

BOOK AND FILM: FITZGERALD'S THE GREAT GATSBY

By

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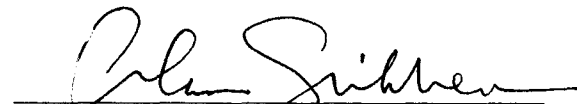
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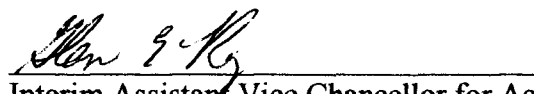
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the preface to F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, Matthew Bruccoli calls the book "a classic" and "the defining novel of the Twenties" (ix). Published in 1925, this literary masterpiece tells the story of the mysterious, lavishly wealthy Jay Gatsby and his love for the beautiful Daisy Buchanan. Paramount brought the famous novel to the cinematic screen in 1974; directed by Jack Clayton, The Great Gatsby starred Robert Redford and Mia Farrow. Though it received two Academy Awards (Costume Design and Best Scoring), the highly publicized film was pronounced a resounding failure by the majority of critics. After viewing this 143-minute production, one can easily see why. Despite Clayton's earnest adaptation of the novel, this melodramatic motion picture is more like watching a parody of Fitzgerald's novel than a well-crafted adaptation. Through a thorough comparison of corresponding scenes in the novel and the film, this graduate thesis will examine the reasons why Clayton's Gatsby ultimately fails as an adaptation.

Gatsby was initially adapted for the stage in 1926. Written by Owen Davis, the play opened in February at New York's Ambassador Theatre and featured James Rennie as Gatsby, Edward H. Wever as Nick Carraway, Florence Eldridge and Elliot Cabot as Daisy and Tom Buchanan, Catherine Willard as Jordan Baker, and Josephine Evans as Myrtle Wilson (see fig. 1). In this version, Fitzgerald's George Wilson is called Buck. As the Valley of Ashes (the location of Wilson's Garage in the novel) would have required an additional set, Myrtle's husband was written into the script as the Buchanan's

chauffeur (Margolies 189). Gatsby on stage seems to have been fairly well received by critics. The New Republic's Edmund Wilson, for example, called the play "a very agreeable entertainment" (223). In The New York Times Theater Reviews, J. Brooks Atkinson commended both Rennie's and Eldridge's portrayals of their characters (219). All in all, Davis's theatrical presentation of Fitzgerald's classic novel proved relatively successful. According to Alan Margolies, "Audiences seemed to agree with the mainly favorable reviews and the play had a run of 112 performances on Broadway" (187).

Since the time The Great Gatsby was first published, there have been four cinematic adaptations of the novel to date. Fitzgerald's novel initially received film treatments in Hollywood in 1926 and 1949, and most recently in 2000. Joy Gould Boyum believes its appeal for filmmakers comes from the novel's glamorous world of wealth and parties, the "mystique of its central figure," and "the extent to which everything has been richly visualized" (115). Also included in this list of reasons is "Fitzgerald's prevailing mode of characterization" and "the novel's slimness and economy of structure" (115).

The first Gatsby film, made in 1926, was silent. Produced by Famous Players, Lasky, and Paramount, it was directed by Herbert Brenon. Eighty minutes in length, the movie was photographed by Leo Tover and starred Warner Baxter and Lois Wilson as Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan. Others in the cast included Neil Hamilton (Nick Carraway), Hale Hamilton (Tom Buchanan), Georgia Hale (Myrtle Wilson), William Powell (George Wilson), and Carmelita Geraghty (Jordan Baker). Wheeler Winston Dixon notes, "All of the leading actors in the film were, in the 1920s, young and vibrant" (288). A discrepancy exists in the published commentary examining the silent film over whether the screenplay, which was adapted by Becky Gardiner and Elizabeth Meehan,

was based on Owen Davis's play. While an essay by Margolies states that "this version seems not to have been influenced at all" by the stage adaptation, an article by Dixon maintains the contrary (191, 287). Sadly, any original insights into this matter cannot be ascertained as the prints of the 1926 film have been lost. Both conclusions are drawn from separate readings of the contemporary criticism, though Margolies mentions that he also relied on Meehan's typed adaptation (Theatre Arts Collection, UCLA) and Paramount's Press Sheet (Library of Congress). When compared with Fitzgerald's novel, scholars agree that a few differences in plot are apparent. One example noted was that in the silent film, "Gatsby's return after the war was portrayed as a threat to Daisy's marriage," as a flashback scene, showed Daisy in Louisville "clutching her child and fearing Gatsby's return" (Margolies 191).

A few critics managed to include at least a compliment or two in their assessments of the 1926 film. Variety's "Abel" called the silent version "a good, interesting, gripping cinema exposition" with "excellent" casting (225-26). However, most reviews were unfavorable. A critique of the movie in Life magazine stated that the director "has not been able make 'The Great Gatsby' more than moderately interesting" (226-27). New York Times critic Mordaunt Hall believed that the film "would have benefited by more imaginative direction" (224). Audiences, it seems, agreed. Margolies states that after just a couple of weeks, "the film was pulled from the Rivoli Theater [where it had premiered in early November] and did little business elsewhere" (192).

In 1949 a second Gatsby film was released. Produced by Paramount, this sound version was directed by Elliott Nugent. Alan Ladd starred as Gatsby, Betty Field and Barry Sullivan as Daisy and Tom Buchanan, and MacDonald Carey as Nick Carraway.

The role of Jordan Baker was played by Ruth Hussey while Shelley Winters took on the role of Myrtle Wilson. Cyril Hume and Richard Maibaum (also the producer) wrote the screenplay for the 1949 film. Most interesting is the role that censorship played in this Gatsby adaptation. In an article that appeared in The Daily Compass before the film's release, Maibaum explained that because of the Motion Picture Production Code, "it was obvious we could not put 'The Great Gatsby' on the screen as we had written it," since the script "dealt with unpunished adultery, unpunished manslaughter, and an unpunished moral accessory to a murder" (241). Therefore, certain changes were enacted to make the 1949 film suitable for its audiences. One example had to do with Gatsby's wish to arrange a meeting with Daisy (a married woman) at Nick's cottage. So that the film would not appear to be condoning marital infidelity, Nick's refuses to invite his cousin over for tea; instead, the "task is left to Jordan [Baker] who arranges the assignation only after forcing Gatsby to agree to give her a Dusenbergs automobile" (Margolies 192). Besides moralizing The Great Gatsby, the 1949 adaptation deviated from Fitzgerald's text in other ways, the reasons for which are not quite as clear. Margolies cites the film's "geographic reversal of Fitzgerald's two 'eggs,' with Gatsby and Nick living on East Egg and the Buchanans coming from West Egg" as evidence of this fact (194). Another example occurs during the movie's conclusion. While Nick and Jordan part ways towards the end of the novel, in this cinematic version "they realize that they are in love and decide to marry" (Atkins 220). Perhaps filmmakers figured that people would be more likely to enjoy the movie if it had a romantic ending.

Like the 1926 film, this Gatsby adaptation received unfavorable reviews. Many critics, such as the New York Time's Bosley Crowther, believed that the movie lacked

the novel's Jazz-Age ambience. Crowther also noted problems with the director's "handling of the cast" in that the manner of the actors in key scenes was "completely artificial and stiff" (243). Another widely held opinion in the film's initial criticism had to do with the way it had been adapted. In a review for The Nation, Manny Farber called the 1949 movie "a limp translation of Fitzgerald's novel" (245). Along with Crowther, Farber found the cast's performances weak. Regarding the onscreen portrayals of Gatsby and Daisy, he stated that "Betty Field is no more marked by Southern aristocracy than a cheese blintz" while Alan Ladd conveys "the impression of an isinglass baby-face in the process of melting" (Farber 246). More recent assessments seem more forgiving towards Ladd's performance in the film. Irene Atkins stresses that the actor was, at the time, "the studio's top box office name" (217). Therefore, Ladd's onscreen exposure was not only crucial for his career in Hollywood, but it was viable for Paramount's financial success. Dixon maintains that the 1949 version of Gatsby "was intended as a vehicle for Ladd, and the film concentrated on the Gatsby/Daisy romance almost entirely" (290). However, the idea seems to have backfired for the actor. According to Dixon, this promotional tactic resulted in "a curiously tedious, flat, and unimaginative film with little visual or thematic resonance" (290). Despite the filmmakers' best intentions, Gatsby's cinematic translation had failed again.

The latest Gatsby adaptation premiered in January of 2001 on A&E. Directed by Robert Markowitz, this made-for-television version featured among its cast Toby Stephens as Gatsby, Mira Sorvino and Martin Donovan as Daisy and Tom Buchanan, Paul Rudd as Nick Carraway, Heather Goldenhersh and William Camp as Myrtle and George Wilson, and Francie Swift as Jordan Baker. Two hours in length, the movie was

written by John J. McLaughlin. According to Tony Atherton, A&E's Gatsby (produced by Tom Thayer) "has not taken great liberties with plot or character"; rather, changes are employed with the story's structure. Two alterations include the depiction of Gatsby's murder in the opening scene and the repeated use of flashbacks to convey the story of Gatsby's and Daisy's earlier romance. "Viewers are allowed to see her first meeting with Gatsby, still James Gatz at that time, her crying jag the night before her wedding with Tom," as well as Daisy's first date with Gatsby (Cutchins 301). A minor plot change is implemented with Gatsby's past; Daisy is now the one to give James Gatz his new name. This movie retains "a well-chosen sampling of Fitzgerald's pitch-perfect dialogue and Nick's (and thus Fitzgerald's) narrative poetry," states the Wall Street Journal's Barbara D. Phillips.

Reviews of the A&E version, while not as negative as those received by the other Gatsby films, were not enthusiastic either. The Vancouver Sun's Lloyd Dykk found the new movie to be "dull" and "as undistinguished as its predecessors." In another assessment, New York Times critic Caryn James acknowledged that while A&E's Gatsby was "colorful and easy to watch," it was also "as forgettable as a high school essay." On the other hand, some reviewers were satisfied with the filmmakers' efforts to present Fitzgerald's novel through a visual medium. One of the most positive assessments came from the Washington Times's Victor Morton, who described the movie as "a worthy tribute to Fitzgerald's masterpiece." The Ottawa Sun's Tony Atherton stated that while A&E version is not "the definitive adaptation," it "will do until one comes along."

Out of all the cast members, Stephens seems to have received the least amount of attention from critics even though he starred as the title character. Atherton found the

actor “less satisfying as Gatsby” as compared to the other performances given. It was Mr. and Mrs. Tom Buchanan who attracted the most critical commentary. Though Atherton maintained that Mira Sorvino’s portrayal of Daisy was “more substantial” than Mia Farrow’s in 1974, other reviewers were not impressed with the Oscar-winning actress. McDonough stated that Sorvino “is best forgotten as Daisy,” playing her character as if “she had just emerged from a coma.” Assessments of Martin Donovan’s performance were also mixed. Phillips declared that as Tom Buchanan, “Donovan is Fitzgerald’s words made flesh.” Dykk, on the other hand, maintained that Donovan was “physically miscast as Tom.” Another difference of opinion among the movie’s critics was over Paul Rudd’s portrayal of Nick Carraway. Whereas Jones found Rudd “brilliant” in this adaptation, McDonough states that the actor reads Fitzgerald’s passages “as if they were written by Raymond Chandler or Mickey Spillane.”

Shooting for the most ambitious production of Gatsby began in June of 1973 and finished in September of that same year. Though exterior scenes were shot in Newport, Rhode Island, the majority of filming took place at Elstree Studios, just outside of London (Phillips 121). Like the extravagant lifestyles associated with the Jazz Age, spending for the film was lavish—around \$6.5 million. Produced by David Merrick, this Gatsby adaptation was written by Francis Ford Coppola and musically enhanced by composer Nelson Riddle. Besides Robert Redford and Mia Farrow, the cast included Sam Waterston (Nick Carraway), Bruce Dern (Tom Buchanan), Lois Chiles (Jordan Baker), Karen Black (Myrtle Wilson), and Scott Wilson (George Wilson). The film was released in 1974.

Originally this Gatsby film was to co-star Steve McQueen and Ali McGraw. Plans changed, however, “when Miss McGraw left her husband, Robert Evans, head of production at Paramount, for McQueen” (Phillips xviii). Looking for someone else to play the part of Daisy Buchanan, the filmmakers turned to Mia Farrow. According to Time’s March 18, 1974 cover story, Farrow’s previous work in Hollywood had included roles in Peyton Place and Rosemary’s Baby, but her marriage to Conductor Andre Previn led the actress to “domestic life in England with the couple’s twin sons and their adopted Vietnamese daughter.” After testing for the part in London, Farrow was chosen for the role. Also considered were Candace Bergen, Faye Dunaway, Katharine Ross, and Lois Chiles, who was instead cast as Daisy’s girlfriend (Bahrenburg 30). Robert Redford officially replaced McQueen after Clayton and his executives at Paramount (Evans, President Frank Yablans, and Producer Richard Merrick) passed on Marlon Brando, Warren Beatty, and Jack Nicholson. According to Bahrenburg, Brando was too old, Beatty “too pretty,” and Nicholson, who was also brought up during discussions about the casting of Gatsby, was simply “considered and rejected” (29).

