters, underscoring the challenges and advantages of various art forms, and testing or exploding the limits of prosaic fiction. The differences between theater and cinema account for some of the distortion of the Gatsby character that we see in the major adaptations, and these portrayals are simultaneously enhanced and impeded by their production modes. Herbert Brenon's silent film adaptation (1926) and John Collins' stage adaptation, *Gatz* (2006; 2010; 2012) model the two extremes of a production's potential linguistic fidelity to the literary text itself, with Brenon's film omitting all of Fitzgerald's prose and *Gatz* including all of it. The 1949, 1974, and 2013 films inevitably fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, with Baz Luhrmann's 2013 adaptation retaining a remarkable amount of Fitzgerald's language and innovatively imitating the novel's narrative structure. In silent film adaptations, the visual qualities of the medium necessarily take primacy over any concerns of linguistic fidelity to the source material. In stage adaptations, directors are limited by the properties of dialogues, asides, sets, and props. In big budget film adaptations, however, the risk becomes submitting to the seductive powers of overproduction. The new millennium has ushered in a series of *Gatsby* adaptations, and an opera, a ballet, Robert Markowitz' TV movie (2000), several plays, and Luhrmann's feature-length film were all produced within the first thirteen years of the Twenty-First Century. It is remarkable that so many recent productions rely on Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* for inspiration, and that each can develop a creative new way to represent the text for viewers.

This Chapter examines how the most important productions of the new millennium, John Collins' staging of *Gatz* and Baz Luhrmann's cinematic adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, fuel Americans' sustained curiosity with Fitzgerald's novel and its protagonist. These adaptations render *The Great Gatsby* fascinatingly relevant to contemporary readers and viewers, and present distinct portraits of Gatsby to a new generation of theater and film audience members. *Gatz* is a theatrical experience that allows viewers to envision a Gatsby that at least partially reflects their own virtual conceptions of the character, whereas Luhrmann's *Gatsby* invites filmgoers to interpret Gatsby as an actor—Jimmy Gatz—at work on a set. Together, these two adaptations of Fitzgerald's masterpiece signify the persistence of his most famous and slippery character, and in keeping with tradition, the productions initiated another wave of popular and scholarly interest in the author and his literary masterpiece.

### **John Collins' *Gatz*: An Overview**

The first notable adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* in the new millennium was *Gatz*, the Elevator Repair Service's popular and contemporary dramatization of the novel. Its very title suggests an appreciation of Jay Gatsby's original identity, and its unique approach to the process of adaptation enables the production to claim bona fide fidelity to the language of the text, something traditional adaptations can never achieve. Director John Collins, however, has found a "wildly imaginative" way to preserve all of Fitzgerald's prose yet still bring it to life for theatergoers, who witness as Fitzgerald's entire novel is read aloud by actors on a stage (Gritten). The impetus for the project was simple: Collins, who wanted to work with the text, thought Fitzgerald's novel is "beautiful...so easy to read...but impossible to adapt...[then] we hit upon simply reading it" (Allfree). In theory, the project *is* simple, yet in actuality, Collins' approach is ingenious: *Gatz* follows an ordinary employee, played by Scott Shepherd, who is reading an old

copy of *The Great Gatsby* aloud in his office, which functions as the play's only set. His colleagues, who become absorbed with the narrative, participate in the production as the plot unfolds in front of audiences in real time. The unique production "is, in effect, a recital of Fitzgerald's entire 50,000-word text, extending over an afternoon and evening, with necessary meal and comfort breaks. Hardened theatre critics in New York and London have been unanimous in calling its eight-hour span the greatest theatrical tour-de-force they've ever witnessed," which is quite the feat indeed (Norman). Outstanding reviews are even more interesting given that the play, while imaginative, is not very elaborate; for example, the cast is largely relegated to wearing whatever outfit they picked out for work that day. The glitz and glamor of Hollywood productions is nowhere to be found—instead, ordinary people breathe life into *The Great Gatsby* using inflection and gesture alone. The approach allows Fitzgerald's fiction to take center stage, offering viewers an unusual aural and visual experience, and satisfying critics around the world with its production.

*Gatz* fulfills a missing link in the adaptation history of *The Great Gatsby*, and as a result of its singularly faithful presentation of Fitzgerald's novel, Collins' play enjoyed sold-out runs on Broadway in 2010 and in the West End in 2012. Critics' reviews of the performance confirm what fans of *Gatsby* adaptations have known all along—that a certain portion of readers are so loyal to the text that they cannot bear to see any alterations to it at all.<sup>94</sup> Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*' theatre critic, applauded its exceptional creativity and its anti-adaptation spirit, declaring *Gatz* "the most remarkable achievement in theatre not only of this year but the

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<sup>94</sup> *Gatz* is credited with influencing new readings of *The Great Gatsby*. After seeing the performance, for instance, Veronica Makowsky formed a different conception of Jordan Baker, prompting her to write the article, "Bad Driving: Jordan's Tantalizing Story in *The Great Gatsby*." *Gatz* is a significant theatrical adaptation of the novel, and its unique relationship with Fitzgerald's novel makes it an interesting case study in the art of experimental adaptation.

decade,” and deeming it “one of the most exciting and improbable accomplishments in theater in recent years” (Brantley). Reproducing the novel on stage in this fashion is both impressive and ambitious, for *Gatz* attempts to capture and project the beauty of the typically solitary act of reading, and since “what happens between a novel and a consenting reader is usually a deeply personal activity, occurring behind the closed doors of individual mind,” it is traditionally protected from both voyeurism and outside influence (Brantley). In addition to managing the novel’s point of view, this phenomenon has become one of the most challenging aspects of filming *The Great Gatsby*: readers are sometimes disappointed with actors’ performances because the characters they see on the screen are inherently different from the ones they create in their own minds.<sup>95</sup> Fitzgerald’s most faithful fans can therefore embrace *Gatz* without experiencing a modicum of the reader’s guilt that might prohibit some people from endorsing or even seeing adaptations of the novel. Because of its unique format, *Gatz* resists artistic classification, and by reading Fitzgerald’s novel to audiences verbatim, it avoids the routine criticism that plagues film adaptations, complaints that tend to lament a given production’s textual changes, artistic embellishments, inexcusable omissions, or miscast characters. Directors such as Nugent, Clayton, and Luhrmann must suppress some of Fitzgerald’s well-crafted narrative and bury some of the characters’ interiorities within their feature-length films, and of course, each production struggles, in its own way, to accommodate Nick’s first-person narrative and *Gatsby*’s book-within-a-book structure. The methodology of *Gatz*, on the other hand, emphasizes Nick’s integral part in the plot, highlighting his dual roles of raconteur and participant, and constantly reminding readers that the narrator is also the author of the text. The cast delivers Fitzgerald’s fiction exactly as it was written, free of the screenwriting and editing

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<sup>95</sup> Reception Theory supports this idea.



that interferes with traditional adaptations. Collins' vision and actors' performances admittedly color this representation of the novel, but in *Gatz*, such outside influence remains subordinated to the language of Fitzgerald's novel.

