



F. Scott Fitzgerald  
Tales of the Jazz Age

FORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

F. SCO



30808853

# *Tales of the Jazz Age*

*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*

JACKSON R. BRYER



OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP  
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.  
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of  
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

Editorial material © Jackson R. Bryer 2012

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted

First published as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 2012

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in  
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the  
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted  
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics  
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the  
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the  
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form  
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2012930916

ISBN 978-0-19-959912-7

Printed in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc



## TALES OF THE JAZZ AGE

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY FITZGERALD (1896–1940) was born in St Paul, Minnesota, and named after his second cousin three times removed, the author of 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. He went to Princeton University, but dropped out, eventually joining the Army in 1917. While in the service he began writing a novel, and also met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, of Montgomery, Alabama, whom he married in the spring of 1920, the year in which he published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. The novel, a thinly disguised fictional account of Fitzgerald's Princeton years, made its author an instant literary success, and a celebrity as well. Dividing his time between the East Coast of the United States and France during the 1920s, Fitzgerald wrote short stories in order to earn enough money to sustain himself and his family between novels. His second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), was not nearly as critically successful as his first. It was followed by a brief but disastrous excursion into drama, *The Vegetable* (1923), and by his acknowledged masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which marked a departure for Fitzgerald in its poetic style, its narrative complexity, and its highly controlled concise structure. Beset during the late 1920s and early 1930s by his wife's psychiatric difficulties, which required periodic hospitalization, and by his own financial problems, he did not produce another novel until 1934, when *Tender Is the Night* appeared—to mixed reviews and disappointing sales. In 1937 Fitzgerald went to Hollywood to write film scripts; despite working on numerous movies, he received screen credit for only one, but he paid off most of his debts and began a novel about the movie industry. *The Last Tycoon* was nearly half-completed in first draft form when, on 21 December 1940, Fitzgerald died of a heart attack.

JACKSON R. BRYER is Professor Emeritus at the University of Maryland. He has published widely on F. Scott Fitzgerald, including an edition of the love letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda* (2002), and he has been President of the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society since 1990. His most recent book is *The Selected Letters of Thornton Wilder* (2008). He is the editor of *This Side of Paradise* for Oxford World's Classics.

## OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

*For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics have brought readers closer to the world's great literature. Now with over 700 titles—from the 4,000-year-old myths of Mesopotamia to the twentieth century's greatest novels—the series makes available lesser-known as well as celebrated writing.*

*The pocket-sized hardbacks of the early years contained introductions by Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, and other literary figures which enriched the experience of reading.*

*Today the series is recognized for its fine scholarship and reliability in texts that span world literature, drama and poetry, religion, philosophy, and politics. Each edition includes perceptive commentary and essential background information to meet the changing needs of readers.*

## INTRODUCTION

IN mid-January 1920, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins of Charles Scribner's Sons, and asked, 'There's nothing in collections of short stories is there?' At about the same time, he addressed an almost identical query to his agent, Harold Ober: 'Is there any money in collections of short stories?'<sup>1</sup> That the potential financial reward of a short story collection was on Fitzgerald's mind at that time is not surprising. While during the first six months of 1919 he had—according to his own probably somewhat exaggerated account—accumulated 'one hundred and twenty-two rejection slips' trying to get his stories published,<sup>2</sup> his fortunes had changed dramatically after Scribner's accepted his novel *This Side of Paradise* in September 1919. Between September 1919 and June 1920, thirteen Fitzgerald stories and two playlets appeared in such prestigious publications as the *Smart Set*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Although the *Smart Set* paid only \$35–\$40 per contribution, *Scribner's* fee was \$150 and the *Saturday Evening Post* paid \$400–\$500. As a result, Fitzgerald's earnings from his writing increased from \$879 in 1919 to \$18,850 in 1920.<sup>3</sup>

But Fitzgerald's scepticism regarding publishing his stories in a book is also symptomatic of his career-long ambivalence about his short fiction. Despite the fact that he relied heavily on the money he earned from publishing his stories, he continually deprecated them as 'trash' and potboilers written only to sustain him during the financially fallow years between novels. Typically, he wrote to John Peale Bishop in 1925, 'No news except now I get \$2000 a story and they grow worse and worse and my ambition is get to where I need write no more but novels'. Similarly, he wrote to Perkins that same year, 'Isn't

<sup>1</sup> John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald-Perkins Correspondence* (New York, 1971), 25; Matthew J. Bruccoli (ed.), with the assistance of Jennifer McCabe Atkinson, *As Ever, Scott Fitz—: Letters Between F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Literary Agent, Harold Ober, 1919–1940* (Philadelphia, 1972), 9.

