

**The Comparative Study of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novel *The Great Gatsby*  
and its Film Adaptation (2013)**

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**Abstract**

An adaptation study is a branch of comparative literature which makes a connection between literature and movie. The comparative literature as an interdisciplinary field, which incorporates the fields of literature, history, philosophy, cultural studies, linguistics and sociology into. It helps perception of the flow that human culture possesses; and, therefore, it brings connection of the discrete domains even in the otherwise disjointed field of knowledge. The medium of movies and novels are two different mediums which have their own ways of presenting and processing ideas. Adaptation might then be most properly described as an art of reimagining a story in translation from one medium or mode to another. Each of them has its ways of conveying meaning. Thus, this paper aims to compare and contrast F.Scotts Fitzgerald's '*The Great Gatsby*,' the novel, to the (2013) adaptation. The novel, *Great Gatsby* by F.Scotts Fitzgerald, explores themes like the decay of the American Dream, the hollow lifestyle of the upper class, and the struggle between old money and new money. Judging from this kind of study, it is possible to explain characteristics that are in some way could exist between a novel and a film as well as the differences that exist between the two.

**Keywords:** adaptation, interdisciplinary, sociology.

**Introduction**

The concept of adaptation will include processes like rewriting, reinterpretation, and even recontextualization, focusing on creatively transforming a source text rather than strictly imitating it. In vivid contrast to remakes, where filmmakers are usually more devoted to the original material, film adaptations afford directors the liberty to re-imagine, and reinterpret the story in fresh and creative ways. At the core of a film adaptation is the process of turning a novel into a cinematic experience. The way this adaptation takes form is influenced by the conditions of its creation, such as production decisions, as well as the audience's interpretation and acceptance.

“Therefore, when we talk about adaptations, transformations, remakes, and so on, we should not simply focus on the structure of those texts - their form and content but on the dialogue between the text and its context. Evidently, adaptation is primarily a phenomenon of recontextualization of the text, or, even better, of reformulation of its communicative situation” (Casetti 83).

This changes the focus from being devoted to the original novel to delving into the relationship between the story and its transformed perspective. The process of adaptation moves beyond from what all is written in the script. It involves marketing and promotion as well. In many instances, promotions which accompany the launch of a film revive public awareness for the novel on which the movie has been adapted. Both production and post-production help in how the content might appear in the novel, hence; together they represent a larger part of this complex process of recontextualization, and re-articulation. Therefore, an adaptation is a complicated dynamic form of creative activity.

Books and films are just different mediums, so they both need different styles of storytelling. Books can build an entire world in one's imagination. As a reader, you have the chance to live with and hang out with the characters; you get to experience all their thoughts in every moment. The author has full power to stop, slow down, or speed up time as much as he or she wants through their writing.

Movies, on the other hand, are moving pictures. They are sometimes likened to painting or photography for it is in the imagery—the effect achieved by composition, color, costumes, and so much more—that much of what one reads is communicated in films. Even though script writing still plays a necessary part, films are planned for one-time viewing so the story has to feel kinetic. Every scene merges with another, and not one minute is a time-waster. In addition, screen actors have to translate words into images, whereas book readers have to use their own minds and imagination to bring a book's story to life, making it perfect to the individual reader. To be straightforward, when taking material to create an adaptation of something, you can't simply copy from the original material. You must make a play on the advantages that the new medium can take. A successful movie adaptation shows a strong appreciation of these differences. This is something which can be seen in the adaptation of Francis Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby* into the 2013 film adaptation.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, was an American writer who authored works set in the vibrant period of the Roaring twenties or the Jazz age as it's sometimes called a veteran of the World War, he only got a chance to write a total of five books in his tragically short life, as he suffered from multiple health complications and died at the young age of forty four.

*The Great Gatsby* (1925), the third of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels, was not well-received. Nevertheless, it gained worldwide recognition some years later. Many believe that Fitzgerald spent a frustrating amount of time describing in detail the looks and actions of people who do not make a second appearance.

Additionally, the book has been described by more "allegory-savvy" critics as a metaphor for the American Dream. The shamelessly decadent behavior of the uber-rich plays a prominent role in the plot.

