

idea with such force that it will have the originality of the thought....

All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath.

Fitzgerald, December, 1940 letter to his daughter Frances Scott ("Scottie") Fitzgerald, *The Note-Books*. From *The Crack-Up: With other Uncollected Pieces, Note-Books and Unpublished Letters*. Ed. Edmund Wilson. New York: New Directions, 1956.

★ Mostly, we authors must repeat ourselves — that's the truth. We have two or three great and moving experiences in our lives — experiences that are so great and moving that it doesn't seem at the time that anyone else has been so caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled in just that way ever before.

Then we learn our trade, well or less well, and we tell our two or three stories — each time in a new disguise — maybe ten times, maybe a hundred, as long as people will listen.

Fitzgerald in his 1933 essay, "One Hundred False Starts." Quoted by Judith S. Baughman, "Art Imitating Life in Fitzgerald's Novels," from *Literary Masters: F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Judith Baughman with Matthew J. Bruccoli. Detroit: Manly/The Gale Group, 2000.

What little I've accomplished has been by the most laborious and uphill work, and I wish now I'd never relaxed or looked back — but said at the end of *The Great Gatsby*: "I've found my line — from now on this comes first. This is my immediate duty — without this I am nothing."

Fitzgerald, June 12, 1940 in a letter to his daughter Frances Scott ("Scottie") Fitzgerald, *The Note-Books*. From *The Crack-Up: With other Uncollected Pieces, Note-Books and Unpublished Letters*. Ed. Edmund Wilson. New York: New Directions, 1956.

★ *This is Paul*
The history of my life is the history of the struggle between an overwhelming urge to write and a combination of circumstances bent on keeping me from it.

When I lived in St. Paul and was about twelve I wrote all through every class in school in the back of my geography book and first year Latin and on the margins of themes and declensions and mathematic problems. Two years later a family congress decided that the only way to force me to study was to send me to boarding school. This was a mistake. It took my mind off my writing. I decided to play football, to smoke, to go to college, to do all sorts of irrelevant things that had nothing to do with the real business of life, which, of course, was the proper mixture of description and dialogue in the short story.

Fitzgerald, "Who's Who — and Why" (1920), *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920-1940*. Ed. James L.W. West III. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. 3.

About the Life and Work of F. Scott Fitzgerald

Writers on Fitzgerald

He had one of the rarest qualities in all literature, and it's a great shame that the word for it has been thoroughly debased by the cosmetic racketeers, so that one is almost ashamed to use it to describe a real distinction. Nevertheless, the word is charm — charm as Keats would have used it. Who has it today? It's not a matter of pretty writing or clear style. It's a kind of subdued magic, controlled and exquisite, the sort of thing you get from good string quartettes.

Detective novelist Raymond Chandler on F. Scott Fitzgerald. *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler*, Ed. Frank MacShane. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 239. Quoted in Matthew J. Bruccoli,

Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Second Revised Edition. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.

Re-read a lot of Scott Fitzgerald's work this week. God, I love that man. Damn fool critics are forever calling writers geniuses for their idiosyncracies [*sic*] — Hemingway for his reticent dialogue, Wolfe for his gargantuan energy, and so on. Fitzgerald's only idiosyncrasy was his pure brilliance.

J.D. Salinger, quoted in Richard Anderson, "Gatsby's Long Shadow: Influence and Endurance," *New Essays on The Great Gatsby*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli. London: Cambridge University Press, p. 31.

Repeatedly he disclaims his role as spokesman and symbol of the Jazz Age, but by reflecting upon it from his chosen distance, he tolls its dreadful excesses in his own life, and so finds its meaning in the body of his wrecked career. There is gallantry in that. We begin to understand our particular affection for this writer. He lacked armor. He did not live in protective seclusion, as Faulkner. He was not carapaced in self-presentation, as Hemingway. He jumped right into the foolish heart of everything, as he had into the Plaza fountain. He was intellectually ambitious — but thought fashion was important, gossip, good looks, the company of celebrities. He wrote as a rebel, a sophisticate, an escapee from American provincialism — but was blown away by society, like a country bumpkin, and went everywhere he was invited. Ambivalently willed, he lived as both particle and wave. "The test of a first-rate intelligence," he wrote, "is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." And while he was at his first-rate quantum best, he used everything he knew of society, as critic, as victim, to compose at least one work, *The Great Gatsby*, that in its few pages arcs the American continent and gives us a perfect structural allegory of our deadly class-ridden longings.

