



A Biblical Theology Illuminated

BY DANIEL ROSS GOODMAN

YOUNG READERS OF THE NARNIA novels may not intuit that the series is an extensive religious allegory, but if one knows of Narnia's theological underpinnings, it is difficult to read C. S. Lewis's novels without seeing their theological motifs. While most novels are not consciously written as religious allegories, some seem more susceptible to theological readings than others, and *The Great Gatsby* may be one such novel. Baz Luhrmann's winning film adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic brings such salience to the novel's implicit anthropopathic resonances that one could almost believe Fitzgerald had taken a page out of Lewis's religious repertoire and written an allegorical novel called *The Great Gatsby*.

The Great Gatsby's overt theological theme lies in the self-evident and much-noted parallel between the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg and the eyes of God, both of

which "always watch over" their respective domains, evoking Deuteronomy 11:12: "The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it [the land]." However, the novel contains a more significant, albeit more implicit, theological leitmotiv when it is refracted through the prism of anthropopathic Old Testament theology.

An expansive literature on anthropopathic theology exists; perhaps most pertinent here is David R. Blumenthal's articulation of this theology:

Since personhood is the core of our being and since we are created in God's image, God must also have personhood. In anthropopathic theology, God has a Face and a real Personal Presence or Personality. To put it formally: Personhood, with its expression as face, presence, and personality, is God's, and we have that capacity because God has created us in God's image.¹

FILM

The Great Gatsby,
directed by
Baz Luhrmann,
143 minutes.

1. David R. Blumenthal, "Tselm: Toward an Anthropopathic Theology," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (Westview Press, 2000), 338.

2. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), 136.

3. For instance, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes: "God does not impose his presence on humanity. Only if we reach out to Him do we find Him reaching out to us"; *Radical Then, Radical Now: On Being Jewish* (Continuum, 2000), 85.

4. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Harper & Row, 1988), 144.

5. Page references are to the 2004 Scribner paperback edition of *The Great Gatsby* (original publication date, 1925).

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If biblical theology is anthropopathic—that is, if the God of the Bible is conceived of as having a personhood that closely approximates the personhood of human beings—the biblical love story between God and Israel can be grasped much more easily. As a rabbinical student who is interested in literature and film, I posit that an interdisciplinary approach to theology—reading the Bible through the lenses of literature and film—can increase our understanding of biblical anthropopathic theology. At the same time, I want to suggest that a theological reading of *The Great Gatsby* can significantly increase our appreciation of both the classic novel and the contemporary film adaptation.

Much as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* produced a "Copernican revolution" in Western philosophy, Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Prophets* stimulated an anthropocentric paradigm shift in biblical theology. Whereas Jewish theology since the medieval era had conceived of God as transcendent, perfect, and lacking nothing, Heschel's *The Prophets* revealed the God of the Old Testament to be anthropopathic: God lacks a loving relationship and desires man to freely join Him in a covenantal relationship.

Heschel carried this theological discovery to its logical conclusion in *God in Search of Man*, famously arguing:

Most theories of religion start out with defining the religious situation as man's search for God and maintain that God is silent, hidden and unconcerned with man's search for Him.... To Biblical thinking, the definition is incomplete and the axiom false. The Bible speaks not only of man's search for God but also of *God's search for man*. "Thou dost hunt me like a lion," exclaimed Job (10:16).

... This is the mysterious paradox of Biblical faith: *God is pursuing man*.... All of human history as described in the Bible may be summarized in one phrase: *God is in search of man*.²

Heschelian anthropopathic theology has become so pervasive in current Jewish thought that its resonances are felt even in Orthodox theology.³ Indeed, many statements that are assumed to be representations of traditional Jewish theology are in fact evocations of Heschel's paradigm-shifting theology.

