

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The Great Gatsby does not proclaim the nobility of the human spirit; it is not politically correct; it does not reveal how to solve the problems of life; it delivers no fashionable or comforting messages. It is just a masterpiece (Brucoli, 7).

No other introduction of *The Great Gatsby* (1925/1996) would suffice as it is one of the greatest classics of American literature. *The Great Gatsby* has influenced imitations of style and topic, but what this master thesis will focus on is the adaptations that it has inspired, more specifically Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013). In this master thesis I will analyze *The Great Gatsby* in the light of Linda Hutcheon's approach to adaptations, and endeavor to demonstrate how particular approaches to analyzing and defining adaptations may lead to different focus in the analysis.

The Great Gatsby (2013) is a film adaptation by Baz Luhrmann who worked as co-writer, producer and director of the film. Luhrmann's adaptation is based on Fitzgerald's novel of the same name and *The Great Gatsby*'s first edition called *Trimalchio* (2000)¹. The film includes a cast of Leonardo DiCaprio as Jay Gatsby, Tobey Maguire as Nick Carraway, Carey Mulligan as Daisy Buchanan, Joel Edgerton as Tom Buchanan and Elizabeth Debicki as Jordan Baker. Warner Bros' production notes of the film describe Luhrmann's film adaptation as combining "his distinctive visual, sonic, and storytelling styles in 3 Dimensions, weaving a Jazz Age cocktail faithful to Fitzgerald's text and relevant to now"(1). But what is an adaptation? To define what an adaptation is can be tricky as one cannot include every form of reinterpretation and representation. Thomas Leitch explains the difficulty of this in his article *Adaptation and Intertextuality, or, What isn't an Adaptation, and What Does it Matter?* (2012). There have been many attempts to define adaptations, and he uses Sanders definition in her work *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006) showing how she "declines to draw a categorical distinction" (88) between adaptation and appropriations because of their complex nature.

¹ Luhrmann's explicitly mentions in several interviews, related to the film, his usage of *Trimalchio* as an additional source of inspiration. As James L. West III. expresses it, reading *Trimalchio* for "the knowledgeable listener it is like hearing the same work and yet a different work" as many would agree and consider it to be a separate literary piece of work (xiii). *Trimalchio* is distinctly different from its later edition as Fitzgerald would rewrite several chapters and include new dialogue after Perkins' response (Fitzgerald, *Trimalchio*, xviii).

Sanders claims that an “adaptation constitutes a more sustained engagement with a single text or source than the more glancing act of an allusion, reference or even citation allows” (5). The process of adaptation can also be “a transpositional practice, adapting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself” or having a temporal or cultural relocation of the original, but it does not have to be a generic shift (Sanders, 18). The adaptation often offers commentary on a source text by presenting a revised view from the original, adding hypothetical motivation or voicing the silenced and marginalized (Sanders, 19). The adaptation can also “constitute a simpler attempt to make texts relevant or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the process of proximations, and updating”. Proximation is a movement towards “the audience’s frame of reference in temporal, geographic, or social terms” (Sanders, 19; 21). She also includes Deborah Cartmell’s broad division of adaptation into three different categories namely transposition, commentary and analogue.

An adaptation can be a “*transpositional* practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of revision in itself” (Sanders, 18. Emphasis added). Furthermore it is often a reinterpretation of “established texts in a new generic contexts or perhaps with relocations of an ‘original’ or source text’s cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not involve a generic shift” (Sanders, 19). This transposition often result in a what is referred to as a “movement of proximation” (QTD, Sanders, 20) as it is a shift towards “the audience’s frame of reference in temporal, geographic, or social terms” (Sanders, 21).

Commentary is a form of “adaptations that comment on the politics of the source text, or those of the new *mise-en-scène*, or both, usually by the means of alteration or addition” (Sanders, 21). “The full impact of the film adaptation depends upon the audience’s awareness of an explicit relationship to a source text ... In expectation of this the most formal adaptations carry the same title as their source text” (Sanders, 22).

Analogue is one of the more distinctive forms of adaptation as it is considered to be a new cultural product that is not dependent on an awareness of the source text in order to be independently enjoyed. Our understanding and experience of it may be enriched when the status of analogue is revealed. An analogue often share motifs, characters or events with the source text (Sanders, 22-24).

Sanders also includes appropriations in her definition of adaptations. Appropriations “frequently affects a more *decisive journey* away from the informing source into a *wholly new cultural product* and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have

suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptation” (Sanders, 26. Emphasis added). Furthermore the relationship between the appropriation and the appropriated source is not always as evident or clearly signaled as in the process of adaptation. Sanders further divides appropriations into two different categories namely embedded texts and sustained appropriations.

Embedded texts are texts with more evident relations to the source text where the “sources begins to emerge, then, as a fundamental, even vital, aspect of the reading or spectating experience, one productive of new meanings, applications, and resonance” (Sanders, 32).

A sustained appropriation is an appropriation where the relationship between the source text and the appropriation can be seen through the author’s creative borrowing, redeployment and allusions without explicitly indicating the intertextual relationship (Sanders, 33-41).

The major distinction between adaptations and appropriations are their closeness and connection to the source text, as appropriations often take a more decisive journey away from the original into a wholly new cultural product. Due to the explicit connection between the film and the novel one would define it as a film adaptation.

Linda Hutcheon gives us another approach on how to define and analyze adaptations with her *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) as Hutcheon analyses adaptations based on two different definitions, as a product and as a process with different modes of engagement. These modes of engagement, the telling mode, the showing mode and the participatory mode “permits us to think about how adaptations allow people to tell, show, or interact with stories” (Hutcheon, 22). The focus on process within adaptation analysis targets the action of reinterpreting and recreating the adapted text. With Hutcheon’s double definition of adaptations she covers a broad array of mediums while at the same time setting down boundaries, as creative works with no sustained engagement, with only allusions, echoes, samplings etc. of the adapted work would not be considered adaptations (Hutcheon, 9). Hutcheon also distances herself from some of the definitions that Sanders borrows such as analogues, transpositions and commentary as they favor studies based on proximity or fidelity to the source text (Hutcheon, 7). Her way of characterizing adaptations can be summarized as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works. A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging. An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (Hutcheon, 8).

In a comparison between Sanders and Hutcheon's definition of adaptation Hutcheon's is the broader one, as she includes everything which is acknowledged as interpretative works of the adapted texts as adaptations. Hutcheon's definitions are certainly easier to use, as one simply have to recognize them as adaptations and then analyze the adaptation as both a product and a process. Sanders on the other hand captures other adaptations with her inclusion of appropriations and analogues that Hutcheon would potentially disregard as inspired or unacknowledged appropriation. Sanders can include these creative works that are far removed from the informing original through different sub categories of adaptation and appropriation. With these theories in mind, is Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* a film adaptation?

According to both Hutcheon and Sanders' definition it would be, as it is explicitly linked to the source text of Fitzgerald's novel. This link between the adaptation and the novel can be seen through the sustained engagement as the adaptation shares the same plot, theme and characters. One can also argue that the film is a transposition as the process of adaptation includes a shift in medium, and arguably a cultural transposition as *The Great Gatsby* includes contemporary music created by well-known artists such as Beyoncé and Jay Z. There are, however, some aspects of the adaptation which Linda and Hutcheon's approaches struggle with as *The Great Gatsby* includes new and reinterpreted aspects of both Fitzgerald's *Trimalchio* and *The Great Gatsby* although this is discussed in further detail in chapter III.

When Luhrmann first started on *The Great Gatsby* he "wanted to be faithful to the book and the epoch and also to make the story accessible for a new generation, to create a cultural weave" ("The Great Gatsby Production Notes", 6). Another goal was "to allow people to feel what it would've felt like to live in that incredibly modern time, when the world was being born and everyone was so young and so beautiful and so drunk and so crazy and so rich and living like that" ("The Great Gatsby Production Notes", 6). One of the ways Luhrmann tried to do this was through proximation, moving the film closer to the audience's frame of reference. By revising and amplifying certain aspects of the novel, such as the corruption, partying, crime and presentation of wealth Luhrmann arguably allows for an easier viewing experience as contextual or historical knowledge is not necessary in order to understand different historical elements of the novel.

Chapter I

Character analysis of Nick.

Nick Carraway is the main narrator of both the film and the novel and due his role as a first person narrator we need to see how his initial traits and further development as a character affects the narration of both the novel and the film adaptation. In the novel several passages shape and mold Nick as a distanced viewer while slowly moving him towards a more central and active role later on in the novel. One example of this is how, early on in the novel, he is described as a person who reserves his judgment of people, lives in a small cottage, but that he enjoys the proximity of the wealthy. He is also compared to Kant, a philosopher who is well known for his thoughts on human experiences and knowledge with his work *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781)² (Cottingham, 40-43). One of the few descriptions Nick gives of himself is “I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known” (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 61)³. As Fitzgerald explains, Nick is a person not fully within the circle of conflict being both “within and without”, but he is close enough to be able to associate with those who belong to the old world such as Tom Buchanan, and Jay Gatsby who represent the new and upcoming middleclass (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 44). Later on in the novel Nick becomes the caretaker of Gatsby’s last business by serving as the host of Gatsby’s father. With this the focus shifts away from Gatsby and more towards how Nick relates to the later events effectively expanding his role.

By using a first person narrative we rely on Nick to tell us the story, but this method also allows us to question the accuracy of what is narrated. One example of the fallibility of Nick is how he contradicts himself. Nick starts the novel by narrating that

Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If

² “Kant’s fundamental thesis is that the only possible objects of human knowledge are phenomena – the empirically observable objects of the world around” (Cottingham. 40). Kant further describes human knowledge with it “begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience” (QTD. Cottingham 40). “According to Kant, the mind in experiencing the world, necessarily interprets it or processes it in terms of a certain structure: it comes to the world already armed with ‘concepts of the understanding’” an understanding prior to or independent of experience (Cottingham, 40).

³ Further reference to works by Fitzgerald, such as *Trimalchio* or *The Great Gatsby*, will be marked with the author and title in the in text citation in accordance with MLA procedures when citing multiple works by the same author.

personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 20).

In the end, however, we see that Nick contradicts himself “because I disapproved of him from beginning to end” (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 134). One could argue that this sentence’s sole purpose is for Nick to momentarily convince himself to dislike Gatsby, as the statement in itself contradicts both his earlier and later impressions of Gatsby. This warns the reader of the limited understanding and perspective of Nick and his ability to revise his opinion. Because of this it becomes important to understand the depiction of Nick in both the novel and the film as the interpretation of his trustworthiness and stability as a character directly corresponds to his role as the narrator.

How is Nick depicted in the film adaptation by Luhrmann? First of all Nick still functions as an intradiegetic narrator but with a shift in focus when it comes to the presentation of Nick. The film starts by informing the viewers that Nick is writing this story. Although there are references in the book to Nick’s role as author, such as when he states that he is “[r]eading over what [he has] written so far”, these references are few and far between (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 59). The film, however, enhances this particular aspect with several flash forwards where we see Nick struggling to deal with his past by writing about it and expressing his feelings. In the end, the film presents Nick as the author of *The Great Gatsby* in one of the final scenes thereby linking the persona of Nick to Fitzgerald himself.