For the cast and crew, making Gatsby was an oftentimes problematic experience. Redford reported to Time that his greatest difficulty “was Gatsby’s language. ‘He simply didn’t talk like a real person.’” Of course, Farrow’s announcement that she was pregnant did not come at the most convenient time; to remedy the situation, the shooting schedule was rearranged and the actress’s costuming was revamped to be more concealing as soon as she began to show. For Bruce Dern, the hardest part about making the film was coming to terms with his past, one he had avoided for eighteen years: “‘I grew up with Tom Buchanans all around me, and I probably was one in a way’” (Sterritt, “Stardom”

15). Even the screenplay presented the filmmakers with conflict. Once Jack Clayton agreed to direct the film, he asked Truman Capote to write the script. While Capote had previously worked with Clayton on The Innocents—also a film adaptation of a novel—the screenplay was not what Paramount expected. “Some claimed it was too literary, better read from a lectern than in front of a movie camera,” explains Bahrenburg (28). Being replaced by Francis Ford Coppola was unacceptable to Capote, who filed suit against Paramount. As monetary compensation for his screenplay, Capote “received \$125,000 after an out-of court settlement” (Bahrenburg 28). It is not clear whether or not any portion of Capote’s script was used for the new screenplay; what is certain, however, is that Coppola completed his version in a little over one month. Translating Fitzgerald’s novel to the cinematic screen also presented problems for Gatsby’s filmmakers. The director decided to incorporate as much of the late author’s text as possible, “figuring that it is too well-known to be tampered with, which would set him up for charges of destroying a masterpiece” (Bahrenburg 202). Set designer John Box discovered difficulty in rendering the novel’s style because of its evocative yet vague descriptions. For example, because Fitzgerald does not provide many concrete details about the T.J. Eckleburg sign, Box had a hard time deciding how to depict the eyeglasses (Bahrenburg 173). Theoni Aldredge encountered a similar problem as the film’s costume designer. The solution she found “during this intense production of designing the clothes for the entire production, a total of six weeks, were the twenty volumes of old magazines and books on period clothes from the public library” (Bahrenburg 103). Aldredge’s costume choices for the 1974 Gatsby earned her an Academy Award.

Anticipation about this film manifested itself in a publicity craze. As Sally Quinn put it in her 1974 review of the Clayton and Coppola adaptation, “The entire nation has been ‘Gatsbyized’” (D13). Paramount’s publicity campaign was one of the most intensely employed methods of promoting a remake that Americans had ever witnessed. The studio’s advertising strategy included joining forces with outside corporations to market “Gatsby” products. According to Scott F. Stoddart, four companies were signed:

Glenby International Hair Salons (“After you’ve seen *The Great Gatsby*, get the cut”); Robert Bruce Sportswear for men (which landed Robert Redford on the cover of Gentleman’s Quarterly for March 1974); Ballantine’s “21” Brands Scotch (which ran ads touting “Gatsby’s parties... we were there... illegally, of course!”); and E.I. du Pont (which marketed “Classic White” Teflon cookware “in the tradition of The Great Gatsby”). (103)

All of these companies adapted large-scale advertising tactics in their efforts to sell both their own products and the movie. Efforts within the fashion industry likewise permeated the media. According to Time’s cover story on Gatsby’s promotion, when Designer Kenzo Takada revealed tennis sweaters and white pants in his October 1972 show in France, “Women’s Wear Daily promptly translated Paris’ le style tennis as ‘the Gatsby look,’ and the fashion publicity fairly snowed.” Besides Robert Bruce Sportswear, other clothing companies marketed “Gatsby products,” among them Polo by Ralph Lauren and College Hall Fashions, Inc. In a letter to the Financial editor of the New York Times, Alex Fingerhut, Chairman of the Board for College Hall, stated, “The Gatsby model was the second-best selling model in our line for spring, 1974, and so far for fall, is still as big

as ever” (142). Women’s attire also reflected the Jazz-Age style that year. A February article in the Christian Science Monitor noted that “... all the girls are haunting the sales in search of T-strap sandals finely honed, in the Gatsby mood that is going to avalanche us long before the film actually hits the cinema” (Sinclair F9). Besides wearing Gatsby, Americans wanted to read it. At number two on the New York Times’s Best Sellers list of Trade Paperbacks for the week of April 14, 1974, was none other than Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (310). Other sources of Gatsby reading material included the first issue of People. The magazine’s cover offered the “nostalgically-coiffed, pearl-chewing Mia Farrow,” set to star in the film as Daisy Buchanan (Safire 37).

While Paramount executives were hopeful that their “supersell” of Gatsby would be successful, many people wondered if it might backfire. Following the film’s premiere in New York on March 27, the 1974 adaptation would open in nearly 400 theaters nationwide. Stoddart recalls that “The Great Gatsby broke all records in prerelease ticket sales, an unprecedented \$18.6 million in advance bookings alone” (103-4). However, Joy Gould Boyum believes the 1974 film’s failure was inevitable after the massive advertising generated such high expectations in people’s minds. In an examination of the movie in her book on cinematic adaptations of novels, Boyum states, “The phenomenal publicity campaign Paramount had mounted prior to the film’s release... was bound to excite a good deal of critical resistance” (116). Despite the studio’s best intentions, reviewers overwhelmingly proclaimed that the movie was a flop. However, even critical and commercial failure could not keep the spirit of Gatsby from sweeping America. This adaptation’s unsurpassed notoriety alone would make the 1974 version merit critical analysis.

CHAPTER II: TURNING NOVELS INTO FILMS

As director of The Great Gatsby, Jack Clayton and screenplay writer Francis Ford Coppola were faced with the enormous task of translating Fitzgerald's famous text to the cinematic screen. Fortunately, Clayton was no stranger to this type of project. Prior to his work on the 1974 film, he had directed four other major adaptations: Room at the Top (1958), based on the novel by John Braine; The Innocents (1961), based on Henry James's Turn of the Screw; The Pumpkin Eater (1964), based on the novel by Penelope Mortimer; and Our Mother's House (1967), based on the novel by Julian Gloag. In The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen, editors Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen define adaptation as "the transfer of an 'original' (literary) text from one context of production to an (audio-visual) other" (2). As the process and issues associated with adaptation are often complex, close analysis of Clayton's The Great Gatsby necessitates an overview of filmed novels in general: the differences between the two media, the translation process, the issues involved, and the analysis of adaptations.

Taking into account the above definition by Giddings and Sheen, it is important to acknowledge the fundamental differences novels and films. In one of the first major studies of film adaptations of novels, George Bluestone outlines in Novels into Film those aspects unique to each medium:

THE NOVEL	THE FILM
“a conceptual and discursive form” (ix)	“a perceptual and presentational form” (ix)
“a linguistic medium” (viii)	“essentially visual” (viii)
“supported by a small, literate audience” (viii)	“supported by a mass audience” (viii)
“produced by an individual writer” (viii)	“produced cooperatively under industrial conditions” (viii)
“relatively free from censorship” (viii)	“restricted by a self-imposed Production Code” (viii)
“can be read in anywhere from two to fifty hours” (50)	“generally runs for one or two” hours (50)
“can afford diffuseness” (50)	“must economize” (50)
“the line of dialogue stands naked and alone” (58)	“the spoken word is attached to its spatial image” (58)

Bluestone’s comparisons reveal the plethora of restrictions that an adaptor faces when he or she attempts to translate a novel into a film; not only must time constraints and industry-related regulations be taken into account, but also presentational limitations. Joy Gould Boyum highlights yet another inherent difference between the two media: point of view, in particular the first-person. The novel can convey this idea through “the simple use of the pronoun ‘I’”; however, “in film, it must be asserted through the camera, with ‘I’ and the camera eye equated” (Boyum 103). Depicting “any action strictly and rigorously from the eyes of a first-person observer means excluding that observer from the scene,” a task Boyum describes as virtually “unmanageable” (102). Events in *Gatsby* the novel are related solely by the story’s narrator, Nick Carraway. Though the 1974 film is also narrated by Nick, the viewpoint does not remain consistent as the audience is allowed to witness events where he is most noticeably absent, such as the scene where *Gatsby* is shot in his swimming pool.

In addition to point of view, the style of language differs between novels and films. Whereas this element is conveyed in the novel through its prose, “style in film

must be constructed out of... pictorial décor and composition; camera movement and editing; transitional devices and lighting; score and sound effects, and so on” (Boyum 142). The translation of style from one medium to the other can be one of the most problematic aspects of adaptation (Boyum 128, Seger 164). Assuming the validity of this assertion, Fitzgerald’s Gatsby would be one of the more difficult works of literature to adapt for film. In one of the novel’s earliest reviews, H.L. Mencken states, “What gives the story distinction is... the charm and beauty of the writing”; he points to the way the author’s “sentences roll along smoothly, sparkingly, variously” (194). While a majority of critics acknowledge that the 1974 Gatsby adaptation is a pretty film to watch, most agree that it lacks the powerfully suggestive nature of Fitzgerald’s text. According to Linda Seger, “Style, in itself, won’t hold an audience” and that “working with a project that is highly stylized” demands supplying the film’s viewers with “more than just the style”; elements such as a clear story line, sympathetic characters, and identifiable themes must be present as well (171). Maintaining the film’s style throughout every scene is another important aspect of style translation. Seger stresses that whatever “style choice you make at the beginning [of the adaptation process] will affect the choice of dialogue, images, costumes, acting style, even character and story choices” (171). Certain styles are more difficult to translate than others because they appeal only to a select few out of the masses of mainstream moviegoers. Unlike humor, a style with which virtually everyone is familiar, “subtle and esoteric styles, such as black comedy, absurdist, expressionistic, satiric, or ironic, will need to be handled more carefully” (Seger 165). Sadly, the Clayton Gatsby adaptation mistakenly transforms Fitzgerald’s evocative language into blatant and oftentimes exaggerated depictions of the novel.

With such disparities at hand, how does the filmmaker go about adapting a novel for the cinematic screen? As Boyum puts it, the filmmaker is first and foremost a reader; and like any reader, he “can either deal with his source naively and superficially, or with insight and intelligence” (83). Once the filmmaker is satisfied with his interpretation of that source, he must decide how to present it visually and in appropriate time parameters. There are a number of ways he can go about this endeavor. In Filming Literature: the Art of Screen Adaptation, Neil Sinyard clarifies that the film adaptation not only “selects some episodes, excludes others, offers preferred alternatives,” but it also “focuses on specific areas of the novel, expands or contracts detail, and has imaginative flights about some characters” (117). In the 1974 Gatsby, scenes were added to elaborate on the nature of Gatsby and Daisy’s romantic relationship, while scenes were deleted from the original text concerning Gatsby’s history with Dan Cody, his benefactor.

An important aspect of scene selection is familiarization with the story’s message. Ben Brady stresses that the adaptor must then “try to find any steps in the development of the story that are alien to the theme” and “avoid them” (21). At times, such as when the audience needs to be made aware of certain information to have a better understanding of the plot and/or characters, the addition of scenes becomes necessary. Looking to the text can provide ideas where such insertions would be most appropriate: “Sometimes scenes are implied when a character briefly mentions a friend, or some incident from childhood, or simply says she or he had a bad day at work” (Seiger 102). Creating a flashback scene can be a useful method to visually depict details about the past. However, it is important to remember that the screenplay itself must be written in the present tense (voiceover narration and dialogue being the exceptions to this rule); a novel “written in the past tense

has to be written in the present” because of the fact that “the play takes place in the present” (Brady 45). The 1974 Gatsby adaptation does not utilize the flashback technique, though it probably would have been wise to do so. According to Brady, flashbacks are especially useful “if you have a character who has a problem that is integrally related to an incident in the past and motivates the character’s choices, thus involving a decision about the present problem” (28). Gatsby’s humble beginnings, which made marriage to Daisy virtually impossible, and details about his benefactor, Dan Cody, are not visually depicted in the Clayton film. Presenting these aspects of the story in the form of flashbacks likely would have made Redford’s Gatsby more sympathetic.

Another essential aspect of the adaptation process is the arrangement of scenes, or plot construction. Brady defines plot as “the manner in which the adaptor chooses to recreate the story” (23). The translation of a story’s dramatic action from its textual form to the cinematic screen may require that certain elements be restructured. A primary objective during plot construction is creating suspense, “the element that holds the attention of the audience” (Brady 23). There are certain guidelines for achieving optimum scene arrangement. First, “the writer looks for the beginnings, middles, and ends within the original source material, and selects the events that create a strong, dramatic story line” (Seger 73). Those that do not should be omitted. For example, Daisy’s bathtub telephone conversation is one of several scenes in the 1974 Gatsby film that do not advance the story’s action enough to have been included. Next, the screenwriter begins looking for what Seger calls “scene sequences”: “A scene sequence can be defined as a series of scenes on the same idea with a clear beginning, middle, and end” (96). Scenes that do not fit into scene sequences can distract the viewer. The scene, for instance, where

Gatsby stares out over the dark water toward the lights across the bay seems out of place in the Clayton film because it not only does not relate to the preceding scene, but there is no transition into the next scene either.

Another of Seger's rules pertains to the story's climax. For a film, the highest point in the dramatic action should come "at the end of the screenplay," which "sometimes means reordering events" as they occur in the novel (Seger 100). Finally, the climax needs to be resolved. However, what is traditionally referred to in literature as the "falling action" need not take long to depict. Seger emphasizes the need for the resolution to be "short, preferably not longer than five minutes and not more than two or perhaps three scenes" (100). She explains that if the conclusion is too long, then the dramatic action fades, increasing the likelihood that the audience's attention will fade as well. Such is the case in the Clayton adaptation. After Gatsby's murder in the 1974 film, a shabbily-dressed stranger arrives at the mansion where Nick learns that this Mr. Gatz is actually Gatsby's father. In the next scene, Mr. Gatz shares his son's boyhood aspirations with Nick during their car ride to the cemetery; the last scene is Gatsby's funeral. While the film's conclusion technically takes place over three scenes, their total duration is so lengthy that it is difficult to classify this as a short resolution.

Besides scene selection and arrangement, the process of adaptation also involves choosing characters. Whereas a novel may contain a large number of characters, the film adaptation may not be able to incorporate them all at the risk of confusing the audience. It may be possible to combine characters who serve the same purpose. However, Seger suggests preserving a novel's "special characters" (those who add interest or humor), but not without giving them a function. Otherwise, their appearance may seem random or

unnatural, perhaps even a bit confusing. Although the Clayton film incorporates “Owl Eyes” and the “twins in yellow,” they simply appear in the film instead of providing information about Gatsby like they do in the novel. Characters need to be “active”; in other words, they need to “carry out an action or give information to move the story forward” (Seeger 123).

