Chapter 6

Textual elements of *The Great Gatsby*

> Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees. (Fitzgerald 1950, pp. 106–107)

Interpreting elements

In addition to the paratexts surrounding the film, the 'text' of the film itself offers more information on approaches, assumptions and attitudes operating in the attempt to adapt *The Great Gatsby* (1925) that are seminal to the operation of fidelity. As Kranz (2008; [*emphasis in the original*]) notes:

> By seeing what a screenplay, director, producer [...] kept and rejected or changed in a source document, we raise the *probability* that what gets into the film was consciously or unconsciously *intended*. (p. 203)

Whilst directors or producers may dissemble in interviews, the actual decisions taken in creating the adaptations, as evidenced in the film texts themselves, give further clarity on intention and approach.

This chapter will consider elements of Fitzgerald's narrative prose and compare the differing approaches to similar elements across the film adaptations. Aspects such as description, exposition, the handing of length, space and time, dialogue and sound and characterisation will be explored and related to the film adaptations. Themes and symbolism will be discussed in the following chapter. Of course, film elements do not exist in isolation,

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but sometimes considering them in (relative) isolation can be helpful. Chapter 8 will discuss how these elements work together in a key sequence.

Each of the film adaptations presents itself as in some way faithful to and linked with Fitzgerald's novel. This chapter will look at what is revealed by the adaptations' efforts to conform to or vary from the text of the novel and the cinematic means they use to do so.

In summary, this chapter will consider what the additions, omissions and changes from Fitzgerald's text tell us about the conception and intention of the filmmakers and whether these serve to support or foreclose the evental site of the novel.

■ Relating to Fitzgerald's prose

In Chapter 3, I discussed Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as an example of openness to an evental site. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) maintains its fidelity to the event of modernity, as 'named' by American modernism, through its use of paradox and contradiction. These ambiguous and undecidable elements leave the meanings of the novel more open. For the films to be faithful to the evental site of the novel within the adaptation, is a subtly differing position from the novel's faithfulness; for the films, this may involve a faithfulness to Fitzgerald's modernism but also an openness to the potential meanings of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) as the expression of an evental site. As previously discussed, the approach to all these aspects either forecloses or allows for the creation of new meanings. Thus, the film analysis will continue to look for meaningful openness, ambiguity, paradox and contradiction.

As discussed in previous chapters, these adaptations seek to connect strongly with Fitzgerald's text, thereby reinforcing their own commercial and cultural value (see ch. 4). In addition to paratextual elements, the Hollywood film adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) must also work to bring in recognisable elements to support these connections. This was achieved by incorporating recognisable characters and plot elements and, a much trickier task, by various strategies for incorporating the 'feel' of the novel – for example, the use of large quantities of Fitzgerald's own prose as dialogue and voice-over in the 1974 and 2013 versions, and attempts to transpose the novel's visual and musical references, especially those connected to the 1920s period, into the film's *mise-en-scène*.

Engelstad (2018, p. 37) notes that there is an expectation that in an adaptation not only is the 'source material recognizable in the film, in terms of plot structure, character depiction, and mood' but that the adaptation also 'corresponds to commonly held conceptions about the book or its author' including 'popular ideas'. Perhaps even more tricky was

to incorporate these commonly held ideas about *The Great Gatsby* (1925) – for example, the expectation of glitz and glamour by an audience that was unaware of or loath to acknowledge the ultimately tragic trajectory of the text. To put it baldly, in popular terms 'people seem enchanted enough by the decadence described in Fitzgerald's book to ignore its fairly obvious message of condemnation' (Seward & Quartz 2013, n.p.) – and that is if they have even read the book. As is not untypical of cinema, spectacle and visual aesthetics are privileged over critical and political critique.

Description

Kundu (2007, p. 146) notes that Fitzgerald's 'creative imagination is informed by the processes and aesthetics of film' and Dixon (2003, p. 287) that *The Great Gatsby* has filmic qualities, being 'both suspenseful and highly visual'. Whilst Matterson (1999, p. 53) notes Fitzgerald's 'sharp dialogue, clear setting […] closeness to dramatic structuring', Kundu suggests a camera-like aspect to Fitzgerald's prose, as it, for example, zooms in or freeze-frames the billboard of Doctor TJ Eckleberg (Kundu 2007, p. 147). These apparent similarities are tantalisingly suggestive of the transferability of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) into the film medium. However, for all the seeming parallels, there is an aspect of the conceptual to Fitzgerald's description that defies the film medium. For example, Fitzgerald's (1950) description of Mrs Wilson, whose 'personality had also undergone a change' when she changes her dress, is both highly visual and yet largely unfilmable:

> Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions grew more violently affected moment by moment, and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her, until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air. (p. 33)

How do the filmmakers attempt to deal with these aspects of Fitzgerald's prose? Attempts at an approach of equivalence or fidelity to the letter of Fitzgerald's text are likely to illustrate 'Hollywood's tendency to reify imagination' (Cutchins 2003, p. 300) rather than a Badiouian openness to the ambiguity and fissure of an evental site (Vooght 2018, p. 24).

Not all of Fitzgerald's descriptions reference concrete objects. Those that do not perhaps give more room for interpretation but require an entirely different approach in the film medium. Nick's description in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) of Daisy's voice is an example (Fitzgerald 1950):

> It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: 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. (pp. 14–15)

As Cutchins (2003, p. 298) puts it, this description is remarkable for 'its nearly complete lack of concrete details'. Each actress has attempted to somehow interpret these lines, with the most peculiar take being Mia Farrow's strident squawk. Cutchins (p. 298) notes that the novel's Daisy is seen only through the viewpoint of others (in this case, Nick); as such, although she motivates the action, she is in essence 'not really there'. This was no accident. Eble (1964, p. 325) notes in an essay on Fitzgerald's revisions of *The Great Gatsby* that the author made changes that in fact made Daisy less, not more, corporeal. Filmmaking requires these descriptions to become a set of concrete visual and auditory manifestations. Alongside Daisy's voice is Gatsby's smile, another perilous endeavour to evoke (Fitzgerald 1950):

> He smiled understandingly – much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced – or seemed to face – the whole eternal world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favour. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (p. 49)

The challenge faced by Ladd, Redford and DiCaprio was to convey something of how Gatsby makes Nick *feel* (Cutchins 2003, p. 299). This was most clearly understood by Luhrmann, who includes several reaction shots showing Nick's changing emotions. Reaction shots are a way of adapting a modernist first-person narration to the omniscient camera. Gatsby's smile is given the full ironic treatment by Luhrmann, with Gatsby raising a champagne glass and fireworks exploding behind him, perhaps the only way it can effectively be depicted in this knowing age (see Figure 6.1). At the same time, however, there is a voice-over from Nick, verbalising the character's thoughts:

> His smile was one of those rare smiles that you may come across four or five times in life ... it seemed to understand you and believe in you just like you would like to be understood and believed in. (min. 28:50–29:02)

In essence, despite the big treatment, there is still a lack of confidence in anything but Fitzgerald's words, as voiced by the character of Nick, to convey the sense of Gatsby's smile. Spelling it out merely serves to reify the text.

Even the supposed simplicity of the reference to a concrete object causes dilemmas around choices on the film screen. There is often a corresponding lack of subtlety. For example, in the novel, Daisy comes to Gatsby's house for the first time, marvelling at it, responding emotionally to his collection of shirts, viewing his hydroplane and being amused by the picture of Gatsby with a 'pompadour' haircut from his days with

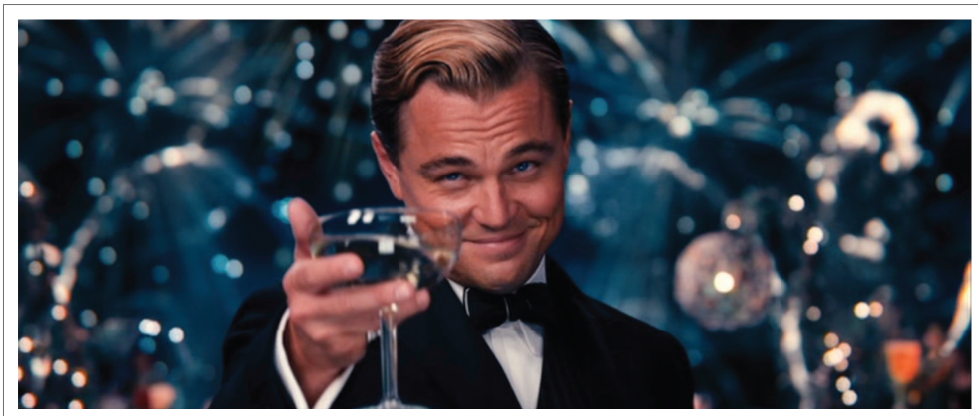

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FIGURE 6.1: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (2013) depicting 'the Gatsby smile'.

Cody: 'I adore it!' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 90). Gatsby then diverts her from this slightly embarrassing reference to his past appearance as well as her assumption that Cody's yacht was his: '"Look at this," said Gatsby quickly. "Here's a lot of clippings – about you." They stood side by side examining it' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 90) (what 'it' refers to exactly is unclear, nor why Fitzgerald might use the singular for clippings – Fitzgerald's writing is not always grammatically sound). This is a tiny moment in the text, which moves swiftly on to a phone call highlighting Gatsby's mysterious business dealings, followed by Daisy's somewhat infantilising flirtatiousness, 'I'd like to just get one of those pink clouds and put you in it and push you around' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 91).

However, in the 1974 and 2013 adaptations of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the directors' decision to show on film the 'clippings' that Gatsby has kept necessitates the creation of these. The on-screen scrapbooks that result require the choice of a particular paper, photographs, layout and handwriting – all of which transform an extremely brief reference into something that may be read, in today's terms, to be an unhealthy manifestation of obsessive stalking rather than an embodiment of romantic idealism. These visually concrete manifestations of the text can also subtly change meanings by changing the emphasis of a scene. Obsessive stalking aside, Clayton and Luhrmann use the clippings to perform filmic functions that go beyond textual references. This adds new meanings and emphases to them that are more meaningful than a mere visualisation of the text.