Readers who are wary of *Gatsby* adaptations can appreciate *Gatz* as a production wherein the author's prose completely dominates the performance—after all, the book is the production's chief prop and it is visibly on display throughout the play. This special scenario guarantees that audience members will acknowledge Fitzgerald and his novel sometime during the long and unusual adaptation, one that honors the text at the expense of everything else. Brantley describes the surprising allure of the play, claiming that *Gatz*'s seductive nature owes as much to the performative act of reading the novel aloud as it does to Fitzgerald himself, explaining, “what's most purely dramatic about it isn't in Fitzgerald's plot. It's in that elusive chemistry that takes place between a reader and a gorgeous set of sentences that demand you follow them wherever they choose to go” (Brantley). A reader who expects to locate the same “chemistry” he or she shares with a novel within a film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* is therefore unlikely to find a production worthy of adoration. Fitzgerald's readers sometimes boast an allegiance to the novel that somehow precludes them from enjoying any of its adaptations. The comparison between fiction and production is uneven, of course, and because *Gatz* blurs the border between literature and theater, it offers its audience a hybrid adaptation that balances the power of the written word against the power of a physical performance. *Gatz* invites the skeptics who shun an adaptation before it even goes into production to appreciate a rendering of *The Great Gatsby* without compromising one's commitment to the author and his work. Collins' verbatim staging of Fitzgerald's novel collapses any concrete definitions of fiction and adaptation, and because of his

fidelity to the text and the audience's adjusted expectations, *Gatz* was received more favorably than the 1949, 1974, and 2013 *Gatsby* films.

### ***Gatz* and *Gatsby*'s Readers**

The production's innovative presentation of *The Great Gatsby* taps into readers' connections with the novel and unveils the intimacy of the reading experience, wherein a reader and a text form a relationship that cannot easily be explained in a conversation or a film. *Gatz* succeeds because it portrays this intimate relationship on stage without the interference of an intermediary. Audiences observe the private act of reading in a way that rarely surfaces in adaptations, and together, theatergoers become voyeurs who are able to participate in the development of the story as it unfolds on stage.<sup>96</sup> In turn, Collins need not attempt to create *The Great Gatsby* because he is not directing a genuine adaptation of the novel; instead, Collins' only task is to depict the world of the book as imagined by one character on stage, a process that liberates him from being subject to routine comparison between readers' own interpretations of the character and the representations they encounter in cinematic adaptations. In 2012, Charles McNulty writes of the relief certain readers must feel upon seeing *Gatz*, explaining how "illustrative sketches accompany the narration but full-scale dramatization is curtailed" in the production (McNulty). This interesting mode of a partial-production permits viewers to

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<sup>96</sup> Brantley discusses how Collins' adaptation avoids the traditional challenges of casting the roles altogether: "It's unlikely that these actors, except possibly Mr. Wilmes [Tom Buchanan], would be cast in these parts in a full-dress, conventional "Gatsby." But Nick's vision magically bestows upon them all the traits they require. And because it is the reader's [the office employee's] idea of them (and you come to identify with the reader the way he identifies with Nick Carraway), you don't get that disappointment that so often comes when actors fail to live up to your expectations of a character. Who, ultimately, could satisfyingly incarnate Gatsby, in any literal way? (Robert Redford sure couldn't in the 1974 film, nor do I think Leonardo DiCaprio)" (Brantley). This sort of attitude plagues many of the negative reviews of the 1949, 1974, and 2013 film adaptations of the novel, and this interview, which was published three years before Luhrmann's film was released, reveals the proclivity of some readers to dismiss an actor's potential performance before it even comes into fruition.

participate in the creation as the hours pass, blending that which they see in *Gatz* with their own thoughts about the novel and its protagonist.

### **Luhrmann's Film: An Overview**

The 2013 *Gatsby* film, which opened the Cannes Film Festival that year, offers viewers a Twenty-First Century cinematic reading of the novel that benefits from an imaginative production team and a vibrant young cast.<sup>97</sup> Luhrmann focuses attention on Fitzgerald's writing and the craft of writing itself, and directly incorporates more of the author's language than any other production to date.<sup>98</sup> He provides a new context for the film's first-person point of view by situating Nick within a mental institution, where he is writing the novel that becomes *The Great Gatsby* in hopes of a therapeutic catharsis. Nick is shown typing the manuscript in several scenes, and much of the film's exposition comes through in the form of narrative voiceovers, monologues that closely match Fitzgerald's novel, and that are sometimes complemented by the physical appearance of the letters and words on the screen. The innovative technique invites readers to witness Nick's creative process, although some critics deem the special effects too distracting to serve their narrative purpose.

The announcement of Luhrmann's upcoming production prompted an undercurrent of critical reluctance based upon the director's trademark directorial flamboyance and his controversial and untraditional adaptation of *Romeo + Juliet*, also starring Leonardo DiCaprio.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For more on cinema in the early Twenty-First Century, consult Timothy Corrigan's Introduction to *American Cinema of the 2000s*. Corrigan explains, "as the movie industry entered its third century, movements between old and new realities and between consistency and change informed especially the institutional forces behind the movies as they adjusted to increasingly expanding markets and more actively discriminating viewers" (7).

<sup>98</sup> If fact, the 2013 production is sometimes criticized for its inclusion of so much of Fitzgerald's prose.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Morgan describes Luhrmann's influence as an *auteur*, as evidenced in *The Great Gatsby* (2013), *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), and *Strictly Ballroom* (1992). He

Yet there is something magical about that film, and it gave Luhrmann the experience he needed to provide audiences with a new adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* in 2013. Luhrmann acknowledged the challenges of adapting of such a famous work of literature, and the self-aware director admitted in an interview that a sense of creative responsibility came alongside the professional opportunity:

‘I can hear the chorus: ‘Oh, my God, what’s he done to it now!,’ he said. He added that he wasn’t bothered by the book’s reputation for unfilmability. ‘I’d have been more worried if there had been a successful one,’ he said, referring to past film versions, ‘or if I was trying to remake ‘Citizen Kane.’ I guess I try to medicate my terrors by throwing myself into impossible tasks.’ (McGrath)

Luhrmann, perhaps unsuccessfully, defends some of his aesthetic choices by deferring to Fitzgerald’s artistic sensibilities, noting that the author confronted stagnation with novelty, and propelled an entire lost generation forward with a singularly modernist momentum, one that transcended his fiction and influenced the author’s contemporaneous society. Luhrmann argues:

Fitzgerald was a pioneer, famed and controversial for using the then new and explosive sound called jazz in his novels and short stories – not just as decoration, but to actively

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writes, “this aesthetic utilizes pastiche, incorporating modern music and pulp culture references with classic love stories. His films seek to create new associations and provoke a new appreciation for the source material by using anachronism and bravura filmmaking techniques. Most Hollywood films strive for a naturalistic technique that allows viewers to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in the story. Luhrmann revels in the artifice, however, and his style is characterized by exaggerated acting more often seen on the stage than screen, fast cutting between images, swooping camera movements, a saturated color palate, elaborate set design, lavish costuming, special effects, and the use of wide shots whose deep-focus lens work allows both the foregrounded actors and their background tableaux to be displayed simultaneously in focus. This non-naturalistic style can be very jarring to audiences not familiar with his work. Luhrmann’s *The Great Gatsby* was shot 3D, which heightens this style even further. As a result of this style, critics are most likely to fall into one of two camps—either disparaging Luhrmann’s artifice or praising his refreshingly postmodern sensibility” (Morgan 26-27).

tell a story using the immediacy of pop culture. He coined the phrase "the jazz age". So the question for me in approaching *Gatsby* was how to elicit from our audience the same level of excitement and pop-cultural immediacy toward the world that Fitzgerald did for his audience. And in our age, the energy of jazz is caught in the energy of hip-hop.

*(TrailerTrash.com)*

By including interesting anachronisms, Luhrmann's *Gatsby* pays homage to Fitzgerald while providing filmgoers with an experience that feels altogether fresh.