For a film to be commercially viable, there are some considerations when it comes to assessing the main character. According to Seeger, “Most successful American films have a main character who is likeable, sympathetic, and identifiable” (5). While the Jay Gatsby depicted in Fitzgerald’s novel definitely fits this profile, Redford’s Gatsby departs from Seeger’s description in that the actor’s movie-star status and Hollywood sex-symbol persona makes it a bit difficult to relate to his character. Another consideration for the filmmaker is that “Americans don’t like their major characters to lose or die in the end” because they prefer a “happy ending” (Seeger 6). Unfortunately, Gatsby is murdered in the novel’s conclusion. If adapting a source where the main character dies, Seeger underscores the importance of giving “us [the audience] some other character who will grieve with us, and can help us understand the significance of the death so it becomes some higher victory” (7). In *Gatsby* (both the novel and 1974 film), this character is Nick Carraway, who is also the story’s narrator. Nick is an example of what Seeger describes as “confidante characters,” while Daisy is the “love interest”; both are “needed to make the main characters more relational, and to reveal aspects of the main characters that we wouldn’t learn if we only watched them ‘do’ the story” (Seeger 123). It is Nick who shapes the reader’s view of Gatsby in the novel, not only through his dialogue but also through his non-dialogue commentary; however, Waterston’s Nick is not so successful in

conveying his reactions towards Gatsby. According to Seger, the best way to cinematically establish the traits that reflect a character's values is "by considering the way the character reacts to a situation" (38). Because of Waterston's lack of facial expressions and other nonverbal gestures during scenes where he interacts with the title character, the audience cannot rely on the narrator for a fuller understanding of Gatsby.

Equally important are the words characters say in the film. Brady asserts that "good dialogue must (A) sound conversational, (B) suit the characters, (C) reveal their values and traits, and (D) advance the plot" (57). If the screenplay will incorporate dialogue from the novel on which it is based, the adaptor still must consider these guidelines. Brady also warns against solely relying on dialogue to develop the plot: "the audience senses immediately that the characters are artificial—they are not talking like real people" (56). Many critics expressed this same concern in their reviews of the 1974 Gatsby adaptation. During a car ride into the city, Nick listens to Gatsby's life story, a truly unbelievable biographical account, without exhibiting any kind of obvious nonverbal reactions, which makes the interaction seem most unnatural.

Another issue that adaptors must grapple with concerns the notion of fidelity, or "faithfulness to the text" (Giddings and Sheen 2). For Clayton, fidelity to Fitzgerald's text was of utmost importance. Whether or not they believe the director's decision was wise, most scholars and critics agree that the 1974 Gatsby is "one of the most literal adaptations ever made" (Boyum 116). According to Giddings and Sheen, however, "the same adaptation can be received by different critics as both faithful and unfaithful" (2). Though a film may stay true to the style and/or point of view of the novel on which it is based, it may differ from the original source with respect to plot structure. Moreover, the

extent to which the filmmaker should stick to the original text is a source of debate in many studies of adaptation. Like Clayton, many critics believe “that an adaptation of a work of literature is committed to a total and complete fidelity” (Boyum 79). Another approach to this issue is put forth in “It Wasn’t Like That in the Book,” a 2000 article by Brian McFarlane for Literature/Film Quarterly: “Fidelity is obviously very desirable in marriage”; however, when it comes to film adaptations,” McFarlane suggests “playing around is more effective” (165). In fact, just because Clayton was devoted to presenting Fitzgerald’s text accurately did not make his Gatsby film successful; in reality, the movie was a both a critical and commercial failure. Cinematic innovations are frequently beneficial when it comes to adaptation. Fidelity often “becomes an issue of making the adaptation a work that is masterful in itself” (Boyum 91). Recalling the inherent differences in novel and film, Boyum makes a valid claim: “Even a filmmaker bent on literal transposition can never fully account for all the elements in his source, nor would he be likely to want to” (79).

If so many viewpoints exist regarding the adaptation process, are there standards for evaluating film versions of novel? Mark Axelrod contends that for those familiar with the original source, “how the story is told and with what efficacy the characters are realistically presented” are the principles on which most assessments are based (201). Usually, there are certain cognitive processes behind the formation of an evaluation of an adaptation. Boyum provides a number these in Double Exposure: Fiction into Film to explain what frequently happens when those who view a film have read the novel on which it is based. She maintains that “adaptations excite an extreme degree of participation from those familiar with the source,” beginning with their “inevitable

awareness of the sequence of events” (63). As Sinyard suggested, the nature of adaptation is change; whether minimally or substantially, it occurs as the original text is translated for the cinematic screen. “Our first response to alterations,” states Boyum, “will usually be to resist them—to be disoriented by such additions and inventions” (65). But if the viewer finds that the alterations are in keeping with the novel’s spirit, the final assessment will likely be a positive one.

Moreover, Boyum asserts that what shapes an assessment the most is the viewer’s “response to an adaptation’s characters” because character “tends to figure more intensely in our individualized novels than an overall sense of plot or a recollection of particular scenes” (65). By “individualized novel,” Boyum is referring to a person’s own interpretation of a novel, the one that remains long after the book has been read. Boyum suggests that negative assessments of characterization may be based “on the actor’s looks, the fact that he doesn’t bear sufficient resemblance” to his description in the novel (67). Though the novel’s description of Gatsby is fairly elusive, most critics did not agree with superstar Robert Redford’s portrayal of his character. Negative assessments of an actor’s performance in a film adaptation may also be due to “the associations he calls up: associations built partly out of the roles we have seen him play before” (Boyum 67). Perhaps the image of Redford romancing Barbara Streisand in The Way We Were (1973) was so ingrained in the minds of critics during the 1974 premiere of Gatsby that they had trouble accepting him as anyone but Hubbell; or maybe they simply thought Redford too good-looking to be believable as someone who would go to such lengths to win the love of Mia Farrow’s Daisy Buchanan. Whatever the case, Clayton’s decision to cast Redford as Jay Gatsby was generally perceived as a bad one. In adapting a classic novel, Boyum

maintains that directors “have often (and frequently wisely) cast lesser-known performers in adaptations or at least opted for the chameleon-type actors around” (67). Perhaps Clayton’s the title character in his version of Gatsby might have been better received by critics if the director had adhered to this principle.

Unfortunately, a fair amount of bias manages to exist in film adaptation criticism. Knowing how to recognize these biases, however, can help in identifying assessments that lack validity. McFarlane contends, “The attitude of literary people to film adaptations of literary works is almost always to the detriment of the film, only grudgingly conceding what the film may have achieved” (164). Bluestone was one of the first to suggest why such negativity persists, and his ideas on the issue are cited repeatedly by film and literature scholars, among them Boyum. In Double Exposure: Fiction into Film, Boyum maintains that a common belief held “in the literary establishment” is that “the adaptation is a variety of classic comic and that film itself... is a lesser form” (11). As one of the major differences between novels and film requires knowing how to read, this proposal seems to make sense. Drawing on one of Bluestone’s characteristics of film, Boyum further substantiates her explanation by pointing to the nature of its audience, “an uneducated, undifferentiated mass” (9). Yet another form of bias extends beyond the literary circles. Even in the filmmaking industry, there are those who find the adaptation to be a lesser form of film. Advocates of this notion believe that a movie based on another source (i.e., a novel), “lacks originality” (Boyum 16). On the other hand, an original source can also be enhanced when cinematic innovations are employed effectively.

While there is no single formula regarding what it takes for a successful film adaptation, there are a number of insightful theories on the subject. According to Sinyard, “The best film adaptations provide a critical gloss on the novels and a freshly imagined cinematic experience that enrich the appreciation of anyone sincerely devoted to film and literature” (117-18). Axelrod puts forth the idea that some novels are easier to present visually than others. Adaptable novels contain “simplified linear narratives, with well-constructed story lines, and rounded characters; they are easy to open, easy to close, and easily understood” (Axelrod 204). Furthermore, though classic literary works have successfully been adapted for film, there are certain advantages to working with a lesser-known novel. Boyum provides that minor novels are less controlling of the filmmaker and that an audience will “tend to bring to his ‘adaptation’ nothing in the way of significant expectation” (77). As one of the most famous American novels of all time, is The Great Gatsby among the inadaptable? Noted Fitzgerald scholar Matthew Brucoli suggests that most of the beloved late author’s works basically are not suited for the cinematic experience. As Brucoli puts it, “Fitzgerald sometimes created delicate monologues in which he detailed a character’s subjective reflections on his past in nuanced prose that simply cannot be visualized or verbalized on the screen with equal effectiveness” (Phillips 6). The story of Gatsby may be best in print, but at least Clayton tried.

CHAPTER III: THE FILM'S RECEPTION

Among Critics

When at last the highly anticipated Gatsby debuted before its first audience in New York on March 27, 1974, the majority of the film's critics were not impressed, to say the least. While there were those who could find something nice to say about Clayton's latest version of Fitzgerald's famous novel, they were sparse: "a dull, dreadful movie" (Jay Cocks, Time), "'Gatsby' is a loser" (Gary Arnold, The Washington Post), "as lifeless as a body that's been too long at the bottom of a swimming pool" (Vincent Canby, New York Times), "Every single aspect of the new film is bad" (Stanley Kaufmann, The New Republic). In her wrap-up of the movie's private screening for area press, Sally Quinn recalled how the audience "hissed and laughed and catcalled and jeered throughout" (D13). Stephen Darst remembered in another article how his 9-year-old daughter walked out of the theatre looking confused and asked "'What was so great about Gatsby?'" ; Darst only hoped that she could "forget it and years from now will go to the book with no memory of the film at all, and find out for herself why he was great" (281). Responses generated by Paramount's Gatsby generally addressed the same elements. Whether they were referring to the film's length, its cast, its Jazz-Age ambience, its fidelity to the text, or its point of view, most critics found more worth lambasting than applauding.

With a running time of 143 minutes, Jack Clayton's version of The Great Gatsby is indeed a long picture, and virtually every critic was quick to point out this fact. For Canby, the film was "lugubrious, threatening at times to turn into the longest movie ever

made” (“Spirit” 32). To many reviewers, it seemed like the film’s creators ignored the novel’s brevity when translating Gatsby to the cinematic screen. In her assessment of the movie for The New Yorker, Penelope Gilliatt stated that “repeated views, shots sometimes held too long for the matter, tracking shots untrue to the terseness of Fitzgerald, and explanations in Fitzgerald voice-over dialogue of what has already been fully shown in visual incident” all contributed to the movie’s lengthy running time (288).

Aware that this new Gatsby had a 6.5 million-dollar production budget, it seems most critics expected the film to have impressively authentic Jazz-Age ambience, equal to or closely approaching the one Fitzgerald so vividly depicted in his novel. Unfortunately, only a handful of critics expressed their approval of such efforts; among them was Gilliatt, who found in the film “much beauty and thoughtfulness” (288). Canby concluded that the period-style automobiles looked “stunning” (“Goo” 111). Foster Hirsch was impressed with the way the filmmakers were able to convey an atmosphere “thick with money and heat” (131). Still, the faultfinding greatly outweighed the number of critics who appreciated Clayton’s efforts in this area. One of the harshest evaluations was made by Stanley Kaufmann, who found in the 1974 Gatsby “an utterly inappropriate atmosphere of quasi-expressionist grotesquerie” of “sweaty faces” and “fish-eye lenses” (33). Stephen Darst saw the elaborately-designed sets as “overbred” (281).

Inevitably, another issue for reviewers was Gatsby’s translation from page to screen. Comparing the novel to the 1974 film, Foster Hirsch felt that Clayton’s version was “not as rounded, as finely etched, as unfailingly trenchant” as Fitzgerald’s original (131). Because fidelity to the text was one of the director’s major concerns, a majority of Fitzgerald’s prose was left intact and turned into dialogue or narrative voice-over for

Coppola's script. However, this decision did not seem to fare well with critics. Some believed the film lacked the novel's powerfully evocative style, and that it turned "Fitzgerald's suggestions into blatancies" (Kaufmann 33). Others asserted that preserving so much of the text made the dialogue sound forced, unnatural (Sterritt F6, Cocks). Some even had problems with scenes that lacked, but may have been flavored by Fitzgerald's prose. For Sterritt, such a moment occurred when Gatsby (Robert Redford), seeing Daisy's daughter for the first time, stares at the little girl with shocking disbelief. Sterritt thought the scene in the book to be "strong... because we are given Nick Carraway's reaction," but in the film, "just a long pause, nothing, dead air time" (281). The alteration of Gatsby's point of view presented yet another problem for critics. Gary Arnold was annoyed by the way it was constantly shifting from Nick to "some omniscient but unobservant movie camera which seems to be on hand when Gatsby and Daisy are alone but not when they're exchanging confidences worth recording" (B9). Similarly, Canby found fault with the liberties that Clayton and Coppola took about filling in the novel's gaps with more on Gatsby's romantic relationship with Daisy Buchanan. He observed that the film contains shots of the two lovers "picnicking, holding hands, behaving like models in a soft-focus hair dye commercial" ("Goo" 112). Still, there were those who defended the way Fitzgerald's novel had been adapted. Tired of so many negative reviews, one New York Times reader adamantly expressed his disagreement with the critics in a letter to the editor. Larry Kramer believed Clayton's Gatsby to be "a fine film... emotionally and intellectually true to its source" (123). One critic, too, was in agreement with Kramer on this issue. Foster Hirsch commended the movie for being "obedient without being obsequious to the spirit of its legendary author" (131).

As the title character, Robert Redford must have predicted that his performance would be one of the most closely scrutinized—and it was indeed. However, unlike Redford's superstar smile, the assessments weren't pretty. Even Redford thought "that his character hadn't been well enough developed" (Quinn D13). Several critics felt that Redford's *Gatsby* was too stiff, and that his supposed passion for Daisy Buchanan appeared fake. As Arnold put it, "you squirm with Redford each time he grits his teeth to show deep emotion" (B9). Sterritt's assessment furthered this view. Though he found the actor "handsome," Sterritt had problems with Redford's onscreen presence: "the uninflected voice, the stony face, the wooden body utterly failing to underscore the words we're hearing" (F6). Other reviewers simply believed that casting Redford as *Gatsby* had been a poor decision. Hirsch stated that Redford's *Gatsby* "wears his pink summer suit much too well; he looks and sounds as if he belongs right at the center of his extravagant, dopey parties" (131). He proposed instead for the role an actor with less-than-perfect looks. In Hirsch's opinion, *Gatsby* would have been best portrayed by "an unknown, a dark, brooding actor, his ethnic features a little lopsided, his voice edged with coarseness, his stance as a gentleman too eagerly insisted on to be a gentleman" (131). Compliments on Redford's performance in the film were slim to none.

