

The Cambridge Edition of the Works of  
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Edited by James L. W. West III

MY LOST CITY  
Personal Essays,  
1920–1940



*F. Scott Fitzgerald*

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J. L. W. W. III

## ILLUSTRATIONS

(*Beginning on page 295*)

*Frontispiece.* First page of “How to Waste Material” (1926).

1. Fitzgerald’s “Monthly Expenditure” list for 1923.
2. Page 4, revised typescript of “A Short Autobiography” (1929).
3. Fitzgerald to Perkins, 25 March 1936.
4. Vernon and Irene Castle.

## INTRODUCTION

"I have cleaner hands in the case of non-fiction than in fiction."

—*Fitzgerald to Maxwell Perkins, 2 April 1936*

Twice during the last decade of his life, once in May 1934 and again in April 1936, F. Scott Fitzgerald proposed a collection of his personal essays to Maxwell Perkins, his editor at Charles Scribner's Sons. On both occasions Perkins was unenthusiastic. The first time, in May 1934, Perkins suggested to Fitzgerald that he instead publish a collection of short fiction. The second time, in April 1936, Perkins advised Fitzgerald to write an entirely different kind of book, a reminiscence of the Jazz Age. Fitzgerald's desire to publish a collection of his personal essays was never realized. He shelved the idea and did not mention it again in his correspondence with Perkins; he died in 1940 without having brought his best essays together into a clothbound collection.

Fortunately, Fitzgerald left behind a table of contents. In a letter to Perkins of 2 April 1936, he included a list of the essays that he wanted to reprint. With this list as a guide it is possible to publish, in the first section of this volume, the collection that Fitzgerald envisioned. To complete the record the volume also includes, in a separate section, the personal essays that he wrote between the spring of 1934 and his death in December 1940. All of these essays have been reprinted since 1940 in various collections and anthologies, most of them now out of print, but the essays have never appeared together. This volume of the Cambridge Fitzgerald Edition is the first comprehensive gathering of his personal essays and, as such, is the nearest thing to an autobiography of him that we can now have.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Scott Donaldson calls for such a collection in "A Fitzgerald Autobiography," *F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, 1 (2002): 143–57.

## I. BACKGROUND

Fitzgerald first proposed a collection of autobiographical writings to Perkins on 15 May 1934. In a lengthy letter he outlined four possible books for publication by Scribners. He had published *Tender Is the Night*, his fourth novel, a month before; he and Perkins now needed to decide what his next book should be. It was the custom at Scribners to follow a novel with a collection of shorter writings—this to capitalize on the notice generated by the novel. Fitzgerald had produced a considerable body of magazine work since the publication of his previous novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in April 1925. He told Perkins that he had enough material in the bank for any one of four books: (1) a “big omnibus” of both old and new short stories; (2) a collection which would combine the Basil Duke Lee stories and the Josephine Perry stories, two series (each featuring a single character) that he had written for the *Saturday Evening Post* in the late 1920s and early 1930s; (3) a volume of previously uncollected short fiction; and (4) a collection of autobiographical essays. He described the fourth idea as follows:

This is an idea founded on the success of such books as Alexander Woollcott’s “While Rome Burns.”<sup>2</sup> As you know I have never published any personal stuff between covers because I have needed it all for my fiction; nevertheless, a good many of my articles and random pieces have attracted a really quite wide attention, and might again if we could get a tie-up of title and matter, which should contain wit and a soupçon of wisdom and not look like a collection of what the cat brought in, or be haunted by the bogey of all articles in a changing world, of being hilariously dated. It might be the best idea of all. Let me give you a rough idea as to what I have in that line.

There are my two articles for the *Post* which attracted such wide attention in their day that I have yet to hear the last of them, “How to Live on \$36,000 a Year” and “How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year.” There are “Echoes of the Jazz Age” from *Scribner’s* and “My Lost City” which the *Cosmopolitan* has been holding up but wouldn’t sell back to me to publish in

<sup>2</sup> A miscellany of anecdotes and reminiscences by Woollcott, a drama critic, book reviewer, and literary personality. The collection was published by Viking in 1934.

the *American*. Other articles which have attracted attention are "Princeton" in *College Humor*, "One Hundred False Starts" in the *Post*, "The Cruise of the Rolling Junk," a long, supposedly humorous account of an automobile journey that appeared in *Motor*, an article called "Girls Believe in Girls" in *Liberty*, and two articles called "Making Monagomy Work" and "Are Irresponsible Rich?" published by the Metropolitan Syndicate in the early twenties, and an article called "On Being Twenty-five" in the *American*. And these also from the early twenties, "Wait till you have children of your own" (*Woman's Home Companion*), "Imagination" and "A Few Mothers" in the *Ladies Home Journal* and "The Little Brother of the Flapper" in *McCalls*.