E.L. Doctorow, "Introduction," *The Jazz Age*. New York: New Directions, 1996.

My generation thought of F. Scott Fitzgerald as an age rather than as a writer, and when the economic strike of 1929 began to change the sheiks and flappers into unemployed boys or underpaid girls, we consciously and a little belligerently turned our backs on Fitzgerald.

Budd Schulberg, screenwriter who worked on a film with Fitzgerald in his final days, quoted in Ruth Prigozy, "Introduction: Scott, Zelda, and the culture of celebrity," *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Ed. Ruth Prigozy. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p 15.

FSF's Contemporaries on Fitzgerald

...if he prefers to paint with startling vividness and virility the jazz aspect of the American scene, why not? Who can do it better — or as well?

On the other hand, those who view with alarm both our riotous, unheeding young men and young women, their actions and reactions, are inclined to blame the F. Scott Fitzgerald school of fiction as much as the strident social saturnalias of Scotch and sex-consciousness that he chronicles.

Roy L. McCardell, "F. Scott Fitzgerald — Juvenile Juvenal of the Jeunesse Jazz," *Morning Telegraph*, November 12, 1922. Reprinted in *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was the first author to chronicle the younger generation at the moment when youth was becoming supreme and defiant. Pubescence had mushroomed overnight into a powerful factor of every-day existence. A new era was dawning. A new type of girl was being created.

This was the beginning of the Flapper Age, an epoch during which the heroine of *This Side of Paradise* exerted

a drastic influence. Her actions, her speech, her manners, her habits and her appearance were under the microscope, and she permeated every phase of life from the schoolroom to politics.

When it was learned that the author of *This Side of Paradise* was a young man in his first year of voting possibility, the amazement of the reading public turned into something like frenzy. The book became a bestseller in two weeks. Critics raved over the discovery of a new literary personality. Their blurbs on the merits and the depravity of the book were taking up all the space in the daily press. F. Scott Fitzgerald's became a household name; debutantes dreamed on it, hard-boiled critics foamed at the mouth, college youths and faculty members quarreled, mothers sighed, fathers wept, shop-girls envied and country wenches patterned their conduct along the lines exemplified by the heroine of the story — in short, something more than a stir was made by the appearance of this incoherent, disconnected, flagellating, first novel which sold into the hundred thousand copies.

B.F. Wilson, "Notes on Personalities, IV — F. Scott Fitzgerald," the *Smart Set*, 73 (April 1924), pp. 29-33.

Reprinted in *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, who left Princeton when he was twenty-one and wrote a book that made every critic in the country hail him as the interpreter of the youth of the Jazz Age —

Who has written dozens of stories about flappers and gin parties and wild dizzy nights maddened by muted saxophones —

Who, at the age of thirty, is certainly the youngest, and possibly the most brilliant, of the younger generation of American authors —

Acquired the literary ability which provided him with a luxurious room overlooking the vivid green lawns of the Ambassador Hotel, in a very ordinary, but serious manner.

He did it by reading books — the best books.

Gilmore Millen, "Scott Fitzgerald Lays Success to Reading," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, January 15, 1927.

Reprinted in *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

Scholars on Fitzgerald

F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the most recognized figures in American literary and cultural history, not only as one of the major writers of the twentieth century, but also as a man whose life story excites the fascination of a public that knows him primarily as the author of *The Great Gatsby*. Any study of Fitzgerald's career must trace its familiar trajectory: early success, then public oblivion, and finally posthumous resurrection; had he lived a few years longer, he might have proved the exception to his own belief that there are no second acts in American lives. Fitzgerald's life and work were intertwined from the very beginning; his career spanned one of the most turbulent eras of the century, and from the very start he was part creator, part victim of the new culture of celebrity which accompanied the rise of modern technology. His fame and his marriage coincided, and so today, as in the 1920s, the names of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald are linked in public perception; indeed, for the last three-quarters of a century they have been indissolubly tied to American popular culture.