<sup>2</sup> 'Who's Who and Why', *Saturday Evening Post*, 18 Sept. 1920; repr. in *Afternoon of an Author: A Selection of Uncollected Stories and Essays by F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1958), 85.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 2nd rev. edn. (Columbia, SC, 2002), 101–2, 133; *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Ledger: A Facsimile* (Washington, DC, 1972), 51–2.

that a disgrace, when I get \$2500. for a story as my regular price. But trash doesn't come as easily as it used to and I've grown to hate the poor old debauched form itself.<sup>4</sup> And most famously of all, there is his oft-quoted remark, in a 1929 letter to Ernest Hemingway: 'Here's a last flicker of the old cheap pride: the *Post* now pays the old whore \$4000 a screw. But now it's because she's mastered the 40 positions—in her youth one was enough.'<sup>5</sup>

There was, however, another side to Fitzgerald's view of his short fiction. Aside from somewhat overvaluing it for the income it provided, he occasionally also saw its artistic merits, as when he wrote to Ober in 1935 that 'all my stories are conceived [*sic*] like novels, require a special emotion, a special experience—so that my readers . . . know that each time it'll be something new, not in form but in substance'.<sup>6</sup> From the very beginning of Fitzgerald's career, Perkins took this more positive position regarding his client's short stories. Replying to Fitzgerald's January 1920 question, he admitted that while story collections 'do not constitute selling books', 'it has seemed to me your stories were likely to constitute an exception . . . they have the popular note which would be likely to make them sell in book form'. He concluded with the sort of tactful and perceptive statement that would characterize and probably help sustain his two-decade relationship with Fitzgerald: 'I wish you did care more about writing them because of this, and also because they have great value in making you a reputation and because they are quite worthwhile in themselves. Still we should not like to interfere with your novels.'<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, in the nine decades since Perkins wrote these words, critics and scholars have, for the most part, taken their cue from Fitzgerald's own negative remarks about his stories rather than from Perkins's opinion that they have 'great value' and are 'quite worthwhile in themselves'. Beyond a core group of eight or nine which have been frequently anthologized and are the subjects of a few scholarly essays, the vast majority of the 178 stories he wrote have been almost totally ignored by teachers, students, critics, and scholars.

In 1920, however, Perkins apparently convinced Fitzgerald and

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Turnbull (ed.), *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1963), 355; Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 134.

<sup>5</sup> Turnbull (ed.), *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 307.

<sup>6</sup> Bruccoli (ed.), *As Ever, Scott Fitz—*, 221.

<sup>7</sup> Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 26.

his publisher, because in September 1920, hoping to capitalize on the success of *This Side of Paradise*, which sold more than 36,000 copies in nine months and went through nine printings before the end of 1920,<sup>8</sup> Scribner's published *Flappers and Philosophers*, its author's selection of the best of his stories published to that point in his career. This inaugurated a practice that was to continue throughout Fitzgerald's lifetime: within six months or a year of the publication of one of his novels, Scribner's would issue a volume that reprinted his selection of what he considered to be the best of his stories that had appeared since his last collection. *Tales of the Jazz Age* was the second such collection; it was published in September 1922, six months after *The Beautiful and Damned*, his second novel. *Flappers and Philosophers* sold well: it went through six printings, and by 1922, more than 15,000 copies were in print. *Tales of the Jazz Age* was only slightly less successful, going through three printings and about 14,000 copies by the end of 1922.<sup>9</sup>

