

Using film to expand upon the great gatsby



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The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald explores the whirlwind lives of the 1920s New York upper class. In the novel, Fitzgerald criticizes the unattainability of the American Dream as well as the shallow nature of the upper class. From this novel, several movie adaptations have stemmed, including movies directed by Clayton (1974) and Luhrmann (2013), each interpreting the novel differently. While Clayton presents a literal, superficial interpretation of the work, Luhrmann expands on the existing work while staying true to the heart of the novel, ultimately making it the more effective adaptation.

The choices in soundtrack and audio editing impact the reception of both movies. Clayton chose to have time-period accurate pieces, choosing to have the parties be very traditional in tone and mood. While this sets the proper time period for the work, it limits the interpretations of the scenes by taking such a surface level analysis. The parties, while containing the debauchery so prominent through Fitzgerald's book, is limited by this literal interpretation and the scenes come across as acoustically underwhelming despite the intense or desperate actions of Gatsby. However, Luhrmann chose to use modern music to overlay the establishing shots, scenes, and Gatsby's parties. This choice provides another layer to the film itself. By having modern music, the sense of corruption and stark depravity is heightened through the contemporary lyrics and creates images of a growing city and age. With modern music, the significance of the time period is better communicated as well as the mood of the parties. The parties come across as much more raucous and intense. This brings a modern spin to the movie, with the soundtrack choice expanding on the ideas of growth and change in

the New York landscape at the time. Despite the differences in sound track, the audio editing is similar. Both directors use periods of silence to call attention to emotions and reactions during the hot summer scene when Tom discovers the affair. This technique to call attention to character's reactions is effective in both films. Through this use of sound, more emphasis can be provided to particular instances that the book did not necessarily apply. With this addition of sound, or lack thereof, the movies can further expand upon ideas in the book. However as far as the use of music and soundtrack, Luhrmann's 2013 version of the novel proved to be more effective as it expands upon the text.

The symbols of the novel are heightened further in the Luhrmann version of the movie, bringing a new layers to the novel. In Clayton's version, the green light is depicted in the start of the movie as Gatsby is introduced, but not elaborated on. In the novel, the green light represents Gatsby's unattainable dream of winning Daisy's heart. The light is seen in scenes involving Gatsby's longing, such as when Gatsby questions if the past can be attained. Through this, the symbol is seen and understood, but it is not built upon and is instead only explored at a superficial level. The symbol is present to the same extent as the novel and carries the same meaning, but it is just observed by the director and not particularly emphasized. However, in Luhrmann's version, a noise is associated with this symbol. Starting from the very beginning, when Gatsby was first introduced on the pier, a low tone plays each time the light flashes at the end of Daisy's dock. This tone continues to play each time Gatsby looks out onto Daisy's house, and even once he seemingly wins her heart. During their affair, there is a scene in

which Gatsby holds Daisy, but even with her in his arms, the ominous tone plays again. Luhrmann managed to take this symbol of unattainable dreams and extend it further by applying it to a scene that in the book was not included and did not reference the green light. By applying this symbol even during the relationship, Luhrman highlights this central idea of the novel, the unattainability and hopelessness of the dream. By taking advantage of the media, Luhrmann expands on the preexisting symbols and meaning of the text to create an effective adaptation and interpretation.

Both Clayton and Luhrmann further promote the heart of the novel, that the dream is often unattainable and the chase futile, through additional scenes depicting Gatsby and Daisy's relationship. Clayton includes scenes of Daisy and Gatsby's courtship, including them picnicking and swimming at Gatsby's mansion. In the novel itself, the courtship is largely vague, with just references to some events along the way such as the firing of servants. However, Clayton expands on the courtship in his adaptation with these additional scenes. This inclusion of additional scenes elaborates on Gatsby's attempts to achieve his dream, the scenes themselves are ideal dates, imaginary romances. Gatsby attempts to recreate this perfect future and relationship, and Clayton shows these attempts in greater depth than the novel did. This addition provides further insight into the heart of the novel, by enhancing this attempt at creating an ideal relationship, Gatsby's failure to achieve this dream is also enhanced. Luhrmann creates a similar effect through the use of repeated phrases. Throughout the 2013 movie, Daisy repeatedly says "I wish it could always be this way" (Luhrmann), to which Gatsby says that it can be. This interaction happens on their dates, when

they are dancing, and culminates to Gatsby telling Nick he doesn't understand why they can't just go back. Through the repetition of Gatsby's holding on to the dream, the idea of the unachievable dream is accentuated. Daisy is shown to understand that it's too late to go back, but Gatsby holds on to the past and the delusion. While both movies make an effort to accentuate Gatsby and Daisy's relationship and the unattainability of Gatsby's dream for the relationship, Luhrmann's technique proves to be more effective. It provides more dialogue and by having the conflict reoccur, it heightens the core of the novel.

The visual choices in each movie, such as color and mise en scene, serve to intensify the on-screen drama and scenes to emulate the novel. One of the greatest differences between the two adaptations was the style, with Clayton going with a classic style and Luhrman taking a modern and dramatic approach. The colors and editing style in Clayton's adaptation are reminiscent of lazy summer days. The muted colors in scenes such as the tea at the Buchanan's house at the start of the movie are all in whites and creams, with even the foliage not being particularly lively. The cuts are smooth and but altogether underwhelming. Even in the party scenes, the colors are muted and the camera work smooth. Clayton's adaptation effectively shows the setting, the summer in New York, and creates a smooth finished product. Nonetheless, the adaptation is limited by the very literal reworking of the setting and does not serve to show the underlying tones of desperate relationships and high strung emotions, especially with Gatsby. Luhrmann's adaptation however takes a colorful, crisp and vibrant approach. The composition of the scenes themselves are amazingly busy and filled with

primary colors. The party scenes especially are reminiscent of Fitzgerald's descriptions of "yellow cocktail music" (Fitzgerald, 40) and "gaudy with primary colors" (40). As a result, the parties' magnitude and fervor is more accurately mirrored. Additionally, the camera work is crisp and modern, the cuts between faces in scenes such as when Gatsby waits for tea with Daisy are blunt. This very different approach highlights the intensity many of the characters are experiencing and serves to highlight the fraught nature of many of Gatsby's actions. Both of the films heavily use proxemic patterns and territorial space to highlight character's emotions. When Daisy and Tom talk about the affair and decide to move on, they are at an intimate distance, showing their emotional draw in Clayton's adaptation. Luhrmann uses the shots of the characters to establish emotional distance, such as by having Gatsby's back to the camera in the hotel scene. Luhrmann and Clayton both introduce Gatsby initially from behind, establishing emotional distance early on. While both Luhrmann and Clayton establish characters visually, but Luhrmann uses color and extremely intense shots to establish more energy and passion, sticking to the undertones of the novel better.

The Great Gatsby conveys the ideas of dissatisfaction, disappointment, and desire. Through adaptations such as the 1974 Clayton film and the 2013 Luhrmann adaptation, these ideas can be elaborated on and the work itself can develop. Luhrmann's film is ultimately more effective due to its extensive exploration of the central ideas of the novel. Rather than just taking the work as it is and retelling it, Luhrmann expanded and considered the work as a whole in a wholly new way. By adapting the novel, more implications are revealed and the work can be seen differently. It is through

the adaptation and interpretation of works that more connections and implications are shaped and a work is made greater.