Shortly after the book was published, many film adaptations were attempted; unfortunately, all copies of these films have been lost over time, leaving only their trailers as proof of their existence.

Mark Anthony (Baz Luhrmann); is an Australian film director, screenwriter, and producer, known for his colorful visual style, irreverent attitude, and love for the lavish and beautiful. He is famous for films such as *Moulin Rouge* and for his 2013 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as the titular character 'Gatsby', and Tobey Maguire as 'Nick'. The film features a blend of jazz, hip-hop, and popular music, including collaboration with Jay-Z. Luhrmann began production on the film, which has a running time of one hour and forty-two minutes, during a production period in Australia from September to December 2011. This research paper will further discuss this work. Also, at the 86th Academy Awards, the film won in both of its nominated categories: Best Costume Design and Best Production Design.

Fascinatingly, the reception to every single one of these films was uncannily similar. They were all praised for their book accuracy but received very mixed reviews from critics. In a review of 236 people, 67 had read the book, 22 had watched the film, and 52 had done both. At the same time, 93 participants neither read the book nor saw the film. This analysis suggests that interest and engagement differ between the book and the film.

### **Analysis**

The overwhelming emotion in *The Great Gatsby* is melancholy, especially when it comes to Gatsby and the theme of romance. Everything feels quite sad because the characters are so caught up in their own worlds to recognize how broken they are. The narrator, Nick, is too apathetic to console anyone or truly confront these emotions. This melancholic mood is encapsulated in lines like, "No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart"(Fitzgerald 101).

The most dominant mood of the story, however, is cynicism or scornfulness. This is primarily derived from Nick's growing aversion to the characters and the lavish lifestyle of the Roaring 20s. His descriptions are laced with hate and frustration, evident in how he describes Gatsby's ambition to be rich as "grotesque and fantastic conceits"(Fitzgerald 106) or how he views Gatsby's life as full of

"ineffable gaudiness"(Fitzgerald 106). The culmination of this scorn is found in Nick's statement at the end of the book about Tom and Daisy,

"They smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together"(Fitzgerald 191). The tone is inimitably different in every chapter of *The Great Gatsby*. For instance, the first few chapters are bursting with excitement that brings Nick Carraway into Gatsby's world, but later the readers will check upon farther disappointed, darker turns in the lives of the characters and their fate. One sentence can alter the entire emotion of the chapter. However, the adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* should not lose the melancholy undertone as well as the critique against the elite of the 1920s.

The tone of Baz Luhrmann's 2013 version is electrifying and dream-like. The film is excellent at conveying the Roaring twenties as exciting and extravagant, especially in its depiction of Gatsby's lavish parties. To organically integrate narration into the film, Luhrmann introduced a non-book-accurate setup. Nick Carraway who is, depressed after the events of the story, has committed himself to a sanitarium for treatment. The voiceovers are presented as either Nick recounting events to his doctor or reading aloud the memoir that he was encouraged to write as a means of processing his grief.

This narration provides greater fidelity to the book by restoring Nick's internal monologue, an essential element of the story.

"And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him..."(Fitzgerald 193)

Whether this is a narrative "cop-out" is debatable. It all depends on the needs of the story—narration can enhance fidelity but must be balanced so it doesn't overdo things. In this case, Luhrmann managed that balance well. Tobey Maguire's voiceover often quotes directly from the book, which adds authenticity.

The movie elaborates on Nick's background as a writer and changes some of the facts, for example, making Nick an alcoholic who is morbid, unlike his statement in the book that he got drunk only twice in his life. Young Gatz rescues the drunken sailor with more drama than what was written in the book. In the same manner, the movie has a longer montage of Gatsby and Daisy's reunion, which stretches plausibility but underlines their love for each other again.

Luhrmann's adaptation takes creative liberties while remaining thematically loyal. For example, Gatsby's introduction in the film is elaborate, with fireworks and

a rhapsodic score—a far cry from the understated book version “*The Great Gatsby*”. Gatsby's violent outburst in the Plaza Hotel is also not in the book, where it is Daisy's realization of Gatsby's bootlegging past that causes her to pull away.