The scene where Gatsby shows Daisy the clippings occurs about an hour into *The Great Gatsby* (1974). Gatsby and Daisy are having an intense discussion about the past and how he felt at the procession of men who

paid court to her (in the absence of flashbacks, a choice that will be discussed in the following section, the 1974 film includes many such spoken scenes). Daisy says, 'Silly young men, so silly, to let an 18-year-old girl into their hearts'. When Gatsby shows her the scrapbooks, she exclaims, 'I can't believe it's all here! Everything that's happened to me'. Gatsby comments on his 'pictures of you in shining cars – every ball you ever attended'. Daisy responds, 'I wore out a hundred pairs of slippers … Come and sit by me, Jay. Why do you stand or sit as far away as possible?' (min. 59:46–1:00:32). This is followed by a discussion about how it is hard for him to touch her, and they reach out to each other in a shot that calls to mind Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' but do not quite touch. Daisy says that if only he still had his uniform, they could dance like they did before. He says he does have his uniform, and she declares that he is sentimental after all. This then segues into a shot of Gatsby and Daisy romancing by the river.

Hence the scene, with its extended emphasis on the scrapbooks, becomes much more overtly about a romantic connection between Gatsby and Daisy – whereas, in the novel, it is a moment within the excitement of showing Daisy everything he has acquired during their separation with the hope of impressing her. The focus in the book is more on Gatsby; even as Daisy is won over, Fitzgerald (1950) writes of Gatsby's dream and how reality must inevitably fall short:

> There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. (p. 92)

Luhrmann in 2013 also gives the moment with the scrapbooks a greater narrative and structuring function. Its positioning in the film is not dissimilar to the book, coming after Gatsby shows Daisy his mansion, the moment of her tears, triggered by his collection of shirts, and the sombre tone of this brightening again as they look at the photo of Cody and comment on Gatsby's pompadour haircut. However, in the film one does not get the sense that the clippings are, in part, to distract her from this focus on Cody and Gatsby's own past. They operate, instead, as part of Gatsby showing his elaborate mansion to her and are a chance to expand on the film's elaborate stylistics. Although lasting a mere minute, the clippings sequence is stuffed with shots of professionally bound books with ribbons and dried flowers at different angles. Initially, we see Gatsby selecting Volume 18 (far beyond Fitzgerald's 'some clippings' [1950, p. 90]) of these beautifully bound books from the shelf (see Figure 6.2). Daisy looks pleased: 'You saved my letters' (min. 1:02:16).

There is a faint voice-over of the letters being read out in Daisy's voice, 'Come home, I'll be here waiting' (min. 1:02:30). Thus, instead of merely being a reference to Gatsby's ongoing devotion or obsession, the film uses this time to allow for the scene to also tell part of the history of their

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FIGURE 6.2: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (2013) depicting Gatsby's bound volumes of clippings.

relationship – with our last view of the scrapbook ending on a scrap of newspaper with the headline 'Daisy Fay engaged to marry'. This is then interrupted by a business phone call, which Gatsby answers in a forced and angry tone, seeming rather more overtly threatened than what is suggested by the text. In short, this sequence is far more sombre in tone than Fitzgerald's text and less humorous. It also leaves out Daisy's schoolgirl comment, instead bringing in an angry wind outside that blows open the doors and blows in leaves – a portentous heralding of doom.

Films with their limited time must work hard to make each element count. The film texts reveal what was deemed essential or what it was felt could be repurposed, whilst other moments in the novel are excluded. A minor textual moment has here been expanded upon and given a greater and, in some ways, differing narrative function, whilst at the same time making an unspoken (and, in this case, largely insincere) claim toward textual verisimilitude. The moment is chiefly used in keeping with the greater emphasis on the Daisy–Gatsby romance that the films tend to put forward. Whether or not this was a desirable moment to give a greater emphasis and whether it drives any emotional investment in this relationship on the viewer's part remains in question.

■ Time and duration

Whilst many of the adaptations attempt to conform closely to the detail of the novel's plotting and events, there is a notable omission in some of them in capturing the novel's feeling of brevity and concision. Whilst *The Great Gatsby* (1925), at just under 50,000 words, is on the short side

for a novel (Fitzgerald was known in America through his short stories for his mastery of impactful brevity), both the 1974 and 2013 adaptations were lengthy for a film. The factor of length is one area where an on-screen faithfulness to the detail of the novel correspondingly creates a serious deviation from the sense of the novel as a whole. The question is primarily how this length is felt and experienced. A film that conforms to the average does not call attention to its length. Likely, length would not become a conscious factor with the audience. A film that exceeds the norm will raise this element to consciousness. It could be said to enter 'blockbuster' territory – which carries with it its own expectations of action-packed entertainment.

Houston (1974b, p. 177) writes, in relation to the 1974 *The Great Gatsby*, the novel is 'very short [...] the film, by contrast, is very long, laboriously extending what Fitzgerald elided'. The average length of a Hollywood film has varied from 90 minutes in the 1920s to 88 minutes (Olson 2014, n.p.) or 110 minutes (Sciretta 2009, n.p.) in the 21st century. *The Great Gatsby* (1974) was two hours and 26 minutes and Luhrmann's 2013 version was two hours and 23 minutes – both significantly longer than average. This again pointed to a fundamental difficulty with the conception of the film. The length suggests either an arthouse film (frequently lengthy but not expected to garner big audiences) or a blockbuster.[39] In arthouse films, there is often an emphasis on scenery or *mise-en-scène* and dialogue rather than action. Clayton's background favoured arthouse film adaptations, which clashed with the studio's desire for a blockbuster to justify their expenditure. Sciretta (2009, n.p.) writes that films attracting the largest audiences are often significantly longer than average. However, Clayton was not on board with this conception of the film, saying, 'I have never made, nor would I entertain making, what is called a blockbuster' (Rosen 1974b, p. 49). The result was a mismatch in expectations between producer, director and audience.

Whilst the 1974 *The Great Gatsby* struggled with these dynamics, at the time of *The Great Gatsby* (2013), Luhrmann was already known for his ability to combine arthouse cinematic material with blockbuster features to draw large audiences, as he did with *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) (Giles 2013, p. 14). Whilst this approach was partially effective, nonetheless, his *The Great Gatsby* was criticised based on repetitive and ultimately disengaging climaxes 'until we go numb to the din' (Charity 2013), whilst Nick has 'become tiresome by the film's second half' (McCarthy 2013), 'endlessly gawping' (Nathan 2013).

39. Based on the top-rated 50 films on *IMDb.com* (Sciretta 2009) or all films listed on *IMDb.com* for each year (Olsen 2014).

The 1949 adaptation, at 91 minutes, shows, perhaps, that Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* can be adapted within a more average film length without the loss of significant pivotal moments or characters (the 1926 version ran to approximately 80 minutes). In fact, the 1949 film includes the minor, yet key, character, Owl Eyes, that was cut from the more extended 1974 version.

Another factor in the subconscious perception of length is the films' pacing. If, as in *The Great Gatsby* (1974), the dynamic action is fairly limited, it may be felt by an audience to be endlessly elongated. Clayton's often static set-up of characters on the screen, as if in a stage play, exacerbated this sense of being slow-moving – see Figure 6.3 for a montage of these shots. The sense Clayton creates is of a tableau, with each shot showing characters in static positions. As film critic Canby (1974, n.p.) writes: 'This deliberate way in which each scene is set up and photographed, sometimes in emphasis-distorting close-ups, adds the intolerable burden of portentousness to the film'. The intention may have been to emphasise the formality of upper-class relations, the emotional distance between characters, or perhaps merely to form a pleasingly balanced image, or indeed all of these – but the result is to create a sense of immobility that affects the film's action.

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FIGURE 6.3: Montage of shots from *The Great Gatsby* (1974) showing the static positioning of the characters.

In 2013, Luhrmann made claims toward blockbuster territory, holding the attention with much moving camerawork and explosive CGI (computer-generated imagery) taking the place of dramatic action. However, whether these decisions enhance or take away from the attempt to adapt Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is questionable. Despite these moves, the film nonetheless feels lengthy, and one of the longest, static scenes, where Tom and Gatsby confront each other in the hot hotel room in New York, comes a full 90 minutes into the film. This scene, lasting over ten minutes, feels prolonged, and whilst there is a moment of physical confrontation (inserted by Luhrmann to enhance the action), on the whole, the emotional tenor is not profound enough to hold one through a long-spoken scene at this point in the film.[40] The scene is important as it exposes Tom's snobbery, Gatsby's false persona and Daisy's lack of moral courage, leading to the complete betrayal of the car crash. There are moments of humour in Fitzgerald's text – for example, at the start of the scene, Daisy talks about the man who fainted at her wedding, Biloxi, who 'made boxes – that's a fact', then stayed at Jordan's house for three weeks until they kicked him out. Jordan notes laconically, 'The day after he left Daddy died', adding, after a moment, 'there wasn't any connection' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 121). Plenty is going on in Fitzgerald's text to hold the interest, but the exposition is plodding in the film, lacking any sense of Fitzgerald's moments of humour and absurdity. Again, paradoxes and contradictions are ironed out, leaving a flattened result. Most problematic is the scene's positioning: as a serious scene, it feels climactic, the moment in which Gatsby's dream is definitively shattered, but the fact that it occurs with nearly an hour of downward trajectory still to sit through contributes to the sense of the last third of the film being over-extended.

Luhrmann, again somewhat disingenuously, claims that his film is on the short side if compared to the novel (Ohneswere 2013):

> We know for a fact that if you read the whole book or perform it that it takes seven hours [...] but we didn't have a seven-hour movie in mind. We had to do it in two. (n.p.)

This is more than a little misleading. A visually represented scene can take much longer than its description in prose takes to read (even aloud) – it may be either longer or shorter.

Another aspect of the time of the novel is how the elements of Gatsby's past are incorporated. Books allow readers to page back or forward if they get lost – this is somewhat different from the one-way trajectory of a film.

40. It should be noted, however, that many of the reviewers of Luhrmann's film who were critical of his theatrics approved of this scene, with Seitz (2013, n.p.), for example, referring to it as 'a more powerful experience than crowd scenes and CGI panoramas', Scott (2013, n.p.) writing that 'the emotional core of the film is laid bare' and French (2013, n.p.) that it is 'one scene that works well'.

Signalling of the moment in time within a film hence has to be overt: sometimes conveyed through displaying a date on the screen, or through a radically different dress, *mise-en-scène* and even often the use of colour. Once Luhrmann has established the look and feel of Nick at the sanatorium, he can return to the wood panelling and blue, snowy colours without needing to restate that this is a flashforward.

