

earlier literature. Scott Fitzgerald is particularly influenced by the work of Oscar Wilde, the English Decadent. Indeed, Wilde is several times mentioned with obvious respect in the literary conversations of Tom and Amory. With his love of bright and cynical epigrams, his fascination with gilded youth, and his occasional surreal touches (like the scene where a drunken Amory meets the Devil), Scott Fitzgerald sometimes seems to be a latter-day member of the Decadent movement. But he was also subject to more modern influences, especially that of James Joyce. Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* also described a young man's development or 'quest' and its experimental style obviously impressed Fitzgerald. In the middle section of *This Side of Paradise* he temporarily breaks with conventional techniques of narration to present part of the story through letters and stage dialogue.

It is unlikely, however, that readers will today be as impressed by *This Side of Paradise* as Scott Fitzgerald's contemporaries were. Edmund Wilson, a lifelong friend of the author, voiced an important criticism when he described the novel as 'a phantasmagoria of incident which had no dominating intention to endow it with unity and force'. At times it seems more like a scrapbook of undergraduate memories than a planned work of art: a contemporary reviewer facetiously hailed it as 'the collected works of Scott Fitzgerald'. Moreover, the novel's outlook on life is often immature. Fitzgerald's cynicism seems like a shallow pose, while his ceaseless straining after brilliant epigrams quickly becomes irritating. In spite of these very real faults, *This Side of Paradise* remains an important and memorable book. It expressed the mood of a generation and it introduced, in however crude and immature a form, a novelist who was to become one of the major writers of the age.

The Great Gatsby

SUMMARY The story is told by Nick Carraway, a quiet young man whose habit of reserving judgement on others often

encourages them to confide in him. The son of an affluent Midwestern family, Nick comes east to work on the New York stock exchange and commutes to the city each day from the nearby island of West Egg. His own house is modest enough, but it is next to an extravagant and vulgar mansion built in imitation of a French château, owned by the fabulously wealthy Jay Gatsby.

Although he does not know the millionaire, Nick chances to mention Gatsby's name when he is dining one evening with Tom and Daisy Buchanan who live on the adjacent East Egg, a more fashionable island. Like Nick, Tom is a wealthy young Midwesterner who has recently come east; he is a hard arrogant man. His wife, Daisy, is charming and polished in her social manners. Despite this there is a tense moment during dinner when Tom goes out to answer the telephone. Daisy hurries nervously out of the room after him and Jordan Baker, Nick's fellow guest, explains that the phone call must be from Tom Buchanan's mistress. On his return home that night Nick Carraway sees his neighbour for the first time. Gatsby is standing on his lawn looking out across the harbour, but his manner is so preoccupied that Nick decides not to interrupt him.

Nick is also destined to meet Tom's mistress soon. One day the two men are travelling together by train to New York when Tom insists that they get off at an intermediary stop. He takes Nick to a shabby garage in a poor neighbourhood, where he talks to Wilson the proprietor. But it soon becomes evident that Wilson's wife Myrtle is the real reason for his visit. In her husband's absence Tom makes an arrangement to see Myrtle in New York that day. Nick is present at this meeting, which is held in Myrtle's New York flat; Myrtle's sister Catherine and some neighbours, the McKees, are also there. It develops into a drunken party that ends abruptly when Tom, angered at the mention of Daisy's name, hits Myrtle.

That summer Gatsby holds a succession of extravagant parties at his house. He provides unlimited food and drink, hires large bands and invites a wide circle of New York

celebrities and socialites. When Nick goes to one of these parties he meets Miss Baker again and begins a mild romance with her. He finds that Gatsby is a mysterious figure to all of the guests. The air is thick with extraordinary rumours: Gatsby is a German spy, Gatsby recently killed a man and so forth. But when Nick actually meets him he finds the millionaire to be a pleasant, self-effacing young man with an elaborately formal manner.

Soon afterwards Gatsby takes Nick to New York in his expensive car and talks about his past. He claims to have graduated from Oxford and to have spent many years touring the European capitals trying to forget a tragic disappointment he has suffered in life. Nick is suspicious of the story for it sounds too much like a cheap romance. In New York he learns that Gatsby wants a favour of him. Miss Baker, a long-time friend of Daisy Buchanan, explains that Gatsby was Daisy's first love. Gatsby has never stopped loving Daisy and has taken the house in West Egg to be near her. Now Gatsby wants Nick to invite both him and Daisy to tea.

