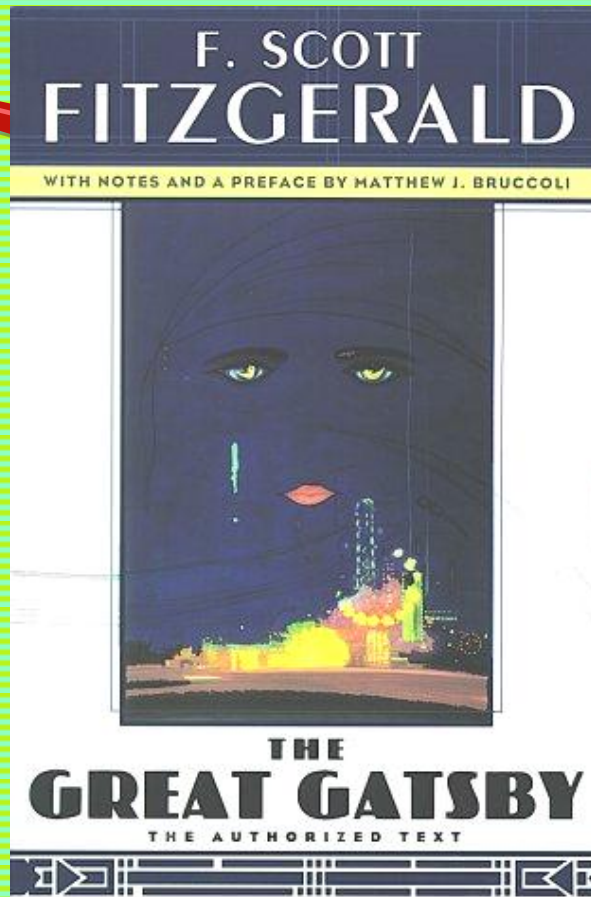


Life & Times of F. Scott Fitzgerald



- Understanding the times helps to understand the novel

Cultural Context of *The Great Gatsby*



American Lit
Edited by
Mr. Volkman

World War I



- World War I ended in 1918.
- Disillusioned because of the war, the generation that fought and survived has come to be called “the lost generation.”

The Roaring Twenties



- While the sense of loss was readily apparent among expatriate American artists who remained in Europe after the war, back home the disillusionment took a less obvious form.
- America seemed to throw itself headlong into a decade of madcap behavior and materialism, a decade that has come to be called the “Roaring Twenties”.



The Jazz Age

- The era is also known as the “Jazz Age”, when the music called jazz, promoted by such recent inventions as the phonograph and the radio, swept up from New Orleans to capture the national imagination.
- Improvised and wild, jazz broke the rules of music, just as the Jazz Age thumbed its nose at the rules of the past.



The New Woman

- Among the rules broken were the age-old conventions guiding the behavior of women. The new woman demanded the right to vote and to work outside the home.
- Symbolically, she cut her hair into a boyish “bob” and bared her calves in the short skirts of the fashionable twenties “flapper.”
- Flappers were seen as brash for wearing excessive makeup, drinking, treating sex in a casual manner, smoking, driving automobiles and otherwise flouting social and sexual norms.



Flapper

- Fitzgerald wrote: "I had no idea of originating an American flapper when I first began to write. I simply took girls whom I knew very well and, because they interested me as unique human beings, I used them for my heroines."
- Fitzgerald originally made this comment in a November 1923 interview for *Metropolitan Magazine*. Early in his career he had acquired the popular reputation of having created the "flapper," particularly in his stories, but this image is misleading. Fitzgerald's female characters are not trivial, immature, dumb beauties; instead, they are independent, courageous, and determined.



Prohibition

- Another rule often broken was the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, or Prohibition, which banned the public sale of alcoholic beverages from 1919 until its appeal in 1933.
- Speak-easies, nightclubs, and taverns that sold liquor were often raided, and gangsters made illegal fortunes as bootleggers, smuggling alcohol into America from abroad.