However, the most brutal judgments were reserved for Redford's costar, Mia Farrow. Kaufmann, for example, described her as "a skeleton in amour" (20). To Arnold, Farrow looked like "a badly rouged corpse," whose "pallor and sunken eyes are not much to conjure with when you're after great romance" (B9). Cocks maintained that Farrow's Daisy did not live up to the character Fitzgerald so brilliantly described in his novel, stating that she "never suggests Daisy's strength, her greed, or even her gaiety and

charm.” Farrow’s fellow cast members also frowned on her performance (Quinn D13). Nonetheless, a number of critics were impressed with the actress. Canby thought she was “just odd enough to be right as Daisy” (“Goo” 112). Gilliatt assessed Farrow’s presence in the film to be “one of the best things about it,” a portrayal “that exquisitely mixes beauty, frailty, and instincts of the most perfidious sort” (288). While Sterritt was not a fan of Redford’s performance, he wholeheartedly endorsed Mia Farrow’s: “you could not wish a livelier, more eloquently elegant Daisy,” whose “mouth-corner crinkles light the screen with happiness” (F6).

When it came to the supporting actors, the responses were again mixed. Bruce Dern’s Tom Buchanan qualified, for Cocks, as the film’s “sharpest characterization.” Canby thought Dern to be “appropriately boorish, without being a buffoon” (“Goo” 112). On the other hand, Kaufmann’s opinion was not so positive. To this critic, Dern acted more “like a nervous shoe clerk” (33). Sam Waterston, who took on the role of Gatsby’s narrator, Nick Carraway, received little negative criticism. The only critic who disapproved of Waterston’s performance was Kaufmann, who called Waterston’s voice-over “stultifyingly boring” and stated that this version of Nick “hurts the picture a great deal” (33). By contrast, Hirsch believed Waterston played the part “beautifully,” that he “makes it all work” (131). While the remaining cast members were commended in multiple reviews (though only briefly), a few critics held nothing back when it came to certain performances. For Cocks, Louis Chiles’s Jordan Baker seemed “to be fighting off unsuccessfully the effects of a massive dose of Novocain.” As Myrtle Wilson, Karen Black reminded Kaufmann of “a writhing gargoyle” (33).

Among Scholars

Academic comparisons of Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Paramount's 1974 film adaptation, directed by Jack Clayton, are not numerous. Scholarly responses vary in their overall analysis of the movie: some blast the actors' portrayal of their characters, others praise directorial efforts to maintain an authentic Jazz Age ambience. Taking into account the entirety of published scholarship on Clayton's movie, those trends that surface repeatedly include assessments of the film's cast, the point of view, the use of flashbacks, the length, and the degree of faithfulness to the novel. Critical analysis initially followed the film's release, and then another body of work surfaced in the mid-1980s; academics thereafter virtually avoided the topic until 2000, the year that A & E's version of Gatsby premiered on cable television.

Two of the earliest assessments of the Clayton film in relation to the novel were made by Edward T. Jones and Irene Kahn Atkins in 1974. Jones's article, "Green Thoughts in a Technicolor Shade: A Reevaluation of The Great Gatsby," generally praises the movie, calling it "artful entertainment" (229). Efforts to remain faithful to Fitzgerald's text are commended, in particular composer Nelson Riddle's score for the party scenes at Gatsby's mansion. Jones maintains that the music, despite what many of the film's reviewers asserted to the contrary, seems "partly justified by Fitzgerald's description of the orchestra" (230). Most critics felt the party music should have been more subtle; however, Jones points to the novel, which states that it "was no thin five piece affair but a whole pit full of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos and low and high drums" (Fitzgerald 44). This article also points favorably to the cinematic portrayal of the famous shirt scene, where Gatsby

demonstrates for his beloved Daisy the extent of his wealth by throwing his expensive collection of dress shirts about the bedroom. Jones believes that this vignette “translated expertly from the novel” (230). He also provides what he believes to be a major advantage in Clayton’s film, which is the audience’s ability to experience multiple viewpoints. In Fitzgerald’s text, the only point of view revealed is that of Nick Carraway, the narrator. All character judgments, especially regarding Gatsby and the Buchanans, are formed according to Carraway’s reactions. By contrast, watching the story unfold on the cinematic screen allows these opinions to be based on the reactions of all present. On the other hand, Jones identifies as a flaw the film’s lack of the flashback technique as used in the novel: “the straight chronological narration sacrifices some of the mystery and also some of the control” (234). Throughout Fitzgerald’s text, information about the main characters is carefully controlled in terms of how much and how soon it is revealed, as in the significant impact benefactor Dan Cody had on Gatsby’s life. Negative aspects aside, Jones finds the 1974 version of The Great Gatsby to be “an entertaining advertisement for F. Scott Fitzgerald” (236).

Similarly, Irene Kahn Atkins admires the Clayton film and also examines the 1949 version directed by Elliot Nugent. While she condemns the Nugent film’s lack of fidelity to Fitzgerald’s novel (in the conclusion of this movie, Jordan Baker and Nick Carraway end up in love and decide to get married), Atkins calls the 1974 version “a meticulously faithful adaptation of the novel” (221). Like Jones, Atkins also approves of the music chosen for Gatsby’s party scenes, emphasizing its part in achieving the film’s Jazz-Age ambience. For Atkins, these parties come alive on screen and help to create a sense of what life was like in the 1920s: “the filmed celebrations are glittering,

shimmering spectacles of decadent affluence” (222). Atkins, along with Jones, is impressed with the narrative choices employed with Nick’s character in the movie. Clayton and the film’s screenplay writer Francis Ford Coppola, not wanting the audience to miss out on experiencing the novel’s brilliant non-dialogue prose, incorporate many key passages into Nick’s spoken narration throughout. Atkins also applauds the director’s casting decision for the role of Gatsby, stating that Robert Redford is a good choice because of his “timelessness” as an actor (223). Furthermore, she commends the extended presence of Mr. Gatz in the film because he helps to provide the audience with more background on his son, James Gatz, who later became the infamous Jay Gatsby. Though Atkins finds fault with the lengthy duration of the 1974 film version, she maintains that “Clayton has come close to an idealized realization of the novel” and hopes the movie will motivate people to read or re-read Fitzgerald’s text (227).

In the year immediately following the Clayton film’s release, only one additional critique compared Fitzgerald’s novel to the 1974 cinematic adaptation. Louis Gianetti’s “The Gatsby Flap” is similar to the articles by Jones and Atkins in its fairly positive assessment of Clayton’s Gatsby: “Though it’s by no means a masterpiece, it abounds in intelligence, delicacy, and grace” (13). Not surprisingly, Gianetti also praises the film’s loyalty to the text. Pointing to the movie’s added scenes, such as the numerous passionate kissing encounters between Gatsby and Daisy, Gianetti contends that they are “in keeping” with Fitzgerald’s novel, and enhance the lover’s onscreen relationship that was much more elusive in the text (13). Though he commends the supporting actors for their performances, Gianetti differs from Atkins in his views towards the director’s casting choices for the two leads. Gianetti suggests that a bigger star, such as Vivien Leigh (in

the 1940s) or Elizabeth Taylor (in the early 1960s), should have taken on the role of Daisy. For Gatsby's part, Gianetti recommends a relatively unknown actor, someone who is capable of conveying that he is able to dabble in bootlegging—unlike Robert Redford, with his “WASP-like good looks and wholesomeness” (21). Finally, Gianetti has problems with the appearances of some characters in certain scenes. Regarding Jordan Baker, he states that “her presence—and this sometimes applies to Nick as well—seems inappropriate, an intrusion on the privacy of others” (19). On the whole, though, Gianetti finds Clayton's film to be brilliant work despite its flaws.

Three years after watching Paramount's latest version of Gatsby at the studio preview in New York where it was met with resounding disappointment from those who attended, Janet Maslin returned to the film, putting aside any initial expectations created by the movie's publicity craze. However, in her 1977 essay entitled “Ballantine's Scotch, Glemby Haircuts, White Suits, and White Teflon: Gatsby 1974,” Maslin's disappointment had yet to fade. Though her disgust for Mia Farrow's performance as Daisy had subsided somewhat from the first time she saw the film, Maslin's annoyance is still evident. She especially objects to Farrow's voice, which she complains about sounding “two octaves higher than the ‘thrilling murmur’ Fitzgerald so lovingly described” (291). Robert Redford's depiction of Gatsby also drew Maslin's criticism, as she does not find him convincing as a man desperately in love with Mrs. Buchanan. Neither Lois Chiles as Jordan Baker nor Karen Black as Myrtle Wilson impress Maslin either; she calls Daisy's friend “no livelier than a mannequin” and Tom's lover “repellent” (291). The film's atmosphere also presents a problem for Maslin. Despite the revelation that \$6.5 million was spent on the movie's production and the fact that

costume designer Theoni Aldredge received an Academy Award for her work on Gatsby, Maslin maintains that its “stylishness winds up working against it, as the characters positively suffocate in their coordinated pastels” (291).

Most frustrating for Maslin are the artistic decisions by which Fitzgerald’s famous novel has been brought to the cinematic screen. To her the 1974 film possesses not “the faintest glimmer of adaptive imagination,” as the script forces its characters “to stumble over descriptive passages from the novel that were never meant to be delivered in conversation” (290, 292). In Maslin’s opinion, not even Clayton’s and Coppola’s slightest innovations work, especially in the film’s altered point of view. By introducing several romantic scenes between Gatsby and Daisy, the movie allows its audience to see what was left out of Fitzgerald’s text as it was published in 1925. For Maslin, the addition of these encounters is a crucial error. She asserts that the film’s writer made the mistake “of trying to satisfy his audience’s voyeurism instead of acknowledging the lovers’ heartbreaking misapprehensions” (292). Also problematic for Maslin is the way some of the novel’s most poignant images have been translated. Pointing to Fitzgerald’s famous green light that shines from the end of the Buchanans’ dock across the bay from Gatsby’s mansion, Maslin finds its significance “slightly distorted,” mainly existing in the movie as a ring given to Daisy by her long lost lover (292). On the other hand Maslin correctly discerns the difficulty of adapting Gatsby to the cinematic screen. Comparing them to Scarlett and Rhett in Margaret Mitchell’s Gone With the Wind, powerfully translated into film in 1939, Maslin asserts that by contrast “Gatsby and Daisy are more closely interwoven with the culture they inhabit, and as such they make for potentially poor dramatic material, since their efficacy depends almost entirely on how well their

surroundings are drawn” (290). Maslin’s condemnation of the film’s failure to convey an authentic Jazz-Age ambience is obviously related to this observation.

Almost a decade later came an influx of printed material on the Clayton film; however, the majority of these assessments were not so kind as the earlier literature on the subject. In his 1984 essay entitled “Novel to Play to Film: Four Versions of The Great Gatsby,” Alan Margolies examines the 1926 Gatsby play and three other films, finding not one of them successful. All in all, he hopes that some future adaptor will recognize that The Great Gatsby “is obviously much more than a gangster thriller and much more than a love story” (199). Despite the essay’s brevity on the subject of the Clayton movie, Margolies manages to measure the effectiveness of certain characters. For example, when it comes to Jay Gatsby in the 1974 film, Margolies’s opinion is much in line with Gianetti’s, asserting that “Robert Redford’s matinee-idol face, blonde hair, and far too even voice in no way fit Fitzgerald’s description” (197). One of the most negative assessments of the Clayton movie was published a year later in Joy Gould Boyum’s book on film adaptations of novels. In a chapter called “The Great Gatsby: The Breakdown of Distance,” Boyum attributes the commercial and critical failure of the 1974 version principally to “its mishandling of point of view” (117). In contrast to Jones, Boyum feels the film paints a different picture of the lead characters because of the fact that Nick’s perspective is not the only one; therefore, Gatsby and Daisy are not presented merely as narrator’s perceptions of them. Boyum also stresses the notion that Daisy is hardly as elusive on screen as she is in the novel; rather, Mia Farrow’s character comes across as “a literal love object” (119). The article points to the redundancy of Nick’s commentaries as well. Boyum’s essay is evidence of yet another who is disappointed in the performances

of the Clayton version's two leads, finding Redford's and Farrow's portrayals of their characters to be neither strong nor convincing. Boyum also joins those who maintain that the 1974 Gatsby is "one of the most literal adaptations ever made" (116).

Still another individual holding this same position in the 1980s is Gene D. Phillips. Though he too registers a negative response to Clayton's film and the two previous Gatsby films, Phillips acknowledges that the 1974 version "remains faithful to the spirit of the novel, not only by retaining Fitzgerald's plot pretty much intact, but also by incorporating into the screenplay the novel's principal symbols," among these the Valley of Ashes and Dr. Eckelburg's eyes (118). Phillips notes that some of the casting decisions in the Clayton film presented a problem for Fitzgerald's daughter, Scottie Smith. Not only did she find it "difficult to accept Mia Farrow as Daisy," but Smith also felt that Bruce Dern as Tom Buchanan did not fit her father's descriptions of the character in the book (122-123). Though he criticizes some of the slower-moving parts of the film, Phillips points out one advantage of the 1974 version's lengthy nature. Compared to the 1949 Gatsby movie, the Clayton film "devotes more screen time to an in-depth examination of the psychology of character" (123).

Oddly, the nineties came and went without any additional published commentary on the 1974 film. However, in 2000 A&E released its adaptation of Gatsby, a movie directed by Robert Markowitz, and a flurry of new responses on the subject emerged. One of the boldest assertions to date is made by Scott Stoddart. Focusing on the 1974 picture, Stoddart states that its failure was ultimately due to "Hollywood's inability to filmically replicate the written word" (102). Stoddart also touches on an idea that Boyum highlights as well—that Nick holds far less power as a narrator in the Clayton film than

he does in Fitzgerald's text. Because Nick's viewpoint is muted on screen, the importance of his overall role is diminished. Clayton's film emphasizes that "Gatsby (Robert Redford) and Daisy (Mia Farrow) were meant for each other in a positive way," transforming Fitzgerald's Nick into "an impotent onlooker" (106). Stoddart also believes that Daisy Buchanan is transformed from page to screen into a more romantic and sympathetic character, and that her empowerment lessens the effectiveness of the narrator's voiceover even further. In one of the more positive assessments from 2000, Frank E. Cunningham exaggeratingly refers to the 1974 production as "one of the superior adaptations of Fitzgerald's works" (188). Throughout his article, "F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Problem of Film Adaptation," Cunningham reads a lot into camera shots. For example, he states that the director "employs glowing photography and sun-drenched green visions to suggest the mythic intensity of Gatsby's dream even as he cinematically satirizes the object of that dream" (195). Cunningham seems to be alone in his praise for the masterful camerawork and the film's "glowing photography and "sun-drenched green visions," which purportedly convey the dream's "mythic intensity."

