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From Noir Hoodlum to Jay-G: Film Adaptations of Gatsby

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Abstract

Beyond the not-as-good-as-the-book fidelity-based response to film adaptations, there is a more productive argument that film versions actually play a valid role in the critical discourse of a work of literature. In this article, following a brief overview of F. Scott Fitzgerald's time in Hollywood, parallel scenes from four feature-film adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* will be discussed. This will include the 1926 silent melodrama (of which only the trailer has survived), the 1949 *film noir* version, the 1974 Hollywood heritage film, and the 2013 blockbuster. A comparison of these scenes illustrates how the film adaptations bring out through genre the multiple potentialities in *The Great Gatsby.* Moreover, each one of the films reflects the time and place in which it was created, as much as the period it aims to depict. Literary adaptations are readings that can serve to modify the ongoing reception of a text by adding their own creative interpretation to the discourse surrounding it. The film adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* highlight the artistic decisions surrounding its conception, show us how the reception of a literary work changes over time, and paradoxically, by modifying the text, contributes to its on-going evolution and survival in the literary canon.

Keywords

F. Scott Fitzgerald, Adaptation, Film Studies, *The Great Gatsby*, *Gatsby* on the Screen

Özet

Film uyarlamalarını 'kitabı kadar iyi olmamakla' değerlendiren, sadakat temelli incelemelerin ötesinde, film uyarlamalarının aslında edebi eserlerin eleştirel söylemini genişletmekte önemli bir rol

oynadığını vurgulayan yararlı bir görüş vardır. Bu makalede, F. Scott Fitzgerald'ın Hollywood'da geçirdiği zaman kısaca gözden geçirildikten sonra, *The Great Gatsby* (*Muhteşem Gatsby*)'nin dört farklı uzun metrajlı film uyarlamasındaki benzer sahneler tartışılacaktır. Sadece tanıtım filmi mevcut olan 1926 yapımı sessiz melodram, 1949 yapımı kara film uyarlaması, 1974 yapımı Hollywood uyarlaması ve gişe rekoru kıran 2013 uyarlaması bu tartışma içerisinde yer almaktadır. Benzer sahnelerin kıyaslanması, film uyarlamalarının türe ait üslupla *Muhteşem Gatsby*'nin farklı açılardan yorumlanmaya ne kadar açık olduğunu ortaya çıkarır. Bunun yanında, filmlerden her biri, tasvir etmek istediği dönemin yanı sıra üretildiği zamanı ve yeri yansıtır. Edebi tartışmalar, bir metinle ilgili süregelen algıyı, mevcut söylem çerçevesinde, kendi yaratıcı yorumlarıyla şekillendirmeye yardımcı olan yorumlardır. *Muhteşem Gatsby* uyarlamaları, filmin algılanma biçimini çevreleyen sanatsal tercihleri vurgular; bir edebi eserin yorumlanmasının zaman içerisinde nasıl değiştiğini ve çelişkili olarak, yapılan metin değişiklileriyle, metnin süregelen evrimine ve edebiyat dünyasında hayatta kalmasına nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu gösterir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

F. Scott Fitzgerald, Uyarlama, Film Çalışmaları, *The Great Gatsby*, Beyazperdede *Gatsby*

F. Scott Fitzgerald lived and worked in Hollywood for approximately two and a half years, briefly between 1927 and 1931, but mostly in 1937. It was a fairly prosperous time in F. Scott Fitzgerald's writing career as he was writing for the studios and earning $1,000-$1,250 per week. Yet, despite the financial rewards, he was not particularly successful as a screenwriter, and in his entire career, he picked up only one official screenwriting credit for the 1938 film *Three Comrades* (McGrath). The famous *film noir* screenwriter, director and producer Billy Wilder compared Fitzgerald to "a great sculptor who is hired to do a plumbing job" and complained that he "did not know how to connect the pipes so the water could flow" (McGrath). Fitzgerald approached screenplays like novels and wrote long back stories for each character. As Anne Margaret Daniel contends in her criticism of

the 2013 film of *The Great Gatsby,* it is the evocative and seemingly cinematic quality of the author's prose that ironically poses the greatest challenge for filmmakers:

> Fitzgerald's language has already done all the cinematic work for the actors, directors, set designers and producers. *The Great Gatsby* is an interior book, little concerned with externals. Fitzgerald conjures what he wants to say by way of description with only a few delicate strokes of words. […] We use our imaginations to fill out the pictures for ourselves, where a camera cannot. ("What Did F. Scott Fitzgerald Think of the Great Gatsby, the Movie, in 1926?")