Gambling

Another gangland activity was illegal gambling.



Perhaps the worst scandal involving gambling was the so-called Black Sox Scandal of 1919, in which eight members of the Chicago White Sox were indicted for accepting bribes to throw baseball's World Series.



The Automobile

- The Jazz Age was also an era of reckless spending and consumption, and the most conspicuous status symbol of the time was a flashy new automobile.





The Billboard

- Advertising was becoming the major industry that it is today, and soon advertisers took advantage of new roadways by setting up huge billboards at their sides.
- Both the automobile and a bizarre billboard play important roles in *The Great Gatsby*.

Critical Overview of the Novel

- How has the reception changed over the decades?



The 1920s



- While fellow writers praised Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, critics offered less favorable reviews.

Newspaper Reviews



- The *Baltimore Evening Sun* called the plot “no more than a glorified anecdote” and the characters “mere marionettes.”
- The *New York Times* called the book “neither profound nor durable.”
- The *London Times* saw it as “undoubtedly a work of great promise” but criticized its “unpleasant” characters.

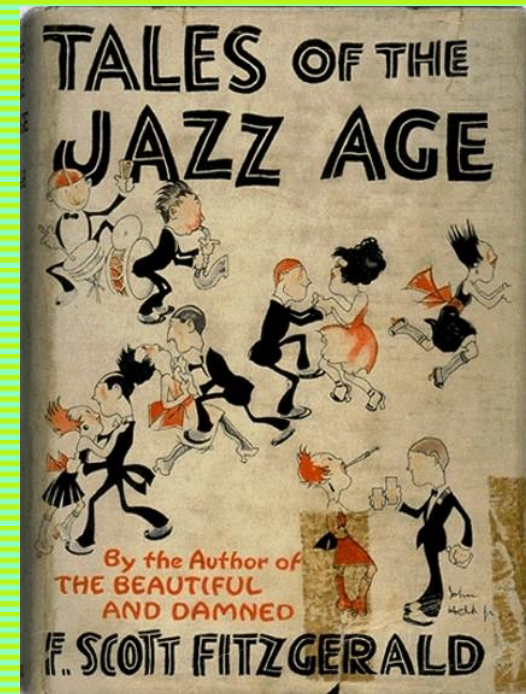
Critics' View



- Literary opinion makers were reluctant to accord Fitzgerald full marks as a serious craftsman. His reputation as a drinker inspired the myth that he was an irresponsible writer; yet he was a painstaking reviser whose fiction went through layers of drafts. Fitzgerald's clear, lyrical, colorful, witty style evoked the emotions associated with time and place.

Fitzgerald's View

As a social historian Fitzgerald became identified with the Jazz Age: “It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire,” he wrote in *Tales of the Jazz Age*.



Fitzgerald's Silver Hip Flask



A gift from friends, the engraving reads:
"To 1st Lt. F. Scott Fitzgerald
65th Infantry
Camp Sheridan

Forget-me-not
Zelda
9-13-18

Montgomery, Ala"

While stationed at Camp Sheridan, near Montgomery, Alabama, Fitzgerald met his future wife, Zelda Sayre, the daughter of an Alabama Supreme Court judge.

Fitzgerald's Earnings



Fitzgerald's peak story fee of \$4,000 from *The Saturday Evening Post* may have had in 1929 the purchasing power of \$40,000 in present-day dollars. Nonetheless, the general view of his affluence is distorted. Fitzgerald was not among the highest-paid writers of his time; his novels earned comparatively little, and most of his income came from 160 magazine stories.

Fitzgerald's Earnings



During the 1920s his income from all sources averaged under \$25,000 a year; good money at a time when a schoolteacher's average annual salary was \$1,299, but not a fortune. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald did spend money faster than he earned it; the author who wrote so eloquently about the effects of money on character was unable to manage his own finances.