Considering Luhrmann's comments about making *The Great Gatsby* contemporary, it is interesting that his beginning presents the tale in very nostalgic tones – a black-and-white film with the lines and smudges on the print and the crackly, sentimental music of yesteryear. The aim of this seems more in keeping with a postmodern pastiche, where styles are referenced without necessarily invoking their meaning, as the overall approach to the film does not appear especially nostalgic. However, for the viewer, it momentarily reinforces a sense of something that is comfortably in the past. Not only that, but Nick looks back on his time with Gatsby – creating a double remove for us who are looking back at Nick. Polan (2013, p. 398) notes that the sanatorium scenes mean that the film, in fact, tells two separate tales and places Nick's story of Gatsby even further in the past. The effects of this can be emotionally disengaging, taking the viewer away from the present, despite Luhrmann's many contemporary touches.

An interesting aspect of the 1974 film was the choice not to use flashbacks at all, perhaps partly because the flashbacks in 1949 were deemed 'awkward and interruptive' (Atkins 1974, p. 219). This is an unusual decision considering its usefulness in film as a storytelling device, not to mention Fitzgerald's own modernist use of narration, with slippages in time and viewpoint. This decision worked against a sense of movement within the film. In the novel, Nick's retelling of Gatsby's confidences conveys the window into Gatsby's past. These reminiscences often slip into present tense and back again, as though they come back to life in the retelling: we are reminded of Gatsby's own statement: 'Can't repeat the past? [...] Why of course you can!' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 106). The same passage where Gatsby makes this statement moves from Nick saying that Gatsby 'talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something' to 'one autumn night, five years before, they had been walking down the street when the leaves were falling' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 106), then becomes more present with 'his heart beat faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own', then moves back to Nick's 'through all he said [...] I was reminded of something' (p. 107). Time is fluid; there is a sense of a desire for the past but one which is also very alive and sensually felt in the present, whereas in Clayton's film, the past is really past: as Jones (1974, p. 223) writes, 'the 1974 *Great Gatsby* is frozen in its own unity of time' suppressing the 'movement' through which Badiou argues that film makes its meaning (see ch. 4).

Considering the 1974 film's stated commitment to nostalgia, Coppola's comment when referring to the origins of Gatsby's romance with Daisy may seem strange, noting that he and Clayton were in agreement that 'we wanted to keep that period in the past as a memory rather than as a literal thing' (Rosen 1974a, p. 47). This choice goes against how real the past is for Gatsby – and should be read in light of the studio's choice to present the *entire* film as a nostalgia fest. There is no 'literal thing' (Rosen 1974, p. 47) in the film. The dislike for flashbacks seems to have been partly a personal choice of the director's, as Clayton expressed in his interview with Atkins (1974, p. 223): 'I don't like flashbacks. [...] To have a diary of somebody's life. That's a bore I think'.

The 1974 version rather tries to find other methods of revealing past events, for example, the scene where Gatsby dances with Daisy wearing his officer's uniform, in a recreation of how they first met. However, this establishes a mood of nostalgia rather than a reinvigoration of the present in Badiouian terms. Whilst Fitzgerald is a writer who can be deeply invested in the past, it is a kind of nostalgia that is incorporated into the sensual experience and openness of the self rather than a stale recreation of what Badiou might call functions of the state. The nostalgia theme of *The Great Gatsby* (1974) was strongly emphasised, as previously mentioned, by its tagline: 'Gone is the romance that was so divine' (a line not from Fitzgerald, but from the Irving Berlin song of the period, 'What'll I Do' which is used as one of the main themes in the film[41]). The desire to avoid flashbacks also resulted in the entire sequence with Cody being omitted – represented merely by a picture on the wall in Gatsby's house. This also had an impact on the audience's perception of Gatsby. We do not see the past where he was a struggling nobody, helped but also exploited and bullied by Cody. This reduces our sympathy for Gatsby – and perhaps forms a part of the perception that Redford was miscast and came across as 'already Ivy league' (Henry 1974, p. 12), as several film critics of the time noted.[42] Having said that, nonetheless, there is the indication through the voice-over near the start that the entire film is, in a personal way, retrospective (which is in keeping with its nostalgia), as Nick narrates: 'By the autumn, my mood would be very different ... I would want no more privileged glimpses into the human heart' (min. 10:08).

In contrast to the 1974 version, *The Great Gatsby* (1949) employs lengthy flashbacks, elaborating upon the sequence with Dan Cody to create more romantic tension. Cody's wife, Ella, makes a play for the young Gatsby, and

41. 'What'll I Do' was written for a musical showing in 1924, just shortly before *The Great Gatsby*'s publication in 1925 (Berlin 1923, n.p.).

42. Canby (1974, n.p.) writes for the *New York Times*, 'He looks so Ivy League it's difficult to believe he didn't prep at Choate'.

the sequence clearly establishes Gatsby as a 'boy from nowhere'. It also uses other techniques, such as newspaper headlines, to establish the passing of time. In fact, the entire film could be considered a flashback, beginning as it does with Nick and Jordan observing Gatsby's tombstone and Nick saying, 'It's been a long time, twenty years …' (min. 1:17). This is followed by a series of vignettes intended to illustrate the 1920s before honing in on the story of Gatsby following his dream, which is begun concretely with the purchase of the house in West Egg. The end of the film shows Jordan and Nick at Gatsby's graveside; however, confusingly for the viewer, this scene takes place shortly after his burial rather than 20 years later, as with the opening scene. To add to the confusion, the fashions they wear in both scenes, that is, the scene at the time of Gatsby's burial in 1928 and the scene at the start, which represents 20 years later, show them wearing clothing more typical of the 1940s.

Of all the films, it most overtly asserts the audience's presence through its concrete establishment of time relationships, but this does not serve to incorporate the audience into the film but rather to keep what they are watching at bay. The motivation for this was, as Maibaum put it, because the 1920s were viewed with opprobrium at the time.

Space

Fitzgerald's prose has a definite conceptual spatial element (see ch. 3) that was apparently little regarded until Luhrmann's version in 2013, which I will discuss later in this section. There are, of course, concrete spatial references in the novel that can be more easily depicted in a film. The book moves firmly in space between the west and east coasts of America, through the so-called valley of ashes, and between the Eggs and New York City – an aspect of travel that all the films include. Whilst conceptual elements of space may be difficult to portray, the concrete physical space of East and West Egg, New York and the valley of ashes allowed filmmakers to construct sets or use suitable locations, as production designer John Box did for *The Great Gatsby* (1974), or to concretise the descriptions through CGI as in *The Great Gatsby* (2013).

Perhaps more problematic for the films than the mansions or castles of West and East Egg was the valley of ashes. In Fitzgerald's text, this is notably not 'The Valley of Ashes' it became in many reviews but simply 'a valley of ashes' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 26) – even its naming shows how it has become more concrete than the original intention. There is an aspect of Fitzgerald's (1950) description that is fantastical:

> A fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (p. 26)

The filmic interpretation has, as with Luhrmann's 2013 version, at times been over the top. As film critic Nathan (2013, n.p.) writes, 'The Valley of Ashes, the hellish strip of slag heaps and coal-blackened workers [...] is outfitted like a Meat Loaf video'. The fact that nothing looks believably real and is overlit without any sense of mystery takes away from the depiction of the poverty and degradation of the area. The intention of the shot in Figure 6.4 is to show the progression from the greenery of East Egg through the slagheap of the valley of ashes towards New York City – however, the aerial shots add to the sense of being overwhelmed by CGI.

What also renders even these concrete spatial relationships less easily portrayed is that as a modernist text, Fitzgerald's novel represents space not only as it is viewed but as it is perceived. The theme of interior and exterior spaces, including those of the self, is continuous throughout the novel. Characters look in and out at these other spatial worlds – passengers on the train to New York City via the valley of ashes 'can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour' (Fitzgerald 1950, pp. 26–27). At Myrtle's apartment, we see through Nick's eyes (Fitzgerald 1950):

> High over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I saw him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. (p. 37)

How to film such descriptions? Only Luhrmann really gives it a try, with 21st-century cinematic tools at his disposal. Figure 6.5 shows a montage of images illustrating this sequence's progression. Filming the quoted passage above, Luhrmann shows Nick looking out at the street. Out on the street, another Nick looks back at him. This Nick is dressed for public view. The emphasis on

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FIGURE 6.4: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (2013) depicting an aerial shot of the greenery 'giving way' to the valley of ashes.