The pathos-ridden story of Jay Gatsby's

laborious efforts to regain Daisy Buchanan's love evokes the covenantal model of divine and human love inherent in Heschelian theotropic biblical theology. In the 2013 film, Daisy (played by Carey Mulligan) is courted by a character (Leonardo DiCaprio's pitch-perfect Gatsby) whose *éminence grise* (the Jewish Meyer Wolsheim) is implicated in businesses of ill-repute. Mulligan has an interesting cinematic history with these types of characters: in *An Education* (2009), Carey Mulligan's Jenny (in what is still her best screen performance to date) is courted by David Goldman (played with the ideal mixture of allure and cunning by Peter Sarsgaard), a Jewish character involved in nefarious business dealings; and in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), Mulligan plays Winnie Gekko, the daughter of Michael Douglas's Gordon Gekko, the cinematic archetype of financial corruption. In that film, Gekko's ethnicity is ambiguous (though the character was reputedly based on the Jewish junk-bond king Michael Milken and the Jewish insider traders Ivan Boesky and Carl Icahn), but Douglas's is not—he is half-Jewish. Viewers will draw their own conclusions as to whether these roles are coincidentally trivial or if they suggest an oddly troubling pattern. Likewise, viewers and readers will draw their own conclusions as to whether Fitzgerald's novel is best read as a theological allegory; I only aim to suggest that it is a legitimate hermeneutic in conceptualizing this literary work.

In covenantal courtship, "[b]ecause the potential vassal... must choose to accept the latter's yoke, the suzerain must woo his vassal."⁴ The anthropopathic God, desiring a covenant with man, must court, or "woo," Israel. God's courtship of man is a rather attenuated process, taking billions of years. Gatsby's elaborate, elongated courtship of Daisy is analogous, though Gatsby's courtship of Daisy takes years rather than eons. As Jordan explains to Nick, "Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay," but his plan had started well before, when, over the course of several years, Gatsby amassed a great fortune; "He had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths," and had thrown his ostentatious parties, all so that *she* might "come over some afternoon to a stranger's garden" (78)⁵ to seek *him*. This echoes anthropopathic

biblical theology in another way: during this time, Gatsby was hidden to Daisy but was actually everywhere, surrounding her, trying to envelop her. As Irving Greenberg describes God's role: "In 'hiding,' the Divine was calling on Israel to discern the Divine, which was hidden but present *everywhere*."⁶

But why does God exert himself so mightily in his efforts to woo us? Likewise, why does Gatsby go through a five-year-long rigmarole to lure Daisy? Because they both need love, which is the only thing that all of their might, wealth, and power cannot coerce. Without Daisy, James Gatz would not have become Jay Gatsby: she was the Beatricean catalyst for his astounding transformation. And if Gatsby cannot reclaim Daisy's love, all of five years of hard work, scheming, and strategic courtship⁷ will have been for naught. Likewise, according to Old Testament covenantal theology, if God cannot win man's love, all of his work in building the universe and in creating man will have been in vain.⁸

Gatsby, like God, is an elusive, mysterious character with a vague identity—we know as little about God as the partygoers at Gatsby's fêtes knew about Gatsby—and, like God's emanation from his hiddenness (in Hebrew, *lester*), Gatsby emerges from this penumbral seclusion in order to seek Daisy. When man is unresponsive to God's persistent courting, God may deign to send oblique yet unmistakable messages that He is seeking man: "Every day a heavenly voice resounds from Mount Horeb," according to the rabbis (Mishna, *Avot* 6:2). Similarly, Gatsby calls out to Daisy every night through his luminous mansion and fabulous parties, desperately seeking to draw her to him by way of sheer magnetism. When man fails to respond to signs from God, God uses prophets to deliver messages. As Daisy fails to respond to Gatsby's signals, Gatsby uses Nick to reach Daisy. Finally, when man remains deaf to even these messages, God, in desperate need to reach man, resorts to revelation—such as the revelations at Sinai—but such revelations seldom occur in theological history. In the novel, Gatsby's revelation to Daisy occurs only after a significant amount of time and effort has been expended. Thus, just as Heschel characterized the Bible as "a record of God's approach to His people,"⁹ *The Great Gatsby* may be read as the story of Gatsby's approach to his beloved Daisy. While many films, poems,

and novels may be read in this vein—the biblical *Song of Songs* is a prime example of a love story to which anthropopathic and allegorical readings have adhered—Fitzgerald's novel, particularly in conjunction with Luhrmann's film adaptation, is particularly amenable to a theological reading, for seldom are literary protagonists so closely aligned with the personas of the anthropopathic biblical God (as is Gatsby) and the equivocal, vacillating biblical Israel (as is Daisy).