The illustrious cast of Luhrmann's film reflects the magnitude of the production and accounts for a measure of its success. Leonardo DiCaprio (*Titanic*; *Inception*; *The Wolf of Wall Street*) stars as Jay Gatsby in a performance that many exalt: "That DiCaprio lives up to the billing, and the part—lovelorn lapdog, social climber, bootlegger extraordinaire, obsessive romantic—is one of the main reasons Luhrmann's version clicks" (Doherty 46). Carey Mulligan (*An Education*; *Never Let Me Go*; *Drive*) plays a self-absorbed Daisy Buchanan that seems seductive enough to sustain Gatsby's romantic interest for all of those years. Luhrmann, however, anticipated the problems that are inherent in adaptations of popular texts: "“Everyone has their own Gatsby, their own Daisy,” Mr. Luhrmann said. He added that [Gatsby] is more mercurial than many readers think—or than you would ever know from the Ladd and Redford performances—and that this was something Mr. DiCaprio had caught singularly well" (McGrath). Tobey Maguire (of the *Spider-Man* series) plays outsider Nick Carraway with a combination of apprehension, moralism, and disbelief, and an interesting dimension of this performance is that Maguire seems star-struck when he is around DiCaprio and Mulligan. Luhrmann also directs gifted actors for the minor parts in his adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*: Joel Edgerton (*Warrior*; *King Arthur*) provides audiences with a particularly haughty Tom

Buchanan, while Isla Fisher (*Home and Away*; *Rango*) represents a solid foil for Mulligan's sophisticated Daisy as Tom's low life mistress, Myrtle. Jason Clarke (*Zero Dark Thirty*; *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*) plays a cuckolded Wilson, who becomes the most sympathetic character of all. Elizabeth Debicki (*A Few Best Men*; *Gödel Incomplete*) plays Jordan Baker in a performance that recalls the seductive nature of 1974's Lois Chiles.

Luhrmann collaborated on the *Gatsby* script with Craig Pearce, a longtime friend who also contributed to the screenplays of *Romeo + Juliet* and *Moulin Rouge!* Luhrmann and Pearce borrowed a good deal of dialogue and prose from Fitzgerald's novel and other writings to fill in gaps in dialogue or exposition, with the end result being a script that represents slightly more than the novel alone. Luhrmann and Pearce conflate several texts from Fitzgerald's oeuvre so as to remain loyal to him, sometimes at the expense of the film.<sup>100</sup> The art of adaptation is tricky, and as Jacob Mertens notes, "an adaptation does not belong to the original author, it belongs to the screenwriter, and with a change in the guard comes a responsibility to do bold new things. After all, the point of writing is to write, to literally or figuratively put a pen to paper and move it across a page. Whether the story moves too is a choice left to whosoever holds the pen" (152). Again, one of the most obvious and controversial additions to the film involves the plastering of words from the film's script onto the screen, which can either be interpreted as an effective visual reminder of Nick's role as writer of *The Great Gatsby* or an inescapable reminder of Luhrmann's presence in the production.<sup>101</sup> Although the tactic slightly reduces the 2013 film's

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<sup>100</sup> David Shumway argues, "Baz Luhrmann's adaptation of the novel, while presenting a superficially realistic picture of the "Jazz Age," diminishes the narrative's historical validity through its treatment of narrator Nick Carraway. Ironically, Luhrmann might have been able to make a much better picture had he not tried so hard to be faithful to the novel" (132).

<sup>101</sup> Critics respond to this tactic differently. In "The 'Great American Novel,' as Pop-up Book: Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*," Dana Polan writes, "just as the film treats the words of the novel literally as quotations that float across the surface of the screen, the visuals also have a

reliance on narrative voiceovers, it does not shorten the languorous film, which runs for 143 minutes.<sup>102</sup>

The production team also conducted a significant investigation into the novel and its socio-historical milieu during the writing process, and as a result, the 2013 *Gatsby* “isn’t just an adaptation of the novel, but of the footnotes, too,” a dimension of the film that troubles many viewers (N. B.). Researching the novel and its author was important to the filmmakers because “Mr. Luhrmann and his wife [Production Designer Catherine Martin] are obsessive researchers...[and] between them they have a textual or historical justification for just about everything in the movie” (McGrath). While some critics fault the film for overproduction, *The Great Gatsby* is the sort of story and adaptation that benefits from such an approach.<sup>103</sup> Thomas Doherty sums it up best when he muses, “whether by calculation or dumb luck, the high-tech updates so feared by literary purists—the format and the CGI terraforming—have ended up well serving the novel’s vision” (47).<sup>104</sup> Luhrmann manages to reconcile the extravagance of the Jazz

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quotational quality: we’re not so much seeing ‘real life’ on screen but a set of notations that refer us back to the novel and stand as rote citations of it. This film of *The Great Gatsby* is not so much adaptation as taxidermy” (399). Steve Chibnall interprets the film as “far from a nuanced adaptation that represents the complexities of the original novel. Instead, it is a polemical work that marries Fitzgerald’s paradoxical text to the dynamic romanticism that is Luhrmann’s established stock-in-trade” (97).

<sup>102</sup> Luhrmann defends his artistic decision (in an interview for the film’s DVD) by deeming the visuals a sort of “poetic glue” that holds the production together and reinforces certain moods or motifs. Thomas Morgan notices how, “in several sections, we see floating text superimposed over the scenes. This text is often used as a transition device and corresponds to Nick’s writing in his journal using cursive, or typing up his journal into a novel using keystrokes...Luhrmann’s use of “poetic glue” was intended to convey the eloquence and emotion of Fitzgerald’s original text visually” (28).

<sup>103</sup> Luhrmann’s film was arguably “the biggest, brightest, most thrilling movie of the year,” and the resulting critical “disapproval it has provoked has revealed that people harbor some fascinating, wrongheaded fantasies about Fitzgerald’s novel,” and recalls Iser’s theory about the reader’s role in determining the meaning of a text (Daisley; Taylor 190).

<sup>104</sup> For more on the merits and disadvantages of 3D technology, see Timothy Corrigan’s collection entitled, *American Cinema of the 2000s: Themes and Variations*.

Age with the potential extravagance of today's cinematographic modes within his adaptation of the novel.

The 2013 *Gatsby* film was successful at the box-office and earned a degree of critical respect as well, rendering the film an entertaining contribution to the lineage of cinematic interpretations of the novel. The film won two Academy Awards and grossed an estimated \$346 million, and with an estimated budget of \$105 million, no expense was spared when it came to the adaptation's sets, costumes, and soundtrack. Catherine Martin (*Moulin Rouge!*; *Romeo + Juliet*) and Karen Murphy (*Moulin Rouge!*; *The Matrix Reloaded*) worked together as the film's Production Designers, depicting the Jazz Age with a meticulous attention to detail, and illustrating the era with dazzling displays of opulence and excess. Martin won two 2014 Academy Awards for "Best Achievement" in both "Costume Design" and "Production Design," and as a team, Martin and Murphy also won the 2014 Art Directors Guild award for "Excellence in Production Design." As with the 1974 production, the film attracted prominent designers, with Brooks Brothers and Prada handling the 2013 wardrobe and Tiffany furnishing the actresses' luxurious jewelry. Jay-Z, who was an Executive Producer and also contributed to the soundtrack, paid respects to Jimmy Gatz by returning to his roots and going by his original name, "Shawn 'Jay-Z' Carter," in the credits. The film's composer, Craig Armstrong (*Love Actually*; *Moulin Rouge!*; *Kiss of the Dragon*), made edgy decisions that elicited a great deal of both praise and criticism from reviewers, although he was recognized for his efforts by his peers. Armstrong won the Australian Film Institute's 2014 award for "Best Original Musical Score" and was nominated for a Grammy the same year. Armstrong defends his musical selections, much like Luhrmann, by surmising that Fitzgerald would likely have approved of his ground-breaking work: "Fitzgerald coined the phrase, 'the Jazz Age,' and I think Baz wanted to make a very



specific point for the audience to say if that was the Jazz Age then we are very much living in the hip-hop age” (Chagollan 71). The soundtrack features a mix of old sounds and new, with orchestral arrangements of Bach and Gershwin juxtaposed against the modern music of artists such as Jay-Z, Beyoncé, Florence and the Machine, Jack White, and Lana Del Ray.