The question of Nick’s reliability still remains after the generic shift to film in Luhrmann’s adaptation. It is possible to argue that Nick has become even more unreliable since there are more reasons to doubt him. First of all, the flash forward to Nick’s present reveals a medical chart which states that he suffers from several diagnoses including alcoholism, insomnia, fits of anger, anxiety and depression (*The Great Gatsby*, 02:18-23). In the film Nick has clearly been heavily affected by something in his past; this is not the Nick Carraway we get to know in New York where he is presented as one of the more stable characters with the least apparent flaws. The impression that Nick has the least apparent flaws could, however, be the result of our point of perspective. Nick as an intradiegetic narrator focuses on the people around him, their faults and his surroundings, but rarely does he focus on himself which results in ample opportunities to discover the faults of our narrator. With all of the flaws presented here about Nick, aspects of the story which Nick shares with us about his past and himself can be doubted.

One flaw of Nick that is presented within this film adaptation is his relationship to alcohol. In the apartment scene where Nick is partying with Tom and Myrtle, Nick narrates that “I *had* just been drunk twice in my life and the second time was that afternoon”⁴ (*The Great Gatsby*, 19:25-31. Emphasis added). In the novel the grammar is a little different; “I *have* been drunk just twice in my life and the second time was that afternoon” (*The Great Gatsby*, 39. Emphasis added). Additionally the first time Nick goes to Gatsby’s party in the film adaptation he decides “to get roaring drunk” and we see him consume a whole drink in one go (*The Great Gatsby*, 25:06-11. Emphasis added). In the novel, however, it is described as “I was on my way to get roaring drunk *from sheer embarrassment*” before Jordan comes and saves him (*The Great Gatsby*, 49. Emphasis added). Luhrmann clearly intended to present Nick as someone who was destroyed by the roaring twenties, similar to Fitzgerald’s characters in later short stories such as Charlie Wales in “Babylon Revisited” (1931). This negative view on alcohol is a rather prominent theme of the film, as it is one of the first topics brought up by Nick. “Back then, all of us drank too much. The more in tune with the times we were the more we drank. And none of us contributed anything new” (*The Great Gatsby*, 01:48-02:09). While this is spoken by Nick in a voiceover, the camera slowly moves across the water towards the Perkins Sanitarium where Nick is trying to recuperate.

The generic shift from a novel to a film could have complicated the process of Nick being an intradiegetic narrator, but this was clearly taken into consideration during the filmmaking. The scene where the identity of Gatsby is revealed clearly indicates this. In the novel Gatsby is a stranger to Nick, for while they are casually chatting it becomes apparent that Nick does not know who he is and Gatsby reveals himself as the host of the party. In the film, however, they use a point of view shot to simulate the experience of Nick personally discovering the identity of Gatsby. First we see Gatsby’s hand holding a tray, before we finally see a close up of Gatsby. As this is happening, the background is filled with exploding fireworks and the background music reaches a climax as Gatsby announces himself (*The Great Gatsby*, 29:13-49). This point of view shot is used several times, but this is one of the more important indicating Nick’s relationship or feelings for Gatsby as something special as he is literally presented with a bang.

The way Nick initially introduces the film creates some confusion as the mood and the voice of Nick are distinctly different from the rest of the film. The film starts with music that

⁴ All quotations from Luhrmann film adaptation where taken from the film’s subtitles in English (for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing).

could be considered morose or depressive as it is both calm and slow and in the first scene the camera moves over dark waters towards the mist and the green light. As this is happening, Nick narrates in an older and more tired voice with the phrase “in my younger and more vulnerable days” before the scene continues and presents Perkins Sanitarium in winter (*The Great Gatsby*, 01:16). In the next scene, Nick’s medical chart along with his rumpled suit, and unkempt hair indicates how Nick has recently suffered. The scene is also quite dark which sets it apart from the rest of the adaptation which is filled with color and romantic shots of New York in summer. This distinction only appears when Nick starts sharing his past about what happened during that summer and through this narration several of the scenes and landscape shots invokes a feeling of an idealized world. An example of this idealization is the scene where we first see Nick in New York. First we see a plane performing aerial stunts in the sky before there is a shift where a camera takes over the plane’s perspective, as the plane seemingly soars down the side of the building towards a smiling Nick. One interpretation of this is that when Nick explores and deals with his own past, it is as a means to escape his troubling present thereby idealizing a lost past. Furthermore with later scenes of Nick’s successful recuperation along with the extravagant story of the eventful summer everything is set for a happy ending. As such one could argue that the adaptation, by creating an opening that is seemingly incompatible with the rest of the film, enables the perspective viewer to pick up on a hidden tension as the past and future of Nick have a very different ending.

Throughout the film adaptation we can see indications of how important Gatsby is to Nick, and this is especially visible in Nick’s confrontation with Gatsby after the death of Myrtle.

[Nick:] That woman you ran down is dead Jay.

[Gatsby:] I thought so, I... I told Daisy that I thought so.

[Nick:] Daisy? Do you hear yourself? How could you? How could you do that? What is wrong with you, You’re nothing but a goddamn coward!” (*The Great Gatsby*. 1:48:16-25).

The passion with which Maguire delivers this outburst seems to convey an incredible turmoil over Gatsby’s action. Nick’s reaction in the novel is by comparison rather dispassionate as he simply asks what Gatsby is doing and answers Gatsby’s questions before guessing that Daisy was the one that drove the car (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 125-126). The way Nick reacts in the adaptation could be interpreted as a sign of Nick’s inner feelings where his beliefs in

Gatsby have been shaken, and which results in him feeling the need to berate Gatsby for failing to live up to Nick's image of Gatsby as someone great.

In the process of transposition Luhrmann added several new lines that deviate from the novel, one of which is spoken during the apartment scene with Tom and Myrtle.

That night in the hidden flat that Tom kept for Myrtle, we were buoyed by a sort of chemical madness. A willingness of the heart that burst thunderously upon us all. And suddenly I began to like New York (*The Great Gatsby*, 20:20-37).

This could be considered a form of proximation, an explicit attempt to move the source closer to the frame of reference of the audience by giving the audience more opportunities to understand the thoughts and actions of Nick. With Nick's inability to stand up for himself, the absurdness of the situation is made explicit for the audience; Nick is partying with his friend Tom, who is cheating on Nick's cousin Daisy, and we witness the inaction of Nick, who is just trying to fit in. He never acts on his concerns that he should tell Daisy about Tom's affair, and when he tries to leave he is forced to stay because "each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild strident argument which pulled me back, as if with ropes, into my chair" (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 44). The explanation also indicates Nick's feelings about the situation since he is usually a man of control and self-discipline; he would feel the need to give a reason for his choice to stay and participate in this party. In this sequence we see that instead of simply standing up for himself and leaving, Nick would rather stay and be pressured into taking drugs as Catherine, Myrtle's sister, forces him to take a nerve pill and drink alcohol (*The Great Gatsby*, 19:14-24). It is only through this chemical madness, as Nick describes it, that he is able to let go and enjoy himself rather than worry about what he feels he should do. It also displays the balance of power between Tom and Nick, as Tom is someone who tries to dominate while Nick prefers being on the sideline, judging and interpreting what he experiences but never expressing or acting on his own thoughts (*The Great Gatsby*, 17:56-18:10). The addition of these two lines presents a situation with added depth and complexity as the lines function as both a source of information and an excuse for Nick's actions, thereby giving the audience a moment to comprehend Nick's inner conflict of values.

How is Nick's role as an author relevant for our understanding of the adaptation? In several scenes throughout the film we get to see Nick scribbling down his thoughts while his past plays in front of us. The formation and color of the letters reveal indications about Nick's associations to that particular event as the letters are different each time. The first time we see

this is when he describes the Valley of Ashes; while Nick is describing this place his words are depicted in white letters that swiftly turn black after he has finished writing them (*The Great Gatsby*, 14:14-17). Nick further describes the place as “a grotesque place”. One interpretation of this is that his feelings and the portrayal of the place match his letters, symbolically hinting that his words turn to ash, or that he is writing with ash. The Valley of Ashes is distinctly different from the rest of New York and West Egg, being filled with dirt and functioning as New York’s dumping ground (*The Great Gatsby*, 14:20-34). It is both the place where Myrtle dies and potentially where Nick seriously questions the character of Gatsby for the first time. The second time he writes is when he takes his first drink at Tom and Myrtle’s apartment, where the text shifts from white to almost every color imaginable (*The Great Gatsby*, 19:26-32). The myriad of colors seem to represent Nick’s feelings through the colors of the letters; this can be linked to that afternoon during which Nick was drunk for the second time in his life due to his consumption of both drugs and alcohol. The colors indicate that Nick, for the first time, lets go of all his worries thus enabling him to participate without any restraint. During one of the last times that Nick writes to us, the arrangement of the letters reveals a great deal as white letters are scattered all over the screen falling downwards with the city of New York in winter depicted in the background (*The Great Gatsby*, 2:01:51-2:02:04). For Nick, New York is no longer a place of safety, of wonder or joy, and as Nick is writing this his thoughts and feelings seem to be without foundation or safety, which results in the letter having no fixed position and Nick is left wandering New York and Gatsby’s mansion. Based on this it is. Based on this it is fairly clear that the colors and arrangement of the letters indicate Nick’s personal associations to a place or an event. In the novel we rarely get to know the personal feelings of Nick as he is usually distant and systematic about his observations, and this is reflected in the adaptation. Through the medium of film, however, we can also rely on visual aspects to inform us, which is where all of the letters, their colors and arrangement function as hints and indications of the true feelings of Nick. This gives us another chance to understand how Nick relates to his past. Through this little addition of a visual aspect, Luhrmann demonstrates how the medium of film is also able to convey subtle hints and indications to the same effect as the novel, just in different ways.

Character Analysis of Gatsby

“You look so cool. You always look so cool, like the advertisement of the man in Times Square. The man in the cool, beautiful shirts” (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:28:40-52). Gatsby is one of the main characters and he looks the part, always wearing fancy clothes, and displaying

impeccable gentlemanly behavior while residing in an extravagant mansion filled with interesting people. Can we, however, learn anything about Gatsby based on his behavior and appearance? First of all, one could argue that DiCaprio's interpretation of Gatsby reflects several of Fitzgerald's descriptions

He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 65).

It is obvious that DiCaprio either read this passage or was made aware of it as his portrayal of Gatsby is also very fidgety, but DiCaprio's restlessness draws focus to special aspects of the character. One object that Gatsby touches the most in the film adaptation is his ring on his right hand as he often adjusts it back and forth. This is especially evident in the scene where he and Nick are talking next to the pool after Daisy and Tom have left from Gatsby's party (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:19:10-14). One interpretation of this is that his insignia ring is a physical manifestation of his dream, or a promise of fulfilling his dream of becoming a great man. As he is uncertain about his future with Daisy having had trouble convincing her to tell Tom about their decision, he removes it from his hands as he shares his worries to Nick. Secondly, his appearance, or more specifically his choice of clothes, is also revealing. During the tour of his mansion with Nick and Daisy he informs them that all of his clothes are bought and sent from England (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:01:20-32). Although at first glance this could be considered a symbol of wealth, this can also be interpreted as a lack of personality since Gatsby is unable to pick out his own clothes and instead relies on other men to help him transform into a gentleman. This interpretation is also supported by the linking of Gatsby to the Arrow Collared advertisement, which I will discuss in further detail later, but this link essentially underlines the idea that the image of Gatsby is in essence that of a created man and everything from the way he speaks to the way he acts or dresses in one way or another indicates this.

