


约克文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

THE GREAT GATSBY

了不起的盖茨比

F. Scott Fitzgerald



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LITERATURE
GUIDES

YORK NOTES

General Editors: Professor A.N. Jeffares (University of Stirling) & Professor Suheil Bushrui (American University of Beirut)

Francis Scott Fitzgerald

THE GREAT GATSBY

Notes by Tang Soo Ping

*MA (MALAYA) Lecturer in English,
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T·S·平 著

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《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

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④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

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Part 1

Introduction

Literary background: the novel

The novel as a literary form emerged at the beginning of the eighteenth century in England, during the age of the Industrial Revolution. The rise of the middle class created a demand for simple reading material, based on familiar everyday experiences. The novel, therefore, developed as a piece of prose fiction (that presented characters in real-life events and situations). Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1741) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) are some examples of early novel-writing.

The novel of manners

The portrayal of actual life and conditions brought about an interest in manners (social behaviour and attitudes) as they were associated with certain classes of people of a certain time and place. And from this kind of interest there came into being the novel of manners such as those written by Henry Fielding and Jane Austen. This type of novel is based on the satirical and comic portrayal of a particular social class and the events concern the conflicts between individual attitudes and conventional values. In a way, most novels reflect the social manners of a certain class, of a specific time and place setting. But if these novels cover more than just social attitudes, then they cannot and should not be classified as novels of manners.

The romance

Whereas the novel is a piece of prose fiction that faithfully attempts to present life as it really is, the romance is a piece of prose fiction (that describes life as it is imaginatively seen). Thus, whereas the novel adheres closely to real life as it is daily experienced, the romance plunges into the unfamiliar and inner aspects of human nature, which are not often encountered in normal life. The romance, therefore, is not concerned with ordinary events. It penetrates into the inner depths of man and establishes a moral truth about human nature.

The Great Gatsby: novel of manners or romance

On one level *The Great Gatsby* may be read as a novel of manners. If we see Gatsby's idealism as representing a personal code of conduct which opposes society and its values, the book can be called a novel of manners. The tone, too, is satirical and comic most of the time.

(But bearing in mind the wider significance of *The Great Gatsby*, it is more appropriate to classify it as a romance. For the book does not merely show the different values of two groups of characters. The account is more concerned with the portrayal of a man's idealism seen, on the one hand, in all its magnificence and, on the other, in all its unreality.) The imaginative presentation of Gatsby as a mysterious figure fits well with the fantasy and magic of his dream. And the very elusiveness of his dream points to the true condition of man's lot, the fact that hopes and desires can never be fully realised.

The author

Born in 1896 in St Paul, Minnesota, Francis Scott Fitzgerald was a Mid-Westerner (see p.10) and he came from a family which, on his mother's side at least, had its roots in the Middle West. Phillip McQuillan, his maternal grandfather, was a successful businessman in St Paul. Although Fitzgerald's own father, Edward Fitzgerald, came from Maryland, he subsequently settled in St Paul and started a business there too in 1898. The Fitzgeralds left St Paul in 1903 but they returned in 1908. And St Paul continued to play its part in Scott Fitzgerald's own life and career. It was here that he came to complete his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920). After his marriage to Zelda Sayre, he settled for some time in St Paul and it was here that his daughter was born. In his novels, especially *The Great Gatsby*, St Paul, or the Mid-West at least, was to contribute a considerable influence on the shaping of the characters' moral outlook.

Edward Fitzgerald belonged to the urban middle class. After a promising start in business, he became more and more of a failure as he moved from job to job. Whatever money Edward Fitzgerald and his family had came from Phillip McQuillan, the father-in-law. Scott Fitzgerald's own education from St Paul Academy to Princeton University was mostly paid for by his mother's family. 多利院

The young Fitzgerald was never more conscious of his poverty than in 1915 when he met Ginevra King, a girl who belonged to a wealthy Chicago family. The father, a successful broker, disapproved of Fitzgerald's poor background, and Ginevra subsequently married another man, the most eligible bachelor in Chicago at the time. The unhappy

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experience left Fitzgerald with a painful awareness of his poverty and a sense of social inferiority. It contributed to the persistent yearning and ^{phc}awe with which he regarded the rich. But the event also warned him of the ruthlessness and carelessness of the upper class.