Cinematographer Simon Duggan (*I, Robot; Live Free or Die Hard*), who innovatively shot the film in 3-D, won the Australian Film Institute’s award for “Best Cinematography” in 2014.

Collectively, this production team harnessed enough creative energy to generate a cinematic adaptation of Fitzgerald’s masterpiece that, in effect, recreates the past, bringing the 1920s to the silver screen like never before.

### **The Novel’s Revival**

Luhrmann’s film resurrected the extracurricular life of Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, and in the wake of this adaptation, the novel has reaffirmed its enduring presence in and impressive influence on Twenty-First Century American popular culture. After Cannes announced it would open its 2013 Festival with *Gatsby*, hardly a day passed without the movie, its trailers, or its related trends surfacing in the mainstream press and its glossy magazines. Art, at least in some sense, helps shape reality, and in the years surrounding the release of the 2013 film, Jazz Age fashion became very popular, with designer flapper dresses temporarily being easier to find than inexpensive flapper costumes. Luhrmann’s film also ushered in a new appreciation for the iconic story of Jay Gatsby, and although the adaptation was met with a certain degree of critical resistance, the 2013 film revived interest in the novel and its author, the author and his wife, and the Fitzgeralds and the Jazz Age itself. The spike in sales of the novel is perhaps the film’s crowning achievement:

Nothing topped the reaction that came when the novel was reissued in a movie tie-in edition (as is usually done when a movie based on a novel is released)...that reached number 1 on Amazon—and anyone who cares about the endurance of great books in the fractured attention span of the digital age should take a minute to savor that: an eighty-eight year old novel, the one most often cited as the Great American Novel, reaches number 1 on Amazon. (Taylor)

Again, the surge in the novel's popularity is perhaps the bottom line when it comes to appreciating cinematic adaptations of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

### **An Institutionalized Nick's Narration**

These varying profiles emerge, as they do in all of the film adaptations, through Nick's limited, first-person perspective, but in addition to relying on voiceovers and dialogic exposition, Luhrmann and Pearce devised a new cinematic channel for connecting Nick's dual roles of narrator and writer. The 2013 narrative strategy captures *Gatsby's* structure by inventing a stylized series of forced confessionals wherein Nick is actually a patient in a psychiatric hospital, and must share the experiences that led to his breakdown with his doctor using both written and verbal expression. Although the method "is hardly a blasphemous indulgence; still, it's one more buffer between viewer and story in a movie that already has more than its share," and it introduces a new screen between the action of the summer and the film's viewers (Seitz). Yet such "buffers" are acceptable in an adaptation of Fitzgerald's novel, which separates past action from the present moment and resists providing readers with any absolute definition of its titular character, a figure shrouded in mystery. Nugent and Clayton struggled to effectively translate Nick's sophisticated narrative maneuvers from fiction to film, and although Luhrmann's stylistic

decisions are dicey, the 2013 production team recreates Fitzgerald's narrative mode in a way that has not been done before.

Luhrmann's film adaptation periodically features Nick's current residence, the Perkins Institute, a move that reminds viewers that all of the action is really a flashback, and that Nick has been institutionalized as a result of his time in West Egg.<sup>105</sup> Because of its eccentricity, some find that this "framing device" is "the least successful element of the movie," but by staging Nick's composition of *The Great Gatsby* within a sanitarium, Luhrmann not only recognizes the decades of psychological support Fitzgerald received from his longtime editor, Maxwell Perkins, he also pays a subtle tribute to Zelda Fitzgerald, who was institutionalized for much of her adult life, and whose mental illness was a heavy burden for herself and her husband (Taylor 198). Viewers rightfully question the reliability of a narrator who is writing from a sanitarium, but since readers often interrogate the accuracy of Nick's accounts in Fitzgerald's novel, the addition is an inventive strategy for conveying not only the narrator's role as author of the film's literary source, but unfortunately, the emotional toll that the summer had upon Nick's psyche as well.

Nick opens the 2013 film with what sounds like a calm voiceover, but it immediately becomes clear that rather than willingly sharing his story, he is instead answering a doctor's pointed questions in the aftermath of a mental collapse. After a short interview, the doctor urges Nick to write about his murdered neighbor, Gatsby, "the single most hopeful person" he has ever known (*Gatsby* 2013). The scene soon dissolves into an extended flashback, wherein Nick

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<sup>105</sup> In "Film in Review," Charles Taylor remarks, "Luhrmann can wear you out...it's easy to feel as if everything were whizzing by...the miraculous thing is that his stays in our head. I've had nearly the same experience every time I've seen a Baz Luhrmann movie. My initial dazed dismay that what's good gets lost in the kaleidoscope of Luhrmann and art director Catherine Martin's design soon gives way to the realization that ever since seeing the movie I haven't been able to stop thinking about it" (195).

presents himself as a man who is minding his own business and working hard as a bonds salesman when he first meets Gatsby. Gatsby's first appearance, which occurs some thirty minutes into the film at the first party, is accompanied by fireworks and choreographed to Gershwin. Amid the exhilarating confusion, Gatsby is presented as the perfect host, a man who presumably has it all—including “one of those rare smiles” that DiCaprio convincingly displays (*Gatsby* 2013). The neighbors' relationship begins on uneven footing, with Gatsby physically elevated above Nick on his mansion's steps, and the narrator, who lives in small eyesore next door, seeming mortified, confused, drunk, and out of place. Gatsby, however, is totally in control in this scene, the first in which he has any lines.

Phrases from Nick's novel begin to appear on the screen at this point in the film, recalling the wordy intertitles in Brenon's 1926 silent film, and drawing the critical ire of many reviewers.<sup>106</sup> As Nick writes his manuscript, the letters drift from his page onto the screen, allowing the narrator to seamlessly move between the voiceovers and scenes from the psychiatric hospital and the flashbacks that comprise the bulk of the film's action. At times, “it is as if all Fitzgerald's writing is being shoved into a two-and-a-half hour runtime, committed to screen in a breakneck voice-over that strangles any and all joy of cinematic expression” from Luhrmann's adaptation (Mertens). However, it is this departure from a traditional cinematic voiceover that accounts for a part of the film's narrative ingenuity and separates it from its predecessors. The passages that make it onto the screen draw attention to some of Nick's most poignant observations of Gatsby and emphasize the descriptions that characterize his neighbor as a self-aggrandizing man with a wondrous imagination. Gatsby eventually shares his unrealistic

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<sup>106</sup> In “For the Love of Gatsby: Fidelity, Voyeurism, and Baz Luhrmann's Rose-Coloured Glasses,” Blair Mahoney argues that the “visual representation of the writer at work... goes a small way towards compensating for the reduced level of narration that we get in the film” (Mahoney).

Weltanschauung with a depressed Nick, explaining, “my life, old sport my life...my life has got to be like this...it’s got to keep going up” (*Gatsby* 2013). This line, which sounds cheesy when paired with a shooting star in Luhrmann’s film, is actually extracted, with the replacement of the word “life” for “career,” from an early draft of *Gatsby* entitled, *Trimalchio* (Crain). Gatsby’s struggle against the reality of his existence surfaces as one of his most damning characteristics in the 2013 adaptation, and as in Fitzgerald’s novel, his illusions about Daisy and the moneyed class ruin him in the end.

