

A black and white photograph of a woman in 1920s fashion. She is wearing a dark, textured, dome-shaped hat with a white feather on the left side. Her hair is styled in a bob with bangs. She has dark lipstick and is looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly lavender or pale blue, dress with a lace or beaded collar. Her right hand is resting on her chest. The background is dark and out of focus.

COLLINS
CLASSICS

F. SCOTT
FITZGERALD

The Great Gatsby

THE GREAT GATSBY

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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Harper Press
An imprint of HarperCollins *Publishers*
77–85 Fulham Palace Road
Hammersmith
London W6 8JB

This edition published 2010

F. Scott Fitzgerald asserts the moral right to be
identified as the author of this work

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-0-00-736865-5

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc



Mixed Sources

Product group from well-managed
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Collins English Dictionary
Typesetting in Kalix by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Falkirk, Stirlingshire

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History of Collins

In 1819, millworker William Collins from Glasgow, Scotland, set up a company for printing and publishing pamphlets, sermons, hymn books and prayer books. That company was Collins and was to mark the birth of HarperCollins Publishers as we know it today. The long tradition of Collins dictionary publishing can be traced back to the first dictionary William published in 1824, *Greek and English Lexicon*. Indeed, from 1840 onwards, he began to produce illustrated dictionaries and even obtained a licence to print and publish the Bible.

Soon after, William published the first Collins novel, *Ready Reckoner*, however it was the time of the Long Depression, where harvests were poor, prices were high, potato crops had failed and violence was erupting in Europe. As a result, many factories across the country were forced to close down and William chose to retire in 1846, partly due to the hardships he was facing.

Aged 30, William's son, William II took over the business. A keen humanitarian with a warm heart and a generous spirit, William II was truly 'Victorian' in his outlook. He introduced new, up-to-date steam presses and published affordable editions of Shakespeare's works and *Pilgrim's Progress*, making them available to the masses for the first time. A new demand for educational books meant that success came with the publication of travel books, scientific books, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. This demand to be educated led to the later publication of atlases and Collins also held the monopoly on scripture writing at the time.

In the 1860s Collins began to expand and diversify and the idea of 'books for the millions' was developed. Affordable editions of classical literature were published and in 1903 Collins introduced 10 titles in their Collins Handy Illustrated Pocket Novels. These proved so popular that a few years later this had increased to an output of 50 volumes, selling nearly half a million in their year of publication. In the same year, The Everyman's Library was also instituted, with the idea of publishing an affordable library of the most important classical works, biographies, religious and philosophical treatments, plays, poems, travel and adventure.

This series eclipsed all competition at the time and the introduction of paperback books in the 1950s helped to open that market and marked a high point in the industry.

HarperCollins is and has always been a champion of the classics and the current Collins Classics series follows in this tradition – publishing classical literature that is affordable and available to all. Beautifully packaged, highly collectible and intended to be reread and enjoyed at every opportunity.

Life & Times

The Jazz Age

There can be few novels as divisive as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in terms of people's opinion of its literary worth. It registered disappointing sales upon its publication in 1925 which led to Fitzgerald slipping into obscurity despite his having established a reasonable reputation with earlier books. Following his death, in 1940, the book was included on a list of titles to be provided free to US service men and women fighting in World War II. This meant that 150,000 copies began circulating through the armed forces until the book became familiar to overseas Americans. As a result it had inadvertently worked its way into the American psyche and won favour where otherwise it would have been forgotten.

The story itself is essentially about the moral decay that ensued in America during the 1920s. Although other countries had class divisions, the US had the equivalent of an upper class in the form of patricians or members of long-established wealthy families. These New World aristocrats lorded themselves above other people and spent much of their lives partying their way through the 'Jazz Age'. In addition, 1920 had seen the prohibition of alcohol, with the result that organized criminals had seen a way to make good money by bootlegging, or illegally selling liquor. When both of these groups came together they formed a social order of dilettantism – people who assumed and cultivated pretensions of sophistication. The story of *The Great Gatsby* spirals into tragedy as the book progresses with a succession of events – manslaughter, murder and then suicide – tragedy that seems all the more horrific in contrast to the spirited and frothy excesses that have come before.