Such a theotropic¹⁰ allegory becomes even more apparent when one considers the explicit religious terminology that Fitzgerald and Luhrmann employ when describing their protagonist. The young James Gatz possesses the confidence to recreate himself as Jay Gatsby because of his belief that "he was a son of God" (98). Luhrmann's screenplay has Nick exclaiming that Gatsby has "more money than God." Additionally, the description of Gatsby's smile—perhaps the most famous smile in American literature—bears the hallmarks of divine omniscience:

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 external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. 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. (48)

And when Gatsby kisses Daisy for the first time, he knows that "his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. . . . At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the *incarnation* was complete" (110–111, emphasis mine).¹¹ Since not every line of the novel is recited in the 2013 film adaptation (though many are), Luhrmann's editorial selection of these particular theological expressions—and his choice to graft a new divine appellation onto Gatsby—ensures that the theological motifs in Fitzgerald's novel are not lost on viewers of *Gatsby*.¹²

The God-like Gatsby, though endowed with "more money than God," cannot buy Daisy's love with spectacular display after

6. Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 155.

7. This is a mysterious courtship by means of concealment that is suggestive of the Lurianic Kabbalistic doctrine of *tzimtzum* (contraction).

8. See *Song of Songs Rabba* 1:9, *Pesikta Rabbati* 21, *Midrash Tanhuma* 1, Babylonian Talmud (hereinafter B.T.) *Shabbat* 88a, cited in Rashi, ad loc. Genesis 1:21, s.v. "*yom hashishi*."

9. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 425.

10. In Heschelian theology, theotropicism refers to God's search for—or "turning toward"—man.

11. While my focus here is largely on Jewish theological motifs, the Christian theological motifs of incarnation and transfiguration in *Gatsby* should be noted as well.

12. On literature as amenable to anthropopathic interpretation, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

13. Exodus 24:7; cf. B.T., *Avodah Zarah* 2b.

14. Levenson, *The Book of Job*, 50. See his qualification concerning how God can—and does—command love.

15. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 144.

16. This echoes God's demand for Israel's complete and total fidelity: "thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

17. B.T., *Eruvin* 54a. Israel must wait until messianic times when comprehending Torah and perceiving the full splendor of the Kingdom of God will once again be effortless endeavors.

18. N.B.: "death-of-God theology is, for the most part, not atheism. Instead, it maintains that the living presence of the real God has vanished. . . . all that can fill the gap is man"; *The Book of Job*, 52.

19. On how the darkness of Auschwitz necessitates the development of a theological construct in which God's covenant with Israel is now voluntary, see Irving Greenberg, "Voluntary Covenant," *Perspectives* (National Jewish Resource Center, 1982).

spectacular display, just as the God of the Bible could not buy Israel's love with miracle after miracle; God only wins Israel's love when she grants full consent to God at Sinai by exclaiming, "everything that God has said, we will do and we will hear [*nishmab*]"¹³ (yet, even that consent was temporary, incomplete, and always subject to Israel's mercurial nature). Just as "the commandment to love is the only one God cannot enforce,"¹⁴ Daisy's love is the only object that Gatsby cannot buy. Both God and Gatsby undertake elaborate love conquests not only because they cannot buy their paramours' love, but because their objects of desire are themselves worthy—at least in the eyes of God and Gatsby—of such conquests. The interpretive key to Gatsby's love for Daisy may lie in the nonrational nature of love. God loves Israel in spite of her manifold flaws, recalcitrance, and small size; the nations of the world often looked down upon Israel (to put it mildly), just as Nick often appears to demote Daisy in readers' eyes. These paramours cannot buy their lovers' love from an ontological perspective, or from a romantic perspective: Israel and Daisy must remain autonomous if their love is to be valued by God and Gatsby. God desires a covenantal relationship of love predicated upon equality,¹⁵ and Gatsby desires a relationship in which Daisy can freely and genuinely profess her complete love for him.