Fitzgerald was subsequently called to the army in 1917 and was not discharged until 1919. It was during this time that he met and became engaged to Zelda Sayre. Fitzgerald's prospects, however, were still not very bright. Zelda therefore broke the engagement and Fitzgerald, rejected a second time, returned to St Paul. Here he completed his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. The book was published in 1920 and became a best-seller. He returned to Zelda and this time married her. Evidently, Gatsby's loss of Daisy and his return to her life is derived from Fitzgerald's own experience with Zelda and with Ginevra King as well.

Life with Zelda was a whirl of gaiety and lavish spending. The Fitzgeralds recklessly pursued their pleasures from America to Europe and back, wildly living up to the post-war mood of careless enjoyment. And it was during this period that Fitzgerald wrote *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), another novel, *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922) which is a collection of short stories, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and others.

The gaiety and high living, however, did not last long. Zelda suffered from schizophrenia, a form of mental disorder that is characterised by a breakdown in rational thinking. (There is also a separation between the mind and the emotions, so that the patient's feelings and emotions do not correspond to the actual situations of his or her life.) After the first break-down in 1930, she became progressively ill and had to be confined in a mental hospital. Fitzgerald was further troubled by financial and psychological problems caused by his wife's extravagance and jealousy of his writing. The fact that his later novel, *Tender is the Night* (1934), completed around this time, was not the triumph he had expected it to be must have worried him even more and deepened his fear of disaster. This sense of defeat and failure was complete, especially after his inability to succeed even as a film scriptwriter in Hollywood. *The Crack-up*, a series of essays written in 1936, is a moving analysis of his failure. He tried to make a come-back into the literary scene with a novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941), but he died of a heart-attack in 1940 while trying to complete it. Fitzgerald died without recapturing the triumph and the success of his youth.

Many critics have seen Fitzgerald's artistic achievement in terms of his ability to depict American society, its history and its people. *The Great Gatsby*, especially, is often taken as an account of the story of America. It describes how the American idealistic outlook, that is, its belief in life and spiritual happiness, contrasts with an interest in material advancement and possessions (see p.11). Fitzgerald's concern,

however, was more personal. In *The Great Gatsby*, as in his other novels, he was writing of his own experiences. If his story recalls a historical situation, this merely broadens and increases the significance of his writing.

Fitzgerald's life was full of contradiction. To begin with, he was an idealist; he idealised youth in the sense that he regarded youth as the most precious and most beautiful period of life. It is a time of hope, when everything seems possible and life seems to be full of opportunities. Fitzgerald's own youthful success encouraged this belief. Even before he was thirty years old, he had written three successful novels. And yet even in his earliest writings there is a fear, a sense that young dreams may come to nothing. So in *This Side of Paradise* and in *The Beautiful and Damned* youthful hopes are checked by the realisation that reality could never measure up to ideals and dreams.

Fitzgerald thought that there should be no waste of youth's talents and opportunities. He emphasised the need for self-discipline to make the most of resources and advantages. And yet this was the same man who repeatedly wasted his literary talent by becoming a magazine writer. In his twenty-year career, he wrote about a hundred and sixty short stories for magazines. Fitzgerald himself was conscious of his own misuse of talent. He wrote in *The Crack-up*: 'I have been only a mediocre caretaker of most things left in my hands, even of my talent.'*

His contradictory nature is also to be seen in his attitude towards money. His rational self, influenced also by his experience with Ginevra King, made him disapprove of and condemn the rich whom he regarded as ruthless and cruel. But his gayer side admired and envied them and this gave rise to a secret sense of his own inferiority. His life of extravagance and gaiety may therefore be seen as an imitation of the way of life of many rich people.

To the very last, these two contradictory sides of his character remained with him and they continued to shape his life and novels. But what Fitzgerald has done in *The Great Gatsby* is to see his own nature in its two aspects and to work out a situation in which they are identified with two opposing groups of people—one thriving on dreams, the other living by physical pleasures.