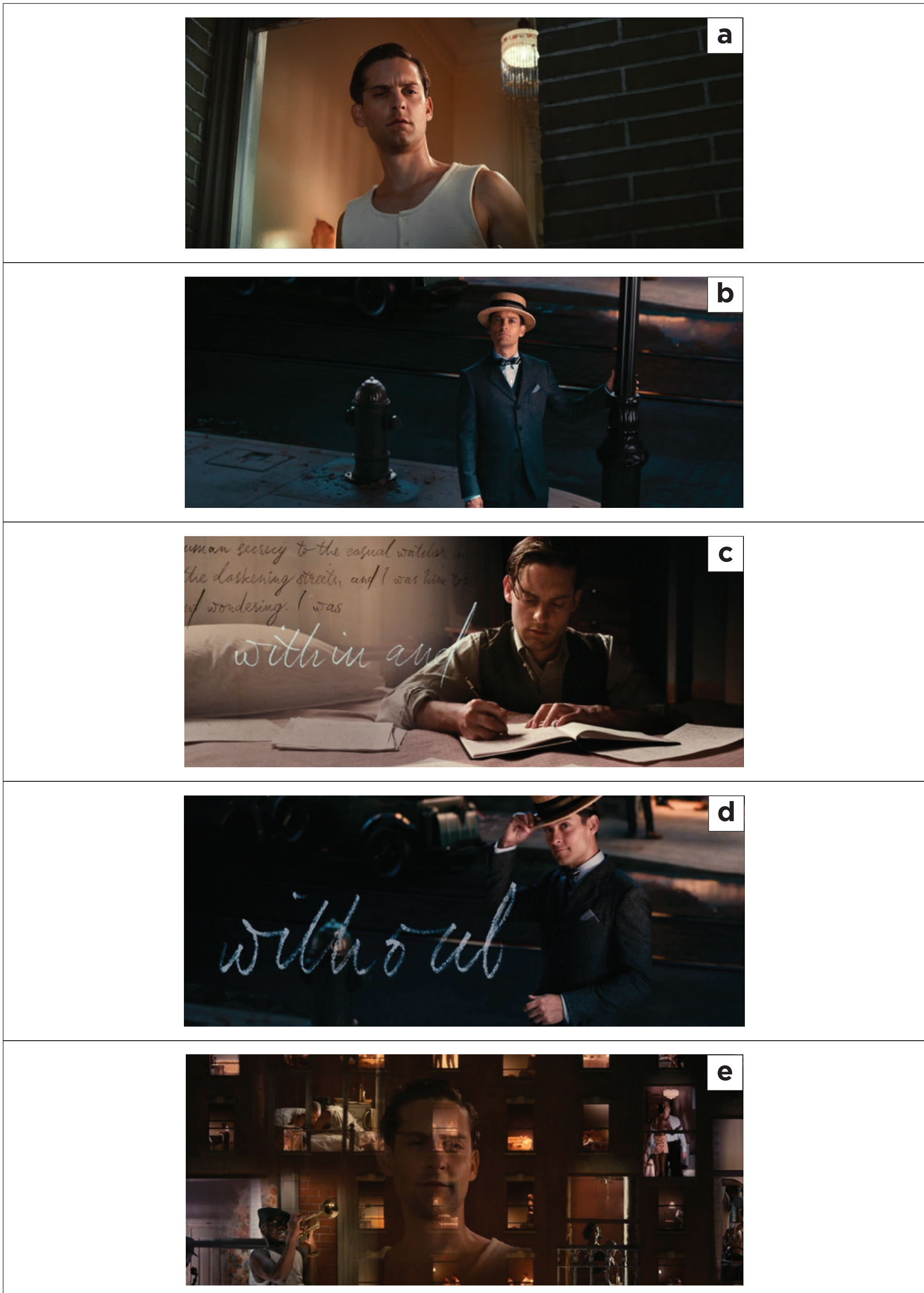

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FIGURE 6.5: Film still photographs montage from the 2013 *The Great Gatsby* (min. 20:55–21:30) depicting the sequence 'I was within and without'.

the cinematic is then taken further as we see the words Nick is writing scroll across the screen. It is notable that the inclusion of words emphasises the screen surface, treating it ‘as a veritable page onto which words are inscribed’ (Polan 2013, p. 397), taking us to a point in space outside the film, Fitzgerald’s novel. We are then moved back onto the street, where the ‘character’, Nick, tips his hat in recognition of his author, whilst words continue to scroll across the screen. This is followed by Nick superimposed against myriad ‘yellow windows’, populated by CGI with various vignettes. Dark and light palettes are used to indicate inside and outside, with the last image opening up the inside to the outside and integrating the two. In the film theatre, this sequence would have had the added spatial element of 3D.

Without arguing for the success of Luhrmann’s perhaps too straightforward representation of Fitzgerald’s words, unlike the other directors, he has clearly tried to grapple with this spatial aspect of the text, the way it enmeshes and collapses both time and space. Film critic Ehrlich (2017) notes that:

> [/]n tune with the strange vertigo of moving forwards and backwards in the same motion, few directors have evinced such a profound appreciation for how someone can be insistently modern and yet still find themselves entombed by the past. (n.p.)

In other words, Luhrmann’s spatial approach not only illustrates an aspect of the text but also ties in appropriately to the thematic concerns of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Gatsby’s desire to ‘repeat the past’ (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 106).

Earlier productions showed a more mundane use of space and possibly lacked some of the tools to do otherwise. In the 1926 version, the trailer (see *HypedFor* 2012) gives us some clues as to the visual style. It appears typical of early Hollywood production with static sets. A scene in a (not very realistic looking) forest, Gatsby’s mansion where the shot is dominated by a long staircase, affording opportunities for some movement as partygoers rush up and down (see Figure 6.6), a shot of Gatsby’s swimming pool – again, the sense of space comes from the movement of the extras, jumping into the pool or running up the stairs.

These shots are lively and full of movement – in some ways seem less flat and static than those of the 1949 version – however, it is a trailer, and these may represent highlights in action.

The 1949 version also suffered from the difficulty of being almost entirely filmed on set. This gave a ‘stagey’ feel to the *mise-en-scène*. The potential for meaning within the claustrophobic was not plumbed (Dixon 2003, p. 292), and it was criticised for ‘indifferent’ lighting and framing (p. 291). In short, space was not used in particularly imaginative ways. However, there are some evocative moments, such as when Gatsby leaves his decrepit,

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FIGURE 6.6: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (1929) depicting the staircase in Gatsby's mansion.

recently acquired new house and vanishes into the mist, and the swimming pool scenes near the end where Gatsby sits isolated and alone at the far side of the pool. The movement of characters through the sets can be lively, albeit in a stagey way. For example, windows and doors are, at times, effectively used. Characters look out and in; Gatsby overhears Daisy's betrayal standing at the other side of her door, and Wilson approaches the closed internal doors before entering to shoot Gatsby, suggesting an invasion into the safe space inside that Daisy has never left. The 1949 version foregrounds themes of class, propriety and inhibition – the spatial intersections effectively illustrate these. It is telling that Myrtle is killed because she escapes her confinement and runs out onto the open road, whereas, in this adaptation, Daisy tends to be closeted within.

Perhaps least effective were the static tableau effects in the 1974 version, which did little to enhance the storyline or themes and seemed intent on maximising the display of garments and accessories only. These Clayton alternates with uncomfortably tight close-ups of faces during confessional scenes, such as Myrtle describing how she met Tom (see Figure 6.7) and Daisy saying her confessional piece about giving birth. As seen in Figure 6.7, sparkle filters brought a hard and shiny brightness into these and other intimate scenes (Giannetti 1975, p. 18), further reducing depth in favour of the surface effect.

Thus, with the conceptual spatial elements of Fitzgerald's text not explored, and the elimination of flashbacks affecting the movement of the

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FIGURE 6.7: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (1974) portraying a tight close-up shot of the character Myrtle.

film narrative, the effect was to increase the stasis and reduce rather than increase emotional involvement. Whilst there is movement in the camera, which is 'constantly gliding' (Giannetti 1975, p. 18), as will be further discussed in Chapter 8, even this movement appears independent of the movement of events. Only the final journey of the hearse carrying Gatsby through the valley of ashes adds a stately sense of movement and works well as a touching endpiece to Gatsby's trajectory.

Sound

Dialogue and voice-over

The contribution of sonic elements to the meaning and organisation of a film is a key consideration. Elliott (2008, p. 3) rightly wrote that 'the tendency is to treat books as though they are purely words and to treat films as though they are purely images'. This is particularly pertinent when looking at an adaptation of the writings of Fitzgerald, an author whose prose style has long been the subject of scholarship. Daniel (2013) states that:

> I have my own opinions on former film versions, and I think they all fail for the same reason: Fitzgerald's language has already done all the cinematic work for the actors, directors, set designers and producers. (n.p.)

If Badiou's fidelity must be individually realised, Daniel's comment suggests there may be no room for this process to occur. Throughout the history

of the adaptations, it appears that the scripting and delivery of lines ill-served the process of reactivating a fidelity. In 1926, one critic thought that the 'intertitles were both excessive and badly written' with 'bad English [and] inappropriate wording' (Cohen 1974, p. 139). Numerous intertitles would have disrupted the flow of action. Whilst this version may have had the virtue of being the least inclined to reify Fitzgerald's prose, the connection with the original may have become too tenuous.

In 1949, the fast pace of this less lengthy film (in comparison to the later adaptations) required a significant amount of voice-over to spell out rather than enact plot points. To give one example, when Gatsby and his henchmen stop at the gas station, they comment on the nearby sign for the long-vanished oculist, Doctor TJ Eckleberg: 'Did you notice that thing? Them eyes. They get you' (just in case the audience has not noticed the sign sufficiently!) 'Like God bought himself a pair of eyeglasses', says the one man and, 'They follow you', says the other. Gatsby's view is more cynical – 'They're painted that way' (min. 4:53–5:10). The eyes are used very moralistically in the film, which is in keeping with the way the film presents the *The Great Gatsby* theme. They also form an opportunity for characterisation, to show Gatsby's 'toughness' at this point and to create unease in the audience at his inability to recognise or honour this manifestation of fate. Whilst the dialogue thus works harder than it may seem at first glance, this kind of explicit exposition creates a lack of tension and makes the film seem wordy.

For the most part, the language used in *The Great Gatsby* (1949) speaks to the Hollywood style of the 1940s rather than the more refined language of Fitzgerald. As part of the film's intro, the voice-over spells out: 'Out of the twenties and all that they were came Jay Gatsby who built a dark empire for himself because he carried a dream in his heart [...]' (min. 3:59). At times, the urge to claim some of Fitzgerald's dialogue resulted in an odd confluence of Fitzgerald's prose with what can best be described as Hollywood hack writing, loaded with cliché and conventional sentiments. For example, Gatsby says to Nick, 'You don't make much money do you?' (min. 25:07), a line taken directly from the novel (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 80), but then follows it up with, 'Every man has his price, Mr Carraway, what's yours?' (min. 25:42). In contrast, the novel illustrates something of Gatsby's delicacy, with him hesitantly suggesting (Fitzgerald 1950):

> I thought you didn't, if you'll pardon my – you see, I carry on a little business on the side, a sort of side line, you understand. And I thought that if you don't make very much – (p. 80)

Equally, in the novel, this suggestion happens after Gatsby has met with Nick two or three times already, whereas, in the 1949 film, it happens at the first meeting, making Gatsby's approach even cruder. Where there is an attempt at the inclusion of Fitzgerald's prose in this film, such as when

Daisy (not Jordan, as it is in the book) says, 'You know, I adore large parties – they're so intimate' (min. 54:42), the placement seems merely to signal the connection with Fitzgerald's text as a canonical work, not being in any other way 'necessary'.

One of the difficulties in adapting the novel was how to include these famously recognisable sentences. Part of each film's claim to partake in *The Great Gatsby*'s (1925) cultural value, these recognisable textual elements may have a jarring rather than connecting effect. For example, Daisy's 'beautiful little fool' speech crops up in all the surviving films. In the novel, at the end of the lunch with the nerve-jangling ringing telephone of Tom's mistress, Daisy tells the story to Nick of how she gave birth and says (Fitzgerald 1950):

> She was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool. I hope she'll be a beautiful little fool.' (p. 22)

Shortly after, she says cynically, '"I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything" [...] She laughed with thrilling scorn. "Sophisticated – God, I'm sophisticated!"' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 22). Nick realises that her particular kind of brokenness, her damage, is, in fact, part of her claim to the elite society she inhabits – it was 'as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 22).