Gatsby comes tantalizingly close to winning Daisy's love, only to fall agonizingly short of attaining it in the climactic Plaza Hotel suite scene. In some ways, Daisy is more akin to the post-Sinaitic biblical Israel—the Israel who never completely loves God but is instead forever, in the unforgettable locution of the Authorized (King James) Version, "whoring after other gods" (Judges 2:17), and forsaking the "love of thine espousals" (Jeremiah 2:2); Daisy forsakes Gatsby, the love of her youth, and, at least in Gatsby's mind, goes "whoring after other gods"—the gods of old money, complacency, and security. Daisy does profess her love of Gatsby in the Sinai-like Plaza Hotel suite scene, but admits that she still loves Tom. Gatsby cannot tolerate this; for Gatsby, Daisy must love only him.¹⁶ When Gatsby realizes that he has asked too much of Daisy and the edifice of his dreams is revealed to be a mere façade, he exhibits such a frightful display of vengeance that he looks "as if he had 'killed a man'"

(134). When Israel—even at the foot of Sinai—cannot renounce her love for other gods, God (through his avatar Moses) lashes out at Israel by smashing the tablets of the Ten Commandments into pieces.

Daisy's relationship with Gatsby was never the same after the Plaza Hotel incident. According to rabbinic-midrashic imagination, Israel was never able to fully experience God's glory after the first tablets were shattered, which may relate to the mystical conception of Torah as the embodiment of God. To this day, rigorous Torah study is, for better or worse, a *sine qua non* of religious praxis in normative Judaism—a requirement that, according to the Talmud, was neither inevitable nor held to be a religious desideratum: "Had the first [set of] tablets not been shattered, the Torah would never have been forgotten by Israel."¹⁷ Like the biblical God, Gatsby still hopes for Daisy's return, but Gatsby returns to his seclusion and relies upon Daisy to seek him. Gatsby's withdrawal from Daisy is evocative of the world's current theological state: as the "death of God" theology intimates,¹⁸ God has retreated further and further (and perhaps irrevocably) from an active role in history. Hence the novel's dark conclusion, in which Gatsby's demise symbolizes the irrevocable withdrawal of God from the sphere of human action. Israel must now assume agency, and may carry on the work of God voluntarily.¹⁹

Reading *The Great Gatsby* and viewing the film *Gatsby* through the prism of Heschelian theotropic theology can thus help us understand the notion of an inscrutable being seeking an object of desire. Additionally, conceiving of God in anthropopathic terms—believing that God has human emotions—helps elucidate why God's quest to attain Israel's acceptance of the covenant was suffused with such heightened emotion. God's love for Israel and her ancestors, God's jealousy concerning Israel's worship of other gods, and God's anger at Israel's betrayal may only be explicable if one ascribes human emotions to the biblical God. One need not adopt Heschelian theology in order to appreciate the pentateuchal narratives—after all, the proliferation of Maimonides's apophatic theology did not prevent generations of Jews from studying the Bible with great ardor—but the consideration of apophatic theology allows for the Bible's literary and cinematic motifs to

surface. Reading and viewing *The Great Gatsby* as a religious allegory can also illustrate the way Heschel conceived the biblical theological story as God's impassioned search for man.

IT IS LUHRMANN'S CREATIVE CON-
trivance of *Gatsby* shattering the glass at the Plaza Hotel that, even more than the film's Jay-Z score, accounts for the undeserved opprobrium that has been heaped upon *Gatsby*. According to the film's detractors, this visual—which is conspicuously absent from Fitzgerald's novel and is solely a product of Luhrmann's and writer Craig Pearce's own imaginations—amounts to Luhrmann's wanton desecration of Fitzgerald's original text. Luhrmann and his crew, critics aver, have corrupted a culturally sacred novel by interpolating imagined scenes and music to render it more cinematic.