Before the tragic sequence of events begins to unfold in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the novel almost seems as if it could be a perfect love story—one that will end not with death and disillusionment but with the promise of “happily ever after” for Jay Gatsby and the girl of his dreams.

Fitzgerald mirrors this realization in Gatsby by showing the depth of Gatsby's desires for his imagined Daisy. Once the two are reunited in chapter five of the novel, Nick states that

“Gatsby literally glowed; without a word or gesture of exultation a new well-being radiated from him and filled the little room”(Fitzgerald 94).

Using material objects, Gatsby builds his dream of being with Daisy. Each book, each shirt symbolizes a step he is taking to realize his dream, as evidenced by Fitzgerald's use of a brick motif. The shirts are “piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high” (Fitzgerald 97) tangible building blocks of an intangible dream. The way in which Gatsby constructs his dream world is made evident in Fitzgerald's symbolism. Material possessions become the physical embodiment of the perfect love Gatsby pursues.

Since he believes he cannot win Daisy's affections unless he is a man of means, he devotes his life to accumulating objects, disregarding their value even as he hopes it will transfer to his person. Two types of objects are particularly obvious in their symbolic value: the books in Gatsby's library and the array of shirts he displays for Daisy's benefit. Both collections reveal Gatsby's obsessive need to show off his wealth and seemingly paradoxical indifference to the objects themselves.

As is the case with the books, Gatsby purchases vast quantities of clothing in order to impress Daisy. Gatsby feels no need to actually make use of his library, for all the “thoroughness . . . and realism” he exhibits by purchasing actual books rather than those made from “a nice durable cardboard” (Fitzgerald 50).

Despite their abundance, the dream-bricks create an unsteady edifice, as Nick learns when Owl Eyes hastily places the book they have been examining back on its shelf, insisting that “if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse” (Fitzgerald 50). Because Gatsby constructs his life using dreams and meaningless material objects, it is structurally unsound, too fragile to reach the lofty heights he wants to attain.

By continuously embellishing his memory of Daisy with his own creative touches, Gatsby unintentionally ensures that the memory, or more accurately the dream, will surpass the reality and leave him disappointed and confused. The

confusion sets in when Gatsby encounters the green light for the first time after he is reunited with Daisy:

“The colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.” (Fitzgerald 98)

The green light, which in Gatsby's eyes signifies the dream-Daisy he is separated from, becomes another inconsequential material item. Like the books and shirts, it is a tangible object valued by Gatsby not for its own worth, but for the deeper meaning it holds. Yet the green light is inescapably linked to money itself—the green paper currency that enables Gatsby to present himself to Daisy. As Barbara Will asserts,

“What motivates Gatsby is not the desire for material betterment ... but the evanescent and the intangible” (Will 131).

Fitzgerald's use of the color green to symbolize both Daisy and material wealth recurs throughout the novel.

The film adds a sense of optimism that is absent in the book. In the novel, Nick believes Gatsby's dream of being with Daisy has died in his dying moments “He must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. 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. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about .....”(Fitzgerald 172).

In the movie, Gatsby dies with the conviction that Daisy has called him; it is actually Nick. This bittersweet change allows Gatsby to die with his dream intact. Similarly, Nick's ending is softened where he finds closure by writing Gatsby's story as opposed to the book, where he goes off alone and heads west.

Some elements, like Nick's relationship with Jordan Baker, are minimized. In the book, Nick briefly dates Jordan and eventually ends their relationship after Gatsby's death. The film's omission of this subplot shifts focus but doesn't detract significantly from the main narrative.

Luhrmann's style of visuals and sound brings the movie a lot of its character, often distracting from the story. If the reader of the novel felt that the film is too long, the charismatic portrayal of Gatsby by Leonardo DiCaprio balances it out. Though Nick has much admiration for Gatsby, the character in the novel is a pathological liar



and perhaps a violent murderer. DiCaprio balances these weaknesses and makes the tragedy of Gatsby more believable.

The 2013 adaptation is ultimately faithful and transformative at the same time. It changes certain aspects of the story, but it captures the essence of Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream in a visually stunning and emotionally resonant way to experience the tale.