Nevertheless, to counter the latter point, a film can hardly be expected to match the readers' imaginative constructions since such conceptions are as much a subjective product of the minds of the readers as they are derived from the ambiguous prose of the text and the discourse surrounding it. Furthermore, to dismiss the filmmakers' interpretations of the text is a missed opportunity to gain additional insight into the potentialities of the source text through different readings of it on screen.

Adaptation studies have now moved beyond the not-as-good-as-the-book approach. Literal fidelity is impossible as it does not take into account the unknowable, ambiguous, indeed *literary,* nature of the source, the material differences between words and sound-images, and the collaborative culturally specific nature of each adaptation. There is no straight line from the film adaptation back to an unchanging original because, as this paper will demonstrate, adaptations are shaped by a range of factors including the genres of the film industry, other films, other adaptations, and the previous roles and on-screen personas of the adaptation's cast members. Furthermore, an adaptation is not only responding to a literary text but to the discourse surrounding it, and it is within this ongoing discourse that the film also makes itself known. Each adaptation affects subsequent readings and adaptations, and contributes to the text's continuing evolution – reasserting its position within the literary canon. Thus, instead of dismissing adaptations for

failing to live up to our impossible expectations, more can be gained by considering them as critical readings. Although we may or may not agree with a critical interpretation, it can provide revealing perspectives into the potentialities of the literary text.

For the filmmaker, one of the greatest challenges of *The Great Gatsby* is the character of Jay Gatbsy because in the novel he only exists through Nick Carraway's subjective narration. This presents a problem for the seemingly objective narrative eye of the realist film, which views its characters from the omniscient third-person perspective. No such viewpoint exists of Jay Gatsby because, as Gould Boyum points out, Gatbsy is

> a fabulous character in the most literal sense of the word – more an emblem or type than an actualized personality. We accept him in the context of the novel, though largely because we never see him directly: only as filtered through Nick. […] whether it's Gatsby in love or Gatsby in death, we gain nothing and lose everything in seeing him directly, unprotected by Nick's viewpoint. (118-19)

Due to the novel's limited first-person narrative structure, *The Great Gatsby* is Nick Carraway's story but the film camera tells the story differently, externalizing and literalizing observations that may only be real in the character's mind. In the book, Carraway is needed for Gatsby to exist; on screen, Carraway is merely a foil, and it is the film that creates Gatsby anew.

Gatsby's mystery is established long before we actually get to meet the man and the effect of this lengthy exposition is that, like Carraway, when we first encounter the novel's hero, it is with certain expectations and a fair amount of trepidation. Their first meeting takes place in a crowded party at Gatsby's mansion, where Carraway appears to be the only guest to have been formally invited, and when he boasts of this to a stranger he has just started chatting with, amid the confusion of the crowd and champagne, he is embarrassed to discover that this same stranger is his elusive host:

> I turned again to my new acquaintance. "This is an

> unusual party for me. I haven't even seen the host. I live over there –" I waved my hand at the invisible hedge in the distance, "and this man Gatsby sent over his chauffeur with an invitation."
>
> For a moment he looked at me as if he failed to understand.
>
> "I'm Gatsby," he suddenly exclaimed. "Oh, I beg your pardon."
>
> I thought you knew, old sport. I'm afraid I'm not a very good host." (Fitzgerald, Ch.3)

The way in which this key event is staged reveals much about how the character of Gatsby might be perceived, his naivety, charm and menace, and the role of Carraway in shaping this perception. Comparing this scene across multiple film adaptations not only provides insight into the multiple potentialities of the text, but also reveals how Gatsby's character has been read and responded to in different pockets of time.