When Fitzgerald began to select the stories for his second collection in February 1922, he faced a situation that was markedly different from that in 1920, when he had made his selections for *Flappers and Philosophers*. While for the earlier collection he was able to choose from among the dozen or so stories and short plays that he had published to that point, most written before he did final work on *This Side of Paradise*, for his second collection his choices were much more limited. For the previous two years, Fitzgerald had been devoting most of his time to his second novel, and had published a mere half-dozen stories between July 1920 and January 1922, two of which were only slightly revised versions of pieces he had originally published as an undergraduate at Princeton University. As a result, he debated what to include and what to call the new book. Originally, he proposed '*Sideshow or A Sideshow*' to Perkins, but when the latter replied that it suggested 'something of secondary importance', he came up with 'In One Reel', a title that evoked the single-reel short films then popular, before finally putting forward 'Tales of the Jazz Age'. Perkins's initial reaction to this last title was negative; he explained that the Scribner's sales force had voiced 'loud and precipitous criticisms' of it because

<sup>8</sup> Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 133.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew J. Bruccoli, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Descriptive Bibliography*, rev. edn. (Pittsburgh, 1987), 29, 31, 53.



they felt that 'there is an intense reaction against all jazz and that the word whatever implication it actually has, will injure the book'. But he added quickly—and typically—that 'Your own instinct has proved so good that you ought not to be overruled by numbers, but give the point consideration'. In his reply, Fitzgerald disagreed, predicting, probably accurately as it turned out, that 'It will be bought by *my own personal public*, that is by the countless flappers and college kids who think I am a sort of oracle'; and he concluded wryly, 'It is better to have a title & a title-connection that is a has-been than one that is a never-will-be'.<sup>10</sup> There were also disagreements regarding the contents of the collection. These centred primarily on whether it should include 'Tarquin of Cheapside', which Perkins thought artistically unconvincing and likely to shock many readers. It was one of the stories that had originally been published while its author was at Princeton. In defence, Fitzgerald cited the praise the story had elicited when it appeared in the *Nassau Literary Magazine* and after its republication in the *Smart Set*, and again Perkins ultimately yielded to Fitzgerald's judgement.<sup>11</sup>

It is probably an indication of Fitzgerald's own doubts as to the overall strength of *Tales of the Jazz Age* that he decided to preface it with a Table of Contents, a feature unique to this collection, in which he humorously and self-mockingly described the circumstances in which each story had been composed. 'The Camel's Back', he asserted, was written '*during one day . . . with the express purpose of buying a platinum and diamond wrist watch which cost six hundred dollars*' (p. 5); while of 'Jemina' he observed, '*It seems to me worth preserving a few years—at least until the ennui of changing fashions suppresses me, my books, and it together*' (p. 8). This tone was also reflected in the book's dedication 'Quite Inappropriately—To My Mother' (p. 3).

Responses to *Tales of the Jazz Age* in 1922 were generally very favourable. Reviewers used phrases like 'unerring insight', 'engaging freshness and frankness', 'original, stylish, expert', 'highly entertaining', 'astonishingly sincere and unselfconscious', 'pungent, witty and fascinating in style', and 'facility, ease, and brilliancy'.<sup>12</sup> As he

<sup>10</sup> Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 51, 271, 54, 58, 271–2, 59.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 61, 62, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson R. Bryer (ed.), *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception* (New York, 1978), 146, 141, 148, 150, 154, 158.

had undoubtedly hoped, Fitzgerald's Table of Contents attracted considerable positive attention from reviewers: Hildegard Hawthorne called it 'an excellent idea . . . done as well as Fitzgerald does anything that has to do with writing, which is very well indeed'; Woodward Boyd challenged readers to '[r]ead the table of contents and see if you can refrain from reading the book afterward'; and another critic praised Fitzgerald's 'ingenuous and disarming comment' that 'quite forestalls any criticism by the gracious candour of his remarks'.<sup>13</sup>

While there were a few negative reviews—John Gunther called the volume 'a poorly assembled mixture of bad, fair and good but not best' and H. L. Mencken noted that '[t]he spread between Fitzgerald's best work and his worst is extraordinarily wide'<sup>14</sup>—what is most prescient in the notices is the number of reviewers that saw in the author's second short story collection a significant shift, both with respect to subject matter and treatment. Some simply mentioned the variety—'no two of the stories are at all alike', observed one, and another commented, '[h]e does many things, and does most of them well'—but others delved more deeply and analytically into the possible implications of this diversity of material. The anonymous critic for the *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger* hinted at this by suggesting that 'Mr. Fitzgerald has post-graduated from the naive and charming sophomorphism of the younger set'; but Hildegard Hawthorne was more perceptively precise in pointing out that the stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age* that Fitzgerald described as written in his 'second manner' showed 'a development in his art, a new tone . . . the outcropping of a rich vein that may hold much wealth', noting that the collection was 'filled with all sorts of hints, promise and portents that make it exciting beyond its actual content'.<sup>15</sup>