This, or a good part of it, would have to comprise the backbone of the book and would be about 57,000 words. In addition there are some literary reviews, etc. of which nothing should be preserved except the elegy on Ring and an article in the *Bookman* on "How to Waste Material" welcoming Ernest's arrival. Beyond this there are a few hors d'oeuvres such as "A Short Autobiography" and "Salesmanship in the Champs Elysees" both in the *New Yorker* and a few other short sketches from *Vanity Fair*, *College Humor*, etc. and some light verse. There are also a couple of articles in which Zelda and I collaborated—idea, editing and padding being mine and most of the writing being hers—but I am not sure I would be justified in using it. Also I have some of my very first stories written at twelve and thirteen, some of which are funny enough to be reprinted.<sup>3</sup>

Fitzgerald's ideas about the collection were not yet fully formed. To Perkins the proposed volume must have looked like a grab-bag, despite Fitzgerald's acknowledgment that he would need to revise the material and bring out its unifying themes. After consulting with the other editors at Scribners and with the sales force, Perkins wrote back to Fitzgerald on 17 May suggesting that he either publish the Basil and Josephine stories together in a single book or assemble a volume of his uncollected short fiction. Fitzgerald chose the second option and after many delays published *Taps at Reveille*, his fourth collection of short stories, in March 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzgerald to Perkins, 15 May 1934, in *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald-Perkins Correspondence*, ed. John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer (New York: Scribners, 1971): 197-98. Quotations from other letters between the two men are taken from this edition. Misspellings and other irregularities in Fitzgerald's letters have been preserved.

Fitzgerald did not forget the book of personal essays, however, nor did he stop writing in the autobiographical mode. In February, March, and April 1936 he published a trio of self-revelatory essays in *Esquire*: "The Crack-Up," "Pasting It Together," and "Handle with Care." These confessional articles caused a sensation, bringing Fitzgerald much attention in the national press. Not all of this attention was favorable, but it was evidence that he had not been forgotten, and it caused him to think again about bringing together a collection of personal writings.

At this juncture Fitzgerald received a letter from Simon and Schuster, a rival publisher, offering to publish such a book. Fitzgerald forwarded the letter to Perkins on 25 March 1936 and asked his advice:

In regard to the enclosed letter from Simon and Schuster do you remember my proposing some years ago to gather up such of my non-fiction as is definitely autobiographical—"How to Live on \$36,000 a Year," etc., "My Relations with Ring Lardner," a *Post* article called "A Hundred False Starts," of hotels stayed at that I did with Zelda and about a half a dozen others and making them into a book? At the time you didn't like the idea and I'm quite aware that there's not a penny in it unless it was somehow joined together and given the same kind of lift that Gertrude Stein's autobiography had. Some of it will be inevitably dated, but there is so much of it and the interest in this *Esquire* series has been so big that I thought you might reconsider the subject on the chance that there might be money in it. If you don't like the idea what would you think of letting Simon and Schuster try it?

I don't want to spend any time at all on it until I am absolutely sure of publication and, as you know, of course I would prefer to keep identified with the house of Scribner, but in view of the success of the Gertrude Stein book and the Seabrook book it just might be done with profit.<sup>4</sup>

The reaction from Perkins remained lukewarm. In a return letter of 26 March he suggested that Fitzgerald instead write "a

<sup>4</sup> *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, p. 227. Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was published in 1933 by Harcourt, Brace. The book by William Seabrook (*Asylum*, published by Harcourt Brace in 1935) is a first-person account of his seven-month stay in Bloomingdale Hospital in White Plains, New York, where he was treated for alcoholism. Fitzgerald mentions Seabrook in "The Crack-Up."