Most recently, Dennis Cutchins and Wheeler Winston Dixon confront the Clayton film as it compares to the novel in two 2003 articles written for Literature/Film Quarterly. Cutchins makes a case for using the 1974 movie in the literature classroom. He maintains that using cinematic adaptations "can offer [students] both good and bad examples of literary interpretations" and that the "limitations or boundaries of both media [novel and film]" are exposed when "writers and directors are forced to change, 'adapt,' the text" (295). Cutchins goes on to point out some of the major problems with the Clayton film, including the screenplay's faithfulness to the text. He explains that one of the essential

reasons the movie failed is “because of its too literal and overly simplistic interpretation of Fitzgerald’s prose” (296). Cutchins concurs with Boyum in his opinion that Daisy’s evocative characterization is lacking in the film. Though he commends Mia Farrow’s performance as the wife of Tom Buchanan, Cutchins disagrees with the way the Clayton version makes known the nature of her character “too clear too soon” (299). Fitzgerald’s evocative language in Gatsby is one of the elements Cutchins feels is often misrepresented in the movie. For example, one of the most-often quoted passages in the novel is the brilliant description of Gatsby’s smile. However, Cutchins suggests that the filmmakers’ overly literal interpretation of that smile is conveyed quite differently than it was in the text: “Redford’s Gatsby is just a nice-looking guy with white teeth, and if they have read the passage carefully students will often laugh out loud at this scene in the film” (299). In a less thorough appraisal of the 1974 Gatsby motion picture, Dixon makes a strong statement regarding Clayton’s film and the 1926 and 1949 adaptations (but does not address the 2000 version). He condemns those who have attempted translating Fitzgerald’s book into a movie in these three instances for having “taken excessive liberties with the work, which all but eliminate the power of the novel” (287). Like many of the critiques discussed thus far, Dixon’s highlights the slow-paced nature of the Clayton film and the weak performance of the male lead. For Dixon, Robert Redford is reminiscent of “a men’s fashion model” who “drifts through the film with an air of detachment and unconcern” (292). An insightful comparison is made regarding the way Nick is introduced to Gatsby during a party at his neighbor’s mansion. Whereas a casual meeting between the two men takes place in the novel, Dixon explains that the moment is much more formally arranged in the Clayton movie. The onscreen encounter begins when

Nick is summoned by his host and taken upstairs in an elevator by a “grim-faced bodyguard,” a scene which Dixon believes gives Gatsby’s illegal bootlegging activities “undue emphasis” (293).

Several conclusions can be drawn from this review of academic commentary on the Clayton movie. To begin, there exists a discrepancy in perceptions concerning the use of flashbacks in the movie. While Atkins and Jones note the absence of this technique, Phillips and Maslin point to the wartime romance scene where Daisy and Gatsby are dancing by candlelight as evidence of a flashback. Next, while the film’s unwavering faithfulness to Fitzgerald’s novel is agreed upon by the majority of scholars, there does not seem to be a consensus regarding whether this fidelity is a strength or a weakness. Similarly, those scenes added or altered from the original text are another source of debate. Though a few scholars applaud the director’s artistic innovations in this area, others consider them out of line or not what Fitzgerald would have wanted in a cinematic adaptation of Gatsby. Next, the movie’s point of view is an area of conflict. Some critics point to the advantages of being able to experience multiple viewpoints; at the same time, several insist that Fitzgerald’s first-person narrator is the only one who should convey the story of Gatsby. Disagreement also exists over whether Clayton and Coppola have successfully translated the novel’s lyrical prose. Some assessments that applaud the way Nick Carraway’s voiceover delivers the novel’s most famous passages, and others who see it as repetitive and ineffective. On the other hand, nearly all of those evaluations disagree with the director’s casting choices when it comes to the two leads: Robert Redford was not the right man for the part, and Mia Farrow should not have played Daisy Buchanan. Virtually everyone finds that the Clayton film is just too long.

Obviously there remains much room here for further discussion. Though some scenes are explicated in detail, an in-depth analysis of how Fitzgerald's text underwent Clayton's cinematic adaptation has yet to be written.

CHAPTER IV: SCENE ANALYSIS

While most of the 1974 Gatsby film fails in its visual portrayal of Fitzgerald's famous novel, the story's opening scene is, admittedly, cleverly presented on the cinematic screen. Sam Waterston makes his first appearance as the movie's narrator, Nick Carraway, steering a motorized skiff with nervous inexperience across the Manhasset Bay of the Long Island Sound in a crisp, white summer suit. Using lines taken straight from Fitzgerald's text, Waterston's voiceover begins, "In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since." Recalling the warning, which was in regards to criticizing the less fortunate, the narrator also reveals his tendency to heed it. Details are provided through Nick's voiceover concerning the nature of his present destination, which is the home of his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, where she lives with her husband in the trendy community of East Egg. The voiceover uses the novel's descriptive prose to explain that West Egg (where Nick has just moved at this point in the story) is the "less fashionable" of the two Eggs, both of which are located in close proximity to New York City. Another detail included is that Nick knew Daisy's wealthy husband, Tom, in college, and that the two Buchanans, as Fitzgerald put it, had "drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together" before relocating to East Egg (10).

Though it is not one of film's most dramatic scenes, the scene is effective nonetheless. In the novel's first chapter, this background information is dispersed over several narrative passages, which include additional details about Nick's family, the nature of his move from the Midwestern United States, and the bungalow where he

briefly lived with a dog and a domesticated Finnish woman. Though these pages of text have been condensed for the adaptation, enough specifics are provided to introduce audience members (even those unfamiliar with Fitzgerald's novel) to Gatsby's narrator and to the friends he is going to visit that evening. More importantly, however, the filmmakers made a wise decision in altering Nick's transportation to East Egg for this scene. In the novel, he drives an automobile (presumably the "old Dodge" mentioned on page ten) to the Buchanans; in the movie, Nick goes by boat. The change works well because the narrative voiceover is pictorially enhanced by shots of beautiful white sailboats gliding alongside Nick over the rolling blue waves as he struggles, at one point, to fish his hat from the water. If the filmmakers had opted to show Nick driving his car during the introductory voiceover, the scene would probably not have been as revealing.

On the other hand, what is perhaps worst about the 1974 adaptation is its unintended comedy. The first of such occurrences takes place shortly after Nick arrives at the Buchanans. After conversing momentarily with Tom, Nick encounters two ladies, one of whom he soon recognizes as professional golfer Jordan Baker, lounging on sofas in an airy sunroom. It is during this scene that viewers are introduced to Mia Farrow's portrayal of Fitzgerald's famous Daisy Buchanan. In one of the most startlingly high voices probably ever captured on film, she says, "Nick? Is it really you? My dear... lost... love... I'm paralyzed with happiness." With her wild eyes and superficial-sounding giggles, it is easy to interpret that Daisy is in some sort of drug-induced euphoria. For this scene, the director or his lead actress must have had in mind the novel's description of Daisy:

It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget....(13-14)

While Fitzgerald's wonderfully evocative language is effective, this adaptation's interpretation of it is most definitely not. Clayton's desire to remain as faithful to the text as possible is, in this instance (and the majority of others with Daisy's presence), mistakenly overemphasized. The misrepresentation's unintended effect not only portrays Daisy as a mindless amphetamine addict, but also makes her character unbelievable as Gatsby's romantic quest. Either Clayton skipped over the beginning of this paragraph where the narrator also calls the voice "low" and "thrilling" or decided to assign these attributes to Lois Chiles' Jordan Baker.

While the foursome is dining outside, Daisy refers to her husband as "hulking." Daisy's description seems silly when directed at Bruce Dern, who is anything but "hulking." In this version of Gatsby, the actor who plays the supposedly physically intimidating Tom Buchanan looks to be about 175 pounds—not much larger than his dinner guest. Though he is athletic enough to play polo, Dern is not the character depicted in Fitzgerald's text. Tom's body, with its "enormous power" and "great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat" is supposed to be "capable of enormous leverage" (11). If Paramount was simply convinced that Bruce Dern was the only actor capable of taking on the role, then Clayton would have been better off deleting the dialogue about Daisy's "brute of a man."

The unintended humor does not end with mealtime, but with Nick's sunset return to West Egg. The narrator's carefully spoken monologue focuses at length on his wealthy next-door neighbor, who at this point he still has not seen. Just as Nick is tying up his dinghy and the voiceover ceases, he looks up. A fanfare ensues, growing louder and louder with anticipation until reaching its climax at the precise second that Redford, like a flawless Greek God looking out over his kingdom, is shown standing atop a massive stone platform in his black tuxedo—Gatsby revealed! What is hinted in the novel is blatantly obvious in Clayton's cinematic interpretation. Toward the end of Chapter I, Nick notices a nearby figure standing under the moonlight on his neighbor's property: "Something in his leisurely movements and the secure position of his feet upon the lawn suggested that it was Mr. Gatsby himself, come out to determine what share was his of our local heavens" (25). Because the reader is not given a vivid physical description of Gatsby ahead of time, Nick's neighbor retains his mysterious nature. However, it was no secret to the American public that Robert Redford, whose face was plastered on *Gatsby* movie posters everywhere, was to star opposite Mia Farrow in the film. Perhaps Clayton forgot about the lead actor's fame when deciding how Gatsby's first appearance would take place. At any rate, the film's undue overemphasis of the moment makes the man who is supposed to be a mysterious legend look foolish.

Another scene where humor was most likely not intended but exists nonetheless begins the first time Karen Black appears as Myrtle Wilson. Depicted in the novel as a gal who "carried her surplus flesh sensuously," this much skinnier version of Mr. Buchanan's lover attempts but does not achieve a sensuous presence when she languidly gropes Tom's buttocks while a trombone serenade that sounds more like an

accompaniment for a strip tease blares loudly in the background. Incorporating the close-up shot of Myrtle's tantalizing gesture not only makes the moment feel forced, but also reveals the extent to which the film plays up the story's sexual element. The novel's portrayal of this interaction is far subtler. While she looks Tom "flush in the eye" and wets her lips, Myrtle's desire is not so overtly displayed when her husband leaves the group to fetch some chairs at her request; Fitzgerald only states that she "moved close to Tom" (30).

Along with the foreplay close-up in Wilson's garage, Clayton's movie version also includes a variation of the trio's secret trip to New York City. Now out of her husband's sight, the overly excited Myrtle jumps into Tom's waiting automobile. Disregarding Nick in the passenger seat, she lunges over him to the driver side, embracing her lover with passionate kisses while racy trombone music blares in the background. Because Myrtle has only met Tom's companion moments earlier back at Wilson's Garage, this action seems unrealistic. It is as if the director was oblivious to social norms when he decided to have her lie across Nick's lap to engage in such an intimate encounter with another woman's husband. The Myrtle Wilson in Fitzgerald's novel is much more cautious in this part of the story. In fact, for the train ride into the city, "Mrs. Wilson sat discreetly in another car" because of Tom's fear that other "East Eggers" might be present (31). Even if the movie viewer had never read the famous novel (which does not mention the provocative display of affection), such an encounter still seems unnatural because of the way that Nick appears so calm even though a woman to whom he has just been introduced is violating his personal space.

The drama that unfolds later at the lovers' apartment is another comical blunder during this scene in the film. In front of at least a dozen guests, Myrtle and Tom get into an argument that escalates into physical violence. The squabble begins when Tom accidentally steps on his mistress's new puppy. Calling him "clumsy," Myrtle jumps up out of her chair, runs into the bedroom, and slams the door in Tom's face. Angrily, he beats on the door, forcing it open, and demands that the couple sitting on the bed "GET OUT!" Adding a more politely spoken "please," to make up for his rude behavior, Tom slams the door so that he and Myrtle can be alone once the startled man and woman have left the room. Moments later, Tom and his lover emerge, visibly upset. Gritting her teeth, Myrtle follows him into the living room, asserting her right to say his wife's name whenever she pleases, which she does at the top of her lungs: "DAISY! DAISY! DAISY!" The room full of guests falls silent when their host hits Myrtle with a blow so hard it is surprising that her tiny little frame does not fly backward onto the floor. Stunned, they watch as a bloody-nosed Myrtle instantly forgives him and the two fall into each other's arms in a tearful reconciliation. While a similar fight occurs in the novel, on screen it seems out of place and out of character for an East Egg gentleman like Tom Buchanan. A 1974 review of the film by Foster Hirsch points to one reason why such is the case. Hirsch emphasizes that "[Bruce] Dern does not convince us that he is to the manner born," that he "does not immediately connote class; his diction, and his chunkiness around the middle, violate upper crust decorum" (131). This assertion is apparent even in the beginning of the film, when Dern seems to be struggling to project his character's quietly confident old-money persona as he shows Nick around the Buchanans' East Egg estate, appearing almost as newly acquainted to wealth as Gatsby.

Tom's low-class behavior becomes even more apparent when considering how the action unfolds in Fitzgerald's text. Upon their arrival at the apartment, the narrator recalls that "Mrs. Wilson called up several people on the telephone" (33). Besides Tom, Nick, Myrtle, and her sister, Catherine, only the McKees are quoted in the dialogue during what is conveyed as a much smaller gathering than the noisy party in the film. Nick also mentions alcohol consumption on a number of occasions, including his announcement about the nature of the evening: "I have been drunk just twice in my life and the second time was that afternoon" (33). The drunken argument between Myrtle and Tom takes place close to midnight, well after a second bottle of whiskey has been opened and the guests are starting to disperse. The text, unlike the movie, contains no door slamming or rudeness directed at the company; the angry verbal exchange occurs only between Tom and Myrtle. Though the nose-breaking part does occur, there is absolutely no description of any intimate making up between the couple whatsoever. In the novel there seem to be significantly fewer people present to witness the event, so it is more discreet. Fitzgerald's characters in the text are obviously intoxicated, and it is much later in the evening when the argument ensues. The fight does not have the same tacky feeling that it does in Clayton's movie where the light-filled living room conveys the sense that it is in the middle of the afternoon. Tom's drunkenness is hardly apparent, and the apartment is packed with people. In other words, the confrontation is much more public and completely out of place at a party where everyone is so formally dressed.