Ruth Prigozy, "Introduction: Scott, Zelda, and the Culture of Celebrity," *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Ed. Ruth Prigozy. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Fitzgerald is so central to the American twenties that it would be difficult to picture that time fully had he not existed. Part of his central role has to do with the style with which he responded to his immediate experience, that made him see certain aspects of the life of the twenties as having a stronger actuality than they had for his

contemporaries. He named the Jazz Age and was in part a historian of its social surfaces. But *The Great Gatsby* is central to the literature of the twenties in more than surfaces; in its articulation of modern estrangement, it is in the mainstream of American realism as it emerged after World War I.

Robert Emmet Long, *The Achieving of The Great Gatsby: F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1920-1925*. London: Associated University Presses, 1979. p. 177.

The popular image of Fitzgerald, something of a combination of the youthful Byron and the dying Keats, undoubtedly became fused, in many American consciousnesses, with images of his protagonists Amory Blaine, Jay Gatsby, and Dick Diver. How much this confusion reinforced Fitzgerald's literary reputation as a slipshod caretaker of an unfulfilled talent is difficult to assess. Ultimately, it may have led readers to the novels and stories themselves and thus may actually have worked to establish his merit rather than obscure it. Certainly, this public Fitzgerald has played some part in consolidating in the American consciousness the permanence of Gatsby: both the character Jay Gatsby, whose shadow falls across the face of modern American fiction as does that of no other figure from American literature, and the novel *The Great Gatsby*, which is admired, emulated, and used as a basis of reference and allusion to an extent only a few works...can claim. The fusion, at some level of the public mind, of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Jay Gatsby — mistaken and simplistic though it may be — has served to make Gatsby a figure of nostalgic mythologizing with power to stir imaginations that have never encountered the pages of the novel.

Richard Anderson, "Gatsby's Long Shadow: Influence and Endurance," *New Essays on The Great Gatsby*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli. London: Cambridge University Press, p. 17-18

A few quotes from Fitzgerald's other Writings



All life is just a progression toward, and then a recession from, one phrase — I love you.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Off-Shore Pirate," *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 29, 1920.

Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy.

Fitzgerald, *The Note-Books. The Crack-Up: With other Uncollected Pieces, Note-Books and Unpublished Letters*. Ed. Edmund Wilson. New York: New Directions, 1956.

Action is character.

The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1978, p. 332.

of Queens provided the valley of ashes setting for Wilson's garage. Gatsby's gambler friend Meyer Wolfshiem was loosely based on racketeer and gambler Arnold Rothstein, and Jordan Baker was modeled on amateur golf champion Edith Cummings, who had gone to school with Ginevra King. In his "romantic readiness" and his belief in the American dream, Gatsby reflects his creator. But Fitzgerald drew some biographical data for the character from a Long Island neighbor, Max Gerlach — or von Gerlach, who was apparently a bootlegger and who, in a note to Fitzgerald on a newspaper clipping, used Gatsby's defining expression, "old sport." Much of the material of Gatsby's life with Dan Cody was provided by Great Neck resident Robert Kerr, who in his youth had had a similar experience with a yachtsman benefactor. Fitzgerald's courtship of Zelda Sayre during the war and his desperation when she broke their engagement inspired Gatsby's feelings about Daisy, and Zelda's betrayal of Fitzgerald with Edouard Jozan during the summer of 1924 when the novel was being written fueled the sense of lost illusions in the novel.

Judith S. Baughman, "Art Imitating Life in Fitzgerald's Novels," from *Literary Masters; F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Judith Baughman with Matthew J. Bruccoli. Detroit: Manly/The Gale Group, 2000.

In the early years of his career, handsome Scott Fitzgerald and his beautiful wife Zelda cooperated fully with the media effort to portray them as exemplars of flaming youth. During much of the time between 1920 to 1924 they lived in Connecticut and Long Island, suburban extensions of New York City, the publicity capital of the nation. For both of them, as Fitzgerald wrote in "My Lost City," Manhattan "was inevitably linked up with Bacchic diversions, mild or fantastic." Newspaper columnists eagerly recorded these diversions, from a table-side interview at a night club to their midnight dive into the Pulitzer fountain (Woodward, *The Artist as Public Figure*, 53).