Now, nearly a century after the publication of *Tales of the Jazz Age*, we have the benefit of knowing just how accurate were Hawthorne and those reviewers who saw it as a major departure from Fitzgerald's earlier work. Less than two years after its publication, Fitzgerald began—and completed rather quickly—*The Great Gatsby*, his third novel, which seemed, upon its appearance in 1925 and still today is generally regarded, in its conciseness, poetic style, and

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 150, 160, 163.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 155, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 141, 157, 151.

intricate patterning, as a radical and somewhat unexpected departure from its author's previous fiction. But, in fact, *Tales of the Jazz Age*, in many respects, marks a pivotal shift in Fitzgerald's writing, both with respect to subject matter and style, and can be seen as an important indicator of the direction his writing was to take as he moved towards *Gatsby*.

One way of beginning to see this shift is to compare the magazines which originally published the stories in *Flappers and Philosophers* with the venues where those in *Tales of the Jazz Age* first appeared. Four of the eight stories in *Flappers and Philosophers* were originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which required its fiction to be 'never cynical, . . . never naturalistic, . . . never openly critical of the near-Puritan virtues which made the *Post* the mouthpiece of middle America; and seldom . . . less than serious about romantic love'.<sup>16</sup> Once royalties from *This Side of Paradise* and income from his short stories and from the sale of film rights to his fiction made Fitzgerald's financial situation considerably more secure, he no longer had to write stories specifically for the *Post*; they could be more experimental in form and more serious and more nuanced in their subject matter. Only one of the eleven pieces in *Tales of the Jazz Age*, 'The Camel's Back', first appeared in the *Post*; and it is arguably one of the two or three selections in the volume that appear to look back to his earlier stories rather than forward towards *Gatsby*. One of the cardinal rules of a *Saturday Evening Post* story was that it had to have a happy ending; so it is another measure of how far Fitzgerald deviated from his previous short fiction in *Tales of the Jazz Age* to note that, of the eleven selections, three ('May Day', 'Benjamin Button', and 'The Lees of Happiness') end in the death of a major character and two ('The Camel's Back' and 'The Jelly-Bean') culminate in accidental and unexpected marriages that certainly do not bode well for the participants.

That Fitzgerald himself saw *Tales of the Jazz Age* as a departure from his previous fiction can be seen in the names he gave to the first two sections of the book and in the order in which he arranged them. By placing 'My Last Flappers' (with 'Last' implying final not most recent; as he wrote to Perkins in January 1922, 'God knows I am indebted to [the flapper idea] but I agree with you that its [*sic*] time to

<sup>16</sup> Bryant Mangum, *A Fortune Yet: Money in the Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Short Stories* (New York and London, 1991), 28.

let it go'<sup>17</sup>) at the beginning of the volume and then following it with 'Fantasies', as Alice Hall Petry explains, 'Fitzgerald could convey semiotically [a] shift in orientation from frivolous flappers to serious fantasies'.<sup>18</sup> Far more than *Flappers and Philosophers*, this collection also, as several reviewers mentioned, demonstrated its author's talents in several different fictional genres and styles, including 'fantasies' ('Diamond', 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button', and "'O Russet Witch!'"), a 'farce' ('The Camel's Back'), a 'domestic melodrama' ('The Lees of Happiness'), a 'technically innovative novella' ('May Day'), a 'sexually suggestive playlet' ('Porcelain and Pink'), a 'burlesque of popular fiction' ('Jemina'), and 'Mr. Icky', 'a play . . . which anticipates the theater of the absurd, . . .'.<sup>19</sup>