Gatsby also goes to great lengths to persuade Nick of his sincerity and of his character. When they start out towards New York, Gatsby shares his mementos of his past during the trip in an effort to make Nick think highly of him. When he brings Nick out to lunch while

meeting Wolfsheim, there are several indications that the meeting was set up and everything that Wolfsheim reveals about Gatsby was carefully planned and agreed upon. The first hint of this is the call that Gatsby has to make, we are not informed about anything regarding the topic of the call, nor why it is important. And as Gatsby is making this phone call we neither see him dial someone nor speak to the person on the other side of the line. Before he leaves for the call, a set of almost absurd interactions take place. He informs Wolfsheim that Nick is not the man, but “*the friend that I told you about*” (*The Great Gatsby*, 42:38-40. Emphasis added). Furthermore, the fact that Gatsby explicitly makes eye contact with Wolfsheim before announcing that he has to make “*that call*” (*The Great Gatsby*, 42:47-49. Emphasis added) indicates that this is an agreed upon cue for Gatsby to leave and for Wolfsheim to verify what Gatsby’s story. After Gatsby leaves, Wolfsheim goes on about him, confirming that Gatsby is a man of fine breeding, revealing almost nothing new and mirroring Gatsby’s earlier phrase of how his family is “*sadly all dead now*” (*The Great Gatsby* 42:57-58). The final hint about this conspiracy between Gatsby and Wolfsheim, is also the one which is that imparts the most as Wolfsheim states that “*you’d know that when it comes to married women a man like this can be trusted. With a friend, with someone like you he’d never so much as look at your wife*” (*The Great Gatsby*, 43:21-31). After Wolfsheim has shared his thoughts on Gatsby with Nick and Gatsby returns, he leaves the table and goes on with his business. Although both *Trimalchio* and Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* have a similar scene, neither of them convey the feeling that this was previously agreed upon, as Gatsby “*looked at his watch, jumped up and hurried from the room leaving me with Mr. Wolfsheim at the table*” (Fitzgerald, *Trimalchio*, 59; *The Great Gatsby*, 70).

Luhrmann’s film adaptation emphasizes the link between Gatsby and crime which is discussed in further detail later, but what is the relationship between Gatsby and his servants that Wolfsheim provides? After Tom and Daisy’s visit, several aspects concerning Gatsby’s servants are revealed. First of all, we know that they are thugs as we see them beating up a man outside Gatsby’s mansion. This man could very likely be Mr. Slagle who was responsible for disturbing Gatsby’s evening with Daisy (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:15:45-51). Secondly we also get to understand that Gatsby does not trust his servants. When Daisy starts to discreetly come by we are informed that he fired his servants as they were not to be trusted with this information. As Gatsby is telling this to Nick over the phone, Gatsby looks at Herzog, his servant, and watches him leave before he finishes his conversation with Nick (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:23:43-1:24:10). Furthermore during Daisy’s visit, we see men wearing hats and suits similar to those of Mr. Slagle closing doors within Gatsby’s mansion and waiting on

the porch, while at the same time we are presented short scenes of Gatsby and Daisy lying in bed together (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:22:49-1:23:00). This gives us several indications about the relationship between Wolfshiem and Gatsby. Through these few scenes we get to understand that Gatsby is shirking his duties, as several men are left waiting while he pursues Daisy, furthermore there are also indications of Gatsby being reluctant for Wolfshiem to be informed about the source for his idleness. We already know that Gatsby is subordinate to Wolfshiem as he does whatever he is told, which results in him organizing others. All of these scenes underline the fact that Gatsby is not really in control of this situation, that there is pressure for him to end this romantic endeavor and return to his illicit duties. At the same time the sequence invites for a later comparison to the way Tom is losing control of both Daisy and his mistress Myrtle. Both men need to act before they lose everything, and it is their own actions that have caused this upheaval.

Character Analysis of Tom

Tom Buchanan has arguably been reinterpreted in the adaptation; he is given new lines that further enhance several of his central traits and especially his lack of moral standards. Both in the novel and the film adaptation, Tom comes across as a racist, referring to Goddard's *The Rise of the Coloured Empires* (which is a reference to Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* 1920)⁵. Tom also expresses his hostility towards the growing middle class of West Egg in the film by asking if Nick is "throwing your lot in with those social-climbing primitive new money types" (*The Great Gatsby*, 08:31-36). This sets up the foundation for Tom's future conflict with and dislike of Gatsby. Based on the new lines Tom received, it seems that Luhrmann wanted to depict Tom as a person who is set on dominating, as Tom declares that "Life is something you dominate if you are any good" and he states "Dominate Nick! Dominate!" when he takes Nick to visit Myrtle (*The Great Gatsby* 06:49-51; 15:11-13). One could also argue that the film presents Tom in such a way that he is even less pleasant when compared to his counterpart in the novel. For example, he immediately blames Gatsby when Wilson confronts him about who owns the car, whereas in the novel his main concern is to discover what happened and to ensure that someone is taking care of Wilson. Furthermore while driving away, we see an angry Tom who lashes out at Nick, asking if he is still going to defend Gatsby (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:47:05-07). At this

⁵ *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* by Lothrop Stoddard (1920). He hypothesized the fall of white world empires and the loss of colonies due to the population growth of the colored races (Stoddard, 6-9)

point in the novel, we get one of the few glimpses of weakness from Tom. “In a little while I heard a low husky *sob* and saw that the *tears* were overflowing down his face. ‘The God Damn coward’ he *whimpered*. ‘He didn’t even stop his car’” (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 124. Emphasis added). Even though we know that Tom is not a role model in any sense of the word, this powerful scene which shows the depth of emotions that Tom experiences upon the death of his lover allows us to feel sympathy for him. By omitting this sequence, Tom’s depth or complexity of character can be seen as diminished.

Hutcheon claims that “a novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size and thus, inevitably, complexity” (36) and the same reasoning could be applied to a film adaptation. Because of this, it is possible to interpret the diminishment of Tom Buchanan as a character as the result of a similar approach to adaptation. In Luhrmann’s adaptation, Tom is arguably diminished but he also becomes much more important to the overall plot of the story through minor alterations. Tom’s position as a representative of the old moneyed world is enhanced in the film adaptation. One example of this is when we see him literally standing in front of newspaper headlines such as “America’s Wealthiest Bachelor to Wed” and “Heir to Railroad Empire Lures Louisville Sweetheart” (*The Great Gatsby*, 46:30-33). In Fitzgerald’s novel, Tom’s family is described as “enormously wealthy” (22) but it never explicitly makes the connection between him and old money. The film further highlights Tom’s connection with the old moneyed world as Nick states that they lived “across the bay in old moneyed East Egg” and that Tom was “heir to one of America’s wealthiest families” (*The Great Gatsby*, 05:50-53; 05:59-06:02). By focusing on Tom’s role as a representative of the “old moneyed world” and their entrenched values, the character becomes much more important to the overall plot even though there is less depth to his character. With this alteration, Tom achieves a higher symbolic status as one of the chief obstacles for Gatsby rather than being presented as a grieving lover. Gatsby later confirms that he considers Tom his chief obstacle since Tom represents money and wealth with the statement that “the only respectable thing about you [Tom], old sport, is your money. Your money, that’s it. Now I’ve just as much as you. That means we’re equal” (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:39:11-17).

Character analysis of Daisy

Daisy’s appearance and costumes give us valuable insight into how *The Great Gatsby* wishes to present her. The different dresses that she wears never alludes to sex or lust, but innocence and wealth. When one compares the costumes of Myrtle and Daisy, we discover that they are completely different, as Myrtle often wears clothing that emphasizes her body while Daisy

wears clothing that represents Gatsby's ideal of a nice girl. Most of Daisy's clothing is either beige and white or light blue; additionally during Gatsby's party her dress is decorated with glass crystals during Gatsby's party. Naturally, this separates them from one another as they have vastly different social backgrounds, but the way in which the film introduces Myrtle further indicates that theirs is not merely a social difference, a point which will be discussed later and in further detail. Daisy's costumes therefore underline the value that Gatsby sees in her as she is constantly presented as a proper belle of fine upbringing. This presentation invokes associations to Ginevra King, the first girl Fitzgerald fell in love with, and who later dumped him "with the most supreme boredom and indifference" (Qtd. Rena Sanderson, 148).⁶ Ginevra King shares many of the same traits as Daisy and, in combination with the way in which Gatsby tries to re-create himself as a rich man, this reflects Fitzgerald's later struggle to become a successful author in order to marry Zelda Sayre. As such, the appearance of Daisy not only informs us about her role within the movie as the ideal woman that Tom and Gatsby consider worth fighting for but also how Fitzgerald would project parts of his own life into his works.

The introduction of Daisy by Nick is both quite revealing while at the same time comical.

[Nick:] Daisy Buchanan, the golden girl, a breathless warmth flowed from her. A promise that there was no one else in the world she so wanted to see.

[Daisy:] Do they miss me in Chicago?

[Nick:] Yes. Um, at least a dozen people send their love (*The Great Gatsby* 07:30-45)

In the film Maguire adds a small pause between "um," and his reply, which indicates that this was an unexpected question. This scene reveals a lot about both Nick and Daisy; first of all his understanding of Daisy is quite lacking because, contrary to his expectation her first question to him is about herself, not Nick. This reflects the vanity of Daisy as she seems disappointed by Nick's answer until he starts exaggerating about how much they miss her. Secondly, based on how Nick completely misjudges Daisy, the scene further indicates that Nick does not know everything and everyone and that the way he feels about people or events is not necessarily correct. What is interesting is considering why Nick would view Daisy in

⁶ According to Curnutt's biography of Fitzgerald, *The Cambridge introduction to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, there are historical sources which indicate that he would use Ginevra King and other women that he had fallen in love with as an inspiration for his female heroines. "[M]y first girl 18-20 whom I've used over and over and never forgotten" (Curnutt, 16).

such a way as there is no indication of prior experience between them at that point apart from the fact that Nick is retelling this story from his future. This play on time could lead to the interpretation that this is not Nick's thoughts or associations, but an attempt to mirror Gatsby in order to make Gatsby's story more understandable. However, interpretation quickly become very complicated when you have to base your interpretations on time and influences of the future/past.

Ensemble

Through Tom we are able to understand Gatsby as he is often used as a point of comparison, with both of them being powerful and wealthy men. When we initially see Tom, he is presented as a man of action as he is riding and playing polo. Furthermore he is also the most muscular among the major characters and he wears tight-fitting clothes to accentuate his physical form. One of the first things we get to know about Tom is his affair with Myrtle, and later information reveals that he is somewhat of a Casanova due to his continuous sprees, which can be deduced when he mentions that “[n]ow once in a while I go off on a spree” (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:36:23-26). Gatsby on the other hand is the complete opposite. He never displays any interest in women besides Daisy, although this particular aspect is more explicitly explained in *The Great Gatsby*. “He knew women early and since they spoiled him he became contemptuous of them, of young virgins because they were ignorant, of the others because they were hysterical about things which in his overwhelming self-absorption he took for granted” (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 92). Gatsby also tries to present himself as a man of class and style and he is even compared to the models of Arrow Collars; strength and physical achievement are not something he associates himself with as Gatsby would rather point out his wealth. Both of them, however, are very conscious of their public image as Gatsby sets up parties and acts like a man of fine upbringing, referring to people as “old sport”. Tom on the other hand, being a Buchanan, dislikes it when Gatsby refers to him as “Mr. Buchanan the polo player” (*The Great Gatsby* 1:10:01-03). When Tom is surrounded by wealthy and famous people, being referred to as a polo player diminishes his stature since his greatest achievement and source of reputation are his family and wealth. In the presence of other successful people, being viewed as a polo player instead of the heir of one of America's wealthiest families could be considered degrading, which Tom confirms with his response that “I'd rather not be the polo player” (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:10:12-15). Through this exchange and comparison we get to understand Gatsby as his choice to refer to Tom as a polo player could be interpreted as a simple attempt to subtly degrade Tom. At the same time, the

act of demeaning Tom makes Gatsby look better in the eyes of Daisy since he is the host of a party filled with distinguished people. This comparison between Tom and Gatsby also reveals something about the inner desires of both men. Tom takes Nick into his trophy room where all of his previous sporting achievements are housed along with several newspaper clips and pictures of him. What Gatsby shows off on the other hand is his wealth and mansion and he rarely mentions his previous affairs unless it is used to explain how he has gained all his possessions, thereby reflecting his desire to be like Tom.