### **DiCaprio’s Gatsby**

Luhrmann creates the most duplicitous representation of the titular character since Fitzgerald’s, offering audiences an intense portrait that is simultaneously Gatz and Gatsby. In this sense, the 2013 *Gatsby* is the most performative of them all, and his proclivity for acting troubles Nick throughout his account of the summer.<sup>107</sup> Nick’s unstable personality and his role as a raconteur are given precedence in the 2013 *Gatsby* adaptation, and his institutionalization provides viewers with a laboratory wherein the narrator’s growth can proceed unhindered. Yet Nick’s acute mental illness indubitably colors his narrative, and his disillusionment and unbalance calls his first-person perspective into question. The film devotes ample screen time to the development of both Jimmy Gatz and his robust creation, Jay Gatsby, and Leonardo

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<sup>107</sup> The obstacles and delights of filming first-person narratives in adaptations of literature are covered at length in film studies. One dimension of this perspective that becomes important in *Gatsby* adaptations, and in particular, in Luhrmann’s 2013 adaptation, is how the nature of the narrator can influence an audience’s reception of the adaptation. The film’s unique narrative technique represents the production team’s efforts to dramatize the interior turbulence of our naïve but introspective narrator. Boggs’ assessment of the first-person point-of-view in film addresses this challenging component of translation in his Chapter on “Adaptations” in *The Art of Watching Films*. Boggs argues, “the unique personality of the narrator is often extremely important in the first-person novel. Much of this personality, however, may be impossible to show in action of dialogue, for it is the aspect of personality revealed by the way the narrator tells a story, not the way the narrator looks, acts, or speaks in dialogue, that comes across in the novel” (356).

DiCaprio aptly captures the character's duality in this adaptation.<sup>108</sup> Flashbacks depict Gatsby's impoverished childhood in North Dakota, where he lived in a tent amid a dusty, rural wasteland. Unfortunately, Mr. Gatz does not play a part in the 2013 film<sup>109</sup>; his arrival for Gatsby's funeral could have reinforced the image of Gatsby as a fraudulent man who abandoned his family in pursuit of a fortune, and rendered him less sympathetic as a result. Gatsby's final autobiographical divulgences to Nick and the flashbacks that depict his life as both Gatz and the skipper on Dan Cody's yacht confirm that the character is staging an elaborate performance. However, in taking on a role he cannot play, Gatz miscasts himself disastrously, and the denouement will be fatal.

In addition to Gatz acting the part of Gatsby, the character also functions as the film's interior director, manipulating people and plot alike as he pursues his lustful and greedy goals without ever considering the consequences.<sup>110</sup> The DiCaprio Gatsby must manage his various roles in the film carefully, and "one reason *The Great Gatsby* is so difficult to film" is because "the book shifts between two views of Gatsby, portraying him as both a corrupt bootlegger—a "common swindler," as Tom Buchanan calls him—and a grand visionary," and that is what makes the 2013 adaptation interesting—Luhrmann's Gatsby *is* both simultaneously (Giles).

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<sup>108</sup> Stephen Daisley agrees: "DiCaprio is dazzling to behold, a cool presence that anchors Gatsby's adolescent romanticism" (Daisley).

<sup>109</sup> The lengths of the 1974 and 2013 film adaptations are often criticized, with reviewers faulting the productions for their slow pace and stubborn attempts at achieving a sense of linguistic fidelity. Boggs highlights "the problems of length and depth" in adaptations and excuses any omissions because, "at best, the film version can capture a small fraction of the novel's depth. It is doubtful that it can ever capture much of what lies beneath the surface. The filmmaker, nevertheless, must attempt to suggest the hidden material. The filmmaker's task is eased a bit if he or she can assume that viewers have read the novel. But we still must accept that some dimensions of the novel are inaccessible to film" (367).

<sup>110</sup> Joss Lutz Marsh also sees Gatsby as an interior director: "Within the world of the novel that bears his name, Gatsby imagines himself, in film terms, the director of the action. First, he has constructed Jay Gatsby. More, the marvelous set scenes of the novel are precisely that—set" (Marsh).

Moreover, Luhrmann also portrays Gatsby as a decorated war veteran, and to emphasize this part of his history, the director “integrates World War I newsreels to highlight the shared military background of Gatsby and narrator Nick Carraway,” a strategy that is perhaps more effective than Clayton’s technique, which involves Gatsby wearing his old uniform and dancing with Daisy in an extended and invented scene (Giles). Luhrmann describes how “the title character is a sort of cipher. There’s not much actual description of him in the book...so readers tend to project their own versions,” which presents a significant challenge for filmmakers, whose audiences will be at least somewhat familiar with the novel (McGrath). Luhrmann also describes Gatsby’s personality as cyclic: he is first “nervous and psychotic, and then he’s dark and intense. He changes the character constantly because Gatsby picks stuff up. He’s performing the character of Jay Gatsby” and is everything and nothing at once (McGrath). Gatsby’s role as a wealthy man of import, then, remains one portrait of the character in Luhrmann’s film, but because he conceals his identity as Jimmy Gatz from everyone but Nick, he is a fraud first and foremost.

Gatsby first appears in the 2013 picture as a solitary and silent figure looking down on Nick from a window high up in his mansion in a scene that introduces viewers to the enigmatic character. He is next pictured from afar, with Nick noticing him standing upon his magnificent dock, and staring across the bay towards Daisy’s house. Despite these sightings, the character remains out of focus, his face either obscured by distance or hidden from view. When Nick finally goes over to Gatsby’s house for his first party, Gatsby claims to recognize him from the war, but Nick, in turn, does not recognize his neighbor. He does, however, find that the party is an unparalleled event that is dizzyingly stimulating. It is an orgy of the senses, and when Nick stumbles into the library with Jordan, Owl Eyes informs them that the house and everything in it

is just “an elaborate disguise...Mr. Gatsby doesn’t exist,” which is one rumor that actually has some truth to it (*Gatsby* 2013). Jordan counters, “I’ve met him,” but Owl Eyes responds by asking, “Which one? The prince? The spy? The murderer? I cannot find anyone who knows anything real about Mr. Gatsby” (*Gatsby* 2013). Nick finally asks, “what’s this all for?,” and old Owl Eyes quickly replies, “that is the question” (*Gatsby* 2013). This question, as it is, shrouds the host in mystery, prompting other characters in the film to speculate about Gatsby’s identity and the inspiration for his parties. This invented scene shrouds Gatsby in mystery, and highlights his role as an actor or impostor who is attempting to remain anonymous, even at his own house.

DiCaprio’s Gatsby is not surrounded by henchmen like Ladd’s—nor is he introduced by a gun-toting servant, as is Redford’s—instead, the 2013 Gatsby strives to conceal his criminality from his guests, and rumors about his illicit business affairs become the main indicator that something is amiss. Gatsby’s suspicious background actually surfaces earlier, at Myrtle’s apartment. Catherine mentions that she attended a party at “a man named Gatsby’s” mansion, where she heard that “he’s a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm’s, you know, the evil German king?” (*Gatsby* 2013). Anachronistic music is blasting in the background, and with women stripping down to their undergarments and everyone spraying champagne on the walls, sexuality pulsates throughout the uncouth party. Catherine has just taken a pill for her nerves, and in all likelihood, has also slipped one into Nick’s mouth during a kiss, but the detail is important because it becomes part of Nick’s first impression of Jay Gatsby. The scene also challenges the reliability of the narrator, who is intoxicated and perhaps drugged as well. A number of rumors also contribute to Gatsby’s ominous aura, and at the film’s first party, Nick wonders aloud, “who is this Gatsby?,” and the question encourages partygoers to trade tales about their host (*Gatsby*



2013). He is purportedly “a German spy during the war” and “the Kaiser’s assassin” (*Gatsby* 2013). One woman offers, “I heard he killed a man once,” while another guest adds, “it’s true. He kills for fun, free of charge” (*Gatsby* 2013). Any attempt on Gatsby’s part to correct these rumors is only marginally successful, and in Luhrmann’s adaptation, Nick remains skeptical of his neighbor for much of the film. Nick admits that although he has spent time with Gatsby on three occasions, he “knew absolutely nothing at all” about him until their disconcerting ride to the City, when Gatsby offers to tell Nick “God’s truth” and then provides him with an autobiography that sounds as unnatural and rehearsed as it does in 1949 and 1974 (*Gatsby* 2013).