Once again, we find filmmakers ironing out the contradictions of Fitzgerald's conception and screenwriters embellishing or seeking to clarify Daisy's utterance. In the 1949 *The Great Gatsby*, this scene occurs just as Nick discovers that Tom has a mistress, and his moral certainty is momentarily discomforted. Tom leaves the house with the obvious intent of seeing his mistress, upsetting everyone. Daisy hugs the child, saying:

> You know what I said when she was born? I said dear Heaven please make her grow up to be a beautiful little fool, that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool (min. 34:39).

This is said whilst clutching her daughter to her. To which Jordan replies, 'You try very, very hard to make people think you're one, don't you Daisy?' to which Daisy almost nods (min. 34:46). Reification thus occurs not only through the visuals but through the dialogue of the films, with Fitzgerald's ambiguities and contradictions smoothed out and explained.

Placement is as important as embellishment. With awkward timing, the well-known reference to the new world that the Dutch sailors set eyes on (linked in the novel to the green light) at the end of *The Great Gatsby*

appears a bit earlier in the 1974 film. The dialogue is given chiefly to Nick as he speaks to Gatsby. Awkwardly rewritten as: ‘Can you imagine what this old island must have looked like to those Dutch sailors when they first saw it? Fresh green – like a new world’ (min. 1:54:55), it appears almost randomly at the point when Nick still believes Gatsby has, without remorse, caused the death of Myrtle. Again, it appears there was a desire to reference a canonical passage from the novel, even if the placement in the film undermines its meaning.

Although the 1974 film thus wipes away some of the complexities of Fitzgerald’s text, this version, on the whole, does a better job than earlier versions of preserving Fitzgerald’s narrative tone through the dialogue and voice-over, whilst not always directly quoting the text. Voice-over has a functional use in terms of giving background information or explaining time shifts, but in these films it is also a way of preserving ‘poetic passages’ from the novel (Giannetti 1975, p. 16) and establishing a point of view. However, once again, in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) Nick’s first-person narration is not quite what it seems. His version of events relies on retelling what he has been told by others, such as Jordan and Gatsby himself, and is ‘coloured by his own nostalgic perception of them’ (Griggs 2016, p. 198). At times the narration shifts to a second-person point of view, as when describing Gatsby’s smile (Dixon 2003, p. 299). Thus, Nick’s narration has elements of modernist unreliability, and his viewpoint on the other characters shifts throughout the novel. This is an example of the openness of Fitzgerald’s approach.

In *The Great Gatsby* (1974), significant amounts of the narration taken almost directly from Fitzgerald’s text are reproduced in the voice-over given to Nick. This works reasonably well. The thoughtful, internal quality of a voice-over, beautifully spoken by Sam Waterstone as Nick Carraway, lends itself more appropriately to the elaborate textual language of Fitzgerald’s prose than when this prose is recast as dialogue. For example, in the film, as Nick leaves the first lunch at the Buchanans’, we hear his voice saying, ‘It had been a golden afternoon, and I remember having the familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer’ (min. 10:00). As he leaves, Tom puts his hand on Daisy’s neck as the green light flashes conspicuously next to the dock:

> By the autumn my mood would be very different … I would want no more privileged glimpses into the human heart – only my neighbour Gatsby would be exempt from my reaction. Gatsby, who represented everything for which I had an unaffected scorn – for Gatsby turned out alright in the end – it was what preyed on him, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams (min. 10:08–10:40).

At this point, Nick is at his own jetty and Gatsby appears, in a dinner suit, with a flourish of not very 1920s music.

To compare with Fitzgerald's text reveals some of the strategies of the screenwriter. The majority of words are taken from the introductory section of the novel (Fitzgerald 1950):

> When I came back from the East last autumn, I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. 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 personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the 'creative temperament' – it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No – Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and shortwinded elations of men. (p. 8)

The line that Coppola has Nick begin with, 'I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 10), in fact, occurs later, but still within the introductory few pages in which we are introduced to Nick and his rather stiff and proper way of seeing the world. It makes sense to move these references in the film to after introducing some of the characters, and Fitzgerald's text is seamlessly abbreviated and knitted together in a new way. The problem lies with the very first words: 'It had been a golden afternoon' (min. 10:00). Whilst these words are not from Fitzgerald's text, they sound quite convincingly as though they might have been – a quick search reveals Fitzgerald, after all, uses the word 'golden' five times in *The Great Gatsby*,[43] although this particular phrase never appears. Thus, the screenwriter has done a convincing job, unlike those of 1949. However, the phrase itself seems utterly out of place, coming as it does after a lunch which, although it began pleasantly with the reunion of Daisy and Nick, progressed to reveal disgraceful white supremacist sentiments, the unpleasantness of Tom's affair and Daisy's unhappiness. One can only conclude that a kind of nostalgically-fed awe at the large mansions, silverware and deferential servants was meant somehow to override any feelings of disquiet amongst the audience. Straightaway, Nick seems misguided and operates as less of a moral compass for the viewer, which is problematic as we must agree with his ultimate assessment of Gatsby. What is notable here is how a shaky conception, based on nostalgia, has coloured many of the small choices within the film.

43. Twice in relation to Jordan's arm/shoulder (Fitzgerald 1950, pp. 44, 77, 91, 115, 144), once as a description of billowy clouds, once in relation to Daisy as 'the golden girl' and once referring to the 'golden and silver slippers' of Daisy and her fellow debutantes in their youth.

The 1974 film thus relies profoundly on voice-over at the start. However, Desmond and Hawkes (2006, p. 247) note that the voice-over is almost dropped after the first quarter of an hour, and 'we forget we are seeing events through (Nick's) eyes, events that change him as a character'. Stoddart agrees, noting that the absence of Nick's narratorial 'gaze' causes the viewer to misperceive Daisy as the victim of Gatsby's obsession (Stoddart 2004, p. 110).

In 2013 there was a similarly frank embrace of the voice-over – somewhat less successfully rendered by actor Tobey Maguire 'talking and talking and talking' (Morris 2013, n.p.). The conceit that Nick is speaking from a sanatorium and therefore has a dry and cracked tone of voice eventually becomes a bit tiresome. As film critic McCarthy (2013, n.p.) writes, 'the final stretch is slowed by too much commentary by Nick, who has become a bit of a bore by now'. Also, Luhrmann is prone to repetition and, for example, Nick repeats the line, previously explored with greater depth during the scenes at Myrtle's apartment, 'Once again, I was within and without', when standing outside in the garden during the tea party at his house (min. 55:58). Clayton is not immune from this tendency either, repeating the 'beautiful little fool' line later in the film – Daisy tells her child, 'beautiful little fools can wear whatever they like', toward the end of the 1974 film (min. 2:00:46).

Bringing Fitzgerald's words into the dialogue, or using the dialogue from the novel verbatim, poses a different kind of challenge. What reads beautifully and meaningfully on the page does not always speak well or convincingly, even with the best actors. The context and set-up for the dialogue are also important. Dixon (2003, p. 289) notes 'Fitzgerald's reliance on dialogue to create mood and atmosphere' and Atkins (1974, p. 217) the 'evocative word-patterns' and musicality of his prose; the attempts to capture this on film seem to be patchy. In 1974, for example, in the first party scene, characters each speak in turn Fitzgerald's words as they sit around the table – rather more like a 1970s dinner party theatre piece. As Maslin (1977) puts it:

> When Clayton shoots a tableful of guests sitting primly at a party, each one carefully enunciating his or her remark in turn, he demolishes the whole feeling of an era in only fifteen seconds. (p. 264)

We see Fitzgerald's words used interchangeably as dialogue or voice-over without always much concern for the nuances of how we conceptualise the read versus the spoken. The use of film medium allows for a greater opening up of choices that means that words do not stand alone – sometimes it feels as if this has been forgotten in the rush to quote Fitzgerald.

Using Fitzgerald's prose verbatim in the film has varying effects. However, the overall effect is clearly different than experienced in the novel,

as the accompanying visual and sound choices add to or divert the meaning in ways deemed suitable for the plot and aims of the film. When text is transposed purely to invoke Fitzgerald's novel as a text of the American canon, it can come across as disconnected from the overall meaning and often jars with other stylistics of the screenplay.

Music and soundtrack

The emphasis on dialogue and voice-over in the films, representing opportunities for the films to ostensibly 'connect' with Fitzgerald's text, should make one ponder the impact of the films' musical arrangements. Is it that, as film critic Morris writes, 'it's obvious the novel is meant to be the soundtrack' (2013, n.p.)? Whilst Fitzgerald quotes snippets of popular tunes in his texts, this 'unheard music', as MacLean (2016, p. 122) describes it, may not conjure up sound for the reader, although it does call attention to the lyrics. Hearing these tunes can enhance the mood still further. Music, with all its allusiveness, may allow for more open-ended meanings in the spirit of Badiou to be called up.

Music is another area in which the film's choices give plenty of clues as to how they were conceived and the (at times) limiting conditions under which they were made. The soundtrack offered another chance to invoke the 1920s – nostalgically or authentically – or to show a relative indifference to the decade. Fitzgerald's in-text references to the music of his time display his youthful sensibilities. In the novel, Fitzgerald refers to a popular song of the time, 'The Love Nest' (perhaps contemporary readers might recall the lyrics: 'Ever comes the question old/ Shall we build for pride/ Or shall brick and mortar hold/ Warmth and love inside?' [Hirsch, Harbach & Mandel 1920, n.p.]), and quotes lines from 'Ain't We Got Fun' (Egan, Kahn & Whiting 1921, n.p.): 'One things sure and nothing's surer/ the rich get richer and the poor get – children' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 92). These locate his text in the early 1920s.

In 1949, songs of the 1920s were played with a 1940s 'big-band' sound in the party scenes (Atkins 1974, p. 218). Atkins (1974, p. 226) also objects to the 'music director's original love theme, performed at the piano by Klipspringer when the novel indicated that he should be playing, "Ain't We Got Fun"'. The 1949 version built sentiment, rather than referencing the more hard-edged lines of 'Ain't We Got Fun' that seem to suit *The Great Gatsby*'s thematic content rather well. Again, we see the pressures of the studio system at the time. This film also reflects the norms of the time in utilising emotive non-diegetic background music far more than the later films. For a contemporary audience, this can seem intrusive.