The relationship between Gatsby and Nick has been debated and analyzed by several critics and one such example is Edward Wasiolek's article "The Sexual Drama of Nick and Gatsby" (1992)⁷. In this article he lists some of the different sexual interpretations of *The Great Gatsby* and further argues for an interpretation of Gatsby as Nick as homosexuals as Gatsby tries to drive away "the 'dirty' woman" by idolizing Daisy (Wasiolek, 21). This interpretation is not explicitly included as several of the scenes and descriptions which Wasiolek indicates were not incorporated; such as the description of Gatsby as gorgeous, Tom as having a cruel body and the scene where Nick ends up in the same bed as McKee (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 20; 23; 44-45). This does not, however, invalidate Wasiolek's arguments of same sex attraction since it is Nick who shares everything with us and his feelings arguably affects the presentation of different scenes and the film in general. Couple this with the fact that Tom is muscular and Gatsby always being impeccably dressed, wearing pink suits which results in remarks from Tom "he wears a pink suit for chrissake" could indicate a form of attraction (*The Great Gatsby* 1:30:36-37). There is, however, one scene that does explicitly evoke associations to this line of thought and it can be found at the end of the film. This particular scene takes place at the end when Nick is reminiscing about Gatsby and his gift for hope. "He had come such a long way. And his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. But he did not know that it was already behind him" (*The Great Gatsby*, 2:03:38-58). Nick tells us this as we watch him walking out towards the end of the dock where Gatsby is standing and we see Gatsby reaching out for the green light before suddenly turning around and smiling at Nick (*The Great Gatsby*, 2:03:38-58) It is therefore possible to conclude that this scene suggests that Nick could have been Gatsby's Daisy; Nick

⁷ Edward Wasiolek's *The Sexual Drama of Nick and Gatsby* (1992) analyzes Nick and Gatsby's relationship based on a same sex interpretation of *The Great Gatsby*. He further highlights other critics' similar thoughts and opinions and he argues for more interpretations of *The Great Gatsby* which focus on the underlying sexual themes.

is the one who is loyal and loving towards Gatsby and if Gatsby had just turned around and looked at Nick, he would have realized this.

Luhrmann's adaptation allows for a comparison between Daisy and Gatsby which is exclusive to the film. In Daisy's "beautiful little fool" speech, the film adaptation has added a rather revealing line as Daisy states that "all the bright, precious things fade so fast. And they don't come back" (*The Great Gatsby* 12:02-09). As she states this the camera moves towards the bay, passes the green light and focuses on Gatsby standing on his dock in front of his manor (*The Great Gatsby* 12:02-24). This sentence indicates a new depth to the character of Daisy, as she discloses to Nick that she has given up on her fantasies of the past and moved on, thereby reflecting a cynical maturation or sophistication as Fitzgerald originally describes it (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 31). Gatsby by comparison has not matured since they originally met, as he is still faithful to his hope and dream that the bright and precious Daisy will return to him in the end. It is possible to argue that Daisy was originally portrayed as a rather shallow character, as Fitzgerald stated that "[t]he book contains no important woman character" (Curnutt, 76). Based on this confession, however, Luhrmann's addition of Daisy calling Gatsby during Gatsby's death scene also allows for an interpretation where Daisy chooses Tom over Gatsby. She does this because she has matured enough to realize that she cannot imagine a future with Gatsby as he is stuck in the past, and thereby demonstrates a depth of character which is not reflected within either of Fitzgerald's novels. The added lines could also indicate the special trait of Gatsby of how his hopefulness is contagious, as Daisy, after discovering that Gatsby is back, is finally able to allow herself to dream and hope for a lost and idealized past.

The Cast

When one considers the cast of an adaptation, it is also important to consider the intertextuality of the adaptation. As McFarlane puts it, "the anterior novel or play or poem is only one element of the film's intertextuality, an element of varying importance to viewers depending on how well or little they know or care about the precursor text" (McFarlane, 27). Stars bring with them associations to other films and creative works and directors usually have a fan base based on their previous directive work. When all of this has to be taken into consideration, the choice of actor, director, writer etc. is arguably complicated as it is not solely based on skills but also on their history as the viewers of the film adaptation will certainly have their own expectations. "The way we respond to any film will be in part the

result of those other texts and influences we inescapably bring to bear on our viewing” (McFarlane, 26).

The choice of casting Tobey Maguire as Nick is very understandable; as the webpage of *The Great Gatsby* puts it, he “continues to garner both critical and commercial success in a career renowned for the actor’s ability to deliver standout performances in both big budget blockbusters as well as thought-provoking independents” (“The Great Gatsby Tobey Maguire”). Maguire has an impressive and varied resume which showcases his ability to act in a myriad of different roles. This has resulted in several nominations and awards, including his 2010 nomination for a Golden Globe award for “Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion – Picture Drama” for his role as Capt. Sam Cahill in *Brothers* (2009) (“IMDB Tobey Maguire Awards”). *Brothers* (2009) tells the story of Sam who is captured and tortured in Afghanistan and is later rescued but is unable to adapt to the routine of daily life upon his return home after his traumatic experience. A Golden Globe nomination for such a role truly affirms Maguire’s ability to portray a wide array of emotions which we are able to witness in *The Great Gatsby*. This is especially true in the later stages of the film where Maguire is seemingly fraught with emotions over the tragic turn of events. Another of Maguire’s more successful roles is arguably as Peter Parker in the movie *Spider-Man* as an ordinary young man who later gains super powers after being bitten by a genetically mutated spider. One of the potential reasons for *Spider-Man*’s success is tied to how the film presents a story of transformation, a story of growing up and making hard choices which ultimately lead to great responsibility. Maguire gives us an outstanding performance where he portrays the struggles in Peter Parker’s life after losing his beloved uncle and experiencing the subsequent economic troubles with his aunt.⁸ These two roles are but a few among many which show off the prominence of Maguire’s acting repertoire.

To cast Leonardo DiCaprio as Jay Gatsby is an interesting choice as it is possible to argue that DiCaprio is the more successful actor compared to Maguire, or at least more sought after with his recent successes with *Blood Diamond* (2006) and *Inception* (2010). DiCaprio has earned four Academy Award nominations and nine Golden Globe nominations, two of

⁸ Further comparison between the character Nick and Peter Parker is interesting as the development of these two different characters could potentially reflect upon one of the many reasons Maguire got the part of Nick Carraway. Peter Parker initially mirrors the same inability of Nick as is unable to take any actions based on his own beliefs. Both Nick and Peter have to come to term with their situation, but it is only through Peter’s alter ego of Spider Man that he is able to take control of own life. Nick on the other hand is unable to do this and is forced to watch as Gatsby, Nick’s ultimate symbol of hope, moves further and further away from his true goal and ultimately to his death.

which he has won. Jay Gatsby is one of the two most important characters and perhaps the most captivating since he is surrounded by mystery and rumors. By casting DiCaprio as Gatsby, the character and actor arguably merge together in the film since anyone familiar with DiCaprio's career is used to seeing him as a main character. In *The Great Gatsby*, however, Gatsby is the catalyst, the character whose very presence changes everything and in turn deeply affects the life of Nick. The combination of DiCaprio's fame and Gatsby's mysterious path arguably enhances the audience's desire to learn and understand more about Gatsby as the audience associates any character played by Leonardo DiCaprio with someone of importance. With this unity of character and actor, a greater sense of mystery and anticipation is created as the audience has personal reasons for wanting to see more of Gatsby due to their own associations of the actor. Furthermore, DiCaprio also brings additional ambiguity to Gatsby as a character based on his previous roles. DiCaprio has a history of playing both good and bad characters as we can see in both *Blood Diamond* (2006) and *Inception* (2010) where his characters are criminals.

When choosing the actress to play the role of Daisy, both Luhrmann and DiCaprio would observe the auditions. When it came to Carey Mulligan, DiCaprio said something very revealing: ““you know, I've been thinking about it... Gatsby has had a lot of very beautiful women thrown at him. Carey's very beautiful, but she's also very unusual. Daisy needs to be sort of precious and unique and something that Gatsby wants to protect. Something that he's never experienced before”” (The Great Gatsby Production Notes”, 12). Mulligan's previous major appearances include *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) as Kitty Bennet, and *An Education* (2009) as Jenny Mellor where she is a 16 year old girl who is dazzled by an older man with his upper-class lifestyle. Throughout Mulligan's career, she has received and won several nominations such as her 2010 USA Academy Award nomination for her role in *An Education* (2009) for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role. Additionally, the role of Jenny Mellor is somewhat similar to that of Daisy Buchanan as she is taken away from her parents' supervision by a wealthier man. When compared to Daisy, however, Jenny is the seemingly stronger woman as she manages to take control of her own life and separate herself from her older suitor. Based on these movies and DiCaprio's statement, it is possible to argue that what Mulligan brings to the role of Daisy is someone both young and innocent, but also with the ability to convey the desires and opinions of Daisy without having many explicit chances to express them.

Another significant aspect that Mulligan adds to the film adaptation is her voice. Daisy's voice is arguably her most prominent trait as it is described numerous times

I looked back at my cousin who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. 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 ... there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered 'listen,' a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 25).

If you were to compare the voice of Mulligan's Daisy with Mulligan's natural voice (there are several interviews of her available digitally), you would notice that she undeniably changed it as she adopts a voice with a higher pitch whenever she is in character. This choice is rather interesting since the film adaptation, contrary to the novel, makes no explicit mention of Daisy's voice, yet Mulligan or somebody else decided that her naturally lower-pitched voice was not a correct representation of Daisy. As such, her voice, although it is fairly consistent, sometimes ranges between higher and lower pitches in different situations, which reflects the novel's or Nick's fascination with her voice. Why would a higher pitched voice be considered a proper representation of Daisy? One could argue that with the change in tone, Daisy's voice highlights her femininity and reflects the role of the character as an object of desire for Gatsby and Tom. Additionally, it also reflects a symbolic innocence as the voice is more girlish, thereby reflecting her lack of experience and her dependence on the men in her life. This innocence is also the driving force behind Gatsby as he had never realized how "extraordinary a nice girl could be" (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:53:40).

Tom is played by Joel Edgerton, an actor who also writes and produces his own movies such as *Felony* (2013) and *Monkeys* (2011). Some of his more well-known appearances in international movies include his role as Owen Lars in *Star Wars Episode II* and *Star Wars Episode III*, along with his role as Gawain in *King Arthur* (2004) where he is a knight following the legendary Arthur in medieval Britain. Although not the most famous of actors, Edgerton brings with him his Australian heritage, a nation that has increasingly had more and more success in Hollywood with actors such as Hugh Jackman, Cate Blanchett and Mel Gibson. His portrayal of Tom underlines raw masculinity and sportsmanship in accordance with Fitzgerald's descriptions as his costumes are the most tight-fitting and accentuate his muscular frame.

Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and

you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 23).

The choice of actor for Meyer Wolfshiem in *The Great Gatsby* is rather surprising, since Wolfshiem is played by Amitabh Bachchan who is one of the most popular Indian actors in Bollywood. The best way to understand the effect of Bachchan's participation in this film is by reading Luhrmann's description of him as "the biggest actor in the world. In the world" (QTD in "The Great Gatsby Interview"). However, what does Bachchan bring to this role? First of all, some would regard him as an exotic actor as he is mostly only known by those familiar with Bollywood. Bachchan automatically makes Wolfshiem seem all the more interesting since members of the audience have their own reasons and associations and tend to pay particular attention to the character due to the actor's previous roles. The significance of Wolfshiem and his connection to crime would also be linked to Gatsby since he is the man who fixed the 1919 World Series (*The Great Gatsby* 44:13-15). This connection between Gatsby and crime becomes even deeper when Nick learns how Wolfshiem turned Gatsby into the wealthy man that he is today. The fact that Luhrmann chose an Indian actor to play the role of a Jewish criminal is also rather interesting. One interpretation of this is that Indians could be considered the contemporary equivalent of Jews due to their migration from Europe and Asia to the USA. Indians are the third largest immigration ethnicity in the USA according to the Migration Policy Institute ("Indian Immigrants in the United States"). Furthermore, "as a group, immigrants from India are better educated, more likely to have strong English language skills" ("Indian Immigrants in the United States"). This could explain why they chose Bachchan for the role of Wolfshiem; as an Indian immigrant he would be considered intelligent, which matches the character of Wolfshiem since Gatsby describes him as a "very smart man" and an opportunist (*The Great Gatsby*, 44:20-24). It is, however, necessary to mention that unlike the novels Wolfshiem is never explicitly described as a Jew in the film adaptation, thereby avoiding the anti-Semitic tendencies which we can find in Fitzgerald's novels⁹ as Wolfshiem is described as "a small flat-nosed Jew raised his large head and regarded me with two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril. After a moment I

⁹ In *A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* (2005). Morse explains that in the beginning of the twentieth century British and American literature depicted the Jew as "simultaneously rich and poor, a jeweled exotic and a denizen of Western civilization's underworlds" (207). "Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* ... simply used a Jewish stereotype to keep his story moving along a clearly marked route" (Morse, 208).

discovered his tiny eyes in the half darkness” (Fitzgerald, *Trimalchio*, 57 and *The Great Gatsby*, 69).

Chapter II

Links to historical context and Fitzgerald

The focus on alcohol and the identification of Nick as the author of *The Great Gatsby* seem to relate the film to aspects of Fitzgerald's own life, which was similarly filled with excess and something that Fitzgerald used to promote about himself. In an interview, Fitzgerald said "don't you know I am one of the most notorious drinkers of the younger generation?" (QTD. Curnutt, 22). By linking Nick with Fitzgerald Luhrmann is once more including aspects of Fitzgerald's life and work in the film adaptation, an approach to creativity that runs counter to New Criticism's focus on the text while disregarding the author similarly to Roland Barthes later work *The Death of the Author*¹⁰ (1968). After his death Fitzgerald's writing would go through a process of revival, gaining new stature through New Criticism (Curnutt, 118-121).

New criticism was extraordinarily influential from the end of the 1930s on into the 1950s. It is widely considered to have revolutionized the teaching of literature, ... and to have been a crucial starting-point for the development of critical theory in the second half of the twentieth century (Matterson, 166).

The essence of New Criticism would be the act of advocating a close reading of literature where the literary text is considered to be "a free-standing, autonomous object, containing meanings that are specific to the context provided by the text" (Matterson, 171). As such, the choice of linking the works of Fitzgerald is interesting as his strong position within American literature became possible through New Criticism's focus on Fitzgerald's writing rather than his life. It is possible to argue that Luhrmann's approach of connecting Fitzgerald with Nick in the film adaptation creates an added sense of intimacy for Nick as a character that is based on a real person. The fantastic elements of Fitzgerald's descriptions of excess, such as the big parties, wealth and lifestyle, seem at times as otherworldly as those found in his short story "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" (1922). The consequences of this lifestyle become nonetheless very real when one considers the fate of Fitzgerald and Nick. The fact that Luhrmann identifies Nick as Fitzgerald, an author who struggles after a life of excess, further

¹⁰ "Barthes argues that a work of art contains no fixed meaning but is rather a field of potential meanings that may be taken up by the readers, this dethroning the auteur of any privileged status in interpretation" (Ed. Grant, 97).

demonstrates the severity of consequences that such a lifestyle can have upon the body and mind.

Another additional aspect of Nick's characteristics in the film, which could arguably be linked with Fitzgerald, is Nick's relationship to women and Jordan Baker in particular. In the adaptation, when Nick meets Jordan she is described as "the most frightening person I'd ever seen... But I enjoyed looking at her" (*The Great Gatsby*, 08:09-18). As Jordan is introduced by Daisy, she is described as a professional golf player. This particular introduction is not in *The Great Gatsby* or *Trimalchio*. The fact that Jordan Baker is a famous golf player is only discovered later in the novel.¹¹ So how can we interpret these differences? It is suggested that Nick has a lack of confidence with women, as Nick claims that he is too poor to be married, even though he comes from a well-to-do family (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 32, 20). As I will argue later, the film adaptation does focus on the theme of class distinctions and social mobility, and being in the presence of a successful woman might be an intimidating experience for Nick as he is quite insecure of his own social stature. When compared to his meeting with Jordan in the novel, this added sentence creates some ambiguity. In the novel, one of the first things Nick tells us about Jordan is that "almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me" (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 25). With this description, Fitzgerald seems to imply that Jordan does not rely on any man for financial support, thereby removing the social and financial obstacles between them as Jordan's interest in Nick would not be for future economic safety. With Nick's depiction of Jordan as someone both desirable and frightening, we get to understand some of the problems that Nick faces through his courtship of Jordan. Numerous times throughout the first party sequence at Gatsby's, we see Nick and Teddy Barton, Jordan's date, competing for her attention; on several occasions, Teddy comments on Nick's lack of wealth stating that "rich girls don't marry poor boys" (*The Great Gatsby*, 28:27-29:15). Both Fitzgerald and the film version of Nick struggled with this problem, as their financial situations were one of the main obstacles in their paths to achieve love. Fitzgerald had to break through as a successful author with *This Side of Paradise* (1920) before Zelda Sayre would agree to marry him. This particular point shows once again how the adapted version of Nick invites comparison with the real life of Fitzgerald. Through the reflection of Fitzgerald's personal life in the film adaptation, an opportunity for added sympathy and suspense is created as those who are

¹¹ Jordan Baker is first introduced to Nick in Chapter 1 as Miss Baker (24). She is fully revealed as Jordan Baker, a famous sportswoman, slightly later in the same chapter (31). In Chapter 3, the first mention of golf is made (49). It is the same for *Trimalchio*, page 11, 18 and 35.

familiar with Fitzgerald's personal life would have greater reason to empathize with the characters since they recognize the struggles of both Nick and Fitzgerald.

Social Commentary

Fitzgerald was never known for political correctness, often depicting racist characters, as for example in his short story "May Day" (1920). One such example of political incorrectness in *The Great Gatsby* is the bridge scene when Gatsby and Nick are travelling towards New York and catch sight of a trio of successful "[n]egroes" (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 69).

As we crossed Blackwells Island a limousine passed us, driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 69)

This particular scene was also incorporated in the adaptation but with some crucial differences. In the adaptation we see two African-American couples, wearing fancy golden clothes and partying in a car driven by a white chauffeur (*The Great Gatsby*, 39:37-39:52). The original scene in the novel where the couples roll their eyes at Nick and Gatsby is altered in the film adaptation. The film depicts Gatsby driving past them and Nick staring at them with an expression that seems to represent an amused admiration. The scene does not portray racism as an issue but that economic success is possible for everyone. This event becomes all the more important if we consider what other African-American characters there are in the film and how most of them have the roles of servants or common workers. This shows how Luhrmann has used what was conceivably a shocking scene with rich "[n]egroes" in the original and turned it into a modern setting where the possibility for economic success is seemingly equal (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 69).

Although corruption and crime were already powerful themes in the novel, the adaptation adds new scenes and sequences that further enhance this aspect, thereby modernizing and reinterpreting Fitzgerald's original references. In the novel the mention of Rosenthal's death functions as a reference to Rothstein, the man who allegedly fixed the 1919 World Series and later helped other infamous criminals through his knowledge of bail bonding. These hints of criminals and corruption would have been obvious for the contemporary reader, but hard to understand for a modern audience which explains why Luhrmann felt the need to bring general corruption and criminality to our attention. As Thomas H. Pauly explains in his article "Gatsby as Gangster", Fitzgerald was inspired by successful bootleggers and members of organized crime, and set out to depict Gatsby as a

gangster in a similar fashion to Rothstein. By including this reference to crime, Fitzgerald reveals himself as a social commentator, where the most important character of the novel represents the underworld of crime and the main antagonist Tom Buchanan represents the old moneyed world. In the film adaptation, the link between Gatsby and criminality and crime is emphasized in the restaurant sequence where Gatsby takes Nick out for lunch in New York. In the novel, they go to a street cellar where they meet Wolfsheim and eventually Tom Buchanan (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 69-72). However in the film, they enter a secret restaurant through a barber salon, sarcastically referred to as a “Temple of Virtue” by Tom (*The Great Gatsby*, 41:00-45:00). During this sequence, we see several policemen drinking in the company of dancing girls, with the police commissioner referring to Gatsby by his first name, joking that he is under arrest while standing on top of a table with a woman on each arm. While this is happening, Jay Z’s song “Hundred Dollar Bills” plays in the background. “Dollars fall on the skin, some might call it sin/ Politicians all move for money, what the hell are we calling them?” (Jay-Z). Additionally, at Gatsby’s first extravaganza we hear Nick describing the party as “a caravanserai of billionaire playboy publishers and their blond nurses ... gangsters and governors exchanging telephone numbers” (*The Great Gatsby*, 24:17-38). This added focus indicates that Luhrmann felt the need for a temporal shift in the form of proximation in order to make the connection between Gatsby and crime more apparent for a modern viewer while at the same time preserving Fitzgerald’s social commentary.

Symbolism

“Throughout Fitzgerald’s deeply symbolic novel we become aware of how far we have gone from the values of realism” (Berman, 82). *The Great Gatsby* is a novel¹² filled with symbolism and imagery which seems to create a sense of the mythic and the otherworldly and the film makers have fully incorporated this aspect and even added symbolism of their own. One such example is the mysterious green light, the focus and embodiment of Gatsby’s dreams until he once again meets Daisy. The film both starts and ends with the green light, with Gatsby’s dream referred to even before we understand its meaning. Luhrmann also

¹² It is possible to claim that *The Great Gatsby* is an American Romance novel. According to Richard Chase in *The American Novel and its Tradition* (1957) the American Romance novel can be defined by its tendencies to portray “reality in less volume and detail. It tends to prefer action to character, and action will be freer in a romance than in a novel, encountering, as it were, less resistance from reality. ... The romance can flourish without providing much intricacy of relation. ... Character itself becomes, then, somewhat abstract and ideal, so much so in some romances that it seems to be merely a function of plot. Astonishing events may occur, and these are likely to have a symbolic or ideological, rather than a realistic, plausibility. ... the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic forms”. (QTD. “Gothic, Novel, and Romance: Brief Definitions)

created a symbolic meaning for Daisy and Gatsby's rings. At the very start of the film we see an insignia which, when closely inspected, shows a signet ring depicting the intertwined initials of Gatsby. This ring on Gatsby's hand is given a lot of attention, even to the point where there is a dissolving focus on the ring during a transition from one scene to another. Their rings are the first thing we see of Daisy and Gatsby. Daisy's first scene starts with her raising her hand before resting it on the couch, while we see Gatsby's ring as he stretches towards the water trying to grasp the mysterious green light. This connection between the characters through the rings and the green light symbolize how they are related to each other - but also illustrates their differences which foreshadow how their relationship ends.