(Fitzgerald's life, therefore, influenced his writings in several ways. The attitudes he conveys are essentially mixed, reflecting his own emotional and rational responses all at the same time.) In *The Great Gatsby*, for example, his dreamy idealistic self can be identified with Gatsby's imagination and hope, even as his rational mind criticises it through Nick Carraway. The situations that occur in his writings were usually drawn from his personal life, for example, Gatsby's desire for

*F Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-up*, ed. Edmund Wilson, New Directions, New York, 1956, p.71.

Daisy, his participation in the war at Montenegro, his expensive way of living and so on. In addition, Gatsby's and Nick's Mid-Western origins parallel Fitzgerald's own; for instance, Nick's father, who leaves only advice but no money, is not unlike Edward Fitzgerald.

As for characters, these were also drawn from the writer's personal background. But what is significant is that Fitzgerald's characters were not singly or directly related to people in real life. For part of Fitzgerald's success as a novelist lies in the way in which he was able to combine several familiar people into one character, so that what emerged was a 'composite character'.* Gatsby, for example, is a combination of the writer himself, a friend called Max Fleischman and 'some forgotten farm type of Minnesota'.† Gatsby, therefore, is sensitive and imaginative even though he is also naïve, flashy and sinister. 那是在 天真——花哨的

Elsewhere, however, the writer divides himself into several characters. While his idealistic self was contained in Gatsby, his objective, critical mind was identified with Nick. Then too, his attitude towards wealth was divided between Gatsby's yearning to be part of Daisy's world and Nick's total abhorrence to the Buchanans. These are only some of the ways in which Fitzgerald used personal events and experiences. They show how his technique combines the subjective or emotional and the objective or rational. The kind of double view so achieved which looks 'from within and without'‡ is what gives his writing its depth and balanced judgement.

Background notes

The Jazz Age

The 1920s in America, the period just after the First World War, is known as the Jazz Age, the Roaring Twenties, the Aspirin Age and so on. The period is usually identified with money and gaiety. This was the time of jazz music, the Charleston (a dance) and the motor car (called the automobile in the United States). Gatsby's flashy cars, his lavish parties, the reckless conduct of his guests and the carelessness of the Buchanans are all part of this atmosphere of gaiety and wild enjoyment. Coming just after the war, the high living and merrymaking are usually seen as a reaction to recent suffering. Fitzgerald wrote on this social

*John Kuehl, 'Scott Fitzgerald's Critical Opinions', *Modern Fiction Studies*, I, no. 1, Spring 1961, p.17.

†Ibid. p.17.

‡F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, with commentary and notes by J.F. Wyatt, The Bodley Head, London, 1967, p.33. All subsequent references will be to this edition, unless otherwise indicated.

scene in *Tales of the Jazz Age* and in *Flappers and Philosophers* (1921).

[Related to this atmosphere of wild celebration was the rise of organised crime. Illegal gambling and bootlegging (that is the production and sale of illegal liquor), were rife in the United States at the time and led to wide-spread corruption. Even sports became occasions for bribery and cheating. In 1919 the World Series, which was a series of baseball games, was manipulated with the bribing of the Chicago team. This background of crime and illegal dealing prevails in *The Great Gatsby*. Jay Gatsby is suspected of being a bootlegger and a murderer, Meyer Wolfshiem is said to have 'fixed the World's Series' (p.64) and Jordan Baker is characterised as a woman notorious for cheating at golf.

The 1920s also brought new life to literature. The war and experience in Europe had given the young Americans a new maturity and a broader outlook. And because these writers (including Fitzgerald himself, Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), William Faulkner (1897-1962) and others) had been freed from their narrow home atmosphere and were informed by their European experiences, the literature which they produced was more spirited and significant. It expressed the truth as it was felt by the writers who, uninhibited by American values and attitudes, could see American habits and outlooks objectively and so write about them frankly.

The Mid-West

The term is actually 'The Middle-West' and refers to states lying west of the Appalachian Mountains and north of the Mississippi River Basin. The Mid-West states include North Dakota, Gatsby's home-state, and Minnesota where St Paul, Fitzgerald's home town, is sited.