The 1974 film is the most effective of the adaptations in balancing the musical score with the spoken word, at least at the start, where the musical and lyrical words of Fitzgerald are transposed into Nick's voice-over.

This voice-over, however, diminishes as the film progresses. Sound effects and background music were used far more sparingly but impactfully. Much of the music is diegetic, although 'ghostly [...] snatches' of song haunt the halls of Gatsby's mansion (Atkins 1974, p. 221). Although sixteen songs of the period were used in the film, the tunes 'What'll I Do' and 'Ain't We Got Fun' stand out and summarise the two key counterpoints of emotion.

However, despite its catchy tune, the appearance of 'Ain't We Got Fun' is minor, and we do not properly hear the words except over the closing credits, before the tune segues again into a few chords from 'What'll I Do'. Clayton very much favours 'What'll I Do', which becomes a theme tune for the film, with its lyrics clearly audible: 'What'll I Do when you are far away/ and I am blue, what'll I do. When I'm alone, with only dreams of you that won't come true, what'll I do' (Berlin 1923, n.p.). This reveals Clayton's conception as it is a choice that emphasises the romantic quest theme that is foregrounded in this film. The inclusion of not just sound but lyrics from a key theme tune, and their repetition throughout the film, gives an overwhelming sense of the mood that Clayton wishes to convey. Publicly released in 1924, this song does not feature in the novel. The words come through clearly at several points in the film; for example, in the opening credits, the words, 'Gone is the romance that was so divine', are clearly heard, setting the stage for what is to come.

The attempt to recreate an authentic 1920s sound was painstaking and largely successful.[44] Clayton chose from numerous recordings from the early 1920s and insisted that 'as many old-timers of jazz and popular music as were alive and available' were used (Atkins 1974, p. 226), and Riddle ensured that they were 'orchestrated as they would have been fifty years ago'. This quest for authenticity was largely successful in creating an overarching mood. Unlike other nostalgic anachronisms, which serve to limit meaning, music allows for a greater degree of allusiveness within the present. One could, however, argue that using 'What'll I Do' as a theme tune emphasises only the romantic quest of Gatsby. This was in keeping with Clayton's interpretation and hence effectively underscores that, but the approach as a whole is limiting.

Where the 1974 film more definitely falters is the inclusion of the *The Great Gatsby* 'theme' that occurs each time we see Gatsby appear on his own. Quite the opposite of Clayton's painstaking recreation of an authentic 1920s sound, this theme is more reminiscent of a James Bond film. It seems unlikely this was wholly Clayton's choice, given his perfectionistic approach to recreating the period. Yet again, we see the director forced to compromise and consider the many power players involved in making a film: in this case, the music director, Riddle.

44. According to Atkins (1974, p. 224), Merrick won the battle with producer Evans on this occasion, allowing for the inclusion of songs of the 1920s period.

For the 2013 version, the music was conceived of as a selling point for the film. Luhrmann gave numerous interviews claiming that he was recreating Fitzgerald's aims in his inclusion of popular music and that the film's contemporary tracks would make 'it feel like it felt to read in 1925' (*The Guardian* 2013, min. 3:46). Despite the supposed centrality of the film's use of contemporary music, Luhrmann himself oversold this inclusion. What happens instead is more of a postmodern mélange. Near the film's start, Nick's voice-over describes the summer of 1922. As he speaks, we see grainy, coloured news footage that might suggest an attempt at creating a documentary-style evocation of a historical moment. However, as Nick's narration pauses, we hear the sound of contemporary music come in – the words, 'Blood stains the Colosseum floor', stand out. This surprises and subverts the expectations created by the documentary effects, but, as will be shown, the trick does not have much staying power.

This was not for lack of thought given to the musical content. Echoing Luhrmann's words, Anton Monsted, *The Great Gatsby*'s executive music supervisor and co-producer, states (Trakin 2013):

> We wanted a blend, a weave [...] Baz and I call it the 'sliding doors' between music that is very true to the period of the movie's setting in 1922 and the music of today. (n.p.)

Noting that jazz was considered adventurous in 1922, they had the 'idea to fuse traditional jazz with modern-day hip-hop, sometimes in the middle of a song' (Trakin 2013, n.p.). According to Trakin (2013), 'that hybrid comes across most clearly on retro-modern songs that fuse old and new like will.i.am's 'Bang Bang', Fergie, Q Tip and GoonRock's "A Little Party Never Killed Nobody (All We Got)", both songs that fuel one of the film's two gala party sequences' (n.p.). However, to the less well initiated, the effects of any 'traditional' jazz inclusion are so subtle as to be unnoticeable, especially as this does not appear to be carried through with other contemporary tracks played in the film, such as Lana Del Rey and Rick Nowel's 'Young and Beautiful' and Florence + the Machine's 'Over the Lover'.

According to Monsted, they did not want to use old recordings 'because they're crackly, mono, and hard to make believable' (Trakin 2013, n.p.). This led to them working with Bryan Ferry, whose 'jazz arrangements' were intended to 'evoke the sound of Fitzgerald's world and celebrate the sound of the '20s' (n.p.). The aim not to be straightforwardly nostalgic is laudable, but Ferry's more languid jazz style does not evoke the jaunty cynicism of 1920s hits such as the iconic 'Ain't We Got Fun'. More importantly, it is simply not that noticeable. For example, during the first party sequence, the music fades in and out, relegated to the background each time Nick speaks. Once again, we find that Luhrmann's claims are in excess of the facts. The film sought a contemporary sound and achieved this, but the

elements intended to suggest the 1920s are elusive. With a broken connection, the ability to evoke a 'trace' that could lead to a fresh reconceptualisation of the 'truth' of the text is missing. The claims to a connection were perhaps too far subjugated to the commercial imperatives that the choice of contemporary music appears to speak to, and the music itself too far relegated to the background.

In the end, the 2013 soundtrack has more of the effect of the non-diegetic background music in the 1949 film – enhancing the mood a little but not setting the overall tone in the way that the key wistful tunes in the 1974 adaptation did. MacLean (2016, p. 120) notes that Luhrmann includes an underscore that is 'evocative of the utopian film scores of the 1930s and 1940s gold age of Hollywood cinema'. As MacLean goes on to say, it is this underscore which is nostalgic (p. 124) – a kind of music that (Flinn 1992, p. 91) 'reveals glimpses of a better, more unified world', 'unveils universal truths or essences' and captures 'the sense of lost integrity and grandeur'. In this case, the contradictions do not seem to add to the power but rather seem to mute each other. We need to return to directorial intention to discover why this might be so when contradiction in Badiou's terms and Fitzgerald's prose so often appears to enhance the interest and complexity. If the contemporary music is purely to '"amp up" the sexiness of the Gatsby myth for a new generation' (MacLean 2016, p. 123), commercially driven and superficial aims work against the embracing of a text in the spirit of Badiou's fidelity.

What dominates the 2013 *The Great Gatsby* in terms of the sound stage, instead, is Nick's continual voice-over. This is not to say that Fitzgerald's words or lyricism dominated, but rather what asserts itself is the style of Maguire's reading: his shaky, cracking voice establishes the key tone of the film and, as it does not change throughout (because Nick is telling the story from his sanatorium), the feeling is eventually too uniform to engage the emotions.

■ Openness in characterisation

With expectations abounding about the key characters, and big studio budgets requiring big-name stars, directors had more latitude with the minor characters: notably, Owl Eyes and Klipspringer, who, through their reactions to Gatsby, are key to our perception of him as a character. Owl Eyes and Klipspringer can remain insubstantial and ambiguous in ways that Gatsby and Daisy cannot on the big screen. As such, they introduce and keep something valuable in the film adaptations by preserving a role that cannot be foreclosed. Mr Gatz, another minor character, also symbolises something unreconcilable between the ideas of modernity and 19th-century ideals of self-improvement and progress.

The character of Owl Eyes is somewhat mysterious and ambiguous. In Badiou's terms, he may form a part of what operates to keep Fitzgerald's meaning fresh and vital – inconsistency and something which cannot be neatly summarised or put into categories. What becomes clear is that he is somehow on Gatsby's side. He appears at the first of Gatsby's parties that Nick attends, somewhat drunk and unsteadily admiring Gatsby's books in the library. The uncut and unopened books are viewed with pleasure by Owl Eyes: 'What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop too – didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 47). When Owl Eyes says about the library, 'It fooled me' (p. 47), he means he thought it would be entirely fake, rather than that he was fooled by the appearance of books that were not actually read: 'I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard'. It is hard, if not impossible, to know quite how to take him – and equally difficult to categorise him.

Toward the end of this party, there is a car wreck that emphasises the increasing chaos and disintegration of the party. Owl Eyes appears getting out of the car in the company of a death-like man. Nick narrates that Owl Eyes is 'pleasant' and 'puzzled' by the situation (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 54) and the lost wheel: 'The fact was infinitely astonishing to him – and I recognized first the unusual quality of wonder and then the man' (p. 55). This will be echoed in Gatsby's 'capacity for wonder', referenced in the final few paragraphs of the novel (p. 171). This again suggests a kind of confusion, doubleness and openness in characterisation that links to Fitzgerald's modernist qualities. Comically mistaken for the car's driver, Owl Eyes does little to clear up this misconception. As Gatsby shows Daisy his mansion, Owl Eyes becomes another agitating, disturbing influence that disrupts the splendour (shortly before they bump into Klipspringer, who performs a similar role). Nick narrates: 'As Gatsby closed the door of "the Merton College Library" I could have sworn I heard the owl-eyed man break into ghostly laughter' (p. 88).

Throughout the party scene, Owl Eyes creates a sense of mystery by displaying almost the opposite kind of reaction to what might be expected. He is equally out of key with the world at Gatsby's funeral, the only 'friend' to attend Gatsby's funeral besides Nick and Gatsby's father (Fitzgerald 1950):

> Owl Eyes spoke to me by the gate. 'I couldn't get to the house,' he remarked.
>
> 'Neither could anybody else.'
>
> 'Go on!' He started. 'Why, my God! they used to go there by the hundreds.'
>
> He took off his glasses and wiped them again outside and in.
>
> 'The poor son-of-a-bitch,' he said. (p. 166)

Once again, it is clear that in some mysterious way, Owl Eyes supports and appreciates what Gatsby stands for. His owl-eyed spectacles seem to link

him to the gigantic Doctor TJ Eckleberg billboard, a symbol that is repeated in each of the films. Like the billboard (which will be further discussed in the next chapter), Owl Eyes is ambiguous – apparently connected to innocence and wonder, but also to death and judgement. He cannot be categorised because of the amorality of his support for Gatsby. How this uncategorisable character is interpreted and depicted within the adaptations is telling.