reminiscent book,—not autobiographical, but reminiscent.” Perkins was careful to praise Fitzgerald: “You write non-fiction wonderfully well,” he said. “Your observations are brilliant and acute, and your presentations of real characters most admirable” (*Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 228). Fitzgerald was probably flattered, but he knew that he could not justify composing, from the ground up, the kind of book Perkins wanted. He needed to invest his creative energies in short stories and eventually in another novel. The collection of personal essays would require little fresh invention. It could be assembled from material ready to hand, and it would generate reviews and discussion. With luck it would have a reasonable sale. Fitzgerald therefore tried once more with Perkins: he reexamined his stock of personal essays, made his choices, put them in order, and in a letter of 2 April presented a proposed table of contents:

Dear Max:

Your letter really begs the question because it would be one thing to join those articles together and another to write a book. The list would include the following:

1. A short autobiography I wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post* “Who’s Who and How.”
2. An article on Princeton for *College Humor*.
3. An article on being twenty-five for the *American*.
4. “How to Live on \$36,000 a Year” for the *Post*.
5. “How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year” for the *Post*.
6. “Imagination and a Few Mothers” for the *Ladies Home Journal*.
7. “Wait Till You Have Children of Your Own” for the *Woman’s Home Companion*.
8. “How to Waste Material” for *Bookman*.
9. “One Hundred False Starts” for *Post*.
10. “Ring Lardner” *New Republic*.
11. A short autobiography for *New Yorker*.
12. “Girls Believe in Girls” *Liberty*.
13. “My Lost City” *Cosmopolitan* (still unpublished, but very good I think.)
14. “Show Mr. and Mrs. F—to—” *Esquire*.
15. Echoes from the Jazz Age.
16. The three articles about cracking up from *Esquire*.

This would total 60,000 words. I would expect to revise it and add certain links, perhaps in some sort of telegraphic flashes between each article.

Whether the book would have the cohesion to sell or not I don't know. It makes a difference whether people think they are getting some real inside stuff or whether they think a collection is thrown together. As it happens the greater part of these articles are intensely personal, that is to say, while a newspaper man has to find something to write his daily or weekly article about, I have written articles entirely when the impetus came from within, in fact, I have cleaner hands in the case of non-fiction than in fiction.

(*Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 228–29)

Perkins replied on 8 April. He had not read all of the essays, he admitted, but had read “almost all of them” and remembered them “pretty well.” He remained unconvinced: “I feel very doubtful of the wisdom of bringing out a book containing them,” he wrote. “It is hard for me to see how the book would have enough unity to seem other than a collection of non-fiction, with only the unifying element of autobiography.”<sup>5</sup>

The rest of 1936 brought much trouble for Fitzgerald. In August, Ernest Hemingway published “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” in *Esquire*; it was a brilliant story but contained a slur about “poor Scott Fitzgerald” and his “romantic awe” of the rich.<sup>6</sup> In September a reporter named Michel Mok wrote an exposé of Fitzgerald entitled “The Other Side of Paradise.” The piece appeared in the *New York Post* for 25 September and damaged Fitzgerald’s reputation, depicting him as a washed-up alcoholic. Depressed over Mok’s article and by other problems in his life, Fitzgerald made an unsuccessful attempt in late September to commit suicide.<sup>7</sup> He recovered his

<sup>5</sup> This letter from Perkins, which survives in the Scribner Archive at Princeton, is summarized in *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, p. 277, n. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Hemingway changed Fitzgerald’s name to “Julian” when he collected “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” in *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-nine Stories* (New York: Scribners, 1938). Fitzgerald’s name appeared only in the *Esquire* text and in a reprinting of “Snows” in *The Best Short Stories of 1937*, ed. Edward J. O’Brien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937).

<sup>7</sup> Fitzgerald described the suicide attempt to Harold Ober in an undated letter, received by Ober on 5 October 1936. See *As Ever, Scott Fitz—Letters between F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Literary Agent, Harold Ober, 1919–1940*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Jennifer McCabe Atkinson (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1972): 282.

equilibrium and managed to make his way through the rest of 1936 and the first few months of 1937, selling just enough writing to meet his expenses. Then in June 1937 he accepted an offer to go to Hollywood as a scriptwriter for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He spent what remained of his life in Hollywood and died there in December 1940, with the manuscript of *The Last Tycoon* partly drafted.

## 2. ARRANGEMENT

The collection (alas, untitled) that Fitzgerald proposed to Perkins on 2 April 1936 was a carefully planned book. The essays listed in the table of contents are not given in the order of their composition or publication; instead they are arranged to present a line of autobiographical development. There is a recognizable progression from the early essays to the later ones—from youthful exuberance and cockiness, to mid-life meditations on work and parenthood, to mature reflections on failure and loss. In this collection one can trace Fitzgerald's journey from youth through young manhood to middle age; one can also watch him invent and reinvent his authorial persona.

