

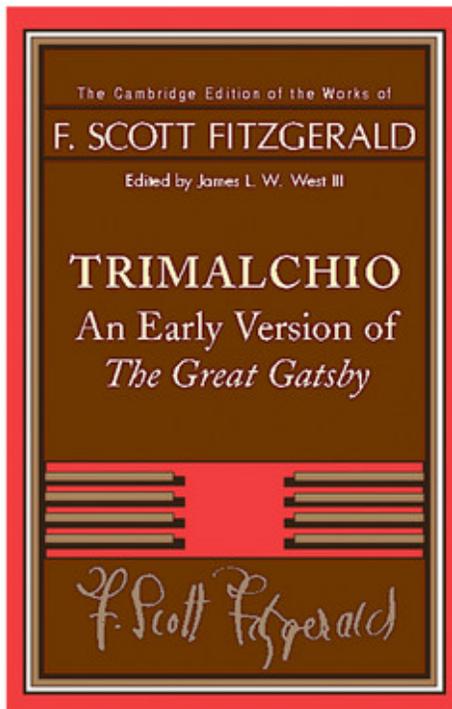
A Darker, More Ruthless Gatsby |WSJ| April 19, 2013

Baz Luhrmann's adrenaline-fueled adaptation of "The Great Gatsby" may startle devoted fans of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 classic. It's in 3-D, and features hip-hop music by Jay-Z, for starters.

But there may be an even bigger surprise in store for Gatsby lovers when the movie hits theaters in May. Leonardo DiCaprio's Gatsby seems more menacing and violent, more like a gangster than his well-mannered literary progenitor.

A rougher version of Gatsby actually fits with Fitzgerald's original conception of the character, says Fitzgerald scholar James L.W. West III, who was an adviser on the film. Mr. Luhrmann and Mr. DiCaprio based their interpretation of the shadowy character partly on an earlier version of "The Great Gatsby," called "Trimalchio," which Fitzgerald submitted to his publisher in 1924. The draft was typeset but was never released as a book until 2000, when Cambridge University Press published an edition.

In "Trimalchio," Gatsby is a more frightening and mysterious figure. "He's more intense and guarded, hiding a kind of violence in his nature, a ruthlessness, that you don't really see in 'The Great Gatsby,'" said Mr. West, who edited the Cambridge edition of "Trimalchio."



Though there aren't huge plot differences between the two texts, key revelations unfold differently. Mr. West compares reading "Trimalchio" to hearing a familiar song played in a different key. In "Trimalchio," Fitzgerald waited until nearly the end of the novel to reveal Gatsby's hidden past, giving greater weight to suggestions that he is a German spy or a murderer. Gatsby comes across as more confident and aggressive in "Trimalchio" during a confrontation with romantic rival Tom Buchanan at the Plaza Hotel, challenging Tom's assertion that Gatsby and Daisy's affair is "a harmless little flirtation."

In the new film adaptation of "The Great Gatsby," Mr. DiCaprio emphasizes the character's darker side. In one charged scene, Mr. DiCaprio smashes a glass and screams and

lunges at Buchanan, his fist hovering just above Tom's face. At other moments in the film, he struggles to keep his simmering rage below the surface, whispering angrily on the phone at members of his criminal network. When a shady business associate shows

up at one of his glamorous parties and demands to see him, Gatsby's white-coated servants escort him outside and beat him up.

"'Trimalchio' was a tremendous resource," says Mr. Luhrmann, noting that Gatsby and Daisy's relationship is more fleshed out in that version. Several key bits of dialogue between Daisy and Gatsby were pulled from "Trimalchio." Mr. DiCaprio became obsessed with it, and carried a copy of "Trimalchio" with him at all times.

The film, starring Carey Mulligan as Daisy Buchanan and Tobey Maguire as Nick Carraway, could lure a new audience to the classic novel, which tells the story of a mysterious millionaire named Jay Gatsby who tries to win back the love of his life, Daisy, by buying a mansion near her Long Island home and throwing outrageous parties.



(In Baz Luhrmann's new adaptation of "The Great Gatsby," Leonardo DiCaprio's Gatsby seems more menacing and violent, more obviously a gangster than his well-mannered literary progenitor. John Edwards takes a look. Photo: Warner Bros. Pictures.)

Fitzgerald finished a draft of the novel in the summer of 1924, while living in France with his wife, Zelda, and their daughter, Scottie.

He mailed the draft to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, that fall. Mr. Perkins wrote back and called the novel "a wonder" but was less enthusiastic about the title, saying some at the publishing house found it too obscure. The name "Trimalchio" comes from a first-century Roman story, "Satyricon," which features a freed slave named Trimalchio who throws wild parties.

In another letter, Mr. Perkins told Fitzgerald that he found Gatsby's character "somewhat vague," and suggested disclosing Gatsby's past earlier in the story. In the final version of "The Great Gatsby," Fitzgerald moved the revelation to the middle of the narrative as Nick describes Gatsby's origins as "James Gatz."

Mr. Perkins also noted a "slight sagging in chapters six and seven," which Fitzgerald rewrote for the final version. Fitzgerald also cut and changed bits of dialogue and made Nick seem less catty and more reliable as a narrator.

"The Great Gatsby" was a commercial disappointment. It sold around 20,000 copies the year it was released. Still, some critics judged it to be Fitzgerald's finest work. In a letter to Fitzgerald, T.S. Eliot called the novel "the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James."

Next week, Scribner will release a movie tie-in edition, and has printed 350,000 copies. Gatsby's story has inspired several earlier movies, including a 1926 silent movie, a 1949 gangster movie and, most recently, the 1974 version with Robert Redford and Mia Farrow as Gatsby and Daisy.

Fitzgerald hated the first adaptation. In a letter to Scottie, Zelda said they thought it was "rotten," according to Sally Cline's biography of Zelda.

But Mr. West says that for Fitzgerald, who was often broke, the money would have been enough of a reward. "For the movie rights, Fitzgerald collected around \$13,000," Mr. West said. "So he couldn't have disliked it that much."