In *The Great Gatsby* (1949), Owl Eyes appears, very briefly, at the party as a kind of support to Daisy and Gatsby's liaison (rather than, as in the novel, at the first party where only Nick and Jordan attend). Daisy asks Gatsby, 'Isn't there someplace we can be alone in this great big house?' (min. 58:37) and they go into the library. At this point, their relationship is light-hearted; Daisy views it as a fun affair rather than something serious, as she hesitates when Gatsby asserts that she 'never loved' Tom. This conversation is interrupted as they become aware of Owl Eyes at the top of some moveable steps. In this film, Owl Eyes retains his sense of humour and some of the mystery, saying, 'I got up here all right, but I don't seem able to get down' (min. 59:27). He comments on Shakespeare as 'exquisite' but does not make his perplexing comments about the uncut books. Seeing them together, he says he 'won't say a word'.

As Owl Eyes leaves the room, he bumps into Tom Buchanan outside. Tom has been blatantly flirting with twin women. He describes his affair with Myrtle to Nick as, 'Just for laughs you know', saying that he 'gets a lot more restless these days' (min. 56:17). The emphasis on his more extreme philandering behaviour allows the viewer to minimise Daisy's moral indiscretion. Owl Eyes tells Tom not to go in (as he attempts to take the twins in there) because of '*l'amour*' (min. 1:00:36), definitively emphasising that Daisy is having her own romantic moment. Tom continues trying to make an assignation with the twins, asking them to meet him tomorrow, and Owl Eyes, swaying with his wine glass, says acidly, 'I'll go there and wait for you' (min. 1:00:47). There is laughter, but Tom's suspicions are then aroused as he sees Daisy and Gatsby coming out of the library together. The painting on the wall behind them shows a woman with a dropped neckline, a way of suggesting what has been happening in the room during this time of censorship (see Figure 6.8).

Thus, there is retained a sense that Owl Eyes is on Gatsby's side and that he is a quirky and somewhat mysterious character. He is given an extended set piece which is fairly effective. His unexpected presence adds something good, conveying humour, an important element in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and mystery. However, the scene with the wrecked car is excluded, and he also does not appear at the graveside – which has become, in this version, a moralistic moment where Nick and Jordan comment on Gatsby's poor choices. Some of the potential power of this character is hence lost.

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FIGURE 6.8: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (1949) depicting the character Tom seeing Daisy and Gatsby leaving the room.

In 1974, scenes with Tom Ewell as Owl Eyes were filmed but were not included in the final cut. The reason given by Clayton was that 'we do not have a short picture' (Houston 1974a, p. 79). Clayton also noted, with his typical perfectionism, that he was sad to cut the car crash, however, it was the 'only scene where none of the principals are present' (Houston 1974, p. 79) (this is not entirely true – as Nick was observing). The effects of Owl Eyes removal may be hard to gauge, but one can guess. Clayton's use of harsh lighting and extreme close-ups removes an aspect of mystery and otherworldliness in favour of the concrete, tactile and solidly reified.

In 2013, Owl Eyes is once again robbed of his full impact, although there is a scene with him in the library. Because Luhrmann chose to abbreviate the ending (once again, length had become an issue), Gatsby's funeral is not shown. Owl Eyes appears at the party and at the crash scene. The question is, does his appearance add anything? Unlike in the 1949 version, in 2013, Owl Eyes is placed in the first party, which Daisy does not attend, in the same position as in the novel. Nick and Jordan fall into the library whilst joking about Gatsby, at which point, from up the circular stairs, Owl Eyes drops a book saying, 'You won't find him. This house and

everything in it is all part of an elaborate disguise'. When Jordan asserts that she's met Gatsby, Owl Eyes asks, 'Which one? The prince? The spy? The murderer? I cannot find anyone who knows anything real about Mr Gatsby'. As they ask what is the point of the Gatsby parties, Owl Eyes joins them, looking out at the party from the window, saying, 'Oh that, my dear, is the question' (min. 26:26–27:13). It's not one that Owl Eyes appears to have the answer to. There is none of the humour that would be possible in this scene. Owl Eyes concretises the mystery of Gatsby rather than contributing to it. The music immediately cuts in with the words, 'Are you ready?' and 'A little party never killed nobody'.

There is the desire of Luhrmann throughout not to lose touch with the fact that the party is continuing. There are a couple of somewhat jarring quick cuts to the party during their conversation, and as Owl Eyes questions what the party is for, the camera cuts back to the party in question with several more scenes. After a few shots of the party, we see that Nick and Jordan are now back in the party outside and dancing. Owl Eyes appears just once more – as Nick tries to leave the party, he passes by the wreckage of the motor car, which forms a major element in Fitzgerald's description of the party. In this case, it is barely noticeable. We hear a muffled thud, then see the wreck for just a second with a crestfallen Owl Eyes standing at the top of the vehicle. However, there is an immediate cutaway to Jordan waving from her car (you can already see her at the back of the car crash shot). Hence the crash scene scarcely registers. We see her shouting to Nick, 'Come and see me! We'll have tea next week – I'm in the phone book' (min. 32:56). The wider shot again shows the crash, but our eyes are led to Nick, who turns toward the waving Jordan leaving to the right of the screen. Nick is focused entirely on Jordan and, in the following shots, mirrors her *joie de vivre*.

Little to nothing is seen of the death-like man. This cutting is likely intentional, either to keep the viewer's focus on the growing Nick–Jordan relationship or to emphasise his blindness to the signals of destruction (just as he does not register when a hard-faced man calls Gatsby to the phone a little earlier in the scene). Nonetheless, the effect is the same on the viewer – the crash has no emotional impact, and the elements of horror and increasing chaos that Fitzgerald effectively evokes through this disturbance are absent.

From Luhrmann's handling of Owl Eyes in the film, one can extrapolate that he is uncomfortable with the ambiguities the character requires. He is, rather, given a solid narrative function (emphasising the mystique around Gatsby) and little else. This seems pointless as the mystery around Gatsby's identity has already been emphasised in several ways before this scene.

Klipspringer is an even more minor but memorable character. His function is to illustrate an attitude of exploitation towards those who are

foolish enough to be lavish with their wealth, as Gatsby is. As Nick narrates, when naming the many large and small visitors to Gatsby's parties, 'A man named Klipspringer was there so often and so long that he became known as "the boarder" – I doubt if he had any other home' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 61). He has occupied Gatsby's mansion and, although on the surface apparently awkward and 'embarrassed' (p. 91) is, in fact, quite uninhibited in the way in which he takes advantage of Gatsby's generosity, giving us, again, a sense of contradiction. When Gatsby shows Daisy around his mansion for the first time, Nick narrates (Fitzgerald 1950):

> We went upstairs, through period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers, through dressing rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths – intruding into one chamber where a dishevelled man in pyjamas was doing liver exercises on the floor. It was Mr Klipspringer, the 'boarder'. I had seen him wandering hungrily about the beach that morning. (p. 88)

Klipspringer, dishevelled, hungry and liverishly unwell, pops up in the luxury of Gatsby's apartment as a manifestation from the subconscious, a sign that all is not well beneath the beauty and ease.

Somewhat later in this sequence, Gatsby tells Klipspringer to play the piano so that he and Daisy can dance – although Klipspringer first protests he is sleeping, then that he does not play well, then that he is out of practice (Fitzgerald 1950, pp. 91–92). He is eventually ordered into playing and chooses to play first 'The Love Nest' and then 'Ain't We Got Fun', contemporary popular tunes. Here Gatsby appears to have the upper hand on his sponge of a guest, but the final scene with Klipspringer does not evidence this. He calls the mansion, initially reluctant to even give his name, and Nick assumes that he is calling to find out when Gatsby's funeral is. When he is evasive, Nick presses him (Fitzgerald 1950):

> What I called up about was a pair of shoes I left there. I wonder if it'd be too much trouble to have the butler send them on. You see they're tennis shoes and I'm sort of helpless without them. (p. 160)

Nick hangs up on him. Once again, Klipspringer's demeanour is 'nervous' and frightened (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 160) rather than bullish, but his selfishness is none the less egregious for that. His lack of scruples is grotesquely comic but also demonstrates something darker, as one of those who 'preyed' on Gatsby (p. 8).

In the 1949 *The Great Gatsby*, Klipspringer loses all of his narrative function. He becomes a piano-playing member of Gatsby's *coterie*, playing music deemed more suitable to the 1940s, and is deferential to Gatsby, who served with him in the war. He tells Nick about Gatsby's service (this is emphasised, creating more sympathy for Gatsby with an audience just coming out of WWII), how he lost Daisy whilst he was abroad and how Gatsby met Lupus (the Wolfshiem character). He is merely a narrator of the

moments Nick was not present for, losing any sense of his original purpose in the text.

Klipspringer retains more of the role he has in the novel in *The Great Gatsby* (1974). Again he is told to play the piano whilst Gatsby shows off his house to Daisy, this time playing 1921's 'Ain't We Got Fun' rather than the music director's composition of the 1949 film. Some of the moments where he abuses Gatsby's hospitality remain – for example, when showing Daisy around the mansion, they come on Klipspringer exercising in a dining room, and Gatsby says, 'Klipspringer here is left over from a party I threw in April. He was here for two weeks before I discovered he'd moved in' (min. 53:44). This is met with a delighted giggle from Daisy. As typical in this film, where all are waited on or watched, Klipspringer is not alone, but rather in the company of a servant – and later Daisy and Gatsby pass through an archway with two 'bodyguards' on either side. The large, empty, cold rooms with the deliberately echoing footsteps emphasise something different from the warmly sensual text of the novel (remember the 'lavender silk' and 'vivid' flowers of Fitzgerald's description [1950, p. 88]) – making Gatsby's hollowness and isolation far more overt, and depriving the viewer of some of the pleasures of the senses.