In another scene a man in a dark suit jacket is shown gazing out across a body of water under a sunset-filled sky. Though the camera angle only allows a rear view of the silhouetted gentleman, his identity is readily apparent. It is Robert Redford as the film's

“mysterious” Jay Gatsby, fixated on the lights across the bay, presumably those that shine from Daisy’s dock in East Egg. While no such scene is described after the apartment fight in the novel, its insertion in the film is likely based on the passage from Chapter I that introduces Gatsby. Soon after his arrival home from the Buchanans, Nick spots a figure who he supposes is his infamous neighbor: “he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and far as I was from him I could have sworn he was trembling” (25-26). The single green light toward which Gatsby gazes in the novel has not been depicted during the added scene in the 1974 film, but makes a random and very brief appearance much later. A symbol that most literature scholars agree upon as representative of the American Dream, the green light also appears onscreen in the form of an emerald ring which Gatsby presents to his beloved Daisy on one of their many secret rendezvous at the mansion. Because Gatsby cinematically portrays the conclusion of Chapter I in two separate scenes (the first being Redford’s initial onscreen appearance in the movie), the addition is overemphasized—especially since the movie cuts in and out of the scene without smoothly transitioning into similar situations. In other words, the added scene seems illogical and random in the plot’s progression. The absence of Fitzgerald’s green light only adds to the scene’s melodramatic nature because of the ambiguous nature of the lights toward which Gatsby is gazing, making his emotional display seem unfounded.

Another overemphasized depiction of Fitzgerald’s text in the 1974 film occurs during Nick’s first party at Gatsby’s mansion. In the novel, Jordan exchanges brief conversation with two girls in twin yellow dresses. They discuss Jordan’s loss at her most recent golf tournament and then disperse into the crowd. Later that evening, Fitzgerald

includes in Nick's observations of the party that the "pair of stage 'twins'—who turned out to be the girls in yellow—did a baby act in costume" (51). The mentioning of their dance in this passage is limited to half a sentence, while the second part describes the extravagant way drinks were served. Nick recalls that "champagne was served in glasses bigger than finger bowls" (51). While Fitzgerald does not devote many words to the yellow-dress ladies, Clayton devotes several camera shots to them. Though they do not engage in any friendly banter with Jordan, the "twins" do share a table with her and Nick, bobbing their heads, synchronized in time with the music. Moments later, they prance down the mansion steps to the patio-converted-outdoor ballroom, where they attempt to jitterbug. Amidst the dozens of other party guests, they are given the camera's full attention for almost a full minute that concludes with a close-up of the identically dressed flappers. The yellow-dress twins seem to captivate Nick; Sam Waterston stares at the pair as if he had been instructed to appear in awe of their less-than-dazzling performance. Though the filmmakers obviously tried to stay faithful to Fitzgerald's text (perhaps even attempting to encapsulate some of the striking language from Chapter III, where Nick says that "the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music"), their efforts during this part of the party scene are ultimately unsuccessful (44). Because the girls in yellow appear inexperienced dancers, staring into each other's eyes as they desperately try to concentrate on their steps, the routine seems unnatural; in fact, Waterston looks like he is trying hard not to cringe at their awkward act. Clayton's major mistake here was giving the yellow-dress twins undue emphasis.

Following the party, Nick is invited to lunch with Gatsby. What are, in the novel, particularly revealing passages about Nick's opinion of his neighbor as they share a ride

into the city, have onscreen become a seemingly pointless, forced, and downright dull conversation (or monologue, rather, as Nick's dialogue is severely limited in this scene). While Gatsby's presentation of his yellow car is plausible (Nick's expression conveys that he is impressed with the beautiful and lavishly expensive automobile), the remainder of the trip to New York is difficult to accept as natural human interaction. As he does in Fitzgerald's text, Gatsby, rather pointedly and abruptly, asks his companion, "What's your opinion of me anyhow?" Hardly waiting for Nick's answer, Redford continues, "Well, I'm going to tell you something about my life," and proceeds to do so, sounding even more rehearsed than Gatsby's speaking parts from the corresponding scene in Chapter IV. Wide-eyed and straight-faced, Waterston's Nick listens intently as Gatsby talks about his wealthy family (supposedly all deceased), his college life in England, and his distinguished stint in the military. Nick's skepticism of these wildly embellished biographical details is not suggested in the 1974 film in the way it is expressed in the original text. For example, when Gatsby mentions his amazing European adventures, Nick's thoughts are provided: "With an effort I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter" (70). In the movie, Gatsby hands Nick a medal he had received for his heroic efforts in World War I. Nick checks out the award's inscription, which is addressed to Major Jay Gatsby, but does not appear shocked that the medallion seems real. However, Nick recalls his surprise in the novel: "To my astonishment the thing had an authentic look" (71). While this scene in the 1974 movie is to be commended for its fidelity to the text (much of the dialogue has been lifted from the novel), it is to be criticized for its failure to include Nick's skeptical reactions. Because the narrator's interjecting thoughts on the conversation are not included, the conversation seems artificial.

The 1974 film deals—for the most part—rather unsuccessfully with scenes from the novel’s Chapters V through IX as well. Mia Farrow, in her high-pitched Daisy voice, is shown carrying on a telephone conversation with Nick while she is in the bathtub, giggling profusely as she accepts his invitation to tea. As one of the plot’s most pivotal moments (Gatsby will finally reunite with his long lost love should Daisy agree to attend), this scene should have not been portrayed in such an unbelievable manner. The Jazz Age was, according to Microsoft Encarta, a time of “youthful rebellion, female independence,” and “exhibitionism”; however, for a woman (especially in Daisy Buchanan’s social class) to carry on a telephone conversation as she is lounging naked in a bathtub is hard to imagine even in the 1920s. In fact, when Nick calls Daisy in the novel, Fitzgerald provides no mention of what Daisy is doing when she answers the phone:

I called up Daisy from the office the next morning and invited her to come to tea.

“Don’t bring Tom,” I warned her.

“What?”

“Don’t bring Tom.”

“Who is ‘Tom’?” she asked innocently. (88)

With the inherent differences in movies and novels, filmmakers of adaptations will inevitably have to take liberties in the portrayal of certain scenes (especially when the original text is lacking in visual cues). However, in this case, fidelity to Fitzgerald’s passage would have been a wiser choice; Clayton might have opted to show only Nick making the call from his office and using Daisy’s voiceover. In the very least the director

should have had Daisy answer the phone while engaging in a more practical and much less distracting activity, such as lounging on her sofa in the veranda.

Another overdone scene in the movie occurs during the afternoon of Gatsby's and Daisy's reunion. Joined by Nick, the long-lost lovers make their way from Nick's cottage next door to Gatsby's mansion. Anxious to impress Daisy with the extent of his wealth, Gatsby leads them upstairs to the spacious closet adjoining his master bedroom. Just as he says in the novel, Gatsby explains, "I've got a man in England who buys me clothes. He sends over a selection of things at the beginning of each season, spring and fall" (97). Thus begins the famous shirt scene, a passage often cited in literary discussions of The Great Gatsby. In the original text, Nick recalls that Gatsby began "throwing them one by one before us," and soon they "covered the table in many-colored disarray" (97). With his brilliant use of descriptive language, Fitzgerald conveys the excessive nature of the Jazz Age beautifully as he depicts the spectacle in Gatsby's closet. The 1974 film, however, destroys the subtle splendor of this passage by having Redford wildly throw the expensive dress shirts about the room, most of which land on the floor. At least Gatsby aimed for the table in Fitzgerald's novel; the shirt scene in the Clayton/Coppola movie turns Gatsby into a mindless, frantic fool, the consequence of which is the audience's lack of respect for the title character.

In the text, Fitzgerald uses death symbolism to foreshadow the deaths of Myrtle Wilson and Jay Gatsby, the death of Gatsby's dream, and the eventual death of the Jazz Age. For example, Nick recalls that during his trip into the city for lunch with Gatsby, a dead man in a hearse passes Gatsby's car (73). In another passage, Nick is startled as he riding on the train. Nick is studying the perspiring female passenger sitting beside him

when suddenly, “Her pocket-book slapped to the floor” (121). This abrupt sound not only predicts the sudden impact of the automobile that hits Myrtle and the gun-shot that fatally wounds Gatsby, but it also foreshadows the rapid decay of Gatsby’s dreams and of so many Americans’ dreams in the 1920s. One of the more obvious indications of death used in the novel is when Nick, Tom Buchanan, and Jordan Baker are traveling home from their tumultuous afternoon at the Plaza Hotel and Nick remembers that “we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight” (143). The 1974 film also attempts the use of symbolism to foreshadow death in an added scene, but does not achieve Fitzgerald’s striking imagery. Stumbling upon a dead seagull on the beach near Gatsby’s mansion, Nick picks the bird up with his bare hand, without any concern for the fact that he is exposing himself to disease-causing bacteria. While the filmmakers’ intent in this scene is blatantly obvious, its effect is diminished by the disgusting nature of Nick’s dead bird fondling.

Another mistaken portrayal in the 1974 is the scene where Tom, Nick, and Jordan Baker are on their way to the city and stop for gas at Wilson’s garage. Daisy and Gatsby are behind at a distance in another automobile, but Myrtle Wilson, never having seen Tom’s wife, mistakes Jordan for her. Gazing up at a second story window, Nick notices Myrtle peering down at the group as they are conversing with her husband. Fitzgerald’s description of Tom’s mistress in this moment is unsurpassed in its strikingly vivid language:

Her expression was curiously familiar—it was an expression I had often seen on women’s faces but on Myrtle Wilson’s face it seemed purposeless and inexplicable until I realized that her eyes, wide with jealous terror,

were not fixed on Tom but on Jordan Baker, whom she took to be his wife. (131)

Depicting this expression on the cinematic screen must have proved challenging for Karen Black and director Jack Clayton. Perhaps they felt it would not have the same powerful effect as the passage in Fitzgerald's text if they simply focused on Myrtle's face in the window; whatever the case, disturbing footage of Mrs. Wilson was added that shows her banging on the glass so hard that it shatters, severely bloodying her right hand. Screaming, a psychotically hysterical Myrtle proceeds to cram her bloody fingers in her mouth. While the image is shocking, it does not convey the same striking impression as the above passage; rather, it provokes strong feelings of disgust. To see a woman suck her blood-covered hand is about as appealing as watching Nick pick up a bacteria-ridden dead bird on the beach.

One of the novel's most dramatic scenes takes place later that afternoon at the Plaza Hotel. In a suite filled with tension and hot summer air, Tom snaps at Daisy for complaining about the heat. As Gatsby defends his lover, Tom confronts the man who is presumably sleeping with his wife. Hoping to expose Gatsby as a criminal and fraud to Daisy, Nick, and Jordan (also present), Tom interrogates him about his schooling at Oxford, his bootlegging, and even his use of the expression "old sport." When Gatsby informs Tom that his wife is leaving him, Daisy's husband fires back that she most certainly is not, "Certainly not for a common swindler who'd have to steal the ring he put on her finger" (140). In Fitzgerald's text, Daisy commands the men to cease their verbal battle. However, Tom is relentless, pressing Gatsby further for the truth about his drug stores and shady dealings with Meyer Wolfshiem, a known gambler and swindler. At the

conclusion of the intense discussion, it is evident that Daisy's affair with Gatsby no longer threatens Tom. In fact, he tells his wife and her lover to go on home, and further establishes his dominance over the situation by diminishing Daisy and Gatsby's relationship: "He won't annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over" (142). Unfortunately, this powerful scene is ruined in the 1974 film. Standing face to face, Redford balls his fist at Dern's remark about having to steal a ring for Daisy. The gentlemen's staring contest is suddenly interrupted by Mia Farrow's piercing screech, a sound approximating that of fingernails scratching a chalk board in terms of its unpleasantness: "NOOOOOOOOOOO!" She runs out of the room and through the hotel lobby, weaving through scores of guests enjoying an afternoon of dancing and fine dining. Watching Gatsby chase after his wife, Tom yells another round of personal remarks, this time across a sea of astonished faces. Because Tom does not confidently insist that Daisy start home with Gatsby, he is reduced in the cinematic portrayal of this scene to a desperate bully, fearful he is losing his wife to another man.

Only one scene from the latter half of Fitzgerald's novel is effectively portrayed in the 1974 film. Set in Wilson's garage during the same evening as the Plaza Hotel confrontation, Myrtle's grieving husband, George, has just lost his wife to a hit-and-run automobile accident and is consoled by Michaelis, a neighboring Greek business owner. Concerned about George's mental stability, Michaelis tries his best to find if there is anyone who could be of comfort to the tearful mechanic, such as a priest or family member. Meanwhile, George is preoccupied with suspicions about his wife's infidelity and about the identity of the man who had been driving the deadly car. Because the corresponding passage to this scene in the original text is primarily dialogue, it is easily

adaptable to the cinematic screen. That is, very little of Fitzgerald's complex language and imagery has to be interpreted for Gatsby's translation to the visual medium for this scene, and the filmmakers were wise in their decision use as much of Fitzgerald's dialogue as possible. Enhanced by the strong performances given by Scott Wilson and Elliott Sullivan (George's friend), this scene is surprisingly convincing.