Luhrmann exaggerates everything in this scene, and with Gatsby, who is speaking almost as quickly as he is driving, is noticeably nervous. His speech matches that of the novel, and while Nick finds his autobiography doubtful, Gatsby hastily assures him that he is about to meet Meyer Wolfsheim, “one of New York’s most distinguished businessmen,” who will “vouch for [his] good character” and presumably bolster Gatsby’s biography, all during lunch at a speakeasy (*Gatsby* 2013). Wolfsheim repeats Gatsby’s speech in the car nearly verbatim, and it as if he too has studied a script. Luhrmann makes it clear that Wolfsheim has been primed for lunch, and that his narrative is part of a great scheme devised to convince Nick that Gatsby is a respectable man who can be trusted around his married cousin, Daisy.

### **Jimmy Gatz’ Gatsby**

Luhrmann also presents Gatsby as an actor, and with his background as James Gatz getting ample screen time in this adaptation, viewers are able to deduce the depth of Gatz’ sustained performance. DiCaprio conveys the complicated meta-performative nature of the character, and the actor secures his position as the most elusive Gatsby to date. As Charles Taylor explains, “Gatsby is always trying to be Gatsby, and so *DiCaprio trying to be Gatsby*

becomes unexpectedly touching” (202).<sup>111</sup> Although Fitzgerald’s titular character is deliberately veiled with secrecy, “DiCaprio makes him comprehensible and aching real. The actor’s choices drive home the idea that Gatsby is playing the man he wishes he were, and that others need him to be. We see the calculations behind his eyes, but we also believe that he could hide them from the other characters—most of them, anyway” (Seitz). He certainly fools Daisy, at least until he unravels at the Plaza Hotel, and realizes that Daisy also desperately wants Gatsby’s performance to represent his reality. In the end, Daisy is the only person in the audience who matters to Gatsby, and so throughout the film, and before the action even begins, he tailors his act to suit her tastes.

Gatsby’s performance requires the perfect set, which is, of course, the mansion he bought for Daisy, and like any professional actor, he must be outfitted in costumes that match the part. The scene wherein Gatsby tosses his shirts at his lover captures the essence of Fitzgerald’s passage by emphasizing Daisy’s diction. Just as she does at the Plaza Hotel, Daisy resists saying the words Gatsby wants to hear, and although she might be muted by Nick’s presence in the bedroom, if she does want Gatsby, she does not have the courage to follow her own heart—and if she does not want him, she does not have the heart to break his. The film then exhibits Gatsby’s shrine to Dan Cody, although he does not share details about their relationship in this scene. Daisy jokes that she “never knew [Gatsby] had a “pompadour...or a yacht,” confirming that she knows little about Gatsby’s experiences before the military, and that he has hidden his childhood as Jimmy Gatz and his apprenticeship with Dan Cody from her all along (*Gatsby*

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<sup>111</sup> The performative nature of James Gatz is emphasized in this adaptation, and “Gatsby’s greatest role is perhaps simply to assure his audiences—within the book and without (in the domain of readers, critics)—that there is meaning, and a self to encompass it, even if we, like Nick Carraway, cannot pin down what “incommunicable” quality of his it was that held such promise (112)” (Marsh).

2013). When Gatsby takes a curious and intense business call, Nick observes him breaking character, and Gatsby—who notices Nick noticing him—is suddenly reminded of his audience, and quickly hangs up so as to resume his act. When Daisy exits the scene, Gatsby and Nick have an intimate conversation wherein the DiCaprio Gatsby seems completely delusional, detached from not only his true identity, but from reality itself.

### **Gatsby and the Buchanans**

To make Gatsby seem more flattering, Luhrmann takes care to render Tom unsympathetic from the beginning. For instance, the director “pays more attention than Clayton did to Tom Buchanan’s racism,” and he emphasizes the differences between Daisy and Myrtle in an effective effort to minimize any of Tom’s more tender or redeeming qualities (Giles).

Although Gatsby is actively pursuing a married woman and lying about his true identity throughout the entire film, he is more likeable than Tom, who seems like a poor companion for Daisy in comparison.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, as a social climber without a respectable background, Gatsby is still not a suitable suitor for a Southern debutante like Daisy Fay Buchanan, and although his fortune and his good looks may be enviable, his happiness depends solely upon his attainment of an unattainable beloved.<sup>113</sup>

In the film’s opening scenes, the Buchanans’ estate looms even larger than Gatsby’s, although it soon becomes obvious that Gatsby is separated from East Egg by more than just a

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<sup>112</sup> Scott Foundas concludes that the DiCaprio Gatsby may be too sympathetic: “Baz Luhrmann identifies far more strongly with Gatsby than Nick, and instead of a tragic figure undone with false optimism and unrequited yearning, the character becomes an object of envy” for nearly everyone he meets (79).

<sup>113</sup> In “If you Build it, She Will Come: An Appreciation of Baz Luhrmann’s *The Great Gatsby* (2013),” Steve Chibnall argues that “Luhrmann is less interested in the critical sociology of *Gatsby* than in its universal power as myth, and that is less the myth of the American Dream than of the magnificent obsession: the story of the man who has everything except what he wants most: the lack that drives his search for meaning” (95).

bay. Later in the film, when Gatsby and Daisy sneak into the garden during one of his parties and she stands passively as Gatsby kisses her, she says that she wishes they could just “run away” together and start over someplace new (*Gatsby* 2013). The DiCaprio Gatsby is both shocked and hurt by this suggestion—his dream, of course, hinges upon the couple continuing their lives together in West Egg in the mansion he has purchased and prepared just for her. This misunderstanding defines the couple’s impossible love and suggests that it will take more than money to seduce Daisy away from her respectable position in East Egg, which is populated with socialites and heirs, well-bred people with family names that summon images of the American aristocracy and inheritances that grant them the priceless admission into the upper echelons of high society. Gatsby, with his newly acquired wealth and dishonorable profession, will never be able to live among the old money residents of East Egg, where the Buchanans’ mansion has enough room on the lawn for Tom to play polo. At the same time, a woman like Daisy can really only live in a place like East Egg, and it would be unlikely that she would settle for—or could even be able to adjust to—a life with Gatsby if it meant that she had to live among the nouveau riche in West Egg. Instead, she would prefer to escape the confines of the binary although, rejecting both Eggs in favor of a location better suited for their particular situation.