There is more to the popularity of the novel than its installation into the favour of the US literati by proxy – it's a book that is representative of an era. In truth, most people had little or no direct involvement with the kinds of people described in the book, but it was a subculture that was perceived as glamorous so it caught the public imagination. In the same way that The Sixties only really

happened in the heart of Western cities, so The Twenties only really happened in affluent mansions and areas of the US. In fact it was this collision of subcultures, the wealthy and excessive nature of the elite set against the 'average Joe' that gave the book its potency. In Fitzgerald's book, Myrtle, the wife of a lowly garage owner, gets seduced by the dilettante lifestyle and starts an affair with the monied Tom Buchanan, leading to tragedy for both her and her husband.

The Great Gatsby appeals because the reader enjoys voyeuristically peering in to view the lives of those who are ridiculed as being exotic, foolish and beguiled, and is grateful not to be a part of it. There is a moral judgement involved in the process of reading such a story and Fitzgerald's work can be compared to that of the British author Thomas Hardy, who takes the same view that people tend to get what they deserve in life and that the real victims are those who get caught up, either by accident or by attraction. In effect *The Great Gatsby* is a Hardy-esque novel set in 1920s America as opposed to 19th century England. There is a definite register of contempt penned by both of these authors, as if to suggest that they have chosen to point the spotlight at those for whom they have little time in real life.

From a historical perspective the book tells of a bygone age that is part of US history. Prohibition ended in 1933 when the US government realized the irony of the situation. Christian values had led to prohibition in an attempt to sober up society and generate a more virtuous American nation. In reality people simply made their own moonshine or else bought their illegal alcohol from speakeasies, thereby making felons wealthy enough to control the police. Bribery and corruption were rife, so the conservatives had to concede that prohibition had countered their intuition. Six years later and World War II began, reshuffling priorities and making the United States a wealthy superpower. In the post-war era America flourished and prospered. It had been unscathed by the war and many nations had to borrow its money to rebuild their infrastructures.

The Great Gatsby became a curious window into a world that had been and gone. A world where elements of US society had drowned themselves in a moral and ethical sump. It was a warning about what can happen when people become decadent

and dishonourable. The novel served as an antithesis to the values and image that clean-cut Americans wanted to promote in the 1950s as a new generation became the custodians of their proud nation. Iniquity was brushed under the carpet and only allowed to exist in the land of fiction.

Fitzgerald and Hemingway

Fitzgerald was friends with arguably the greatest American writer, Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway encouraged Fitzgerald to pursue his prose with artistic integrity, but grew frustrated with Fitzgerald's tendency towards making his literature commercial. However, most of Fitzgerald's novels did not perform that well, so a large part of his income came from magazine work, writing short stories which, by their very nature, had to conform to editorial requirements. Nine years after *The Great Gatsby*, he published his next novel *Tender Is The Night*, which he had struggled to complete. Unfortunately for Fitzgerald the book was received with disappointment and the decline of his writing career continued unabated. In the latter half of the 1930s he found work developing movie scripts and carried out further commercial writing. By the time of his death his literary career had died too.

In hindsight Fitzgerald's work is regarded variously, but *The Great Gatsby* has become the quintessential American classic. Some feel that Fitzgerald's talent would have been better focused on his novel writing, but fiscal matters always dictated that he continue with his commercial work. However, Hemingway may have been a heavyweight writer but he was certainly not a contented man. For him the praise he garnered for each new book was a fix. When he ran out of ideas he suffered severe depression and ultimately took his own life with a shotgun. Fitzgerald battled on in a workman-like manner even when plaudits were a distant memory.

THE GREAT GATSBY

Once again to Zelda

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
I must have you!"

THOMAS PARKE D'INVILLIERS

CHAPTER 1

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about that in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men. Most of the confidences were unsought – frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions. Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth.

And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard

rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on. When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the “creative temperament” – it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No – Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men.

* * *

My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother, who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today.