For Fitzgerald, the Mid-West is identified with the hopeful spirit which Gatsby represents. (Fitzgerald's own idealism is related to his Mid-Western background). For it is in the Mid-West (that Fitzgerald sees still a certain old-fashioned stability which rests on the comfort of old, unchanging values and close relationships, where some of the old pioneer spirit of industry and purpose still lingers. Gatsby's Mid-Western origins, therefore, are significant. And Nick's sympathy for Gatsby is partly explained by the fact of his similar Mid-Western background. The Buchanans, however, although originally Mid-Westerners, have lost that 'gift for hope' (p.6). Having lived longer in New York, they have become more like the people in the East (the East referring to the Eastern Seaboard). They have surrendered totally to a careless, aimless way of life, occupied only with material things. And it is this difference between the East and the Mid-West, a difference, that is between materialistic concerns and spiritual purpose, that destroys Gatsby.

The American Dream

The American Dream describes an attitude of hope and faith that looks forward to the fulfilment of human wishes and desires. What these wishes are, were expressed in Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence of 1776, where it was stated:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*

This search for freedom and happiness actually goes back to the very beginning of American civilisation, to the time of the first settlers. The Puritan Fathers who first came to New England (one of the first states to be settled), the Quakers who came to Pennsylvania (another American state), and the Huguenots in Virginia were all religious refugees (who were driven to the New World by persecution). To these people, America represented a new life of freedom, holding a promise of spiritual and material happiness. For those settlers (who were not so religiously inclined), America was still a fairyland, a land of great possibilities. It was also a rich mine of natural resources. And so the first thirteen colonies came into being, amidst the religious and materialistic hopes of the first settlers. Material prosperity and progress kept pace with religious and spiritual goals because the Puritans and the Quakers alike approved of industry and material advancement. For, whereas physical pleasures were evil, hard work and achievements were regarded as indications of inner goodness.

When the Eastern Seaboard, comprising the thirteen colonies, became overcrowded, this pursuit of happiness and freedom shifted inland with the drive westward beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The opening of the Middle and Western states increased the sense of hope and faith. And this looking forward beyond the immediate present, this belief in the future, has become a national characteristic that may partly explain the speed of American advancement in so many areas of activities. The democratic system, first voiced in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence in 1776, may be traced to this basic attitude of hope and confidence.

2. The American Dream, however, originally relates to a desire for spiritual and material improvement. What happened was that, from one point of view, the material aspect of the dream was too easily and too quickly achieved, with the result that it soon outpaced and even obliterated the early spiritual ideals. So there emerged a state of

*Walter Allen, *The Urgent West: The American Dream and Modern Man*. E.P. Dutton, New York, 1969, p.4.

material well-being but lacking in spiritual life or purpose. So that when Fitzgerald produced *Gatsby*, modelled (no doubt) on the writer's own faith in life, he seemed to have created a character who represented an early American (in whom the Dream was still very much alive).

From another point of view, the American Dream has totally failed to bring any kind of fulfilment, whether spiritual or material. For all the progress and prosperity, for all the declaration of democratic principles, there are still poverty, discrimination and exploitation. And as for values and morality, there are also 'hypocrisy, corruption and suppression. In a way *The Great Gatsby* is also a comment on this condition. Other writers have written about these hard truths which have made the American Dream an illusion; John Steinbeck (1902-) in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and J.D. Salinger (1919-) in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) are two examples.

A note on the text

Textural history

In July 1922 Scott Fitzgerald expressed his intention 'to write something new—something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned'*. Out of this desire *The Great Gatsby* was created. It took ten months to complete and during this time Fitzgerald made every effort to keep away from drink. He stopped all other writing that he considered trashy in order to devote himself to the new work.

The manuscript was sent to Scribner's, the publishers, at the end of October 1924 but Fitzgerald still had to revise his book considerably before it was finally ready for print. He added Chapter II to the original work, rewrote Chapters VI and VII and made some significant changes and additions in Chapter VIII. He had wanted to call the novel *Trimalchio* but finally settled for *The Great Gatsby*.

The first edition was published in 1925.

Modern editions

Some modern editions of *The Great Gatsby* include the following:

The Great Gatsby, with commentary and notes by J.F. Wyatt, The Bodley Head, London, 1967. Page references in these notes are to this edition.

The Great Gatsby, Scribner, New York, 1968.

The Great Gatsby, Penguin Modern Classics, Harmondsworth, 1969; 1971.

*Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald*, The Bodley Head, London, 1962, p.138.