If this collection had been put into print, it would have given Fitzgerald a chance to reclaim control of his public image. He had not worried much about that image during the early years of his career: he had nearly always been depicted by the press as a talented, likable, successful young author. He and Zelda, his wife, had been celebrities who provided dependably good copy for newspaper reporters and literary journalists. During the 1930s, however, Fitzgerald's relationship with the press deteriorated, reaching a low point with the piece by Mok. This proposed collection of essays would have given Fitzgerald a chance to present himself in a different light—as a thoughtful, mature literary artist.

After Fitzgerald's death, the task of bringing out a collection of his personal writings fell to the literary critic Edmund Wilson, a Princeton friend who had functioned as Fitzgerald's "intellectual conscience" throughout his career. Wilson assembled *The Crack-Up*, a brilliantly conceived volume which presented Fitzgerald as a chronicler of remorse and regret. The collection drew heavily on Fitzgerald's later writings, containing no essay written

before 1933. The image of Fitzgerald as an analyst of failure and an elegist of the 1920s is certainly not fallacious, but it has come (perhaps unduly) to dominate writing about him since 1945, when *The Crack-Up* appeared under the imprint of New Directions. This image is not the one that Fitzgerald wanted to present in 1936.

The essays in Section I of this volume are published in the order that Fitzgerald proposed to Perkins. This is of course not precisely the book that Fitzgerald would have produced in 1936: he would certainly have revised the weaker essays and probably would have added the "links" or "telegraphic flashes" that he mentioned to Perkins in the 2 April letter. He might have reordered the essays; almost certainly he would have cut many passages and composed much new material. He was a conscientious worker, conscious of the state of his literary reputation, and would not have reprinted these essays without significantly revising them. Still, this sequence of pieces is substantially the book he would have put into print. It gives readers an opportunity to see Fitzgerald as he wanted to be seen in the mid-1930s.

Fitzgerald wrote in the autobiographical mode until the end of his life. He produced several excellent pieces of writing: the linked series "Author's House," "Afternoon of an Author," and the quasi-fictional "An Author's Mother"; the memoir "Early Success"; the meditation on insomnia called "Sleeping and Waking"; and the summary article "My Generation." Perhaps Fitzgerald meant to take several of these essays, combine them with the best of the earlier pieces, and publish a collection more nearly in line with the "reminiscent" book Perkins had suggested. Fitzgerald mentions no such plan in his surviving letters, but the idea must surely have occurred to him. It therefore seems proper to include these later essays in this volume of the Cambridge Edition.

### 3. EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The texts published in this edition have been established according to techniques of scholarly editing developed by W. W. Greg and Fredson Bowers and extended by G. Thomas Tanselle. No

"A Short Autobiography," *New Yorker*, 5 (25 May 1929); "Girls Believe in Girls," *Liberty*, 7 (8 February 1930); "My Lost City," *Cosmopolitan*, 131 (July 1951); "'Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number—'" (two parts) *Esquire*, 1-2 (May-June 1934); "Echoes of the Jazz Age," *Scribner's Magazine*, 90 (November 1931); "The Crack-Up," *Esquire*, 5 (February 1936); "Pasting It Together," *Esquire*, 5 (March 1936); "Handle with Care," *Esquire*, 5 (April 1936); "Auction—Model 1934," *Esquire*, 2 (July 1934); "Sleeping and Waking," *Esquire*, 2 (December 1934); "Author's House," *Esquire*, 6 (July 1936); "Afternoon of an Author," *Esquire*, 6 (August 1936); "An Author's Mother," *Esquire*, 6 (September 1936); "Early Success," *American Cavalcade*, 1 (October 1937); "My Generation," *Esquire*, 70 (October 1968).

*Factual errors and regularizations:*

Because the essays in this volume are nonfiction, they have been emended for factual accuracy. Fitzgerald would have wanted to use correct names for the people, places, book titles, restaurants, streets, and towns mentioned in his texts. As it happens he nearly always had his facts right. When he did make errors they have been corrected; the emendations have been recorded in the apparatus. Fortunately none of the errors is significant enough to require even the slightest verbal or stylistic revision. Nearly all of the corrections involve single words; usually the error is in spelling.