The films to be discussed for this brief study are the cinema features from 1926, 1949, 1974 and 2013. For each film, the first meeting between Carraway and Gatsby is considered with the exception of the 1926 version as this scene is no longer available because, sadly, only the fragments featured in the trailer for this first film adaptation have survived. The rest of this movie, like so many films from the silent era, has now been lost. The 1926 film adaptation was directed by Herbert Brenon, written by Elizabeth Meehan and Becky Gardiner, and starred Neil Hamilton as Nick Carraway, Warner Baxter as Jay Gatsby, and Lois Wilson as Daisy Buchanan. The surviving fragments suggest that the film was typical of the silent films of the time, which, in the fledgling years of film, were still heavily influenced by the stage-set melodrama. The trailer uses a shot of the book to announce and authenticate itself as a literary adaptation and claims it is a "record-selling novel", which was an exaggeration since the book sold poorly in its first years– a point illustrated by the fact that when Fitzgerald died in 1940, he had only received 13 dollars in royalties from it. The hyperbole continues in the subsequent scenes, which show the characters wearing heavy stage makeup that gives them wide eyes and flashing teeth, and by their over-acting with theatrical gestures – typical of a performance that might

normally take place on a distant stage rather than a cinema screen. The perspective is restricted to a stationary viewpoint because the cameras were too heavy and delicate to move around easily in the 1920s and the action is highly choreographed as the characters move in and out of this limited frame.

The sequence of scenes which make up the trailer begins with Tom Buchanan's lover, Myrtle Wilson, hyperventilating while being confronted by her husband, George, in their humble home, which is an obvious film set. In the next fragment, a character that appears to be Nick Carraway finds the prostrate body of either Gatsby or his killer, and the murder weapon, which he holds in a manner that would have allowed the audience to see it. Next, a passionate embrace is shown in close-up between a young woman in flapper attire and a burly dark man in uniform, characters that appear to be Daisy and Gatsby. Then follow scenes of highly choreographed revelry outside Gatsby's mansion around a lavish swimming pool and inside around a majestic staircase. The wide shots of 1920s' revelers diving into the pool and descending the stairs in synchronized lines align this film with the highly stylized performances of a staged musical extravaganza rather than the Hollywood-style realism that would become the norm a few decades later. The next scene shows a tightly framed confrontation between Gatsby and Tom in the New York apartment as the other characters look on anxiously. The final scene is the iconic painted eyes billboard for Eckleburg's Optometrist and, in the closing moments of the trailer, the eyes surprisingly roll downwards. This brief animation was probably intended to unnerve the viewer with their ever-watchful nature but juxtaposed with the bizarre spectacle of the previous clips, it ironically seems like an unfortunate eye-rolling disapproval of the film.

This was certainly the view of the Fitzgeralds. The 1926 film adaptation is the only film adaptation, which F. Scott Fitzgerald viewed and he apparently stormed out of the cinema before its end. As his wife Zelda complained, in 1926 (and in caps), "We saw 'The Great Gatsby' in the movies. It's ROTTEN and awful and terrible and we left" (qtd. in Daniel, 2013). A contemporary reviewer from the *New York Times* was also bemused by this first adaptation, complaining of an excessive staginess, which, even in the 1920s, made the story seem somewhat ridiculous:

> Daisy was evidently most memorable for drinking

> absinthe. She takes enough of this beverage to render the average person unconscious [and] to give the impression of Gatsby's recklessness with money there is a sequence in which he tosses gold pieces into the water, and you see a number of the girls diving for the coins. (Hall, 1926)

Such prejudice towards the sensationalist aspect of film adaptations in this period was not uncommon. Most authors and critics of the modernist period (with the notable exceptions of Joyce and Fitzgerald) generally viewed contemporary film, which at this point in time tended towards melodrama, as rather crass and no substitute for literature or theatre, which they feared it could desecrate. Virginia Woolf (1926), for example, thought that cinema was degrading, with readers becoming "savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures" (166). Cinema was seen as vulgar because it appealed to the uneducated general populace rather than the educated elite who feared that the dumbing down of literature for film might lead to its desecration and demise. Nevertheless, regardless of the merits of the film, surely every adaptation has something to offer if it is viewed for what it really is, a collaborative reading. Such readings, regardless of how incomplete or misjudged they might be considered, can still add to our understanding of the text and the decisions faced by the author. The melodrama of the 1926 film is an undercurrent within the source-text too, in the hyperbolic descriptions of the lavish parties and lifestyles and in the barely repressed obsession and savagery of the central characters. Adaptations help us to see the potentialities of a text and in this case, it is the potential for hysteria and farce.