While *Tales of the Jazz Age* presents ample indications of its author's movement towards more serious and complex fiction, familiar and persistent Fitzgerald motifs are also abundantly evident. Chief among these are the related themes of a poor boy hopelessly in love with an unattainable rich and beautiful girl who often ends up marrying someone of her own class and that of a couple whose marriage is fraught with obstacles, either due to circumstances beyond their control or to inherent personal defects. The former of these, announced as early as an August 1916 entry in his *Ledger* that 'Poor boys shouldn't think of marrying rich girls' (the remark is sometimes attributed to the father of Ginevra King, the wealthy Chicago-area teenager with whom Fitzgerald had a brief but intense—mostly epistolary—romance between January 1915 and July 1917),<sup>20</sup> pervades Fitzgerald's fiction from Amory Blaine's relationship with Rosalind Connage in *This Side of Paradise* through Jay Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* to Dick Diver's doomed marriage to Nicole Warren in *Tender Is the Night* and many of his short stories. In *Tales of the Jazz Age*, in 'The Jelly-Bean', the title character, plebeian Jim Powell, 'who spends his life conjugating the verb to idle in the first person singular' (p. 11), is hopelessly smitten with Nancy Lamar, who 'had left a trail of broken hearts from Atlanta to New Orleans'

<sup>17</sup> Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Petry, *Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction: The Collected Stories 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., and London, 1991), 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 55-6.

<sup>20</sup> *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Ledger*, 170.

(p. 14), but loses her to Ogden Merritt, 'an individual in white trousers' whose 'father had made a better razor than his neighbor' (p. 17). In 'May Day', Gordon Sterrett, who admits to his friend Philip Dean that 'I'm on my own now . . . and I can't stand being poor' (p. 58), unsuccessfully tries to rekindle his college romance with Edith Bradin, 'a complete, infinitely delicate, quite perfect thing of beauty, flowing in an even line from a complex coiffure to two small slim feet' (p. 73); while in 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz', John T. Unger from Hades, 'a small town on the Mississippi River' (p. 117), falls in love with Kismine Washington, the daughter of the world's richest man, who, she tells John, would 'have you poisoned if he thought we were in love' (p. 143).

Even 'Caroline', who hapless bookstore clerk Merlin Grainger of "O Russet Witch!" realizes represents his 'romantic yearning for a beautiful and perverse woman' (p. 214), is, at the end of the story, married to Thomas Allerdyce and 'secure for life' (p. 216), while Merlin becomes 'too old now even for memories' (p. 216). In the playlet 'Mr. Icky', Ulsa, the '*very worldly*' and '*loudly dressed*' (p. 241) daughter of the title character, is pursued by Rodney Divine, '*handsomely attired in a dress-suit and a patent-leather silk hat*' (p. 240), to whom she observes, 'they wouldn't let me in through the servants' entrance of your house' (p. 241); and 'Jemina, the Mountain Girl', at the beginning of that story, encounters a 'man from the settlements' and muses that '[n]o one like him had ever come into her life before' (p. 247). In 'Porcelain and Pink', Mr Calkins, the 'Young Man' who, mistakenly thinking she is her sister Lois, carries on a flirtatious conversation with Julie while, unbeknownst to him, she is in her bathtub, is a 'literary' man whom the obviously upper-crust girls' mother 'detests . . . because he's just got a divorce' (p. 107). And Betty Medill's unwanted marriage to Percy Parkhurst in 'The Camel's Back', despite the fact that they are of the same social class, leaves her furious with him, exclaiming that her father will 'take his gun and put some cold steel in you' (p. 52). Significantly, it is only when Percy threatens to leave her to the luckless cabdriver who was the back half of the camel whom she was tricked into 'marrying' that she proclaims her love and agrees to marry Percy officially.

The second iteration of Fitzgerald's marriage motif, that of the unhappy or doomed couple, prominently apparent in the relationship of Anthony and Gloria Patch in his second novel, *The Beautiful*

and *Damned*, which he was working on at the same time he was writing several of the pieces in *Tales of the Jazz Age*, is present in 'The Lees of Happiness', probably the collection's most pessimistic selection. The idyllic union of Roxanne and Jeffrey Curtain—"It was a marriage of love. He was sufficiently spoiled to be charming; she was ingenuous enough to be irresistible" (p. 220)—is shattered when a 'blood clot the size of a marble' (p. 226) bursts in his brain and leaves him in a vegetative state for eleven years before he dies. Roxanne cares for him devotedly and unceasingly; while the marriage of their friends Harry and Kitty Cromwell abruptly ends when she, 'nervous without being sensitive, temperamental without temperament, a woman who seemed to flit and never light' (p. 223), abandons him and later marries 'a man named Horton, a sort of lumber king' (p. 237). Roxanne is only 35 when Jeffrey dies and Harry, who is 'devoted to her' and is her 'best friend' (p. 236), has faithfully visited them throughout Jeffrey's illness; but the story ends with them denying the possibility of future happiness together, because, in Fitzgerald's words, 'To these two life had come quickly and gone, leaving not bitterness, but pity; not disillusion, but only pain' (p. 238).