Subtle symbolism is also effectuated through the use of color and its associations. When we first meet Myrtle in the film adaptation, there is no doubt that she is the mistress and the seducer. Her costume consists of almost exclusively red clothing, red fingernail polish and red lipstick, and she is presented through an extreme close up which begins with her legs and moves upwards towards her face. The whole sequence represents a frank and earthly sensuality. It is possible to argue that this particular presentation reflects a focus on sex and lust which we can identify in our own culture and history. This focus on sex resonates with modern advertising, but this is not a new trend. During the 1920s, there was an increasing focus on youth and products that would enable a youthful appearance that was promoted in contemporary advertisements (Curnutt, *Cambridge Fitzgerald*. 28-37). As such, Myrtle would naturally have been influenced by contemporary advertising that focused on youth and sex by advertising products that would maintain one's youthful appearance. Myrtle is also associated with magazines and advertisements as Fitzgerald specifically mentions that Myrtle kept magazines about the newest trends in her apartment (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 39). Based on this, we can conclude that even though Myrtle's clothing and appearance differ from the descriptions in the novel, her makeup and the way she is dressed is still a reflection of the 1920s as well as affirming her role as the seductress.

Most of Gatsby's possessions play on symbolism as several of the statues and sculptures throughout his property have inherent allegorical meanings. Some examples of this include the weeping, winged humanoid statue, potentially an angel or gargoyle, next to Gatsby's dock which could symbolize his longing to realize his dream as he gazes out towards the green light (*The Great Gatsby*, 12:25). Furthermore, we can see lions at the front of Gatsby's house and a sculpture of Cupid and a sphinx in his library (*The Great Gatsby*, 24:43; 27:32; 27:12). In his fountain there are several statues of couples dancing and there are statues of angels in his great hall (*The Great Gatsby*, 59:48; 1:00:55). Finally we can see two ravens

next to Gatsby's pool (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:19:04). All of these statues and sculptures have their original mythological and symbolic meanings, from cupid who is the Greek god of desire and love, to the statues of dancing couples that also symbolize affection and love. However, the most relevant for us are arguably the angels and the ravens; the fact that Gatsby has several sculptures and statues of angels around his property simply reflects his belief that he is the son of God, a fact that is revealed to Nick as he and Gatsby are waiting for Daisy to call (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:07:21). Furthermore angels can be perceived as the idealized form of humans, which reflects Gatsby's idealized woman, Daisy. The ravens on the other hand can be interpreted in several ways.¹³ One interpretation is that they foreshadow the death of Gatsby as he is shot in his pool. Ravens are carrion birds and were known to follow armies so they could later feast on the dead after a battle. With the death of Gatsby, the only characters who are left are the reporters who figuratively feast on his corpse as their sole concern is to sell the news of his death to the magazines (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:59:02-25).

Gatsby's pool also holds symbolic meaning as it is a source of water. Water has several symbolic meanings such as rebirth, life and baptism, but also danger and death as bodies of water can be dark and deep. The adaptation also focuses a lot on water, as much of the scenery includes the bay between East and West Egg and the waters in front of Perkins Sanitarium. Furthermore, it is only in the pool that we have the moment of epiphany in the novel, as Gatsby has the false realization that, in the end, Daisy chose him (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:58:09). In addition to this, it is in the pool that everything changes; although Gatsby finally chooses to enjoy his wealth and the present as he remembers that he has not used his pool all summer, in the end this is also the moment when he is killed by Wilson (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:54:53-55:03). With a pool as grand as Gatsby's, it also functions as a symbol of leisure, wealth and enjoyment since it is a luxury that only the wealthy can afford. As such, the symbolic meaning of Gatsby's pool is compromised since wealth and corruption can be considered the opposite of cleanliness, renewal and life, thereby making the pool a fitting setting for Gatsby's death as he is punished for his actions the moment he enjoys the wealth he has gained through illicit means.

Another symbolic aspect that is linked to the medium of film is sound. Hutcheon argues that in the mode of showing, music and sound can function as the equivalent of the

¹³ For a Scandinavian audience or someone who is familiar with Norse mythology, the ravens could represent Hugin and Munin, the two ravens that belong to the Norse god Odin. Odin would send them out into the world of men and gods each morning and they would return at night telling him what they had learned about the tidings of the world. Gatsby used his parties in a similar fashion in order to find Daisy or someone who knew who Daisy was.

novel's description of feelings (Hutcheon, 23), and this is reflected in the film adaptation. There is one recurring image and sound motif which we can interpret to be linked to Nick's feelings. This is the image of an African-American man playing the trumpet outside of Tom and Myrtle's apartment as Nick is drunk for the second time in his life. Throughout this party sequence, we hear and see the man playing on his trumpet as he is depicted four times in brief shots (*The Great Gatsby* 20:15-19; 21:15-17; 21:43-45 and 21:56-57). One possible interpretation is that this man is the personification of the Jazz age that Fitzgerald is famous for having portrayed in his writing; excess, alcohol, life and the topic of inner consciousness are included in this particular sequence, making the entire sequence a reflection of the mood that *The Great Gatsby*, in both its forms as a novel and a film, invokes through its descriptions.

“In the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg various readers will see different significances; but their presence gives a superb touch to the whole thing: great unblinking eyes, expressionless, looking down upon the human scene” (QTD. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 162). Nick describes the eyes on the poster “like the eyes of God” (*The Great Gatsby*, 14:43-45). Throughout both the novel and the film adaptation there are several references to God and religion, and in the end through this symbolism we can see how Wilson and Gatsby are connected to the spiritual. Gatsby considers himself to be the son of God, and that it is his destiny to become a great man; furthermore his mansion has arches, statues of angels and architecture that bears connection to the divine (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:07:20-26).). Wilson on the other hand is the sickly man who lives in the Valley of Ashes, a place that has associations to the biblical valley of the shadow of death.¹⁴ He is also the only one who actively verbalizes the name of God. “You might fool me, but you don't fool God. God sees everything” (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:42:10-16). As Daisy and Gatsby are travelling home through the Valley of Ashes, they metaphorically drive towards death as Myrtle runs away from Wilson and is hit by Gatsby's car, sending her into the air in front of the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg. What is so fascinating about this is the fact that there are symbolic equivalents for the following actions; not only do the different characters have their own reasons, such as revenge in the case of Wilson, but they also become symbolic avatars of God. Gatsby, as the son of God, is punished for the sins of Daisy, and Wilson becomes the shadow of death for a few seconds as he goes over to the mansion of Gatsby. In the novel Wilson is described as “that ashen, fantastic

¹⁴ The names are very similar and the valley is dark and filled with the struggling poor. Furthermore it functions as a passage between the shimmering mirage that is New York and the daily life of East and West Egg.

figure gliding toward him [Gatsby] through the amorphous trees”, while in the film adaptation we only see the silhouette of Wilson’s shadow before he shoots Gatsby (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 140; *The Great Gatsby*, 1:57:15-53). Here we see how the film adaptation plays with the heavy symbolism of Fitzgerald, depicting both the physical and symbolic actions of its characters which results in an intensely spiritual climax as both Gatsby’s dream and God’s wrath merge in that particular scene.

Mode of Engagement

The film also includes a story within a story which adds an interesting depth to the plot. The film adaptation develops both stories at the same time within *The Great Gatsby*, and through a series of flashes backwards and forwards in time, an interesting relationship is established between them. The film begins with Nick being hopefully optimistic about the summer he is about to spend in West Egg, while at the same time in a different timeline he is presented as a destroyed man after a series of tragic events that have taken place within that particular summer. This arguably creates an added sense of insecurity and intrigue, because Nick is presented both as someone enjoying himself and as a man destroyed by earlier events. While this is happening, the story continues to add hints about Gatsby. This insecurity and wariness of what is going to happen seemingly disappears once Nick starts talking about Gatsby and how he was invited to his party. In this particular scene at Perkins Sanitarium Nick is not completely clean shaven but he looks healthier and appears to be taking better care of himself (*The Great Gatsby*, 22:30-39). With the introduction of Gatsby everything seems to improve; we get to see more of New York, Nick and Jordan become closer and the next time we see Nick at Perkins Sanitarium, he is sitting on the couch next to flowers while being served breakfast and he is doing better. This development seems to create a false sense of security as both past and present forms of Nick are doing well, but the observant viewer would notice that not everything is as it should be. There are several signs of what is to come for Nick; he partakes in several drinks during parties as he seems to become getting accustomed to alcohol and his earlier reluctance to party has vanished. Additionally, the way in which Gatsby and the tour of his mansion is presented signals to us that not everything is blissfully romantic beneath the surface. In the end, everything crumbles; Daisy chooses Tom over Gatsby, Gatsby is killed by Wilson who later commits suicide, and Nick is left alone and devastated. Here we see Nick at his lowest point when he rages at the journalists and judges Tom and Daisy for being careless people who used their money to avoid any responsibility (*The Great Gatsby*, 2:00:28-46). All of these scenes are engaging in themselves, but the fact that the film plays on

these supposedly mutual positive developments for both forms of Nick leads one to hope for a happy ending and makes the climax and the twist in the plot all the more shocking. This is one of the best reasons why one should re-watch Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*; there are so many hints and signs of what is going to happen, yet the summer, parties and romance of Daisy and Gatsby do not leave the viewer with any sense of the looming tragedy and further lead them to believe that it will all end happily

Fitzgerald foreshadows Myrtle's death several times through references related to driving accidents and this is implicitly included in the adaptation through several visual and aural hints. In the novel, we read about the car crash outside of Gatsby's mansion where someone states that "well, if you're a poor driver you oughtn't to try driving at night" (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 58-59). In the same scene, the man is suddenly described as a criminal (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 58). Furthermore, Nick tells Jordan that "you're a rotten driver ... Either you ought to be more careful or you oughtn't to drive at all" (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 61). As we can see there is a focus on the driver's skill and the act of taking responsibility, all of which is explicitly mentioned to the reader. In the adaptation, however, many of these scenes are not included and instead we are made aware of this through the actions and reactions of the characters. One example of this is when Gatsby takes Nick out for lunch. While driving towards New York we see Gatsby speeding and passing several other cars while talking to Nick (*The Great Gatsby*, 35:46-36:03). As this is happening we see Nick grabbing the side of the car for support due to the speed, with an expression on his face that indicates that he is uncomfortable with the situation (*The Great Gatsby*, 35:52-35:54). Additionally the only sounds we hear are of the cars and Nick and Gatsby talking as Gatsby slaloms his way between cars towards New York. Later on in the same sequence the background music slowly reappears. Based on all of this it is possible to conclude that Luhrmann wanted us to stay aware of Gatsby's driving and not to be distracted by any music or scenery as the car and Gatsby's driving is always in focus, and in this moment we are given the possibility to reflect over Gatsby's irresponsible and reckless driving. Through the subtle use of camera focus and sound Luhrmann creatively adapts the descriptions and awareness that Fitzgerald created through his writing, into the medium of film.