Twenty-three years later, the next film adaptation approached the story in a way that showed that the film industry had matured into its own artistic entity because instead of borrowing from the story-telling techniques of the stage and music hall, the 1949 adaptation reimagined *The Great Gatsby* as a crime thriller in the style of *film noir*. The heyday of *film noir* is widely believed to span the period from 1941-58 and featured films with a much darker content and style (Grant, 27). The stories frequently involved crime, deception and cynical protagonists doing bad things. The monochrome style featured an abundance of shadows falling across lying faces and provided a dimly lit setting for

the unfolding dark deeds. Instead of spotlighting the characters, it was not unusual for the actors in a *film noir* to share the same light source as the background. As Paul Schrader explains, this stylistic technique contributed to the timbre of the films, because "[w]hen the environment is given an equal or greater weight than the actor, it, of course, creates a fatalistic, hopeless mood. There is nothing the protagonist can do; the city will outlast and negate even his best efforts" (219). This technique of ambiguous lighting is widely deployed in the forties' adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, in which the characters seem barely distinguishable from the murky grayness that engulfs them.

The 1949 film was directed by Elliott Nugent, and starred Macdonald Carey as Carraway, Betty Field as Daisy Buchanan, and one of the archetypal faces of the *noir* genre Allan Ladd as Jay Gatsby – an actor well known for his depiction of gangsters with a conscience. Ladd's handsome blonde floppy-haired delicately-featured and trimly-built Gatsby was an extreme contrast to the dark short-haired stocky Gatsby of Warner Baxter in the first adaptation. In fact, from this point onwards, Ladd became the on-screen template for all future big screen depictions of Jay Gatsby to follow.

Produced during the post-war period and at the height of popularity for the crime and gangster film genre, Nugent's film owes as much to *film noir* as it does to Fitzgerald with its iconography of crime, shadows, and violence. It opens with a cartoonish action sequence of Jay Gatsby firing a tommy gun from the window of a speeding car at another vehicle and then looking concerned when it crashes into a wall and explodes. Next, we see Gatsby walking purposively at the head of an archetypal gangster triangle flanked by two heavies as a voice-over narrative explains, "And out of the twenties, and all they were, came Jay Gatsby who built a dark empire for himself because he carried a dream in his heart." Apart from this tacked-on exposition sequence, which establishes Gatsby's credentials as a crime film antihero, the rest of the film is closer to the events of the text –and might be described as a rather dull and austere retelling of the story.

Despite its A-list star, the film was critically panned with a contemporary *New York Times* reviewer complaining, "Elliott Nugent's handling of the cast and of supposedly significant behavior is completely artificial and stiff" (Crowther). Not only are the performances rather subdued, but so too are Gatsby's parties in this austere post-WWII

rendering. When compared to the jubilance on display in the other adaptations, the party scene where Carraway meets Gatsby is a much more somber affair with its abundance of gray walls, long shadows and deep pockets of darkness. Carraway is also notably more sober, confident and priggish in this version. As he wanders bemused through the party, his unknown host appears and enquires if he is enjoying himself, to which, Carraway complains, "Yes and no. Beautiful evening, lovely girls, good music, but what's it all for?" Gatsby recovers, "I gather you don't like parties." To which Carraway responds, "That depends. This Gatsby must be quite a character. I'm his neighbor and I've been listening to his goings on for two weeks wondering what it is that makes a man live like this. I thought I'd come and see for myself." Gatsby asks, "Do you think you'll find out" to which he replies, "I don't know. Gatsby probably doesn't know it himself." At which point, the host avoids further awkwardness by announcing, "I think he does. You see, I'm Gatsby." Carraway's embarrassment is saved by a large drunk who barges in, rudely addresses his host as "Gatz," and tells him in a manner that suggests trouble, "You know what I want!" Gatsby politely walks the man behind some trees into the darkness, and then swiftly punches him unconscious, before returning to Carraway to calmly continue their polite conversation. Like the opening car chase sequence, this scene aligns the film with the generic cartoonish violence of pulp fiction and the talky set-bound nature of *film noir*, rather than its literary source. It is still the story of *The Great Gatsby* but told in the sucker punch style of *The Maltese Falcon*.