First, I would ask: if creative license is not a prerogative of a director charged with adapting a screenplay, for whom is creative license ever sanctioned? But more to the point, what is remarkable about *Gatsby* is its painstaking *faithfulness* to Fitzgerald's original work. Save for a few relatively innocuous additions or subtractions—DiCaprio's shattering of the glass in the Plaza Hotel suite, the omission of scenes involving *Gatsby's* father, and the etiological conceit of situating Tobey Maguire's (Nick) narration in a sanatorium—most of the dialogue is a virtual word-for-word transcription from the novel. In fact, the text so closely resembles Fitzgerald's prose that one could scarcely call the screenplay "adapted"; "lifted" would be a more apt term—especially vis-à-vis Maguire's voice-over narrations, most of which are wholesale transcriptions from the novel. What is striking to me about *Gatsby* is not its hip-hop sound track (which, it must be noted, is used quite judiciously and strategically—the rumor of the film being a two-hour hip-hop concert is unfounded), but how little creative license Luhrmann actually exercises. For me, this is not a criticism, since I believe the film's unquestionable fidelity to the text allows it to interpret the novel in fresh, creative ways while still preserving its continuity with the original text. This is also the essence of midrash.²⁰

Midrash can loosely be defined as the imaginative interpretive license a tradition bequeaths to its followers (or that a tradition's heirs assume for themselves) to gener-

ate new meanings from a sacred text. Most scholars assume that midrash is eisegesis disguised as exegesis; a more fitting term for the contemporizing function of midrash is "jurisgenesis."²¹ Midrash may also function eisegetically when it "fills in the blanks" of a scriptural story, as it does in appending the legend of God's suspension of Mount Sinai over the heads of the Hebrews. Though the legend ostensibly explains and amplifies the story's ambiguous components (what does it mean that the mountain "trembled violently"? [Exodus 19:18]), such a midrash can also be used to interpolate contemporary values and sentiments into the text. For instance, this particular midrash may have been penned to articulate the conscious or unconscious sentiment that covenantal obligations had become such an overwhelming burden for some Jews that they could not have conceived of their ancestors as having willingly entered into the covenant.

Regarding the traditional Jewish method of reading the Bible, James Kugel observes

We like to think that the Bible, or any other text, means "just what it says." And we act on that assumption: we simply open a book—including the Bible—and try to make sense of it on our own. In ancient Israel and for centuries afterward, on the contrary, people looked to special interpreters to explain the meaning of the biblical text. For that reason, the explanations . . . acquired an authority of their own. . . .

And so, it was this *interpreted* Bible, not just the stories, prophecies, and laws themselves, but these texts as they had, by now, been interpreted and explained for centuries—that came to stand at the very center of Judaism and Christianity.²²

What Kugel suggests is that it is *more* faithful to a text to interpret it in ways that allow it to maintain its relevance than to interpret it in ways that narrow its applicability to the era in which it was originally written. It was the biblical hermeneutic of midrash (and the legal hermeneutic of *hiddush* [creative interpretation])—interpreting texts imaginatively while concomitantly maintaining painstaking fidelity to the text's words—that allowed each generation of Judaism to embrace change while preserving continuity with its tradition. As Joseph Soloveitchik wrote, "[t]he power of

20. Though any creative license or interpretation cannot simply be characterized as midrash, Nathan Abrams has similarly argued that "midrash allows us to penetrate deep into the film text," in "A Double Set of Glasses: Stanley Kubrick and the *Midrashic* Mode of Interpretation," in *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, ed. Saër Maty Bâ and Will Higbee (Routledge, 2012), 142. Udi Lion coined the term "midrash qolnoa" (film midrash) in his comparison of rabbinic exegesis to film; see David C. Jacobsen, "The Ma'ale School: Catalyst for the Entrance of Religious Zionists into the World of Media Production," *Israel Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 43. On movies as midrash, see Alicia Ostriker, "Whither Exodus? Movies as Midrash," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2003).

21. See Robert Cover, "The Supreme Court, 1982 Term—Forward: Nomos and Narrative," *Harvard Law Review* 97, no. 4 (1983): 11.

22. James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Harvard University Press, 1998), xviii–xix.

23. Joseph B.

Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (The Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 81.

24. For instance, the rabbis invented the rather cinematic scene of God hoisting Mount Sinai over Israel's heads and exclaiming, "if you shall accept my Torah, it will be for your good; and if not, here will be your burial place" (B.T., *Shabbat* 88a) to account for what had been so frightening about God's approach to Israel at that pivotal moment that could have provoked Israel's idolatrous reversion at Sinai.