On the other hand, the next couple of scenes featuring Myrtle's now-widowed husband are not so effective in the 1974 film. As angry, grief-stricken George Wilson tramps over to East Egg carrying a crumpled brown paper sack with a deadly weapon inside, he is not alone. A chorus of overly suspenseful music, coming straight out of an old-fashioned horror movie, follows his every move as he seeks to find out who is responsible for the deadly accident. In the novel, Nick recalls that on the morning of Gatsby's murder, "there were boys who had seen a man 'acting sort of crazy' and motorists at whom he stared oddly from the side of the road" (168). Instead of focusing on the actor's facial expressions and behavior to convey a sense of craziness, the movie ineffectively depicts the mood in this scene with its melodramatic musical soundtrack. Another mistake in the 1974 film has to do with its portrayal of the novel's plot structure in the hours leading up to the fatal gunshots that kill the title character. In Fitzgerald's text, Wilson's conversation with Tom Buchanan is revealed much later in the story. Nick reports that in the fall of that year, he runs into Tom one afternoon in the city and questions him about what he said to Wilson on the day he went to East Egg hunting the person who had murdered his wife. The shallowness of Tom's character is revealed when Nick realizes even without Tom's response that Wilson was pointed in the direction of Gatsby's mansion. In the 1974 film, this information is presented linearly, incorporating

the fateful conversation that took place when Wilson arrived at the Buchanan's home to obtain the name of the individual owning the yellow car that hit Myrtle. The novel's first-person point of view is broken for this scene as the audience is allowed to witness the exchange between Tom and Wilson even though the narrator, Nick, is not present. Unlike Fitzgerald's text, which maintains the reader's interest by delaying key details, the movie is much less captivating because the plot becomes more predictable with its linear structuring.

The swimming pool murder scene is supposed to be one of—if not the—most tragic moments in the story. After all, with the death of Gatsby also dies his dream of Daisy, and literature scholars commonly agree that this event symbolizes the dissolution of the American Dream. However, in the 1974 film, this tragedy is overshadowed by unintended comic touches. One of the most humorous elements in the entire film is the costume outfitting Robert Redford as he is lying on a raft in his swimming pool on the afternoon of his death. This flawlessly tanned version of Jay Gatsby looks like a male model in his skintight one-piece belted swimsuit. Fidelity to the time period is, in this scene, a distracting costume that minimizes the scene's rising action. In Chapter VIII of the novel, there is absolutely no description of the suit, and no details about Wilson shooting Gatsby. Nick simply recalls that the chauffeur was the one who heard the shots, but “hadn't thought anything much about them” (169). The movie also changes the direction in which Gatsby gazes just before his death. Fitzgerald beautifully describes this moment in the original text: “He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass” (169). However, in the 1974 film,

Gatsby repeatedly glances back toward the veranda's billowing white curtains, imagining that Daisy's voice is beckoning from somewhere inside. Such a change from page to screen evidences the filmmakers' goal of emphasizing the relationship of the two lovers. Unfortunately, what is emphasized most in this scene is the chiseled body of a movie star.

All in all, Paramount's 1974 Gatsby film is a most ineffective cinematic adaptation of Fitzgerald's classic American novel. There are two major reasons for this failure, one of which is the movie's casting. As the majority of the film's criticism asserts, Robert Redford and Mia Farrow were terribly miscast as Gatsby and Daisy. In the novel, Fitzgerald's title character is handsome, mysterious, and lovesick. Redford's Gatsby looks more like a male model who is in love with himself rather than Daisy, the woman for whom he supposedly built his lavish West Egg mansion, positioned directly across the bay from her house; moreover, being played by a Hollywood superstar makes Gatsby anything but remote and mysterious. With a voice about as far away from "thrilling" as it could be, Mia Farrow makes it hard to imagine that such a sex symbol would be so obsessed with winning back Daisy Buchanan that he changed his name—his entire self image—just to impress her. As Nick Carraway, Sam Waterston delivers a performance that is virtually void of emotion; whether he is listening to Gatsby's wildly embellished life story or waiting while Myrtle, stretched across his lap, finishes her make-out session with Tom, Waterston's narrator fails to react in situations in which natural human responses (i.e., facial expressions) would seem appropriate. Moreover, because Nick's perceptions of Gatsby are not as readily apparent as they are in the novel, the film's title character is not as sympathetic. Even minor casting mistakes diminish this adaptation's authenticity; Bruce Dern's Tom is anything but "hulking" while Karen

Black's Myrtle looks nothing like the "sumptuous" woman Fitzgerald famously described in his text.

Finally, almost every aspect in Clayton's Gatsby is melodramatic. With the exception of two scenes (namely, Nick's boat ride to East Egg and Wilson's tearful conversation with Michaelis), the brilliant subtlety of Fitzgerald's text has been turned into a blatant form of cinematic overstatement. While some scenes are simply unnatural or cringe-provoking (i.e., Gatsby's shirt episode, Nick dead seagull fondling), others are downright tasteless (Tom's and Myrtle's foreplay display in Wilson's garage). Sadly, the famously beloved Jazz-Age tale about a tragic American dreamer has become, in this film, nothing more than a bad joke.

APPENDIX

GATSBY 2000

Almost twenty-five years after Paramount's cinematic adaptation of The Great Gatsby was blasted by critics, A&E Television Networks attempted its own version of F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece. As noted in Chapter I, the 2000 film was directed by Robert Markowitz and starred Paul Rudd (Nick Carraway), Toby Stephens (Jay Gatsby), Mira Sorvino (Daisy Buchanan), Martin Donovan (Tom Buchanan), Francie Swift (Jordan Baker), Heather Goldenhersh (Myrtle Wilson), and William Camp (George Wilson). The movie received mixed reviews; debates ensued over casting decisions, acting performances, and visual interest. However, in a scene-by-scene comparison with the 1974 film, the most recent Gatsby shows much improvement. It is highly probable that the Clayton version's mistakes were referenced in the making of the A&E movie since not a single one was repeated.

While the opening scene of the earlier Gatsby film is interesting enough, the beginning of the 2000 version is captivating. The first shot sets the tone for much of the two-hour picture. Nick's deep voice-over begins as a lone crow flies across the bleak waters of what is presumably known in Gatsby as Long Island Sound: "In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since." Like the 1974 film, this version also uses many of Fitzgerald's lines; however, the 2000 movie conveys more than Nick's recollection of his father's wisdom with the use of music. The beautifully sad, slow sounds of the saxophone abruptly change to a suspenseful chorus of violins and then back again, an arrangement which not only reflects the narrator's cynical mood, but also hints at title character's desperate dreams, his sudden and tragic death, and Nick's disappointed realizations in the

story's conclusion. Seconds later, the camera focuses on Nick's contemplative expression as he is driving to a destination later revealed as West Egg. Rather than delving into background information about that fateful summer in 1922 as Nick does in the earlier film, this narrator concentrates on Gatsby, for whom Nick heeded his father's advice by reserving judgment. "If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life," he says, reading a passage straight out of the novel. At the mention of this mysterious character, a man in a dark-colored, period-style bathing suit tightly clutching something in his right hand is shown floating on a raft in the middle of a swimming pool. The aerial view switches to an underwater one, and through the crystal clear water is the silhouette of a man holding a gun. As a series of shots are fired, the man on the raft releases what he had been holding onto, a pair of silver cufflinks, which sink to the bottom of the pool as the opening credits roll. Even for those familiar with Fitzgerald's classic novel, this scene is riveting. After all, it is not as if the conclusion of the story is ruined because it is revealed too soon. For those who have not read the book, this scene is especially intriguing as audience members will wonder about the details surrounding the murder.

Nick's arrival at the Buchanans is another scene that is better portrayed in the 2000 Gatsby film. While she may not look like the perfect Daisy, Academy Award winning actress Mira Sorvino definitely acts—and sounds—like the character depicted in Fitzgerald's novel. As a natural brunette with olive skin, Sorvino is not quite right as a blonde. However, Sorvino embodies the description of her character in the text: "Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—

but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget” (14). Unlike Mia Farrow, Sorvino’s voice actually is “low” and “thrilling.” Moreover, Paul Rudd’s Nick is much more wry in this version of Gatsby. For example, when Jordan (Francie Swift) quietly asks the narrator if he is surprised that Tom has a mistress, Nick replies, “Actually, I’m more surprised that he was depressed by a book” (The Rise of the Coloured Empires, about the need for the white race to suppress the minority population, which Tom brings up during dinner). Casting for the role of Tom Buchanan was another improvement made for the 2000 Gatsby. While Bruce Dern fails miserably to convey a man with “hulking” physical stature, Martin Donovan embodies that term. Upon his arrival at the Buchanans, Nick states that Tom had been “one of the most powerful ends who had ever played football at Yale.” After one glance at Donovan’s broad shoulders and thick chest, such a statement is not hard to believe. In the 1974 film, Nick arrives home from dinner with the Buchanans, just in time to witness Redford’s exaggerated interpretation of Gatsby’s smile. By contrast, the dinner in the 2000 movie is followed by Tom’s request for the narrator to join him for an afternoon trip into the city, and Nick’s initial encounter with his neighbor is delayed until the first party scene. The effect of this particular plot structure preserves the mystery surrounding the title character and the audience’s anticipation of Gatsby.

Better choices have also been made for the first scene at Wilson’s garage, where Nick is introduced to Tom’s mistress. The camera focuses on Myrtle’s thick calves and ankles as she tramps downstairs into the grubby shop. Wearing a loosely-fitting white dress, Heather Goldenhersh closely resembles the woman with the “thickish figure” described in Fitzgerald’s text: “in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her

surplus flesh sensuously as some women can” (29). As soon as Myrtle’s husband steps out to fetch chairs, Tom greets his lover with kisses on the cheek while an uncomfortable Nick looks away, a better choice than the buttocks-grabbing close-up from the 1974 film. Instead of the racy trombone music that blared as Karen Black groped Bruce Dern, the A&E scene is accompanied by the more realistic sounds of clanking machinery and whistle-blowing from nearby factories. While Myrtle jumps across Nick in the passenger seat of Tom’s coupe to embrace her lover yet again in the latest cinematic portrayal of Gatsby, the passionate automobile encounter seems much more natural than it did in the earlier film. For example, Tom is driving an open-top car, which makes it easy for Myrtle, giddy with excitement over having sneaked away from her husband, to leap into the waiting automobile and fall across Nick’s lap into her lover’s arms. Furthermore, Nick winces slightly as most of Myrtle’s body weight is pressing down on his legs and against his stomach, trying his best to screw the cap back on the silver flask from which the two men had been sipping as Tom’s mistress showers her lover with kisses. Aware of Nick’s presence, Tom does not let the affectionate exchange get out of hand; playfully patting Myrtle’s rear, he reminds her to speak to speak to his passenger. The moment is kept lighthearted as Myrtle charmingly bids Nick hello, using her free arm to give him a friendly sort of hug as she gets situated for the ride.

Though the scene where Tom breaks his mistress’s nose is miserably portrayed in the 1974 Gatsby film, it is perfectly rendered in the 2000 version. Just as he does in the novel’s second chapter, Nick recalls, “I have been drunk just twice in my life and the second time was that afternoon” (33). Like the narrator, nearly everyone at Myrtle’s little party in the downtown apartment appears intoxicated with their slurred speech and heavy

eyelids. In the earlier film, the lover's violent quarrel seems both out of place and unnatural for several reasons. First, it is hard to believe that a man of Tom Buchanan's social class would hit his mistress in front of a room full of guests, and it is even harder to believe that he would do so completely sober, which is exactly how Bruce Dern appears. Next, the fight seems to take place rather early in the afternoon, giving a character his size little time to get drunk. This scene in the recent Gatsby adaptation is without such problems. For example, Tom's demand, "Myrtle, wake up! We're out of booze" suggests the passing of time as well as the excessive consumption of alcohol. By making his gestures seem slightly uncontrolled and repeating his words, Martin Donovan's Tom appears to have had a few drinks, especially since he is shown sipping a whiskey flask in the previous scene. Moreover, realizing that he does not want to carry on the argument with Myrtle in the living room where guests are present, Tom leads his mistress into the adjoining foyer where they can continue in semi-privacy. When Myrtle is backhanded, only a couple of curious guests peeking around the passageway are visible in the background. Despite Tom's whispered apologies, his bloody-nosed lover is not convinced that his actions were unintentional and turns around to walk back through the living room; only Nick appears concerned as the other guests have gone back to their party banter. This conclusion is much more realistic than the way the scene ends in the 1974 movie, where Karen Black's tearful Myrtle falls instantly back into Tom's arms even though he has just broken her nose.

What was in the earlier adaptation a seemingly purposeless random shot of Gatsby's darkened silhouette (the character's identity is blatantly obvious as he is played by such a famous movie star) staring out across a body of water at sunset has finally been

appropriately incorporated into the story for the 2000 movie. Arriving home in the late evening from his escapade with Tom in the city, Nick receives an invitation to a party given by his neighbor, Jay Gatsby. The scene fades into a shot of Daisy looking out over the water from her dock. Ignoring Tom's question about why she does not seem concerned over his whereabouts, Daisy nods at the lights across the bay and asks, "Is all of that West Egg?" Suspense is building as the shot fades back to Nick, now recalling all of the comments said thus far about the mysterious man who has sent him the invitation, and then again fades to Daisy, who is recalling them as well. This mood is created in part by the increasingly rapid changing of camera shots and by the increasingly rapid tempo of the movie's musical soundtrack, in this scene a powerful symphony orchestra.

Reaching its height, the anticipation subsides into a flashback. The smiling face of a young soldier in uniform fills the screen as the shot widens when an automobile driven by a young woman emerges into the beautiful autumn landscape five years back. In this captivatingly romantic scene—one that Fitzgerald no doubt would have hoped for in a cinematic portrayal of his classic novel—the nervously excited James Gatz encounters Daisy Fay, the gracefully charming female driver who mistakes his name as Jay Gatsby in the course of their ensuing flirtation that progresses to a first date. Moments later, the story flashes forward back to Daisy, standing next to a flashing green light at the end of her dock. It is here that the shot fades to the silhouetted profile of a man looking out the water towards the flashing green light, fading finally to black. A relatively unknown actor, Toby Stephens is a wise choice to play the title character; even for those familiar with the novel, Gatsby's identity in this scene's concluding shot is evident because of its intelligently subtle placement within the context of the plot.