Klipspringer appears briefly at Gatsby's later party that Daisy attends. Although Atkins (1974, p. 224) writes that he appears in person at the film's end to ask for her shoes because he is 'more obnoxious in person than over the telephone', this no longer appears in the film – perhaps Atkins saw a preview showing. This scene was cut, as were the scenes with Owl Eyes. Unfortunately, deleted scenes have not been made available for this film, as it would be fascinating to ponder the effect of their inclusion. The impact of leaving out this small yet key moment is to render Gatsby's death in the style of heavy tragedy, without Fitzgerald's attendant moments of dark farce. The farce around Klipspringer adds a necessary poignancy to Gatsby's death – his misguided and fantastical self-creation may otherwise seem undeserving of such heavily tragic treatment. Nonetheless, as will later be examined, the funeral and scenes with Gatsby's father in the 1974 *The Great Gatsby* are affecting, perhaps less complicated but retaining some depth and complexity.

In 2013, Klipspringer again barely features in the film. Introduced by Nick during the first party as a 'genius descendent of Beethoven', his role is more similar to the 1949 *The Great Gatsby* film than to Fitzgerald or the 1974 film, that is, as a useful character to bring a diegetic soundtrack into the film. He next shows up briefly to play the organ when Daisy visits Gatsby, who tells his staff to wake up the 'symphonic genius' (min. 59:14). The organ starts up again after the shirt-throwing scene and the scene in which Gatsby shows her his clippings when the mood has already turned sombre; the tennis shoes rest on top of the organ, perhaps as a record of

an earlier intention of the director to bring Klipspringer back after Gatsby's death, or perhaps merely as a knowing reference to the book. The request for shoes is not taken up at the end, and Klipspringer does not appear. Klipspringer has even less of a role than he did in 1949, and something is undeniably lost. There is a recognition of the impact of these minor yet memorable characters in that they appear in the films, albeit often straightened out and simplified. However, their function in the text, which appears to highlight the contradictions in Gatsby's character, is largely removed (most obviously in the 2013 *The Great Gatsby*), leaving them feeling, at times, like redundant additions.

Mr Gatz is another minor character, appearing suddenly only at the end of the novel, posing a problem for the filmmaker as this goes against conventional screenplay wisdom, which is to introduce key characters within the first fifteen minutes (the tardy arrival of Gatsby himself also strains this convention to its limits). He is the most straightforward of the minor roles in many ways, a 'solemn old man very helpless and dismayed' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 158). However, there is tension between his perception of his son and the reality. His genuine love for Jimmy, as he calls him, shines through and his presence highlights Gatsby's rejection of foundational values in favour of the ephemeral shallowness of a rich elite (Fitzgerald 1950):

> 'He had a big future before him, you know. He was only a young man but he had a lot of brain power here.' He touched his head impressively and I nodded.
>
> 'If he'd of lived he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country.'
>
> 'That's true,' I said, uncomfortably. (pp. 159–160)

Nick's discomfort relates to the fact that Gatsby had, unbeknownst to his father, gone wrong, and yet the conversation with Gatsby's father also makes the point (which is reiterated in the sequence that follows where Mr Gatz shows Nick Gatsby's childhood journals) that he had great potential. The conversation is also symbolic, with Gatsby's father representing an older America in contrast to the America that has, alongside Gatsby perhaps, left solid values behind – this is drawn out in the 1974 *The Great Gatsby* where the actor (Roberts Blossom) is dressed and presented in a way that somewhat resembles Abraham Lincoln (see Figure 6.9). Gatsby's childhood journal speaks to a 19th-century idea of order that haunts this 20th-century modernist novel.

The scene also contains the important admission from Nick, 'We were close friends' (Fitzgerald 1950, p. 159), as Nick, towards the end of the novel, becomes clearer about where his loyalties lie. The entire character of Mr Gatz is left out of the 1949 version, with Maibaum declaring it 'unnecessary' because of the lengthy flashbacks the film used instead

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FIGURE 6.9: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (1974) of Gatsby's father: portraying an older America.

(Atkins 1974, p. 219). This reasoning is similar to Luhrmann's in 2013. In the 1949 *The Great Gatsby*, the idea that Gatsby had a greater and nobler potential is put into Gatsby's own mouth as he announces that he will 'take the rap' and call the police, saying:

> I owe that to a kid named Jimmy Gatz. Me, Nick. Me. What's going to happen to kids like Jimmy Gatz if guys like me don't tell them we're wrong … Maybe after I do my time and start over … (min. 1:28:45)

The inclusion of Mr Gatz expressed this sentiment far more subtly. In the 1974 version, the effectiveness of the final scenes with Mr Gatz emanates from the greater depth which Clayton instils in them. Firstly, the audience is given sincerity in emotion from Mr Gatz and Nick, and genuine love for Gatsby, which is a relief after the unpleasant shallowness of many of the other characters. Secondly, the suggestion of the values of an older America, and the stately progression of the hearse through the burning valley of ashes, call to mind larger symbolisms. They retain something of Fitzgerald's ambivalence in the depiction of 19th-century ideas of diligence and persistence associated with Gatsby's childhood and Mr Gatz versus 20th-century ideas of freedom and self-expression. Here, two separate worlds collide and the emotional impact registers. Clayton's efforts show that invoking such larger and more provocative meanings is not impossible. In this version, Nick also gets to voice his 'close friends' admission of loyalty – an important moment of commitment. In 1949, the need to keep Nick's disapproval of Gatsby overt did not allow for this.

In 2013, scenes with Mr Gatz were filmed but they did not make the cut into the final film. They are available on the published DVD and YouTube (*Martin* 2014). The clip shows excised scenes as part of an interview with Luhrmann where he explains his directorial decisions. What Luhrmann refers to as 'wonderful' deleted scenes (*Martin* 2014, min. 1:00) show Gatsby's father arriving and nearly being assaulted by the heavies at the door (reminding us a little of Coppola's 1949 interpretation of *The Great Gatsby*) and asserting, 'I'm Jimmy's *father*' (min. 1:32). We then see him noting Gatsby's generosity to him as he ogles the vast rooms and cries over Gatsby's coffin. Luhrmann states that (*Martin* 2014):

> The only problem with this is apart from drawing away from Nick and Gatsby was that we've learnt all these things already and we couldn't see that until we'd actually done it. (min. 3:26)

In the deleted scenes, we see the list of Gatsby's youthful goals for self-improvement read out as he is interred (with no signs of Owl Eyes or Klipspringer in this ending). Luhrmann notes that it was hard to leave this out, but 'we know he was born with ambition, we've been told earlier – again it was a very hard decision, it was in the film for a very long time' (*Martin* 2014, min. 3:55). Having furnished a far more concrete, visually realised emphasis on Gatsby's poor origins, Luhrmann felt that these scenes were redundant. The concern was with tangible, storytelling necessities more than hints and allusions – expressing a general tendency of Luhrmann's to concretise. However, as previously noted, excluding these finishing scenes also does not allow for a tie-up with the earlier scenes with Owl Eyes and Klipspringer, making the earlier scenes feel less impactful.

■ All that is air becomes solid

A Badiouian focus helps explain some of the areas where the films got into difficulty without asserting that they should follow the book and display textual correspondence. Indeed, it shows that correspondence, where it is obvious, usually extends only to surface depictions or has been commandeered to perform other roles within the screenplay. Changes are not in themselves indicative of a lack of Badiouian fidelity and may even support it. However, changes that serve to close down Fitzgerald's openness will work against the possibility of a Badiouian fidelity.

In this chapter, I explored the persistent attempts in these film adaptations to reify aspects of Fitzgerald's text. These and some of the other changes served more as foreclosures than as an opening up of possibilities. Attempts to draw upon the cultural value of Fitzgerald's name and novel seem to have often resulted in solidifying elements of his prose. The films employed various strategies to represent aspects of Fitzgerald's prose within the

adaptations. These included attempts to bring his descriptions to life or represent concepts of space and time in concrete, visual terms. Another attempt was to bring Fitzgerald's actual words into the films through dialogue, voice-over or even lettering on the screen. These strategies had varying effects. Aspects that lightened Fitzgerald's prose, such as his humour, were generally abandoned or given a brief showing in slapstick mode, as in *The Great Gatsby* (2013). Instead, a more sombre mood was created by either setting the films later or having the characters look back on previous events.

An approach of romantic nostalgia dominated 1974; whilst *The Great Gatsby* (1949) was impacted by the moral codes and preferences of the time. In the 2013 *The Great Gatsby*, conflicting reifying and open approaches ultimately resulted in an emotional superficiality. Where the films do allow for more ambiguity, as in 1949's depiction of Owl Eyes, Luhrmann's flexible use of space in the 2013 *The Great Gatsby*, and Mr Gatz in the 1974 film, the effects allow for greater openness to operate.

The transposition of minute details from the text, approaching the text with prior ideas about its meaning and cultural value within the canon, taking an overtly nostalgic attitude and favouring a spectacular *mise-en-scené* over intimacy are all manifestations of a 'traditional' kind of fidelity based on replication. Nonetheless, the films are intermittently successful in their goal of making a Badiouian connection to *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Luhrmann's film makes a partially successful effort, through the use of montage, overlays and 3D, to bring to life the conceptual elements of Fitzgerald's depiction of space, whilst Clayton effectively conjures up a sense of loss in the passing of the old certainties of the 19th-century paradigm. Nugent's Owl Eyes manages to keep something of the humour and mystery of the character. All the films have moments where they are able to stage the undecidability of the event.

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FIGURE 7.5: Film still from *The Great Gatsby* (1974) depicting George as he departs in search of Myrtle's killer.

also have a quotational quality', showing us 'a set of notations that refer us back to the novel and stand as rote citations of it'. These represent attempts to harness the novel's cultural value.

There is a certain deadening of emotion and involvement as we look at the prettified or striking images before us, and the flying words merely emphasise the flatness of the cinema screen. The actual sign looms even larger and more striking than in 1974.

Once again, cutting is required to associate the billboard with particular characters. As George and Myrtle fight, the characters ride back from New York City 'towards death' as the voice-over announces (min. 1:40:14). The billboard makes its fateful appearance again, moving out toward the viewer (remember the 3D) as the camera then swerves down toward the yellow car flashing around the corner. In presenting the billboard as erected on an intersection between the roads, Luhrmann makes more of the billboard as connecting with the motorcar and the idea of travelling between different spaces and fates. As Myrtle runs out into the road and is hit by Gatsby's car, her body flies up in the air in front of the billboard. There are some fairly awkward shots where there is an attempt to get both her body and the eyes in the shot, and the figure appears superimposed in. In this film, Myrtle's death is treated in operatic style. Her figure stands before the car, clothes billowing, before being flung upward and passing by the stars, then