25. According to the technique of *d'rash*, creative interpretation is a legitimate hermeneutic. However, *d'rash* does not exhaust the limits of possible hermeneutical techniques. Nevertheless, the fact that *d'rash* is one of the four principal interpretative techniques in the Jewish hermeneutical tradition illustrates the extent to which the tradition internalized the imperative of creative interpretation in its pursuit of perpetual spiritual renaissance: "every day they [the Torah and the commandments] should be new in your eyes"; Rashi on Deuteronomy 6:6, s.v. "*Asher anokhi metzav'kha hayom*."

creative interpretation (*hiddush*) is the very foundation of received tradition."²³

In this cinematic interpretation of a "sacred" literary text, meticulous fidelity to the original text was not Luhrmann's sole concern. If it had been, the precious element of midrash that imbues *Gatsby* with its tactile vitality and contemporary resonance would have been sacrificed to the gods of literality. Why did Luhrmann fabricate the scene of DiCaprio shattering the glass and winding up his fist as if to punch Tom? Because perceptive readers of the novel understand that something much more drastic than a mere harsh look must have occurred to drive Daisy away from *Gatsby*: only something as intimidating as a fist raised with murderous intent, something as shocking as seeing a glass obliterated with jealous fury, could account for Daisy's sudden volte-face. The rabbis of the Talmud understood that traditional texts are often glaringly lacking; consequently, new, creative interpretations must be read into these texts in order to unearth their concealed but true meanings.²⁴

Indeed, *Gatsby's* surprisingly muted tone belies the unfair generalization that every Luhrmann film will be suffused with excessive exuberance. Luhrmann's and Pearce's limited improvisations bespeak their faithfulness to the spirit (if not the letter) of *The Great Gatsby*; yet they do not hesitate to proffer creative interpretations when the text seems to beg for them. Luhrmann's *Gatsby* epitomizes the hermeneutical position which holds that valued texts are *supposed* to be interpreted creatively²⁵ and in accord with the ethos of the times. Is depicting Nick Carraway listening to Jay-Z any different than the midrashic depiction of Abraham eating matzah on Passover? Viewed superficially, both portrayals are ludicrous anachronisms; Jay-Z's music did not exist in the Jazz Age any more than the Passover holiday existed in the second millennium BCE. Viewed symbolically, however, these portrayals are profoundly true, figurative attempts to contemporize texts that we hold dear; such imaginative interpretations aren't meant to be held as literally true, but to indicate that the interpreters of these texts believe that these characters still resonate in our age, in our language, and in our cultural milieu.

Luhrmann's original, invigorated *Gatsby* is at once a successful film and a compelling literary interpretation. It is an instructive film for future directors of literary adaptations who aspire to make their source-works speak to current viewers, for it illustrates that the adaptation will only be successful to the extent to which it is loyal to the source-text's actual words, and simultaneously allows for creative interpretations that permit the original work to resonate with contemporary audiences. In my view, the execrable thing would have been for Luhrmann to exercise no creative license whatsoever and to keep the novel confined to the 1920s, thereby implying that *The Great Gatsby* is only capacious enough for a single interpretation, and insinuating that the novel cannot be made to speak in a modern voice.

The vitality of both rabbinic midrash and cinematic adaptations of classic literature illustrates the polysemous qualities of important texts. A well-known rabbinic midrash imagines the Torah to have been given in "seventy languages" (*Exodus Rabba* 5:9). This midrash is itself subject to multiple interpretations, but its overriding meaning is that enduring literature should not, and cannot, be limited to a single voice or to a single interpretation. That is to say, if a work of literature *can* be limited to a single interpretation, it cannot be great literature.

In the film's dénouement, Fitzgerald's indelible closing lines—"So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past"—are recited and, in a poignant visual acknowledgment of the written medium upon which this cinematic rendition is based (a literary homage that is not without a soupçon of propaganda from the film's writers), the novel's letters float off the page and evaporate into the ether, symbolizing that the film was faithful to the words of the novel. Yet, as the letters levitate off the page, they are being bequeathed to a new generation that is charged with gathering those letters and reconstructing them into interpretations consonant with its particular zeitgeist. This fitting closing visual reveals Luhrmann's simultaneous loyalty to the words of Fitzgerald's novel and his engagement in *hiddush*—his synthesis of these ostensibly contradictory hermeneutics is precisely what enabled him to create such an imaginative, contemporary, and revived *Gatsby*. ■