Success

With such success, the Fitzgeralds lived fast and well. From their marriage in 1920 until they left for Europe in 1924, they lived in and near New York City. Their life was expensive and "an almost continual party" which forced Fitzgerald to begin an endless and desperate struggle to keep pace with the bills. After his precocious beginning, he strove to keep on being young. He was aided by boyish good looks-fair blond hair and light blue eyes.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Briefcase

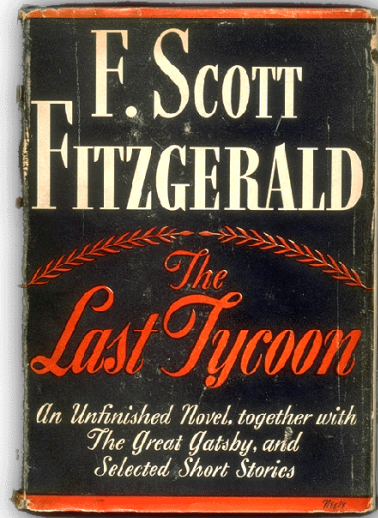
The monogram reads:
"Scott Fitzgerald
597 - 5th Ave.
New York"



The 1930s



- Fitzgerald's reputation reached its lowest point during the Depression, when he was viewed as a Jazz Age writer whose time had come and gone.
- *The Great Gatsby* went out of print in 1939.
- When Fitzgerald died a year later, *Time* magazine didn't even mention *The Great Gatsby*.



The 1940s

- Interest in Fitzgerald was revived with the posthumous book, *The Last Tycoon*.
- A literary critic was the first to point out that *Gatsby*, despite its Jazz Age setting, focused on timeless, universal concerns.

HEARST'S INTERNATIONAL

MAY, 1923



Photographed by Alfred Cheney Johnson

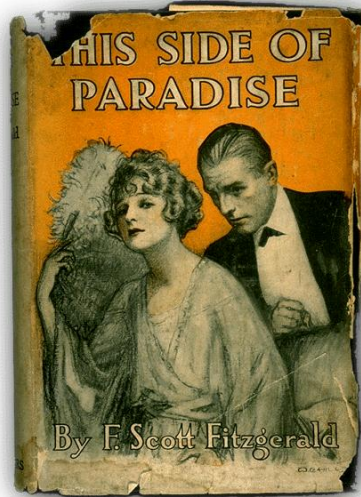
SCOTT AND ZELDA FITZGERALD

Mr. F. Scott Fitzgerald started the flapper movement in this country. So says his husband, the best-loved author of the younger generation. His first book, *This Side of Paradise*, was finished when he was twenty-two. He began it at Princeton and wrote portions of it at military camps during the war. Mr. Fitzgerald says he wrote it because he was certain that all the young people were going to be killed in the war and he wanted to put on paper a record of the strange life they had led in their time. The novel made an immediate success. Since then he has written *The Beautiful and Damned* and two collections of short stories which are in the young people of this generation what *O. Henry* was to the last. All of F. Scott Fitzgerald's new fiction will appear in HEARST'S INTERNATIONAL.

The 1940s



Zelda Fitzgerald observed after her husband's death: "I do not know that a personality can be divorced from the times which evoke it. . . . I feel that Scott's greatest contribution was the dramatization of a heart-broken and despairing era, giving it a new *raison-d'etre* (purpose for existence) in the sense of tragic courage with which he endowed it."



The 1950s

- Fitzgerald's reputation soared with a new biography entitled *This Side of Paradise*.
- The *London Times* affirmed that *Gatsby* is “one of the best-if not the best-American novels of the past fifty years.”

The 1960s



Fitzgerald had died believing himself a failure. The obituaries were condescending, and he seemed destined for literary obscurity. By 1960 he had achieved a secure place among America's enduring writers. *The Great Gatsby*, a work that seriously examines the theme of aspiration in an American setting, defines the classic American novel.

What is the reputation today?



Fitzgerald was the voice of his generation--disillusioned, flippant, hard-boiled--and he spoke its exact language.

**It's time for you to decide,
Old Sport...**