There are several scenes that include historically correct advertisement and one of these gives a large amount of attention to the Arrow Collared Man, the famous advertisement of Arrow collars from 1907-1931. "Follow the arrow and you follow the style ARROW COLLARS" (*The Great Gatsby* 45:06). The advertisement became famous after a successful

campaign that started in 1907 and later resulted in the musical *Helen of Troy New York* 1923. The different models of the Arrow collar became known as Arrow Men since they were supposed to represent the ideal American Man with “strong features, casual postures, and intense expressions” (Turbin, 471). This advertisement is central in many scenes, taking up much of the focus of the *mise en scène* in a long sequence. The first time we encounter it is when Nick is meeting Jordan for tea as the scene starts with an overview of the café where the advertisement holds a central position before moving over to Jordan (*The Great Gatsby*, 45:06-12). Later as Jordan is explaining how Gatsby and Daisy met and how Daisy ended up marrying Tom, there is a cut from one scene to the next where once again, the camera initially focuses on the advertisement of the Arrow Collars before moving on to Nick and Jordan (*The Great Gatsby*, 47:05-08). In the last scene of the sequence we see the advertisement reflected in the window of the taxi before everything dissolves into the next shot which overlooks the bay and New York with the face of the Arrow Collar model still lingering after the previous scene has faded away (*The Great Gatsby*, 48:11-14). Why is this important? First of all it is no coincidence that this particular piece of advertisement receives such a large amount of attention, therefore it is natural to conclude that it holds a symbolic meaning. This is verified through Daisy’s remark that Gatsby looks “so cool. You always look so cool, like the advertisement of the man in Times Square. The man in the cool, beautiful shirts” (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:48:41-52). When one considers Daisy’s statement and the fact that the sequence between Nick and Jordan is all about how Gatsby wanted to see Daisy, the link between Gatsby and the Arrow Man becomes clear. Furthermore, the previously mentioned description of the models fit Gatsby as he is a man of strong features, intense expressions and a casual posture. By including these ads and linking them to Gatsby we, as the audience, are able to perceive Gatsby as literally a self-made man as even Daisy realizes in the end that he reminds her of the famous advertisement. This explicit focus on the ad is exclusive to Luhrmann’s *The Great Gatsby*, but this interpretation of Gatsby as someone who created himself can also be seen in both *Trimalchio* (139) and *The Great Gatsby* (148) as both include the scene where Gatsby’s father shows Nick how Gatsby as a child would practice poise and elocution.

The Visual

The film adaptation also uses several camera techniques to create tension and ambiguity about what is happening during the climax of the movie. During Gatsby’s death sequence, there are several cross cuttings which suggest that Daisy is trying to call Gatsby but either changes her mind or is blocked by Nick who is on the line to Gatsby. When Gatsby dives into the pool, we

see Daisy going towards the phone and breathing audibly. As Gatsby is shot later in the sequence, we see her hang up the phone (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:58:37-40). The creation of this additional scene is rather interesting as it alludes to the possibility that Daisy might have chosen Gatsby over Tom. It suggests her ability to make her own decisions instead of going along with the wishes of the men in her life. Furthermore, the same sequence could also be interpreted as a promotion of Nick's relationship with Gatsby. In the end, while Gatsby is neglected and ignored by everyone else, Nick proves himself as Gatsby's sole friend as the only person who contacts Gatsby after his social stumble. By including these cross-cuttings it is possible to argue that Luhrmann takes a more decisive step away from the source text as he creates an ambiguous scene which reflects the mystery of Gatsby's death in the novel where Nick is unaware of any specific details of what really happened (Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby*, 139-140; *Trimalchio*, 130-131). Furthermore this particular scene underlines McFarlane's thoughts on the requirements of the viewer compared to the reader. He argues that it is a misconception that the source text in the form of a written text makes higher demands of the imagination of the reader than what the medium of film can demand of the viewer.

The film, if it is to make any serious impact on us, will require that we pay attention to the intricate interaction of *mise-en-scène* ... the editing ... and sound. Each of these three categories of film's narrational arsenal has numerous subdivisions, and a full response to the film will ask the viewer, at various levels of consciousness, to take them all into account (McFarlane, 16).

The scene of Gatsby's death is the climax of the movie and, through different camera techniques, reveals the consequences of several different actions: Tom's accusation of Gatsby when talking to Wilson, Gatsby's refusal to leave without Daisy, and Daisy's feelings towards Gatsby. All of this culminates with the death of Gatsby which allows for diverse interpretations of the different events, such as the previously mentioned possibility of Daisy choosing Gatsby or that *The Great Gatsby* could have had a happy ending if Tom had informed Wilson about Gatsby.

There are several examples where we see how Luhrmann has been inspired by a particular phrase from both *The Great Gatsby* and *Trimalchio* and has enhanced and incorporated it using techniques that we can find only in the medium of the film. One example of this is how Luhrmann plays with the connection between a window and the world, which is arguably based on the following phrases from both of the novels: "This isn't just an epigram—*life is much better looked at from a single window*, after all" and "This isn't just an

epigram—*life is much more successfully looked at from a single window*, after all (Fitzgerald, *Trimalchio*, 7; *The Great Gatsby*, 21. Emphasis added). In Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*, we can see how particular scenes play on this imagery of life being a window. In the apartment scene with Nick, Tom and Myrtle, Nick moves over to the window and looks at the neighboring apartment, upon which each window transforms from being a simple window into a depiction of each person's life (*The Great Gatsby*, 21:33-45). Later in the same scene, we see Nick climbing out of a window to escape from the events that take place within the apartment after Tom hits Myrtle (*The Great Gatsby*, 21:59-22:02). As this is happening, the camera moves away from Nick and their apartment and, as the camera speeds away, we see that almost every window of New York is lit up, thus depicting New York as a shimmering bustle of life (*The Great Gatsby* 22:03-10). All of these scenes are based on Fitzgerald's brief imagery based on life and windows, and it is possible to conclude that the imagery takes on a more profound meaning since Luhrmann took the time and used different techniques to film these images in a medium that is comparatively constrained by time. In this case the imagery can be interpreted to reflect Nick's ability to only experience or witness life as someone who is distanced from it all. And when things become too intense for him, he leaves in an attempt to distance himself from it. The only time that he does not leave is upon the death of Gatsby, and we get to know that this choice heavily affected him and resulted in a long list of problems such as alcoholism and depression.

The camerawork of *The Great Gatsby* is actually one of the aspects that reveals the most about Gatsby to the viewer. Take the sequence where Gatsby is showing off his mansion to Daisy and Nick as an example. Before the tour starts, everything is set for a romantic sequence as the rain has stopped and Daisy and Gatsby are reunited and in a happy mood (*The Great Gatsby*, 58:08-14). The whole tour is only possible because Gatsby requested that Nick invite Daisy over for tea so that he could be reunited with her. Surprisingly, throughout the tour the focus of the camera does not lie on Gatsby and Daisy as a couple but rather on Gatsby's mansion. When Gatsby guides them to his mansion, he takes the time to explain to Nick why the mansion looks great and this is seemingly the most important thing for him at that particular moment (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:00:04-09). Furthermore in the following scenes, Nick, Daisy and Gatsby are within the frames but they are not in the center. Although the frames capture everything, in each and every one of them Gatsby's wealth and mansion occupy the most space and demand the most attention, even where it would be natural for Gatsby and Daisy to take up the most space. Servants also receive a large amount of attention as their actions are also included (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:00:23-39). Only when Nick borrows

Gatsby's camera to film Daisy and Gatsby do we see the couple occupying the whole screen as our point of view shifts to that particular camera (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:00:41-46). Additionally the camera also moves away to a distant location where it films them from the side, capturing the railing and some of the statues of Gatsby's mansion (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:00:49-53). When they enter the dancehall the camera presents the scene by first taking in the ceiling, which looks like the inside of a cathedral with statues of angels and a great chandelier decorated with pearls, before panning to them when they arrive (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:00:53-59). Similarly, when Daisy is about to give her reaction with regards to the splendor of the hall, the camera focuses first on the floor where the insignia of Gatsby is depicted before moving on to her (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:01:01-06). At some point Gatsby admits to Nick that Daisy "makes it look so splendid don't you think old sport" (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:01:18-21). Later in the same sequence, Gatsby informs Daisy that "if it wasn't for the mist we could see the green light" as she is resting her head in his lap (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:03:08-14). The focus and presentation could all be considered as the first revelation of Gatsby's tragic flaw as a character: He is unable to live and enjoy the present, but is instead focused on what his past ought to be and what he has to achieve in his future. This leads to the interpretation that this romantic meeting was never about Daisy but the dream and vision that Gatsby has of himself and how he will only be able to fulfill his dream through marrying Daisy. Later on in the film Daisy admits that she just wants to run away with Gatsby and leave everything behind, but when Gatsby has this opportunity in front of him, he balks at the notion and considers such an action unrespectable. Attaining Daisy was seemingly never his ultimate goal.

The amount of space within Gatsby's mansion also indicates his emptiness as a person. When one compares the mansion of Gatsby with the cottage of Nick, one realizes that Nick's home is cluttered with objects of importance, such as his "volumes on credit, banking and investments" which were clearly not there when he initially moved in (*The Great Gatsby*, 04:43-45). This indicates the emptiness of Gatsby, as his big halls and rooms hold nothing but a promised faithfulness to his dream. The only room within Gatsby's house that is actually filled with his personal belongings is next to his bedroom, and it is where we see his mementos and pictures of his voyage with Dan Cody (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:02:56-1:03:02). Gatsby shares a similar revelation about this void in his life as he states that "[y]ou know, I've thought for a while I had a lot of things, but the truth is I'm empty. I suppose that's why I make things up about myself" (*The Great Gatsby*, 1:52:55-1:53:05). This epiphany of Gatsby's can only be found in Fitzgerald's *Trimalchio* and its inclusion shows us the development of

interpretation from *Trimalchio*, *The Great Gatsby* and Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*. In *Trimalchio*, we have this revelation to warn the reader about the shallowness of Gatsby, but at the same time, later in the novel, Gatsby is able to realize his mistake and simply wishes for Daisy to be with him. "I don't ask you to say anything. I only want *you*, Daisy" (Fitzgerald, *Trimalchio*, 106). This particular line is not mentioned in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* but neither does it include Gatsby's statement that he considers himself empty. Both of these Gatsby's have the tragic flaw of emptiness, but in *Trimalchio* Gatsby's shallowness is balanced through exclusion and addition of different lines which allows one to consider Gatsby as a romantic man. Luhrmann's adaptation does truly portray Gatsby as a man seemingly obsessed with his dream of himself. He never simply accepts Daisy's past and choices, which he does in *Trimalchio*, and his tour of his mansion along with his later revelation further illustrates this. All of this results in an interpretation and presentation of Gatsby at his lowest or most idealistic, as Luhrmann takes several inspirations from both of these sources to present Gatsby's denial of the present, but Luhrmann never includes any redeeming lines or actions which could indicate that Gatsby in the end would ever let go of his dream and accept the present.