A demarcation between the lovers’ social strata implies that neither Daisy nor Gatsby could transition seamlessly from living on one Egg to the other, and because they are unable to realistically occupy space in one another’s realms, their love affair is doomed. Luhrmann’s reliance on synecdoche begins at the Buchanans’ dinner party, where Daisy’s gigantic Tiffany wedding ring appears before she does, symbolically representing her status as a married woman and obviously representing her high status in society. Mulligan’s Daisy is a self-absorbed and sarcastic woman, but she is also an absorbing and gracious host, a Southern Belle with perfect

manners. She too seems to be performing a part, however, and her airiness evaporates only once in the opening scene, and that is when she hears Jordan mention a man called Gatsby. Daisy's entire demeanor changes, and in an instant she becomes very serious, transfixed by the mere mention of his name. Mesmerized by his memory, she asks, "Gatsby? What Gatsby?" (*Gatsby* 2013). With this signature question, Daisy reveals that her interest in the man is sincere and that her romantic attraction to him is real. She also piques the curiosity of Gatsby's neighbor, Nick, and filmgoers as well, who spend the rest of movie trying to determine exactly who Gatsby is, how he has earned his money, and why he throws outlandish parties for such a "menagerie" of strangers (*Gatsby* 2013). As an audience member, Daisy's opinion is the only one that matters to Gatsby, although a number of mutual friends must have a good impression of him in order to bring the affair into fruition.

Gatz' performance as Gatsby begins to suffer when he is pitted directly against Tom Buchanan, whose financial and sexual affairs are already documented for viewers, and who therefore has the distinct advantage of having nothing to hide. At the Plaza Hotel, Tom asserts his superiority over Gatsby once and for all by exposing his illicit business endeavors and reducing him to a role defined by lies and criminality. The damage is irreparable, and "when Gatsby's deceptions are revealed and his illusions shattered, DiCaprio becomes at once terrifying and pathetic, a false idol toppling himself from his pedestal" (Seitz). Gatsby has waited to see Daisy for years, but suddenly, he cannot wait another minute to secure her commitment to him. He falters and says Tom, "your wife doesn't love you" (*Gatsby* 2013). Functioning as an interior director, Gatsby then attempts to coach Daisy into saying she never loved Tom and denying her feelings for him, feelings that have developed over the course of their marriage. He feeds her lines and tells her exactly how to act before eventually calling cut, and declaring that he needs to

take five and talk to Daisy alone. Yet Gatsby is slowly realizing that he is no longer in control of the action, and if he cannot control himself anymore, he certainly cannot control his lover, either. The confrontation ultimately confirms that Tom is the only respectable choice for Daisy's hand in marriage because Gatsby is just a bootlegger, "a front for Wolfsheim, a gangster" who is not worthy of her affections, and who certainly cannot provide an upright life for her and her daughter (*Gatsby* 2013). Tom dominates the conversation as he explains to Gatsby how he will never be able to fully participate in the Buchanans' world: "We're all different from you. You see, we were born different. It's in our blood," and as a result, it can neither be bought nor transmuted, and as a result of his upbringing and occupation, Gatsby is permanently excluded from their social realm (*Gatsby* 2013). Gatsby loses his temper and reacts by seizing Tom physically; in doing so, he abandons both his act as a well-heeled gentleman and his "fine Oxford manners," and since his involvement in the underworld is confirmed, Gatsby loses Daisy forever to Tom, who laughs at him (*Gatsby* 2013).

Yet DiCaprio's Gatsby never loses hope that Daisy will leave her husband to join him in his mansion, and his reaction to the scene at the Plaza Hotel and the accident with Myrtle highlights his role as a naïve romantic with an indefatigable and idealistic hope.<sup>114</sup> Gatsby, however, reveals to Nick that he was not driving the car, and that, in reality, it is Daisy who killed Myrtle, and then fled the scene of the accident. The film quickly cuts to the next scene,

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<sup>114</sup> Luhrmann crafts his film in a way that supports Gatsby's illusions about his future. One important omission in this film is the physical incarnation of the Buchanans' daughter, Pammy. Thomas Morgan draws attention to "Luhrmann's decision to remove the Pammy scene from chapter 7 of the novel so that Gatsby is never faced with evidence of Daisy's having consummated her marriage vow to Tom Buchanan...[which] enables Gatsby's delusion that he can go back to the way things once were. Gatsby returns to claim a young girl, unchanged, not a fully mature woman with family responsibilities; Daisy never mentions her daughter to Gatsby" (27). In this sense, Daisy contributes to Gatsby's delusions by downplaying her current familial entanglements in favor of fueling the lovers' fantasy of being together again in the future.

which shows Gatsby scrubbing his car in a manner that looks as if he has done it professionally in the past, intimating that he has not always been the wealthy proprietor he appears to be now, and that in reality, he comes from a background of hard work. The scene also signals the end of Gatz' performance as Gatsby, with Nick divulging, "that was the night he finally told me the truth—all of it," truths Nick withholds from his audience until the end of the film (*Gatsby* 2013). Gatsby still believes that Daisy "just needs time to think"—that she is going to "call in the morning" and that his dreams of being reunited with her will finally be fulfilled (*Gatsby* 2013). Nick now knows that he cannot convince Gatsby to believe otherwise, so he does not even bother trying. In their final scene together, when Nick shouts his first and only compliment to Gatsby, the host is physically elevated on his balcony, and Nick is situated below him on his lawn, their positions mirroring that of the scene wherein they first meet. Luhrmann allows Gatsby to remain on his imaginary pedestal until the very end. The phone is ringing when Gatsby is shot, and while viewers are aware that it is Nick calling on the phone, Gatsby dies with the name "Daisy" on his lips.

Luhrmann offers audiences a more pitiable portrait of Gatsby than Nugent or Clayton, and he portrays the character as a lost man who was "concealing an incorruptible dream" (*Gatsby* 2013). Since Mr. Gatz does not arrive for his son's funeral in this adaptation, DiCaprio's Gatsby is spared from being defined as a fraudulent orphan, and that part of his deception remains obscured. Gatsby's pathetic yet heroic love for an unattainable Daisy Buchanan prevents him from appreciating that which he has achieved in his short life. Although he has accrued great wealth and is very popular, Gatsby's happiness is tethered to an impossible dream. The film concludes with the novel's last line, "so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past," and the final scene of Luhrmann's film, which features

Nick standing at the end of Gatsby's dock, suggests that Gatsby's underestimation of his own self worth proves his fatal undoing. However, the scene also reminds viewers that it is important to strive for our goals despite the unavoidable obstacles that may stand in the way. Of course, the biography of Jimmy Gatz is the most impressive one in the novel—he is, after all, the only self-made character in *The Great Gatsby*—but by obliterating his past instead of using it as a barometer of success, Gatsby forfeits his opportunity to enjoy all that he has in fact achieved. He literally goes from being “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” to being the most popular host in Long Island, a gorgeous, wealthy, and well-connected man who, in reality, could find dozens of single golden girls that would happily fulfill his romantic dreams if only he could give up on his illusions about Daisy. However, by rejecting his true identity and trying to be someone he is not, Gatsby misses out on the bounty of his adult life, needlessly sacrificing absolutely everything for absolutely nothing, tragically mistaking a nightmare for a dream, and in Luhrmann's adaptation, literally going from dust to dust without ever pausing to enjoy the glitter.



## CONCLUSION – Jay Gatsby: From Film to Fitzgerald

These six productions offer distinct representations of the Gatsby character, and an overview of the performance history of *The Great Gatsby* reveals that its protagonist has been able to captivate audiences' attention in the ninety years since the novel's publication. Although each portrait of Gatsby is shaped according to a given director's interpretation of his uncertain nature, each one also brings out new dimensions of the character by projecting different aspects of his personality. In this sense, the adaptations encourage viewers to reconsider their own conceptions of Jay Gatsby and revise it as needed. The adaptations addressed in this dissertation are important to literary studies because they encourage moviegoers to read or reread the novel, and since their collective impact on the sales of Fitzgerald's novel is undeniable, their intrinsic value and cultural influence cannot be underestimated. This is not to say that the adaptations are therefore worthy of critical and scholarly praise, but rather that readers might consider major productions of *Gatsby* positive contributions to literary studies because they spawn an extracurricular interest in *The Great Gatsby*. Adaptations of *Gatsby* not only renew public fascination with the F. Scott Fitzgerald and his fiction, they also set trends, making Jazz Age fashion and design chic once again and inspiring theme parties, hotel suites, and even mansion decor. Fitzgerald's position in the canon is now secure, so the real worth of the adaptations is that they boost the author's popularity outside of the classroom and confirm his posthumous influence in society to this day. Despite the popularity of these six adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*, some literary scholars and film critics maintain that the novel should not be adapted into another medium at all—that nobody can really *be* Jay Gatsby, and that the nuances of the novel

will be lost in the process of translation—and some readers worry that such productions might interfere with serious studies of the novel, or even damage its reputation by distorting the plot or characters beyond recognition.