“If adaptation involves the reformulation of a communicative situation, we can foresee instances, in which the adapted work does not really fit because it is too contrived, out of place, or inadequate. Indeed, “second lives” are not always successful (and that is also true for the “first”). There are, however, some failures that are revealing in terms of the initial and final communicative situations” (Casetti 87). Gatsby abandons his family and origins to become single-mindedly focused on gaining wealth, believing it will lead him to happiness, which, in this case, is personified as Daisy. Gatsby first approached Daisy as a young man because he was both envious of and infatuated with her luxurious lifestyle. He lied about his wealth to seduce her, and when she moved away, it became his life's mission to reclaim that love and lifestyle. He worked his way up to becoming a millionaire to win her back. While their love might have been genuine, its foundations were built on greed, lies, and false perceptions of one another. Like all great tragedies, it was destined to fail. Gatsby eventually comes within reach of his desires, but it all falls apart. He has built up an image of success so much in his mind that reality could never live up to his imagination. Unable to move on, he remains trapped because his entire life was dedicated to this one girl.

The most prominent example of the changes made to Gatsby is the fact that they removed one of the most iconic quotes from the book. The context is significant: every time Daisy speaks, Nick describes how beautiful her voice is. He describes it slightly differently each time because he can't quite place what makes it sound so enchanting. About three-quarters into the story, Nick brings this observation to Gatsby, and Gatsby's response feels like a gut punch. Instead of skirting around the question like Nick, Gatsby suddenly says, "Her voice is full of money" (Fitzgerald 128).

This quote can be interpreted in various ways, but the most prominent view is that Gatsby accidentally lets his guard down and reveals the real reason he has been chasing Daisy.

Removing this quote strips the story of much of its depth. It's one of those motifs that works significantly better in a book than on film. In the book, there is a buildup as every time Daisy speaks, the narration describes her voice as the most beautiful thing in the world. In the film, however, the audience actually hears her voice, and it's left to their judgment whether it's beautiful or not.

This movie seems to omit every single moment that portrays Gatsby in a negative light. For example, Gatsby hopes to settle down with Daisy, but whenever Daisy's daughter appears, Gatsby acts like a lost child because he lacks the skills needed to be a competent parent. Additionally, in every flashback, Nick's narration is highly critical of Gatsby, viewing his persona as something a 17-year-old boy would dream up. To underscore this idea, Nick says, "And to this conception, he was faithful to the end" (Fitzgerald 105).

Fitzgerald, in the novel, paints Gatsby—and anyone who believes in the American Dream—as naive and, to a certain extent, greedy. To be honest, it's almost impossible for the film to ignore any of these messages since they are so embedded in the story that removing Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream would require completely altering everything. However, I find Baz Luhrmann's interpretation quite curious. Whether intentionally or not, the movie ends up being much more sympathetic to Gatsby than the novel.

However, the ways in which the story was altered to make Gatsby more likable hurt the themes the original narrative is trying to convey. These changes often shift the tone of key scenes, and, at the end of the day, the story loses some of its nuance and complexity.

The biggest narrative misstep of the film, in my opinion, is the depiction of the final chapter. In the book, there are about five pages of Nick desperately calling every single person on Gatsby's contact list, hoping they will attend his funeral. Yet, they all refuse. Gatsby had no real friends. Those lavish parties were merely a facade to lure Daisy, making him appear cool and popular. The guests leached off him, and Gatsby, so singularly focused on his American Dream, failed to build any meaningful relationships.

The only person who attends Gatsby's funeral is his father, which is ironic, given that Gatsby would not have wanted that. Earlier in the book, Nick notes, "Gatsby's imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (Fitzgerald 105). Gatsby's father is as melancholic as everyone else. At the story's most heartbreaking moment, Gatsby's father gives Nick a to-do list he found in Gatsby's teenage bedroom. The last item on that list reads, "I need to be better to my parents," offering a final glimmer of hope in this otherwise tragic story. Gatsby ultimately appears shallow, and his death is, in a way, a relief for him. The only winners in the story are those who are already wealthy because they get to enjoy all the luxuries without any of the effort or disappointment.



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