Another characteristic of Fitzgerald's fiction evident in *Tales of the Jazz Age* is the care with which he selected the names of his characters and the titles of his stories. Petry has suggested that Merlin Grainger's name, in "O Russet Witch!", reflects the story's theme that 'each of us contains the capacity for both the magical' (Merlin) and 'the mundane (hence "Grainger," literally "farmer")' and 'that it is our individual responsibility to nurture the former rather than to submit to the latter'.<sup>21</sup> In the same story, Caroline's real name, Alicia Dare, combines her pretentious phoniness with her audaciousness. In 'May Day', the 'over-rouged' (p. 84) Jewel Hudson's first name is typical of many of Fitzgerald's names and narrative passages in that it is both perfectly descriptively appropriate for someone of her class and also an ironic commentary in that she is anything but a 'jewel'. Likewise, Ogden Merritt of 'The Jelly-Bean' has a name that is suitable for a vapid well-born young man but as well ironically suggests that he in no way 'merits' any rewards he receives. Most transparently, the Braddock Tarleton Washington's genealogy in 'The

<sup>21</sup> Petry, *Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction*, 76.

Diamond as Big as the Ritz' carries a great deal of symbolic meaning, combining references to 'the Norman conquerors who brought with them a system of steep class differences', Lord Baltimore, 'a charter-holding proprietor of a large tract of early America who held absolute . . . power', Tarleton and Braddock, both 'noted for their presumptuousness', and Washington, 'a Southern, slave-owning plantation owner'.<sup>22</sup>

And, most obviously, by giving the rapacious, corrupt, and unscrupulous owner of the diamond as big as the Ritz Carlton Hotel the name of the man commonly known as the Father of His Country, Fitzgerald is satirizing the essential principles underlying the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave. A similar intention probably lies behind Fitzgerald's choice of the name Carrol Key for one of the two returning servicemen in 'May Day', who are described as 'ugly, ill-nourished, [and] devoid of all except the very lowest form of intelligence' (p. 64); his surname is suggestive of Francis Scott Key, author of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' (and, not incidentally, a distant relative of Fitzgerald, after whom the latter was named); this connection is made overt when we are told that Key's name hints that 'in his veins, however thinly diluted by generations of degeneration, ran blood of some potentiality' (p. 65)—an observation that may well also indicate some subtle authorial self-deprecation. With respect to titles, many have noted the possible multiple meanings of 'May Day' and their applicability to the story. On a literal level, it refers to the actual date on which the story takes place, 1 May 1919; but it may 'also ironically refer to the spring festival of crowning the May Queen and dancing around the Maypole, or even to the French expression, *m'aidez* ("help me")',<sup>23</sup> the latter being the origin of the term 'Mayday' for a distress call issued by a vessel at sea.

These layers of meaning in the names of Fitzgerald's characters and in the title of 'May Day' in turn suggest the principal reason that the three best stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age*—'May Day', 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz', and 'The Jelly-Bean'—represent significant turning points in Fitzgerald's writing and major transition points between his earlier fiction and *The Great Gatsby*. To varying degrees, in them, he was able to do what he had not done

<sup>22</sup> Robert Emmet Long, *The Achieving of The Great Gatsby: F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1920-1925* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1979), 63.