On screen, Carraway does not appear to have witnessed the violent altercation that interrupted their conversation or at least behaves as if he did not. Alternatively, since the story is being told in retrospect from Carraway's recollection of it, perhaps the narrator creatively imagined that violence took place in order for Gatsby to have dispatched the intruder so swiftly. Either way, in this adaptation, Carraway ultimately serves as the sensible sanctimonious foil to Gatsby's immoral behavior. Like the showy but sparsely lit setting for the party, Gatsby is well-presented, wealthy, and welcoming but also a part of the darkness that surrounds him. Within the genre of the forties' crime film, Jay Gatsby takes his place alongside Sam Spade, Mike Hammer and Philip Marlowe, as the archetypal *film noir* antihero, but Elliot's film hardly reflects the complexity of its literary hero or the society he inhabits. As Martin Halliwell points out, "Elliot Nugent admitted that his 1949

adaptation did not live up to his cinematic expectations. This was one of the reasons why Paramount commissioned a third version with a much more lavish budget in 1974, directed by Jack Clayton with a screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola" (93). A quarter of a century later, in color and a very different genre, Gatsby's character would undergo another significant metamorphosis.

The 1974 film directed by Jack Clayton and written by Francis Ford Coppola realizes Gatsby's extravagance through the opulence of the big budget blockbuster. Starring Sam Waterston as Nick Carraway, Robert Redford as Jay Gatsby, and Mia Farrow as Daisy Buchanan the film shimmers and sparkles with its expensive settings, costumes and stars, and won two Oscars for costume design and score. Yet, as the following section discusses, despite closely adhering to all of the major events, characters and settings of the novel, the film told a very different story because of its genre, casting, narrative viewpoint and pace.

Although the 1974 adaptation is undeniably a big budget Hollywood film, its iconography, leisurely pacing and subdued civility between the characters align the film most closely with the genre of the Heritage Film. Indeed, Clayton's sumptuous retelling of the tale perfectly illustrates Paul Dave's description of heritage film: "Shot in a cinematographic style designed to display spectacle, the films give the impression of celebrating a social order that their own narratives are preoccupied with questioning, particularly through the attention given to characters' attempts to transgress established boundaries of class"(28). In addition to its lavish decor, other typical tropes that associate this film with the Heritage Film genre are the overly polite and awkward interactions of the characters that populate its world, the insecurities about class, the subdued soundscape of chamber music and awkward silences, and the slower, more reader-like, narrative pace. As Gould Boyum observed, in comparison to the source text, the pacing of the 1974 film is

> languorous, whereas the novel is tight and fast-paced; its look is consistently elegant, whereas in the novel much of what we see is characterized by an 'ineffable gaudiness'; the parties are less wild and vulgar than they seem in the book and are populated not by a mix of nouveau-rich West Eggers and elegant East-Eggers, but with all the same type of people. (116-17)

In fact, one of the chief complaints against Cardiff's film was that the movie miscast its stars, with Robert Redford's Jay Gatsby appearing too refined and sophisticated to be convincing as the character described in the novel as an "elegant young roughneck" (Fitzgerald, Ch.3). As Desmond and Hawkes explain, "the actors' portrayals reshape the roles and disrupt the architecture of the original story" (250). In other words, Redford's Gatsby has become such an integral part of his opulent surroundings that he seems more at home in high society than his nemesis Tom Buchanan. Buchanan is the character who is supposed to represent the highborn breeding that Jay Gatsby can never attain despite his wealth, yet in the film it is Buchanan, not Gatsby, who appears uncouth and out of place.

Cardiff's film followed the events of the text quite closely, yet the narrative viewpoint of the tale was changed from Carraway's first-person limited view to an omniscient perspective. This facilitated the addition of numerous sequences that were not in the source text, for example, Gatsby and Daisy alone together on an idyllic picnic – a scene that could not have occurred in the book because the narrator was not there to see it. However, as Gould Boyum explains, Carraway's "[p]erceptions and judgments stand at the story's very heart" (117). This is because it is the rich, ambiguous and irreverent imagination of the narrator that makes the character of Gatsby and the world surrounding him so fantastical. Instead, as Halliwell points out, Clayton's film "reworks the novel along the lines of classical Hollywood realism" (93). Thus, Gatsby's world is filtered not through the narrative technique of the Modernist novel but through the generic conventions of a Hollywood feature film.