Fitzgerald was inconsistent in orthography and word division; this problem is compounded by the fact that each magazine followed its own style of spelling, word division, and punctuation—with the more literary journals (*Scribner's Magazine* and the *Bookman*, for example) leaning toward British usages. Fitzgerald's most common word divisions and spellings, as established by the study of his holographs, have been used throughout this volume. He generally employed American orthography and punctuation but preferred some British spellings—*glamour*, *grey*, and *theatre*, for example. These British spellings have been preserved.

Fitzgerald used italics for emphasis and, occasionally, for words in languages other than English. This practice has been followed, with book, magazine, and newspaper titles appearing within

quotation marks. Numbers of avenues in New York City have been spelled out; numbers of cross-streets have been given in Arabic numerals. Fitzgerald often used no comma between two adjectives of equal weight; he usually omitted the comma between the final two elements in a series. These habits have been allowed to stand. Three ellipsis points appear within sentences, four at the ends of sentences. Commas omitted by Fitzgerald before conjunctions in compound sentences are supplied only when there is a possibility of confusion. Space breaks indicated by roman numerals are retained; nonstructural breaks, signaled in magazine texts by extra space and display caps, are omitted.

When Fitzgerald wishes to render the name of a restaurant or hotel in its original language (most commonly French or Italian), the correctly accented spelling is given. When he gives the restaurant or hotel name in an English-language version ("the Grand," for example, instead of "Le Grand Hôtel"), the anglicized version has been used.

### *Collaborations:*

Collaborations between Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, bring up issues of attribution and intention. In the Cambridge Edition, such collaborations will be dealt with individually, as they appear in the various volumes. Two are included here: "Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number—" and "Auction—Model 1934." The extent of the collaboration on "Mr. and Mrs. F." is revealed by the surviving typescripts. Zelda produced the first version of the text—a free-association piece written mostly in the first person and addressed to her husband. In it she reminisced about the various hotels in which they had stayed during their marriage. Fitzgerald saw the potential of "Mr. and Mrs. F." and decided to make it publishable for *Esquire*, a new magazine to which he had been invited to contribute. He made major revisions in the original typescript: he cut and condensed, smoothed and polished, and introduced stylistic flourishes. He also changed the point-of-view to first-person plural. Zelda had written the following sentences:

We played tennis on the baked clay courts and you fished rather tentatively from a low brick wall. The foliage dripped like rock formations over

the bare ground at the water level and the heat of summer seethed in the rosin of the white pine bath-houses. We walked at night towards a cafe blooming with Japanese lanterns and I followed your white shoes gleaming like radium in the damp darkness. Rising off the water, lights flickered an unimperative invitation far enough away to be interpreted as we liked; to shimmer glamorously behind the silhouette of retrospective good times when we still believed in summer hotels and the philosophies of popular songs. Another night, we learned to Wiener waltz, and once we regimented our dreams to the imperative commands of a nostalgic orchestra floating down the formal paths of the garden of a better hotel.

Fitzgerald revised to produce this version:

We played tennis on the baked clay courts and fished tentatively from a low brick wall. The heat of summer seethed in the resin of the white pine bath-houses. We walked at night towards a cafe blooming with Japanese lanterns, white shoes gleaming like radium in the damp darkness. It was like the good gone times when we still believed in summer hotels and the philosophies of popular songs. Another night we danced a Wiener waltz and just simply swep' around.

(First typescript, p. 27)

Fitzgerald had a fresh typescript made of “Mr. and Mrs. F.” and sent it to *Esquire*, where it served as setting copy. This second typescript survives as well; both typescripts have been consulted in establishing the text for this volume.<sup>10</sup>

The nature of the collaboration on “Auction—Model 1934” is less certain. Only one prepublication version survives, the setting-copy typescript from *Esquire*, and it bears revisions only by Fitzgerald. The piece was published under both names; probably the mechanics of the collaboration were similar to those for “Mr. and Mrs. F.”—initial drafting by Zelda, revisions by Fitzgerald. Not enough documentary evidence survives, however, for an editor to be precise. These two collaborations will carry joint by-lines in this volume, as will similar collaborations that appear in future volumes of the Cambridge Edition.

<sup>10</sup> The earlier typescript, bearing Fitzgerald's revisions, is facsimiled in Appendix 1 of this volume.