



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 11, 2013

How Great Is “The Great Gatsby”?

Baz Luhrmann’s direction of *The Great Gatsby* wonderfully depicts on screen the grandeur that epitomizes the setting throughout F. Scott Fitzgerald’s classic novel in a way that is emblematic of his touch. The root of the story is money and its seemingly infinite power — and, perhaps more importantly — its illusory nature. The film does a fairly good job of capturing that crux and running with it in a way that would likely have made Fitzgerald proud of the effort.



Jay Gatsby (Leonardo DiCaprio) is a brilliant, albeit shady, moneymaker and is not afraid to flaunt it. Each weekend, he turns his mansion into a grand party scene with guests of all varieties reveling in the type of entertainment and feasts that the huddled masses may only dream of.

To the outsider, Gatsby appears to be wonderfully popular and well-loved by all. But in reality he is a mystery, particularly to those who keep his company on the weekends. To some of the regular attendees of his elegant parties, Gatsby is like Santa Claus. But in fact, the majority of Gatsby’s relationships with his friends and associates are devoid of all substance.

The real Gatsby is a tortured individual.

Just one person is able to penetrate Gatsby’s barrier: his modest neighbor, Nick Carraway (Tobey Maguire), who observes Gatsby from a distance until he receives a rare invitation to one of his lavish parties.

Very quickly, the unlikely two form a bond.

As it turns out, Gatsby has loved Carraway’s lovely socialite cousin Daisy (Carey Mulligan) from afar for years. But Daisy is married to wealthy, arrogant Tom Buchanan (Joel Edgerton), who is flagrantly engaging in an affair with a married woman.

Gatsby and Daisy had fallen in love years previously when he was soldier, but when he went off to war, Daisy married Tom. It was a crushing blow from which Gatsby never quite recovered.

Gatsby had been throwing his over-the-top parties for years in the hope that Daisy might one day attend one and fall in love with him again.

Much to Gatsby’s disappointment, however, Daisy has never appeared at any of his parties.

But Gatsby’s newfound friendship with Nick provides him with an exciting idea, and he asks Nick to bring Daisy to his home.

What unfolds is a rather painful lesson for Gatsby, about just how far his money may take him. Could the Beatles have been right after all? Does money not buy love? At least not in its purest form.

It is with great hope that nothing I write from here on out is a spoiler alert, as many believe that *The Great Gatsby* is one of the greatest American novels ever written and should be read by all.



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The tragedy that culminates at the end of *The Great Gatsby* is what makes it such an epic novel and therefore an intriguing film. Missed opportunities and misplaced priorities ultimately plague these characters throughout the story, even when some of them are seemingly unaware, and all of these components come to painful collision at the end that ultimately hurts some of the most decent characters. But it provides the opportunity to showcase the purest of love, that of the sacrificial nature. Unfortunately, the sacrifice has been made for someone who would likely not have returned the favor, thereby enhancing the tragic element of it.

Gatsby's relationship with Daisy is compelling on screen, even as it skews the boundaries between right and wrong. Lusting after a married woman is certainly a violation of God's law, even though his feelings for Daisy go far beyond lust, and it is his desire to save her from a loveless marriage.

Moviegoers will likely sympathize with Gatsby, who would love nothing more than to go back in time and change the past. But despite his incredible wealth, the one thing in the world he wants more than anything has no price and is entirely intangible.

Besides the dazzling performances of award-winners DiCaprio and Mulligan, seeing the novel come to life on-screen helps reveal the dichotomies in the plot that enhance the contrasting themes of consumption versus sacrifice; money versus love; substance versus hollowness; West Egg versus East Egg regions; old money versus new; mansions versus modest living; the haves versus the have-nots. It's all there.

Some of the subtler nuances of the novel are perhaps a bit overdone in the movie. For example, Carraway's struggle with the written word is displayed in the film by floating 3-D letters that seem to be more about effects than anything else.

There were some other rather odd choices in the adaptation of the novel as well, particularly the soundtrack, which melds contemporary hip-hop with jazz. I question why anyone would choose to deviate so far from the 1920s in the musical choices, when the 1920s and its own "personality" is such a significant element of the story.

The film, like the novel, has a number of spiritual as well as biblical references and includes invocations of God. Often these items seem out of place among this crowd who has adopted a rather Sodom and Gomorra lifestyle, though that is the very point. These are people who have largely lost sight of the most important things in life.

Overall, Luhrmann's film artfully captures the decadence of the period and stays true to F. Scott Fitzgerald's themes, and moviegoers cannot ask for much more than that. Fans of the book will likely be pleased with the outcome.



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