At 144 minutes, 53 minutes longer than the previous adaptation, Clayton's stately production is noticeably slower than the previous film adaptation and, from beginning to end, the scene where Carraway meets Gatsby for the first time takes four times longer to unfold than in the preceding film – and, unlike in the source text, takes place in a quiet room away from the party. The sequence begins in the garden with Carraway's summoning by one of Gatsby's unsmiling servants. Carraway thinks that he is in trouble and insists that he has an invitation. His journey into the house to meet Gatsby is an anxious one as Carraway does not know to where he is being taken or why – and the man he is with is silent, unsmiling and armed. When Carraway finally comes face to face with Gatsby, in a richly paneled office, he is visibly relieved to discover a man just as nervous as he. His charming, smiling and nervous

host cannot do enough for him, but there are long embarrassing pauses, typical of the heritage genre, in which the characters' inabilities to communicate also convey their social entrapment.

Unlike in the previous film, Gatsby's menace is suggested, not by his physical presence, but by the henchman and mystery that surrounds him. When he has to break the conversation with Carraway to answer a telephone call from Chicago, his change of tone is probably intended to indicate a man more accustomed to harsher interaction, but Redford's portrayal of Gatsby is so genteel it seems more like he is pretending to be tough rather than pretending *not* to be. Unlike in the book, in Clayton's film it appears to be Carraway rather than Gatsby who feels most uncomfortable in this lavish world. Furthermore, the celebration of Gatsby's lifestyle through the lingering Vaseline-smeared color-saturated photography of this seventies film and the attention to its many accouterments such as the sparkling dinner services, manicured lawns, and idyllic lakes brings a costume-drama quaintness to the story and a sense of literary proprietary to the novel, which it did not have in the 1920s. Thirty-nine years later, the next film would steer the Gatsby story in a very different direction by combining the blockbuster budget of Cardiff's film with the kinetic energy of the twenties' version, and the exaggerated verisimilitude of the *film noir* – and all in stroboscopic 3D.

The 2013 film directed by Baz Luhrmann stars Tobey Maguire as Nick Carraway, Leonardo DiCaprio as Jay Gatsby, and Carey Mulligan as Daisy Buchanan and is shot in 3D with an anachronous pumping soundtrack produced by hip-hop musician Jay-Z. It opens with a shot of a book and a voiceover of its prose – a device which is generally considered an adaptation cliché, as words become moving pictures. However, in the 2013 version, the turning of this page opens a door into a 3D wonderland. Elaborate crane shots, hyperbolic sets, rapid editing from multiple angles, and a liberal dose of CGI stretch the limits of conventional Hollywood realism into what has now become recognizable as Luhrmann's flamboyant auteur style.

The film frames the events of the novel within a story of how the book came to be written, by the narrator Nick Carraway. The main effect of the film's departure from the source text in this manner is that it ironically brings the film closer to the novel's narrative because the limited first person perspective of Carraway is restored. Unlike in the 1974 version, there are no shots of Gatsby and Daisy alone together that

Carraway would not have been there to witness and report – he is again the perpetual gooseberry that he played in the novel. Furthermore, the incredulously exaggerated opulence and glitter of the wonderland that he presents to us, through extensive use of voiceover and head-spinning visuals, is so unbelievable that it could only be possible in our guide's over-imaginative nostalgic recollection of it.

Luhrmann's film illustrates how a film's cast carries baggage from previous movies which paratextually influences our perception of the literary character that continues to evolve through its filmic depictions. Just as Alan Ladd reworked Jay Gatsby as his star turn, the charming handsome gangster and anti-hero of *noir*, the casting of DiCaprio as Gatsby illustrates other facets of Gatsby's literary character through DiCaprio's oeuvre: there is the poor boy mistreated by the ruling classes (DiCaprio as Jack from *Titanic*), the epitome of extravagance and excess (Jordan Belfort in *Wolf of Wall Street),* and the softly-spoken charmer hiding a terrifying rage (Calvin Candie in *Django Unchained*).