The first party scene at Gatsby's mansion has likewise been dramatically improved for the 2000 adaptation. A majority of critics agree that this scene goes on too long in the 1974 film. In actuality, both versions of the party run approximately the same number of minutes; however, the duration of this scene seems much shorter in the most recent movie because efforts are made to reveal more about Gatsby's character, his partygoers, and the opulent lifestyles of the Jazz Age instead of simply showing throngs of drunken guests dancing the Charleston. For example, arriving early to the festivities next door, Nick in the A&E version takes it upon himself to look about the place. Making his way down near the shore, he recalls the way throngs of people would frolic about Gatsby's beach. Whether these guests had actually been invited does not seem of much concern as they returned day after day over the course of the summer, taking advantage of his fine amenities. Eventually their shallow characters are exposed as not one of these individuals attends Gatsby's funeral. Additionally, whereas the 1974 film simply incorporates a few shots of a man wearing round spectacles among the others of the huge crowd of guests, the 2000 adaptation actually includes the part of the novel in which Nick and Jordan encounter in Gatsby's library Owl Eyes, who reminds Nick of the billboard he saw of Dr. Eckelburg in the Valley of Ashes. This colorful character drunkenly exclaims that all of the books in the room are real. Owl Eyes informs the slightly amused pair that after a thorough examination, he has concluded that the volumes are not just empty cardboard covers as he had initially suspected, a discovery that shows the great lengths to which Gatsby goes in order to protect his extraordinarily wealthy and cultured image. The yellow-dress twins also make an appearance, but with much more subtlety than the excessive treatment in the 1974 film. While Nick, who stands over Jordan as she sits on

the sofa, is asking about her performance in the recent golf tournament, two intoxicated young women plop down and interrupt the conversation. Both giggling girls are dressed in the palest shade of yellow; while their gowns are similar in style and color, they are not identical. Instead of simply incorporating them for the sake of fidelity, these characters also have a function in the A&E movie, which is to divulge more information about the party's host. One reports the story from the novel about tearing her dress at another of Gatsby's parties and receiving a brand-new gown soon after from Gatsby himself. Tired of their company's drunken banter, Jordan jumps up and, taking Nick by the arm, beckons him to relocate elsewhere. "They're boring," she says, a statement indicative not only of the girls in yellow, but of so many of the superficial people Nick encounters during his residence in West Egg.

The narrator's lunch with Gatsby is another scene much improved in the 2000 movie. A minor change is made with respect to Gatsby's car. While the reasons for altering the color of the car from yellow to white for this movie are unclear, the fact that Gatsby picks Nick up at Nick's cottage instead of having the narrator come to the mansion as he does in the 1974 version has a significant impact on how the title character is portrayed. Having Gatsby drive to his next-door neighbor's house shows how desperately he is trying to be in Nick's favor. After all, Gatsby is about to ask the narrator for his assistance in staging an afternoon tea with Daisy at Nick's cottage, a reunion about which Gatsby has been dreaming for the past five years; so that Gatsby's beloved will finally be able to see the grand house solely built in hopes of impressing his beloved, he must make every effort to assure that Nick will not turn down his request. Because Sam Waterston's Nick virtually fails to express any kind of visible reaction as Robert

Redford's *Gatsby* presents him with the story of his life, this scene in the 1974 is most unnatural. However, in the recent adaptation, Nick's responses to his neighbor's monologue are more in keeping with those in the corresponding passages of the novel where the narrator's disbelief is conveyed through non-dialogue commentary. Onscreen, Nick's skepticism is depicted through facial expressions as he periodically furrows his brow while listening to Gatsby's wild tale. Furthermore, the scene is better structured in the 2000 movie where the story is told over lunch at the restaurant instead of in Gatsby's car. With the camera focusing on the characters one at a time, Nick's reactions during the conversation are given equal weight with the seemingly far-fetched biographical account. For instance, when Toby Stephens says Gatsby's lines from the novel, "I lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe... trying to forget something very sad that happened to me long ago," Nick cannot hold back any longer and bursts out laughing (70). Realizing that Gatsby is serious, he contains himself and apologizes for the outburst and does his best to keep a straight face for the remainder of the narrative.

The version of *Gatsby* in this adaptation is much more endearing than his predecessor, even bringing an intentional bit of comedy to the role now and then. After letting Nick know he has a request of him, Gatsby says, "I understand you're seeing Miss Baker later." Astonished and appearing rather disturbed at the very thought of Gatsby wanting to move in on his new love interest, Nick asks, "Do you mean you're in love with Miss Baker?" Aware that his now disturbed lunch companion has mistaken his intentions entirely, Gatsby plays along and starts, "I might..." However, he is overcome with the humor of the moment and reassures Nick: "No... no... I'm not... but Miss Baker has kindly consented to speak to you about this matter." As the title character, Toby

Stephens is definitely attractive-looking, but unlike Robert Redford, who was often referred to in the media as a Hollywood sex symbol around the time he starred in the 1974 film, this Gatsby's handsomeness is understated, so relating to him is simply easier. Moreover, as Stephens is a relatively unknown actor—most of his work confined to British theatre productions—his Gatsby is more in keeping with the mysterious character described in Fitzgerald's text.

One of the most outlandish scenes in the 1974 adaptation is when Daisy (Mia Farrow) carries on a telephone conversation with Nick while lying in the bathtub. Thankfully, nothing of the sort occurs in the 2000 movie. Here, Daisy's acceptance to Nick's invitation to tea is implied—considering the fact that she shows up for the occasion that Gatsby and Nick just discussed in the previous scene. During this telephone conversation in the novel, Nick requests that Daisy come to his cottage without Tom. Because the passage where this communication occurs is not visually recreated for the movie, the audience learns of this particular detail through the remarks Daisy makes when she arrives at Nick's. Getting out of the car, she asks, "Why did I have to come alone?" Then, jokingly, "Are you in love with me?" By utilizing dialogue, this adaptation is able to avoid portraying a potentially mundane (or ridiculous) scene without leaving its audience uninformed.

The shirt scene is one of the most fondly recalled moments in Fitzgerald's classic novel. As discussed in Chapter IV, the late author's brilliant use of descriptive language brings beauty to what would otherwise be the simple act of Gatsby showing Daisy his expensive wardrobe. The cinematic portrayal of this moment in the 1974 film fails to achieve the novel's same emotional intensity as when Robert Redford wildly throws the

entire collection of dress shirts about the bedroom, Mia Farrow sobbing unconvincingly as she witnesses the lavish display. The 2000 movie omits the wardrobe tossing bit entirely. Though Gatsby still mentions his British clothing connection and shows Daisy his shirt collection, she gazes at the beautiful garments with the same awed expression she has when examining his other fine possessions, such as the gilded brush on his dresser. It is Gatsby who has the overtly emotional response in this adaptation, a performance so moving that it becomes hard not to have the response right along with him. Watching Daisy as she brushes her hair in the mirror, Toby Stephens says to Nick with as much—if not more—passionate conviction as the title character in Fitzgerald's novel, "It's the funniest thing, old sport. I can't...I just...I can't..." The cufflinks which sank to the bottom of the pool when Gatsby is shot in the opening scene of the movie surface in this scene when Daisy finds them in his jewelry box. Though not a part of the story in the original text, they are used to incorporate a flashback of Daisy and Gatsby when he was still a poor young soldier. So that he will not feel out of place amongst the financially privileged, she affixes to his sleeves a pair of silver cufflinks so that "no one will know the difference," or in other words, that Gatsby is not from old money. Not only does the addition of this flashback demonstrate the difference in their social classes, but it also serves to show how far Gatsby came in his drive to achieve financial success to impress his long lost love.

To foreshadow the deaths of Myrtle and Gatsby in the 1974 film, Nick handles a dead seagull during a scene that does not appear in Fitzgerald's novel. Fortunately, the 2000 movie is without bird groping and the rising dramatic action is instead signaled by changes in the music and camera shots. During the second party at Gatsby's mansion,

Tom begins to wonder where his wife has gone. The dotted rhythm of the drum beat which began when Daisy asked Nick to keep an eye out for her husband while she and Gatsby steal a few intimate moments alone together becomes more intense the moment Tom asks, "Where's Daisy?" As the camera view switches back and forth between Tom, Nick, and Jordan at the mansion and Gatsby and Daisy over at Nick's bungalow, the rate at which the shot changes grows increasingly faster. Finally, while it may not be as obvious in an initial viewing of the movie, the last shot in this scene parallels the image of the title character just before his murder. In the daylight hours following the mansion's all-night festivities, an inebriated Jordan Baker lying on a raft in the middle of Gatsby's swimming pool calls out for Nick to "shut the window." A few scenes later, Gatsby is delivered a fatal gunshot wound to the heart as he floats over the water, dreaming of his beloved as he forever drifts off to sleep.

Also improved is the scene where Myrtle, seen through a window above Wilson's garage, watches her lover stop for gas with Nick and a woman whom she assumes is Mrs. Tom Buchanan. In the 1974 film, Myrtle's reaction is wildly over dramatized as she beats the glass so hard that it breaks, and then sucks her bloody fingers as if they are covered with maple syrup. Perhaps the only flaw in the 2000 adaptation, it is not clear whether Myrtle thinks the female passenger (who is actually Jordan Baker) is Tom's wife. The novel's clarification of this detail conveys Myrtle's jealousy. As Tom pulls up, the camera is angled so that the audience views Myrtle as she stares out of the window. Though her eyes appear just as Fitzgerald described them in the text, "wide with jealous terror," it is not evident that they are "fixed not on Tom but on Jordan Baker, whom she took to be his wife." Because the camera's view is focused on the backseat passengers

from afar, the exact source of her jealousy is not apparent. Nevertheless, the scene is effective because Myrtle is obviously upset that Tom does not stop for her the way he usually does, signaling for the audience a coming change in the plot's now swiftly rising action.

Approaching perfection is the 2000 movie's portrayal of the hotel confrontation scene, which occurs in Chapter VII of the novel. In the 1974 film, Tom (Bruce Dern) chases Gatsby (Robert Redford), who is himself chasing after a hysterical Daisy (Mia Farrow) as she darts through the lobby to avoid the drama which has just ensued between her husband and lover in the hotel room. All the while, Tom has launched a full-scale character attack on Gatsby, and shouts personal remarks in his direction over the crowded room of astonished guests. The critical mistake in the earlier adaptation's version of this scene is that Tom fails to possess the air of superiority he held in Fitzgerald's text by appearing to have lost control over the altercation from which Daisy made a mad dash. On the other hand, it is Tom who commands his wife to exit the room in A&E's adaptation. Though the scene has been condensed for its cinematic presentation, the action unfolds just as it does in the novel, leaving Tom's superiority intact. Moreover, unlike Sam Waterston's Nick and Lois Chiles's Jordan, who sit like statues as Dern and Redford come to blows over Mia Farrow in the 1974 film, Paul Rudd and Francie Swift look appropriately uncomfortable as the tension in the room reaches its height.

Even seemingly minor choices make the 2000 movie a more effective Gatsby adaptation than the 1974 film. Two scenes from the earlier version featuring George Wilson in the hours following his wife's tragic death are not portrayed; the first is when Wilson's Greek neighbor, Michaelis, tries to help the grieving mechanic locate someone

who could offer him comfort and support. Instead, the A&E movie recreates the terrible accident through a flashback which occurs when Gatsby, hiding in the darkness outside the Buchanans', reveals to Nick that Daisy had been the one driving when Myrtle was hit. Though the scene is somewhat gruesome (Myrtle's bloody body is shown as it is crushed under the car), it is much more attention-grabbing than Wilson crying in the garage. Also not depicted in the newer movie is Wilson's trek to East Egg, a scene ruined in the 1974 film by an overly suspenseful musical accompaniment. This particular plot structure greatly enhances Gatsby's murder scene because Wilson's sudden appearance at the edge of the pool is brilliantly surprising. Moreover, the murder scene finally possesses the ominous mood Fitzgerald intended in his novel. Instead of distracting the audience with a Gatsby-the-swimsuit-model (like Redford with his flawless tan physique), the fair-skinned title character in this version actually incites sympathy as he lies on the raft so quietly and unassuming, dreaming only of his treasured moments with Daisy as the dark figure on the edge of the pool emerges into view and fires a bullet into Gatsby's heart.

In summary, the 2000 Gatsby movie is a vast improvement over its 1974 predecessor. Unlike in the Clayton film, the casting in this version is ideal for Fitzgerald's characters. Toby Stephens makes the perfect Gatsby with his understated handsomeness and charmingly awkward mannerisms. The title character is by far more sympathetic than Redford's Gatsby because of the way Paul Rudd conveys Nick throughout the movie. In this adaptation, Nick's opinion of his neighbor is obvious as his dialogue and facial expressions go from skepticism to respect to pity. Moreover, Rudd's Nick is simply more fun to watch because his comic sarcasm which repeatedly surfaces in many of the scenes. While Mira Sorvino delivers a flawless performance, Academy-

Award winner Charlize Theron might have looked more convincing with Daisy's blonde hair since the actress normally fashions lighter locks in her off-camera life. On the other hand, Martin Donovan is the physical embodiment of the novel's Tom Buchanan. Not only is he appropriately burly, but he is also successful at conveying his character's aristocratic arrogance. Unlike Karen Black in the earlier film, Tom's mistress in this movie, played by Heather Goldenhersh, looks like the Myrtle in Fitzgerald's text with her nicely carried slightly fuller figure.

Besides markedly better casting, the 2000 Gatsby adaptation greatly surpasses the 1974 film in terms of effectively presenting the events in Fitzgerald's novel. Though the script is generally faithful to the text, its fidelity is not exaggerated the way it is in the earlier version. What keeps all of the colorful, suspenseful and/or intensely dramatic aspects of the story from becoming melodramatic is the movie's bleak undertone that continues throughout every scene. This mood is conveyed through the music, the lighting, the scenery, the costumes, and the arrangements of various camera shots. A major criticism of the 1974 film is that it is too long. By contrast, the 2000 version eliminates scenes where details can be implied rather than visually depicted (such as the telephone conversation where Nick invites Daisy—sans Tom—to tea), thereby shortening the movie's duration as well as keeping the audience well informed. Another main difference between the two adaptations has to do with which plot elements are portrayed. While the 1974 film seems to focus solely on Gatsby's romantic relationship with Daisy, the 2000 version also incorporates aspects of the lovers' past through the use of flashbacks and also reveals the shallowness of those with whom Nick comes in contact during his summer in New York. Lastly, the latest Gatsby movie makes for a more

captivating adaptation. By placing Gatsby's murder within the movie's opening credits and by allowing the audience to witness Myrtle's tragic death, Fitzgerald's classic novel is transformed into suspenseful cinematic entertainment. While the 1974 film vastly surpassed the 2000 version in terms of publicity, it is the latter of the two that excels in quality.

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