<sup>23</sup> John Kuehl, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston, 1991), 39.



previously: compose a narrative that existed on more than one level. In each case, albeit to differing extents, the story has some basis in Fitzgerald's own experience; and thus has a literal narrative. In fact, Fitzgerald locates many of the stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age* in a specific place and sometimes at a specific time: 'The Jelly-Bean' in Tarleton, Georgia, just after the end of the First World War; 'The Camel's Back' in Toledo, Ohio, 'during the Christmas holidays of 1919' (p. 29); 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button' 'in ante-bellum Baltimore' (p. 156) in 1860; and 'The Lees of Happiness' 'near the town of Marlowe, half an hour from Chicago' (p. 221) in 'the first years of the present century' (p. 219). But, unlike his previous stories and novels, there is also a very clear intent in 'May Day', 'Diamond', and 'The Jelly-Bean' to convey a larger, more universal, often ambivalent, and sometimes mythic dimension that clearly presents Fitzgerald's complex and often critical views on America and its culture. As Henry Dan Piper puts it, in these stories Fitzgerald begins 'to explore and expose the values that he had so naïvely glamorized in his early *Saturday Evening Post* stories'.<sup>24</sup>

This multi-layering is most apparent in 'May Day'. It is based on a number of actual events that took place in New York on 1 May 1919, when a rowdy group of returning servicemen tried to disrupt labour and socialist meetings throughout the city and were dispersed in sometimes violent confrontations with the police. Fitzgerald was living in New York at the time, writing advertising copy by day and unsuccessfully trying to pursue a writing career at night in order to establish a financial basis on which he might reinstate his engagement to Zelda Sayre. His situation is clearly parallel to that of Gordon Sterrett and Edith Bradin. But we can begin to see the other, less literal dimension of 'May Day' by looking at Fitzgerald's 1931 essay 'Echoes of the Jazz Age' where he dated the beginning of the Jazz Age as 'about the time of the May Day riots in 1919' when 'the wildest of all generations, the generation which had been adolescent during the confusion of the War, brusquely shouldered my contemporaries out of the way and danced into the limelight'; it was '[a] whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure'.<sup>25</sup> Viewed against this background, the chaos and self-indulgent pleasure-seeking that Fitzgerald saw as descriptive of that pivotal moment become the template not only for

<sup>24</sup> Piper, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait* (New York, 1965), 76.

<sup>25</sup> Edmund Wilson (ed.), *The Crack-Up* (New York, 1945), 13, 15.



the events of the story but also for its structure. The longest story he ever wrote, it is sometimes criticized for its diffuseness and for the coincidences used to bring its narrative strands together. Its tripartite plot construction is also unique in Fitzgerald's short fiction; but that structure is deliberately chosen as a reflection of the confusion, hysteria, and lack of focus that typified its time.

The characters are also deliberately selected to represent a cross-section of the constituencies of the day: Gus Rose and Carrol Key, soldiers newly returned from the war not knowing how they will fit into the new order, taking out their frustration in violence against what they see as society's radical element; Henry Bradin, the social activist editor, and the nameless Jew, eager to take advantage of the uncertainty of the times to promote their socialist ideology; Edith Bradin, Philip Dean, and Peter Himmel, upper-class hedonists out for a raucous and unfettered good time, aware that their social status insulates them from punishment or censure; and George Rose, the waiter at Delmonico's, and Jewel Hudson, representatives of the proletariat. As Brian Way notes, nothing is more characteristic of the arbitrariness of this moment than 'the distribution of happiness and misery'—the 'rich and fortunate' Dean and Himmel are at the beginning of a 'memorable party', while the fate of 'the weak' like Philip and Carrol Key is death—one self-imposed, the other utterly random.<sup>26</sup> One thinks of Myrtle Wilson and Jay Gatsby, similarly victimized by the rich and impregnable Buchanans.

Two specific passages serve further to exemplify the story's resonances and complexity. Couched in biblical or mythical language which deliberately withholds any mention of a specific time or place, its opening paragraphs imply perfectly the 'universality' of Fitzgerald's 'theme—the general hysteria and confusion of values which follow war'.<sup>27</sup> They read in part:

Never had there been such splendor in the great city, for the victorious war had brought plenty in its train, and the merchants had flocked thither from the South and West with their households to taste of all the luscious feasts and witness the lavish entertainments prepared—and to buy for their women furs against the next winter and bags of golden mesh and varicolored slippers of silk and silver and rose satin and cloth of gold. (p. 55)

<sup>26</sup> Way, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction* (London, 1980), 78.

<sup>27</sup> James E. Miller, Jr., *F. Scott Fitzgerald: His Art and His Technique* (New York, 1964), 56.