In the 2013 film, the meeting between Carraway and Gatsby is set within the heart of the party, like in the novel and the 1940s film, but also borrows the menacing summoning scene from the more detached 1970s version. As Carraway roves around the party becoming visibly drunk, he is offered a large glass of champagne from a tray and the hand bearing the tray is wearing a significant ring. The editing is extremely fast and from numerous perspectives. To illustrate just how fast, a brief comparison of the amount of shots used for this scene in Luhrmann's film with those of its predecessors reveals the dramatic difference in pace and style: in the 2013 film, the first conversation between Carraway and Gatsby lasts only 1:48 minutes yet contains a staggering 36 cuts – that makes an average of one cut every three seconds. In the 1974 film, the same conversation takes a much more leisurely 2:25 minutes to unfold but only uses eight cuts making an equivalent of one cut every 18 seconds. In the 1949 film, the parallel scene lasts 1:45 seconds yet contains only three cuts, which is about one cut every 35 seconds. The effect of these technical details on the style is that the first film unfolds more like a filmed play, the second has the glacial pace of a reverential period piece, and the third assaults the senses with the visceral kinetics of a pop music video.

Frenetic editing is a familiar trait of Luhrmann's films and can be quite disorienting but here it effectively shows our narrator Carraway's intoxication and confusion and is adroitly used to conceal the identity

of the tray bearer. The characters converse, as in the text, but we never see the face of who Carraway is talking with and our narrator seems too inebriated and distracted to be paying much attention. Carraway boasts not only that he has received an invitation but that he has heard Gatsby "is third cousin to the Kaiser and second cousin to the devil." To which, Gatsby responds serenely, "I'm afraid I haven't been a very good host old sport, you see … I'm Gatsby." At which point, our viewpoint changes to Carraway's, and in an entrance contrived for the big screen in 3D, Gatsby holds a huge glass of champagne out to him, or rather *into* the audience, as spectacular fireworks explode all around him in dream-like slow motion. As we see the reaction shot of Carraway looking awestruck, a voiceover narrative paraphrases from the book: "His smile was one of those rare smiles that you can come across four or five times in life. It seemed to understand you and believe you just as you would like to be understood and believed in." After setting up their next meeting, Gatsby is called away to answer his call to Chicago and Carraway is left with the socialite Jordan Baker who begins to gossip that she does not believe Gatsby went to Oxford. At which point, she is startled by the deep somber voice of Gatsby's sinister minder by her side who tells her that Gatsby wants to speak with her, alone. As she begins her nervous journey up to the house, with the mobster alongside, it recalls the summoning to the house of Carraway in the preceding film. Both of them used this scene to similar effect, to suggest a certain aura of menace surrounding Gatsby while the man himself at this point remains charming, vulnerable, and seemingly beyond reproach.

Film adaptations draw attention to the creative decisions surrounding the text and its conception. For example, on Carraway's first encounter with Gatsby, Fitzgerald could have menaced Carraway too, or at least further deepened his embarrassment. The suggestion is there in the prose, in the call from Chicago and the boasting of the written invitation, but the Fitzgerald left it as such, and open to interpretation. Like an anecdote that becomes more apocryphal on each retelling, each film adaptation has expanded on this scene's potentiality to create something new – something that did not happen but could have done. Thus, adaptations illustrate how we read texts through the filter of our own minds and experiences, how this changes over time, and how seemingly timeless texts change as their readers do. As the aforementioned clips demonstrate, adaptations also adapt other adaptations and films. This, in turn, reshapes how we might read the

text, which then feeds back into the ongoing discourse surrounding it.

As Cartmell and Whelehan explain, "Adaptation studies can open our minds to considerations often swept beneath the carpet in literary studies, regarding the popularization of a text through marketing, standardization (or genre), intertextuality, or plagiarism, and the targeting of specific audiences" (4). The different commercial interests and genres of the films bring out diverse potentialities in *The Great Gatsby* because the films reflect the periods and creative energies of when they were created as much as the period that they aimed to depict. The silent twenties melodrama foregrounded the text's barely-concealed mayhem for the flapper generation; the forties *film noir* focused on Gatsby's shady past to appeal to fans of the popular crime film; the shimmering seventies Hollywood production polished up the stately respectability of its literary source for the Academy of Motion Pictures, while Luhrmann's post-millennial hyperbolic blockbuster brought out the bling for IMAX 3D thrill seekers. Yet, rather than diminishing the literary source text, each new film continues to expand *The Great Gatsby*'s audience and renew its relevance, and as such, helps it to survive and evolve in exciting new ways that have yet to be imagined. Instead of viewing film as a threat to literature, adaptations should be seen as critical readings, which however misjudged they might sometimes be considered, still have something to offer as creative interpretations. Also, the collaborative commercial nature of adaptations draw attention to the fluidity of the source material and what it says about each age that revisits it.

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