Chapter III

Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* presents a new interpretation of Fitzgerald's novel as he adds depth, interpretations, symbolism and alterations to the plot of the film adaptation. Take Gatsby as an example; he is portrayed differently when compared to *Trimalchio* or *The Great Gatsby* and his rings, appearance and mansion indicate several of these new and enhanced traits. His death scene allows for a completely new understanding of the novel as it hints at the possibility of Daisy choosing him over Tom. Furthermore the film adaptation also brings to attention the love he feels for the vision of himself, thereby adding to the tragic aspect of the story as his hope of marrying Daisy is arguably not based on love.

Daisy has also received additional lines and scenes that depict her personality and choices. As previously mentioned, one of the new lines that she received allows for an interpretation which indicates that she has matured over time compared to Gatsby. At the same time it could also be interpreted as a sign of her simply expressing a desire to relive a lost past. Whichever the case, Daisy as a character grows throughout the adaptation as the film adaptation allows for a richer experience when it comes to understanding Daisy.

Nick is probably one of the characters that has been reinterpreted the most, one example of which is in his role as author of *The Great Gatsby*. This was originally mentioned in the novel, but it has been heavily emphasized in the film adaptation. The film includes several scenes of him writing the story where the letters he writes are used to indicate his feelings and associations toward a particular event. Additionally the scene where he alters the title of his book underlines his relationship with Gatsby. Nick's relationship to Gatsby has received a lot of focus and attention compared to the novels which is indicated by the way Nick reacts after the trauma of Gatsby's death and results in him ending up in Perkins Sanitarium with several conditions.

The Great Gatsby is known for being filled with symbolic imagery Luhrmann included and amplified several of these which adds both suspense and cohesiveness to the story. The rings of Daisy and Gatsby, as previously mentioned, add an entirely new element that was not originally an aspect of their characters. The references to God and the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, along with Gatsby and Wilson, also create an interesting relationship. Although present in the novel, this relationship is highlighted in the film adaptation through the repetition of pictures, thereby demonstrating how the adaptation plays with the source text.

All of these changes, reinterpretations and omitted elements indicate the creativeness of Luhrmann's adaptation, but at the same time also reflect some of the problems modern adaptation studies have when defining adaptations as many formal definitions are based on proximity or fidelity to the source text. Sanders' definition would be the first to meet with resistance. Although both Sanders and Hutcheon would ultimately define *The Great Gatsby* as an adaptation, Sanders' definition would still have to consider the possibility that the film is not simply an adaptation. Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* takes a decisive journey away from the source text; it shares the same motifs, characters, themes and plot, but with several distinct differences which indicate that it has several elements that are similar to that of an appropriation. Sanders' distinction between adaptation and appropriation does ultimately define *The Great Gatsby* as an adaptation since it shares the title, an indication of an explicit sustained engagement.

This does, however, present one of the weaknesses of Sanders' definitions, namely the vague distinction between them because the foundation of Sanders' definitions is rooted in proximity and fidelity. An appropriation is further removed from the source text than an adaptation, but this only informs us about differences and as Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* has demonstrated, some of the most crucial elements are what the adaptation has done with the source, and how it has incorporated, represented and played with the source rather than what has been changed from the informing original. Additionally, the definition of appropriation is almost indistinguishable from that of analogue. The chief difference, as previously mentioned, is that an analogue is considered to be a new cultural product that is not dependent on an awareness of the source text in order to be independently enjoyed. What is surprising is that the only aspect which actually separates them is an intertextual awareness, and without an intertextual awareness or explicit reference to intertextual relationship, the definitions are unable to inform us about what distinguishes a sustained appropriation, or even some appropriations with embedded texts, from other analogues.

Hutcheon does not share these weaknesses as she focuses on adaptations as both a product and process, thereby analyzing all of the changes and play on sources, but even her approach arguably has some deficiencies. One deficiency can be found in Hutcheon's arguments for the inclusion of the adapter's intention. The reasoning behind reintroduction of intention is that knowledge concerning the adapter's choice

can actually affect the audience member's interpretation: what they know about artists' desires and motivations, even about their life situations when they are creating,

can influence the interpretation of any work's meaning, as well as the response to it. Like the adapter, the audience too interprets in a context (Hutcheon, 109).

Her arguments for including what many would consider the intentional fallacy are that Hutcheon does not consider "authorial intent as the *sole* arbiter and guarantee of the meaning and value of a work of art", but that it is relevant for the understanding of the audience's interpretation (Hutcheon, 106-107). Although one can agree with this, as the contextualization and awareness of an author's or adapter's background is relevant for any interpretation, the most important aspect one has to consider is the identity of the adapter. Hutcheon claims that for films or television series, it is the director that should be considered the adapter. A film adaptation, however, makes "the shift from a solo model of creation to a collaborative one" (Hutcheon, 80) and she further considers the writer, music/film editor, actors and others as possible candidates for the role of adapter, but eventually concludes that it is the director who in the end is the adapter.

It is hard for any person who has been on the set of a movie to believe that only one man or woman makes a film. ... But as far as the public is concerned, there is always just one Sun-king [the director] who is sweepingly credited with responsibility for story, style, design, dramatic tension, taste, and even weather in connection with the finished product. When, of course, there are many hard-won professions at work (QTD. Hutcheon, 82).

Although the definition of the director as adapter is both simplistic and practical, and is the same reason why this thesis names Luhrmann as the adapter of *The Great Gatsby*, this approach by Hutcheon does not fully consider the full effect of actors, for example, and what they bring with them into the film adaptation. Should one simply consider them as persons recruited by the adapter, in this case the director, for a desired effect? Or do they actively take part in the shaping of the film adaptation? One can definitely see the virtues of contextual information about an author, but when it comes to collaborative modes of creation, such as the film, it seems like Hutcheon's initiative to include adapter's intention in the process of analysis struggles to properly function due to the amount of people which influence the creation of a film.

By examining the adapter's intention we do, however, get a potential insight into the reason why an adapter would choose to significantly alter or reintroduce new elements to the source text. The adapter's aim might be "to contest the aesthetic or political values of the

adapted text as to pay homage” (Hutcheon, 20). An adaptation could add new significant messages or themes to a classic in order to highlight an injustice or political situation, such as *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1980).¹⁵

An important aspect of Hutcheon’s arguments for adapter’s intention is the way she describes it as it seems to equally focus on background information and contextualization of the author, film etc. and not just the intent of the adapter. It is only natural that knowledge about the author or situation of the work of art should influence our understanding or interpretation of the adaptation. Luhrmann’s *The Great Gatsby* often touches on historical elements or scenes that invite comparison to the life of Fitzgerald and this reflects an awareness of historical information to the adapter and the adapter’s time period, but this information does not translate into adapter intention. Instead, it is simply information about the personal situation of the adapter, not what the adapter’s goals or intentions were. These are some of the reasons why one would be ambivalent towards the inclusion of adapter’s intention when one analyzes adaptations.

It must be mentioned that the point of this is not to critique Hutcheon or Sanders. It is simply an attempt to stress the difficulties related to defining adaptations and appropriations when one uses proximity or fidelity as the basis for formal definitions. Both of them include several theories or approaches that are very applicable to *The Great Gatsby*. Sanders, for example, argues for a more diverse set of terms and understanding of adaptations which would highlight how the adapted text and the adaptation affect each other. Through this focus on the relationship between the source text and the adaptation, the focus should be on how the informing original has been used in order to create something new (Sanders, 97-99).

Indeed the study of appropriations in an academic context has in part been spurred on by the recognized ability of adaptation to respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural position, and by capacity of appropriations to highlight troubling gaps, absences, and silences within the canonical texts to which they refer (Sanders, 98).

¹⁵ “The comma that divides *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* also serves to unite two plays which have common elements : the first is hardly a play at all without the second, which cannot be performed without the first” (Stoddard, 7). *Dogg's Hamlet* is an adaptation of Hamlet which also includes Wittgenstein’s philosophical investigations about the role of language. *Cahoot's Macbeth* reflects Shakespeare’s Macbeth but also functions as critique of the Czechoslovakian totalitarian regime which prevented actors from performing (Stoddard, 8-9).

It is this that is arguably the most relevant aspect of adaptation studies, as a focus on proximity or fidelity does not reveal the full creative actions of the adaptations. Fidelity as a perspective could also strengthen a perspective of adaptations as secondary when compared to the source text, which is something that both Sanders and Hutcheon distance themselves from. *The Great Gatsby's* portrayal of Nick, Gatsby, Daisy and Tom would most likely affect one's later understanding of them as characters when revisiting Fitzgerald's novel. This new understanding would arguably result in different interpretations as our experience of them could result in a new focus on certain passages or scenes which we recognize from the adaptation. "It is an ongoing dialogical process ... in which we compare the work we already know with the one we are experiencing" (Hutcheon, 21). Therefore the focus should lie on how the adaptation has interacted with the source, and not simply what is different from the informing original. Hutcheon's definition of adaptations as both a process and a product further accentuate this new tendency to focus on the creative work of the adaptation rather than the fidelity to the source. "An adaptation's double nature does not mean, however, that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis" (Hutcheon, 6). This approach, when compared to Sanders' definitions of adaptation and appropriation, enables us to understand how the adaptation functions as an autonomous work of art.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

In this master thesis Luhrmann's film adaptation has been analyzed using Hutcheon's approach to adaptations. Through this analysis of Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*, we have considered the adaptation as a product by analyzing the shift in medium through examining some of the effects of cameras and visual aspects that form our interpretation, such as the tour of Gatsby's mansion. We have examined the process of creation by observing the reinterpretation and recreation of the informing original, such as the portrayal of Nick as a narrator and how the events of that particular summer affected him. Furthermore, *The Great Gatsby*'s mode of engagement has also been explored as several elements about how the film presents the story, and how it shapes the story through the use of repeating imagery, linked symbolism and creative camera techniques. Through Hutcheon's double definition of adaptation as both a product and a process, we are able to understand and witness how the adaptation interacts with its sources and how these creative changes shape our viewing experience. This focus on the process is therefore arguably more valuable than definitions based on proximity since they allow us to expand our scope of analysis which in turn results in a more diverse and dynamic understanding of both the adaptation and its sources. Through the creative adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* we have become aware of this interplay, as some of the most central aspects of the adaptation is not how it deviates from the informing original. Instead the adaptation uses its source to highlight and enhance particular events, lines and descriptions in order to add new depth or allow for different interpretations. Through this focus on the full relationship between the novel and the film we can conclude that Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* is a creative adaptation that reintroduces the famous novel into the world of modern cinema.

Appendix: The relevance of adaptation studies for teaching

As a teacher I find this kind of adaptation analysis to be very rewarding as I consider it to be excellent practice for future teaching in the ESL classroom. For a teacher it is important to be able to discover different examples of alteration, amplification, editions etc. as I can use this knowledge to expand and incorporate different aspects of the curriculum. Through adaptation studies I am able to pinpoint different scenes, camera usage, elements of proximation that would be both interesting and educative for my students. Simply watching a film or reading a book would not suffice as a classroom activity and through this experience, I have become confident in my abilities to analyze and deconstruct the different aspects of an adaptation in order to present it to my students for maximum educational value. *The Great Gatsby* is a relevant and diverse text that can be used for a variety of different approaches in order to meet the learning goals of the curriculum. Additionally, through these close reading activities that students of higher proficiency can perform, students get the opportunity to engage with the English language in a new and rewarding way. Through adaptation analysis or simply film analysis students engage with the English language and through this exposure their input takes the form of engaging activities and their English output can be managed in such a way that they get to practice more specialized forms of the English language.

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