I never saw this great-uncle, but I'm supposed to look like him – with special reference to the rather hard-boiled painting that hangs in father's office. I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and a little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War. I enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe – so I decided to go East and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I

supposed it could support one more single man. All my aunts and uncles talked it over as if they were choosing a prep school for me, and finally said, "Why – ye-es," with very grave, hesitant faces. Father agreed to finance me for a year, and after various delays I came East, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-two.

The practical thing was to find rooms in the city, but it was a warm season, and I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees, so when a young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting town, it sounded like a great idea. He found the house, a weather-beaten cardboard bungalow at eighty a month, but at the last minute the firm ordered him to Washington, and I went out to the country alone. I had a dog – at least I had him for a few days until he ran away – and an old Dodge and a Finnish woman, who made my bed and cooked breakfast and muttered Finnish wisdom to herself over the electric stove.

It was lonely for a day or so until one morning some man, more recently arrived than I, stopped me on the road.

"How do you get to West Egg village?" he asked helplessly.

I told him. And as I walked on I was lonely no longer. I was a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler. He had casually conferred on me the freedom of the neighborhood.

And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.

There was so much to read, for one thing, and so much fine health to be pulled down out of the young breath-giving air. I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities, and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew. And I had the high intention of reading many other books besides. I was rather literary in college – one year I wrote a series of very solemn and obvious editorials for the "Yale News" – and now I was going to bring back all such things into my life and become again that most limited of all specialists, the "well-rounded man." This isn't just an epigram – life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all.

It was a matter of chance that I should have rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America. It was on

that slender riotous island which extends itself due east of New York – and where there are, among other natural curiosities, two unusual formations of land. Twenty miles from the city a pair of enormous eggs, identical in contour and separated only by a courtesy bay, jut out into the most domesticated body of salt water in the Western hemisphere, the great wet barnyard of Long Island Sound. They are not perfect ovals – like the egg in the Columbus story, they are both crushed flat at the contact end – but their physical resemblance must be a source of perpetual confusion to the gulls that fly overhead. To the wingless a more arresting phenomenon is their dissimilarity in every particular except shape and size.

I lived at West Egg, the – well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. My house was at the very tip of the egg, only fifty yards from the Sound, and squeezed between two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season. The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard – it was a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden. It was Gatsby's mansion. Or, rather, as I didn't know Mr Gatsby, it was a mansion inhabited by a gentleman of that name. My own house was an eyesore, but it was a small eyesore, and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbor's lawn, and the consoling proximity of millionaires – all for eighty dollars a month.

Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago.

Her husband, among various physical accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven – a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anti-climax. His family were enormously wealthy – even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach

– but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away: for instance, he'd brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that.

Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn't believe it – I had no sight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game.

And so it happened that on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all. Their house was even more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay. The lawn started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens – finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run. The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold and wide open to the warm windy afternoon, and Tom Buchanan in riding clothes was standing with his legs apart on the front porch.

He had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body – he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage – a cruel body.

His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked – and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts.

“Now, don't think my opinion on these matters is final,” he

seemed to say, "just because I'm stronger and more of a man than you are." We were in the same senior society, and while we were never intimate I always had the impression that he approved of me and wanted me to like him with some harsh, defiant wistfulness of his own.

We talked for a few minutes on the sunny porch.

"I've got a nice place here," he said, his eyes flashing about restlessly.

Turning me around by one arm, he moved a broad flat hand along the front vista, including in its sweep a sunken Italian garden, a half acre of deep, pungent roses, and a snub-nosed motor-boat that bumped the tide offshore.

"It belonged to Demaine, the oil man." He turned me around again, politely and abruptly. "We'll go inside."

We walked through a high hallway into a bright rosy-colored space, fragilely bound into the house by French windows at either end. The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding-cake of the ceiling, and then rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea.

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor.

The younger of the two was a stranger to me. She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. If she saw me out of the corner of her eyes she gave no hint of it – indeed, I was almost surprised into murmuring an apology for having disturbed her by coming in.