Scott Donaldson, "Fitzgerald's nonfiction," *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Ed. Ruth Prigozy. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 166.

Fitzgerald's 1920s

Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through a revery of long days and nights; destined finally to go out into that dirty gray turmoil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken...

Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*. New York: Scribner, 1920 (copyright renewal, 1948). pg. 282.

The 1920s saw the enshrinement of business as the religion of America, and at the same time saw some of the most pervasive business and governmental corruption the country had ever experienced. One president gave the country the Teapot Dome scandal, a rip-off of oil resources to stagger the imagination; another president proclaimed that "the business of America is business." The decade opened with a scandal of the "fixing" and "wheeling-dealing" that will never be wholly unraveled. It was the era of Al Capone and bootlegged booze and Harry Sinclair in Teapot Dome oil lands. For the first time in history, members of the presidential cabinet were jailed for bribery. With such national heroes for models, what more can a country ask for?

Fitzgerald's novel is a more powerful embodiment of the spirit of the times than the collected works of Sinclair Lewis, perhaps because Fitzgerald *dramatized* while Lewis *stated*. The corruption of the 1920s saturates *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby's "greatness" is constructed in part on illegal activities that are never fully and clearly defined — bootlegging in a string of drug stores? the handling of bonds from governmental bribes? big-time gambling and gangster warfare? No matter. Our imagination improves on the withheld reality. ... Even the narrator Nick Carraway is infected with the "business ethic" of the time as he pursues his career as a bond salesman.

James E. Miller, Jr., Fitzgerald's *Gatsby: The World as Ash Heap*," *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*, Ed. Scott Donaldson. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1984, p. 250.

→ whatever is in our imagination
is accurate

F. Scott Fitzgerald is now automatically identified with the Twenties. He is regarded as an exemplary figure for that decade — embodying and expressing its charm, ebullience, waste, genius, dissipation, confidence. Yet Fitzgerald was a professional writer from 1920 through 1940; connecting him exclusively with the Twenties distorts the shape and significance of his life and career. The dominant American historical influences during his lifetime were the First World War (the Great War, 1914-1918 in Europe) and the Great Depression of the Thirties. In between there was the Boom, the Roaring Twenties, the Jazz Age — named by Fitzgerald. His own history reflected the history of his time: his success and fame in the Twenties; his crack-up and relative obscurity in the Thirties.

Matthew J. Bruccoli, "Fitzgerald's Eras: Social and Political Backgrounds of the 1920s and 1930s." From the University of South Carolina's F. Scott Fitzgerald Centenary website, reprinted from *Literary Masters: F. Scott Fitzgerald*, by Judith S. Baughman and Matthew J. Bruccoli. Detroit: Manly/The Gale Group, 2000.

...a fresh picture of life in America began to form before my eyes. The uncertainties of 1919 were over — there seemed little doubt about what was going to happen — America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history and there was going to be plenty to tell about it. The whole golden boom was in the air — its splendid generosities, its outrageous corruptions and the tortuous death struggle of the old America in prohibition. All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them — the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Thomas Hardy's peasants. In life these things hadn't happened yet, but I was pretty sure that living wasn't the reckless, careless business these people thought — this generation just younger than me.

Fitzgerald, "Early Success." *The Jazz Age*, New York: New Directions, 1996.

By this time contemporaries of mine had begun to disappear into the dark maw of violence. A classmate killed his wife and himself on Long Island, another tumbled "accidentally" from a skyscraper in Philadelphia, another purposely from a skyscraper in New York. One was killed in a speakeasy in Chicago; another was beaten to death in a speakeasy in New York and crawled home to the Princeton Club to die; still another had his skull crushed by a maniac's axe in an insane asylum where he was confined. These are not catastrophes that I went out of my way to look for — these were my friends; moreover, these things happened not during the depression but during the boom.

Fitzgerald, "Echoes of the Jazz Age." (1931) Fitzgerald, "Early Success." *The Jazz Age*, New York: New Directions, 1996

That America passed away somewhere between 1910 and 1920; and the fact gives my generation its uniqueness — we are at once pre-war and post-war. We were well grown in the tense spring of 1917, but for the most part not married and settled. The peace found us almost intact ... Men of our age in Europe simply do not exist. I have looked for them often, but they are twenty-five years dead.

