

The Great Gatsby Novel vs Film

Adaptation Essay

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F. Scott Fitzgerald's book *The Great Gatsby* is considered one of the Great American novels. *The Great Gatsby* has been adapted in 1926, 1949, 1974 and in 2013 for film. This essay will examine the most recent film made in 2013. This essay will note differences between the novel and the film and give a practical explanation for why these changes were necessary.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* had a number of racist descriptions in it. One example would be how Fitzgerald described Wolfsheimer on page 69 as a "small flat-nosed Jew" and having a "large head" with "two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril." These anti-Semitic characterisations wouldn't have raised any eyebrows in Fitzgerald's day but they would be condemned today as being racist. Baz Luhrmann intentionally cast Indian actor, Amitabh Bachan, as Wolfsheimer so that the film didn't align itself with Fitzgerald's anti-Semitic characterisation.

In the novel *Gatsby* is aware that Daisy isn't going to run away with him. On page 161 of the book it says, "No telephone message arrived." It also says, "Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared." This is in stark contrast to the film. The reason for this is because in the film Nick says that *Gatsby* is waiting for Daisy. The telephone rings and the butler answers saying, "I know Mr Gatsby will be very happy that you've called." *Gatsby* is on his way to exit his swimming pool and answer the telephone when he gets shot by Wilson. Before he dies *Gatsby* looks across the lake at Daisy's home and says, "Daisy." Only after *Gatsby* dies does the audience find out that it was only Nick calling *Gatsby* and not Daisy. In the film version *Gatsby* dies believing that Daisy had every intention of running away with him. A possible explanation for this change could be to further illustrate *Gatsby*'s naivety when it comes to Daisy. It could also be reasoned that *Gatsby* not knowing makes his death all the more tragic. It also serves as an effective final plot twist in the film.

In the novel Nick and Jordan have a romantic relationship and date each other. On page 58 Nick says, "Her grey, sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her." Nick eventually breaks up with Jordan after she displays no emotion regarding Myrtle's death. In the film Nick and Jordan's relationship is platonic and they're merely observers. Director Baz Luhrmann stated in an interview with *Life and Times* that,

"We had to make choices and we chose to stay very focused on the linear plot of the book." He also asked the question of, "What scenes are absolutely fundamental to the story? What scenes must be in our film? And what scenes can we do without, even if we love them." This explains why Luhrmann decided to cut Jordan and Nick's relationship from the film. It would simply take too much time and would detract from the romance between Daisy and Gatsby.

The character of Daisy Buchanan in the novel is portrayed as being shallow and interested only in material gain. There's a part in the novel where Gatsby flings a bunch of his shirts at Daisy and she begins to cry. She cries because she realises that Gatsby could have supported her financially if she had waited for him. The reason she didn't wait for him is because he was a lowly officer in the first World War and because her family pressured her into marrying Tom Buchanan. On page 92 she says, "It makes me sad because I've never seen such beautiful shirts." In the film Daisy is portrayed as being less shallow but weak in her convictions. The film also dives deeper into the romance between Daisy and Gatsby. In the film's shirt scene Nick explains that Daisy cries because she truly regrets the time she missed with Gatsby. Daisy in the film truly loves Gatsby and cares for him. It stands to reason that Daisy is more likeable in the film for the sake of the romance between her and Gatsby. It would be hard to construct a compelling love story on screen if Daisy was as cold and materialistic as her character in the novel. The driving force behind the entire film is the yearning that Gatsby and Daisy have for each other and the tragedy of their separation. Daisy's character in the film is easier to sympathise with and that makes her more engaging.

Jazz music plays an important role in the novel. The jazz age took place during the twenties and many people considered it a fad at the time. Back in those days listening to jazz was scandalous because it was African American street music. Fitzgerald incorporated jazz into his novel to show how raunchy and exciting Gatsby's parties got. Jazz also had an impact on the fashion of the time and was considered cutting edge. Fitzgerald used lyrics from jazz songs such as on page 95 when Gatsby shows Daisy around his mansion and has Klipspringer play the piano. The song he plays is called Ain't We Got Fun. The lyrics that Fitzgerald included in the novel were, "One thing's sure and nothing's surer, the rich get rich and the poor get – children." Director Baz Luhrmann did the same in the film by using hip-hop for

the soundtrack. This was one of the biggest gripes that fans had with the film but Luhrmann justified his reason for doing this. In an interview with Empire Magazine Luhrmann says, "Look Fitzgerald put African American street music in his book and he did that because he wanted to be of the moment." He goes on to say, "I put African American street music in the film. It just happens to be hip hop because that's dangerous and jazz is quaint." The change from jazz to hip-hop wasn't much of a leap when you think about it from Luhrman's perspective. It kept the feeling current. It would have been harder to do that with a genre of music that is considered old fashioned by modern standards.

This essay has examined some key changes made from the book to the film and explained the practical reasons behind them. It has been demonstrated that director Baz Luhrmann made these choices out of necessity in order to achieve his own vision for the film.

### Bibliography:

- 1) The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- 2) The Great Gatsby(Film) by Baz Luhrmann
- 3) Life and Times Magazine interview with Baz Luhrmann
- 4) Empire Magazine interview with Baz Luhrmann

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