

# The Great Gatsby

## Elliott Brett

This is a story of high society, of decadence, and of forbidden love.

The origin of the movie comes from the novel of the same name, written by F Scott Fitzgerald in 1925. His other books include *This side of Paradise*, and *Tender is the Night*. All of his works are centred around, as he called it, the *Jazz Age*. This was the period of the American Great Depression, in which poverty was widespread, jobs were few, alcohol illegal, jazz music and dance the latest craze. As you will see in this film tonight, each of those topics are apparent, and how the main characters observe and participate in that age.

This movie tonight is actually the fifth adaptation of the novel, the first being in 1926 which was a silent movie, with no sound other than the pianist playing along to the moving images. Unfortunately this is a lost film, that is, no surviving print can be found anywhere. However, if you go to Youtube, can see the original trailer for this film which is quite amazing when you see comparable scenes with the version that you will see tonight.

I would like to paraphrase two people's views of the novel, one a literary critic Sarah Churchwell, and the other, a political journalist Nick Gillespie:

Sarah said, "This is a story that warns us of the negative aspects of the American Dream." Nick said, "It captures a world in which nothing is fixed in terms of status, and fortune." Both journalists recognise the transformation America was going through at this time, of how the rich lived glamorous lives while the poor lived in awful conditions, working to make a better life for the rich: the poor clearly have very little benefit from their labour as you will see in the movie. To me, it was as if only two classes existed: the very rich, and the very poor. This is a story of stark contrasts, and beneath it all, the backbone of American society, consumerism.

In this film, the gorgeous beauty of the homes in which the elite live, with their parties, drinking, and dancing are juxtaposed with terrible poverty and desperation. It certainly is a very colourful movie, in fact colour is used by the director Baz Luhrman to display clear differences in society.

Music also plays an important role in this film. When the novel was written, Jazz was the latest craze. When this fifth version of the film was made, the latest craze is Dance, Hip Hop etc. And that, to my surprise is the music used for this film, for example Jay-Z rapping along to ladies dressed in 1920's fashion whilst dancing a fusion of 1920's and modern dance. I guess the movie makers' purpose is to mirror our contemporary society with that of the one back in the 1920's. Whether you will enjoy or accept that, is another story.

The actors include Leonardo De Caprio as Gatsby, Toby Maguire as the narrator, best friend and author of Gatsby's biography, and Adelaide Clemens who plays the love interest of two men, and relative of Toby Maguire.

Without giving away the details of the story, I can tell you a little about it:

This is the story of a young, well-mannered, moral man, Toby Maguire named Nick, who moves into a quaint little home in an affluent suburb of New York. He lives immediately next door to a huge, glorious mansion whose owner is seemingly reclusive, hiding from view, and unsociable towards Nick. Through gossip Nick learns that the owner of the home is a man named Gatsby. Nick's cousin Catherine lives across a nearby lake and she is married to a very rich and famous sportsman. Through her, her husband and other people, Nick learns more about Mr Gatsby, who in fact is a supposed war hero, highly successful businessman, of the upper class, and notorious for holding luxurious parties to which no-one receives an invitation, people merely show up and enter his stately home. Nick experiences more than he expected, from drinking parties in New York, to witnessing love affairs, and passing through the poorest area of New York in which the people work tirelessly to make New York city the modern place that it is.

I really cannot say any more than that, as there are of course twists and turns that had me thinking for example, is Gatsby real? Is this one of those stories in which we discover the main character is a ghost!?! That is one aspect of the film that captured my interest, thinking to myself, "Who is what here?", "Who isn't what they say they are?" This is a mystery, a love story, and a political statement.

After watching, I do hope you discuss what you have seen, how you feel about the choice of music and the modernisation of the story. The reviews for this movie are both positive and negative, as with any movie, it is a matter of personal taste. It is quite unique in its approach to telling the story written in a very different age, when it was illegal for you to purchase alcohol, and you were either very rich, or very poor. If you like, you can post your comments on the Anderson House Facebook page, or if you are a student of ours please come in to the school with your opinion which I would love to discuss in more detail.

Thank you for listening, and I hope to see you at Anderson House, or at another movie viewing in the future.

Enjoy the film!