So we inherited two worlds — the one of hope to which we had been bred; the one of disillusion which we had discovered early for ourselves.

Fitzgerald, "My Generation." (1939) *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920-1940*. Ed. James L.W. West III. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005. p.194.

New York is going crazy! When I was here a year ago I thought we'd seen the end of night life. But now it's going on as it never was before Prohibition. I'm confident that you can find anything here that you find in Paris. Everybody is drinking harder — that's sure. Possessing liquor is a proof of respectability, of social position. You can't go anywhere without having your host bring out his bottle and offer you a drink. He displays his liquor as he

used to display his new car or his wife's jewels. Prohibition, it seems to me, is having simply a ruinous effect on young men.

Fitzgerald, quoted by Marguerite Mooers Marshall, "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Novelist, Shocked by 'Younger Marrieds' and Prohibition," *New York Evening World*, April 1, 1922.

The Twenties were not a ten-year binge during which everybody got rich and danced the Charleston in speakeasies while drinking bootleg hooch. Certainly the reaction to America's participation in World War I — which ended on 11 November 1918 — triggered disillusionment, moral reevaluation, social experiment, and hedonism. Although Fitzgerald joined the parties and chronicled them, he wrote in judgment. The Twenties were primarily an era of possibilities and aspiration — a dominant Fitzgerald theme. In "Echoes of the Jazz Age" he wrote: "It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire." ...

The novel is appropriately set in the get-rich-quick decade that brought about the organization of crime as a concomitant of Prohibition. Gatsby's criminal activities are kept mysterious, but it is evident that he has been a bootlegger. The Twenties were a time of stock-market speculation and speculation — though penny-ante stuff compared to the Eighties — and Gatsby is involved with stolen securities. ... The Wall Street crash marked the end of the Twenties boom and initiated the Great Depression of the Thirties. What Fitzgerald called "the most expensive orgy in history" was over.

Matthew J. Bruccoli, "Preface," *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Preface and notes by Matthew J. Bruccoli. New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995.

Fitzgerald and the Flapper

F. Scott Fitzgerald is best known as a chronicler of the 1920s and as the writer who, more than any other, identified, delineated, and popularized the female representative of that era, the flapper. Though it is an overstatement to say that Fitzgerald created the flapper, he did, with considerable assistance from his wife Zelda, offer the public an image of a modern young woman who was spoiled, sexually liberated, self-centered, fun-loving, and magnetic. In Fitzgerald's mind, this young woman represented a new philosophy of romantic individualism, rebellion, and liberation, and his earliest writings enthusiastically present her as an embodiment of these new values. Although she is often seen now as a mere fashion of the bygone Jazz Age, the flapper should be regarded as one of the great authentic characters in American history.

Rena Sanderson, "Women in Fitzgerald's fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Ed. Ruth Prigozy. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p. 143.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was a keen observer of these changes in women's mores and behavior. Throughout many of his earliest stories — read by thousands of women — many golden girls, popular daughters, and debutantes adopt the deportment, fashions, and attitudes of the flapper and sprinkle the magic dust of their high spirits. In spreading these images, Fitzgerald helped to guide women's modernization. In his own stated view, the significance of his early flappers was that they "were not a type — they were a generation. Free spirits evolved thru the war chaos and a final inevitable escape from restraint and inhibitions." ... He traced the American flapper to several influences, especially the rise of a new moneyed class in the American Midwest "without background, tradition, or manners," and the popularization of Sigmund Freud, whose ideas "at third-hand" convinced "wealthy young girls" that "They were all victims of repressed desires" and that they should "cut loose" ...

Soon, what had seemed like liberation became prescription. Women were not just free to be modern — they were expected to be modern. By 1922, in her "Eulogy on the Flapper," Zelda was announcing the flapper's demise: "Flapperdom has become a game; it is no longer a philosophy."

Rena Sanderson, "Women in Fitzgerald's fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Ed. Ruth Prigozy. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p. 146-147.