Gatsby arrives at the tea-party desperately nervous and embarrassed, but after Nick has left him alone with Daisy for a while he becomes radiantly cheerful and insists on showing them around his elaborate house. Clearly, Gatsby is overjoyed to feel that he has Daisy back again. But soon Tom Buchanan becomes suspicious and insists on accompanying Daisy to one of Gatsby's parties. Daisy finds the party too raucous for her taste. Afterwards Gatsby talks to Nick about Daisy's reluctance to leave her husband. He shows, as usual, a childlike faith in his ability to bring back the past and live it again. He also suddenly changes his style of life, discontinuing his season of parties and employing a smaller staff of servants.

On one of the hottest and most uncomfortable days of the summer Nick and Gatsby go to the Buchanans for lunch. After a tense meal during which Tom obviously begins to realize that Daisy is in love with Gatsby, the group goes for a drive. On the way into New York, Tom stops at Wilson's

garage; the proprietor, who looks ill, mentions that he is planning to return to the west with his wife very soon. The party decide on impulse to hire a suite at the fashionable Plaza Hotel, so that they can sit and drink out of the heat. The atmosphere becomes increasingly edgy, with Tom persistently taunting Gatsby. At last Gatsby blurts out that Daisy never loved Tom. But Daisy corrects him; she has loved both of them, she claims.

On the way back to West Egg Gatsby's car hits Myrtle Wilson and does not stop. Wilson had at last become suspicious of her fidelity and had begun to bully her; in panic she ran into the road and under the wheels of the car. Tom Buchanan, driving up shortly after, sees the corpse and is badly shaken. When he is dropped outside the Buchanans' house that evening, Nick finds Gatsby waiting in the shadows. They talk about the accident and Gatsby reluctantly admits that Daisy, not he, was driving; now he has stayed behind to check that she is all right.

When Gatsby returns to his house in the early hours of the morning he and Nick again talk. This time Gatsby at last reveals the truth about his past life: his real name is James Gatz and he is a poor boy from the west who began to succeed through the help of a corrupt elderly millionaire, Dan Cody. He also talks about his first meetings with Daisy and his shock on hearing that she had married Buchanan. That day Nick forces himself to go to work, studiously avoiding Wilson's garage.

After an anguished night Wilson has now set off to avenge the death of his wife; he arrives at Gatsby's house late that afternoon when the owner is in his swimming pool. On his return home from work Nick finds Gatsby dead in the pool and Wilson's body in the grass nearby. Nick now takes on his shoulders the melancholy task of winding up Gatsby's affairs. It is a lonely business, for all of Gatsby's acquaintances desert him: the Buchanans leave town, business colleagues claim to be too busy and the party guests vanish. The only other person to go to the funeral is Gatsby's father, Henry Gatz, who arrives from Minnesota. Months later Nick meets

Buchanan and realizes that it was he who told Wilson where to find Gatsby.

CRITICAL COMMENTARY *This Side of Paradise* and its successor, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, established Fitzgerald as the literary spokesman of the Jazz Age. He was the Golden Boy of those determinedly gay and resolutely cynical days that followed the Great War. Yet these novels, like the age that produced and adulated them, are essentially light: they deal in striking poses rather than substantial emotions. This makes Fitzgerald's third novel, *The Great Gatsby*, all the more of a surprise. It is subtle yet precise in its artistry, rich in feeling: a carefully polished jewel of a book. To T. S. Eliot, never a hasty or extravagant critic, it seemed 'the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James'. Today it is obviously the work by which Fitzgerald's name is destined to be remembered, and one of the classics of modern American literature.

T. S. Eliot's invocation of Henry James is entirely appropriate. For Scott Fitzgerald, previously a sprawling and disorganized writer, showed in *The Great Gatsby* that he had developed into a controlled and careful craftsman. One notes, for example, how skillful is the handling of the narrative. The story is told not by an impersonal and omniscient narrator or from Gatsby's viewpoint, but by Nick Carraway, Gatsby's friend. As befits a novel that expresses both fascination and disillusion with Gatsby's world, Nick Carraway is neither insider nor outsider. He attends Gatsby's parties and feels at ease amidst the elite social world of the Buchanans. Yet he himself is neither rich nor leisured in the way many of his friends are. Similarly, he shows an interesting blend of ignorance and knowledge about Gatsby. Gatsby makes Carraway his confidant, but Carraway does not find out the complete truth about the millionaire's past until near the end.

Fitzgerald's literary style is precise and polished. He likes, for example, to make Nick Carraway sum up a chapter or section with a graceful epigram: 'Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am

one of the few honest people that I have ever known.' The crucial episodes in the story remain sharply etched in the reader's mind – the scene where Gatsby hurls his expensive shirts about the room to impress Daisy Buchanan, for example, or the scene where Daisy and Tom sit together in sinister intimacy after the accident in which Tom's mistress has been killed. The story, moreover, is dominated by several compelling visual images: Gatsby standing in his darkened garden staring at the green light of Daisy's house across the harbour, or the eyes in the poster advertising Doctor T. J. Eckleburg's spectacles.