Readers who worry that books and films are in competition with one another are in good company, however, for Fitzgerald himself once worried that films might replace novels as a form of entertainment, predicting that they might even render paperback writers obsolete. In his 1936 “Crack Up” essays, a self-disparaging non-fiction series published in *Esquire*, Fitzgerald writes:

I saw that the novel, which at my maturity was the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to another, was becoming subordinated to a mechanical and communal art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion. It was an art in which words were subordinate to images, where personality was worn down to the inevitable low gear of collaboration. As long past as 1930, I had a hunch that the talkies would make even the best selling novelist as archaic as silent pictures. People still read...but there was a rankling indignity, that to me had become almost an obsession, in seeing the power of the written word subordinated to another power, a more glittering, a grosser power. (Fitzgerald, “The Crack Up” 78)

Although Fitzgerald’s fears were legitimate, they were perhaps magnified because he was working in Hollywood at the time, and was struggling to churn out enough fiction to make a living. In addition, much of his work was out of print when the author died in 1940, suggesting that he might have had every reason to presume that the cinema was slowly replacing literature. Fortunately, major adaptations of Fitzgerald’s fiction have proven themselves to be reliable contributions to the author’s legacy and estate over the last ninety years, and since they fuel a

surge in the novel's popularity outside of the high school or college bookstore, they confirm *Gatsby's* status as an accessible masterpiece of modern literature that is ripe for adaptation. Part of what makes this novel a desirable text for adaptation is the complex nature of Jay Gatsby, an iconic character that is molded differently by each production team that adapts *The Great Gatsby* into another medium. Directors seize the opportunity to depict Gatsby on stage or film because of the many profiles of him that emerge in the tome. James Gatz becomes a number of things as he transitions into playing the part of Jay Gatsby, and the resulting figure means different things to different characters. As Nick demonstrates in his narrative, Gatsby is simultaneously a poor nobody from North Dakota, a courageous veteran, a sentimental romantic, a generous host, a lousy criminal, and a strange neighbor, but in the end, Gatsby is deemed great by the narrator, who considers the ambiguous character intriguing enough to comprise the substance of his novel, *The Great Gatsby*.

Gatsby's unmistakable multiplicity is latent in Fitzgerald's novel, wherein Nick resists telling readers whether he believes Gatsby's dreams are worth pursuing, and does not admit whether he thinks Gatsby's delusions are okay or not. Each adaptation approaches this dilemma differently, and directors' interpretations of Gatsby's intentions influence their respective representations of the robust character. In the novel, Nick remains conflicted about the character, and although he becomes Gatsby's most loyal friend, the unreliable narrator also concludes that his neighbor "represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 2). Nevertheless, Nick's final assessment of the subject of his biography is that "Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 2). The novel opens with this brief description of

Gatsby, but because Nick manipulates the chronology of the story, readers accrue fragments of information about the protagonist's life story over the course of the novel instead of hearing it all at once. Nick soon shares more about Gatsby's dreams and the "foul dust" that clouded his judgment and prevented him from finding contentment in the present moment, but his presentation of the character in *The Great Gatsby* is colored by the methodology of these staggered revelations. Yet at the end of the novel, when Nick recounts Gatsby's most complete autobiography for his audience, the titular character seems sympathetic and even pathetic, and the narrative approach complicates readers' reception of the slippery character. Directors combine the various parts Gatz plays into one representation of Gatsby when projecting their respective portraits of this round character on stage or screen. Gatsby's complexity renders Fitzgerald's novel an attractive candidate for adaptation because, as an actor and an imposter, the rich character can be portrayed in a variety of ways without being rendered unrecognizable.

### **Gatsby's Evolution**

The major adaptations' Gatsbys showcase different attributes of a performative character that is hard to define, and actors' portrayal help viewers assemble a more complete picture of the novel's protagonist as a result. Like Nick, directors control the flow of information to viewers, and as such, they can distort, downplay, highlight, omit, or invent details about the adaptation's plot and characters as they wish—and as demonstrated in this dissertation, they certainly do. Each resulting adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* suits its given socio-historical context and reflects the production modes of its times, demonstrating not only the cultural development of the character over time, but technological developments as well. The major motion pictures are particularly important to the evolving legacy of Jay Gatsby because of their reliance on the reputation of the novel and its author and their relationships with the text.

Every adaptation provides a slightly different interpretation of the mythical character, and each portrayal is certainly grounded in the source material, production teams collaborate to generate highly distinct depictions of the novel's titular character. Although Brenon's 1926 silent film is lost, its very production signals the popularity of Fitzgerald's story and sets the stage for subsequent adaptations. In 1949, Elliot Nugent present moviegoers with the Alan Ladd Gatsby, who is introduced in the opening scenes as an unseemly gangster who has amassed a fortune since the war. This film in particular invites viewers to consider Gatsby's early experiences as Jimmy Gatz, a skipper aboard Dan Cody's yacht who receives some bad advice: money is the only thing that matters in the world, especially when it comes to attracting women. In Nugent's 1949 adaptation, Gatsby is an honorable romantic who undergoes a significant amount of personal growth before experiencing a redemptive epiphany wherein he recognizes the folly of his ways, and the moralizing forces of the film industry's Production Code are undeniable. Jack Clayton's 1974 film offers viewers the Robert Redford Gatsby, which was the signature cinematic portrayal of the character for 39 years. Redford's Gatsby is a charming but deceptive man who is carefully controlling his speech and behavior. Clayton does not treat the Gatz backstory at all in his film, and Mr. Gatz does not appear for his son's funeral; these omissions make the Redford Gatsby seem more like a social outcast than an outright impostor, and the alteration stifles much of the general curiosity about the character's background that arises in other adaptations. The most interesting aspect of the 1974 Gatsby is that Clayton depicts him as a delusional character that is apparently stalking his betrothed beloved, Daisy Buchanan, who does not mind the attention. The Redford Gatsby, who is often depicted as a heroic war veteran, is seen primarily through Daisy's eyes, and the result is a sentimental and overreaching man who is absolutely living in the past. Baz Luhrmann's 2013 adaptation stars

Leonardo DiCaprio as a sensitive and performative Gatsby who is clearly the center of the film and the subject of Nick's biography. Luhrmann includes many indications of Gatsby's former identity as James Gatz, such as flashbacks that depict his poor rural upbringing and the disclosure that upon meeting Dan Cody, a young Gatz decided to call himself Jay Gatsby. The DiCaprio Gatsby is an insecure loner, and his veritable belief in his impossible dreams can make this representation of the character particularly sympathetic for viewers, who watch helplessly as he ruins his life. These coexisting profiles complement two stage productions: the 1926 *Gatsby* Broadway play and *Gatz*, the early 2000s Broadway and West End stage adaptation of the novel, both of which were wildly successful and refocused attention on Fitzgerald and his novel as well. These six adaptations chart the performance history of a fictitious cultural icon that has achieved great fame on stage and film, and they are significant to literary studies because they function as free marketing for the novel and return readers to Fitzgerald's prose.

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