This technical advance is accompanied by an emotional maturity that is also new in Fitzgerald's work. *The Great Gatsby* is his summative comment on the Jazz Age of which his own career was so prominent a part. The book expresses neither shallow criticism nor thoughtless praise but a delicate blend of enchantment and disenchantment. Like Nick Carraway himself, Scott Fitzgerald is both an outsider and an insider in Gatsby's world. He is passionately attracted to its glamour while being deeply aware of the pettiness and suffering that underlie its tinsel.

At the centre of this glamorous but insecure world, its very epitome, is Jay Gatsby. He is ridiculously rich, so rich that he possesses an almost magical power to conjure up whole worlds of enchantment. He can hire or fire a whole retinue of servants at the snap of his fingers. He can convert his life at the extravagant mansion in West Egg into an endless party, continually fuelled with exotic food and drink and peopled by the cream of New York society. He has a house like a French château, a man to send him clothes from Europe by the score, a hydroplane, and a car like an armoured tank. Gatsby is the apotheosis of the American dream of wealth.

Fittingly enough, there is more than a smack of vulgarity about all of this. If Gatsby's life is the fulfillment of a romantic dream, it is a dream based on coarse and popular appetites. His very nickname, 'The Great Gatsby', suggests the circus showman rather than the aristocrat. His house is

a bad imitation of a French château, while his car, with its excess of ostentatious gadgetry, is ridiculous. Moreover, Gatsby himself turns out on close inspection to be distinctly ill at ease in his own fairytale kingdom. Significantly, Nick Carraway talks to him at the party for a while without realizing who he is; for Gatsby can never quite live up to the magnificent role he has created for himself. His suit is cheap-looking (Fitzgerald memorably describes it as 'a pink rag') and his manners are nervous and overly formal.

In a sense, however, the subtle wrongness of Gatsby's personality only adds to the mystery that surrounds him. The end of the book gives the hard, disillusioning facts: Gatsby's real name is James Gatz and he is a bootlegger. But this is concealed for most of the action. Gatsby appears to have sprung up out of nowhere and his parties hum with bizarre and unlikely speculations about him. Is he a graduate of Oxford? Is he a murderer? Obviously a man so hard to place is an impressive figure, whatever the real truth about him may be.

Although Gatsby's life seems both mysterious and glamorous to spectators, its mainspring is almost touchingly simple. Gatsby is the last of the great romantics, devoting his life to thoughts of Daisy Buchanan, his youthful love. He attempts to woo her in a characteristically extravagant manner. His parties are designed to attract her attention and win her love, and when he finds that they have failed in this he abandons them at a stroke. There is an alarming naïvety in such adolescent romanticism beneath so impressive a façade. This is especially apparent in the scene where Gatsby sees Daisy again at Nick Carraway's tea-party. First of all, there is the elaborate way that Gatsby arranges the occasion; then the typically grandiose gesture of sending round a servant to mow Nick's lawn. Finally, Gatsby himself arrives in a pitiable state of nerves, more like a schoolboy at his first dance than an experienced man of the world.

It is this innocence that seals Gatsby's fate, for it makes him vulnerable. In this respect, despite all his wealth, he resembles the Wilsons. Just as Gatsby's car can sweep

Myrtle Wilson down without noticing, so the hardness of Daisy and Tom Buchanan can destroy Gatsby. The simultaneous death of Wilson and Gatsby – fellow victims of the same tragedy – is thus a fitting irony as well as a superb dramatic touch. Nick Carraway understands the reasons for Gatsby's destruction. He sees the essential callousness of the gay brittle life of the Jazz Age:

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made ...

Tender is the Night

SUMMARY The film actress Rosemary Hoyt arrives at a Cannes hotel with her mother, Mrs Elsie Speers. On the beach Rosemary meets Dick and Nicole Diver and their friends Abe North and Tommy Barban. Dick himself is polite and superbly sensitive to other people's feelings; Rosemary is immediately attracted to him. She is invited to a party at the Divers' new house, the Villa Diana. Under their hosts' expansive influence the guests shed their anxieties and give their best to the occasion. The only exception is McKisco, an egocentric literary critic and novelist. Rosemary feels more and more intimate with the Divers as the evening progresses, and at its end Dick asks her to accompany them to Paris to say goodbye to Abe North, who is returning to America. She tells him that she is in love with him, but he passes the matter off jokingly.

Later that night Rosemary learns that there has been an argument between McKisco and Tommy Barban. Apparently Violet McKisco had begun dropping innuendoes about the Divers; Barban, coming ferociously to his friends' defence, challenged McKisco to a duel. Abe North has been appointed McKisco's second. He and Rosemary visit the writer in his room and find him frightened and half-drunk.

