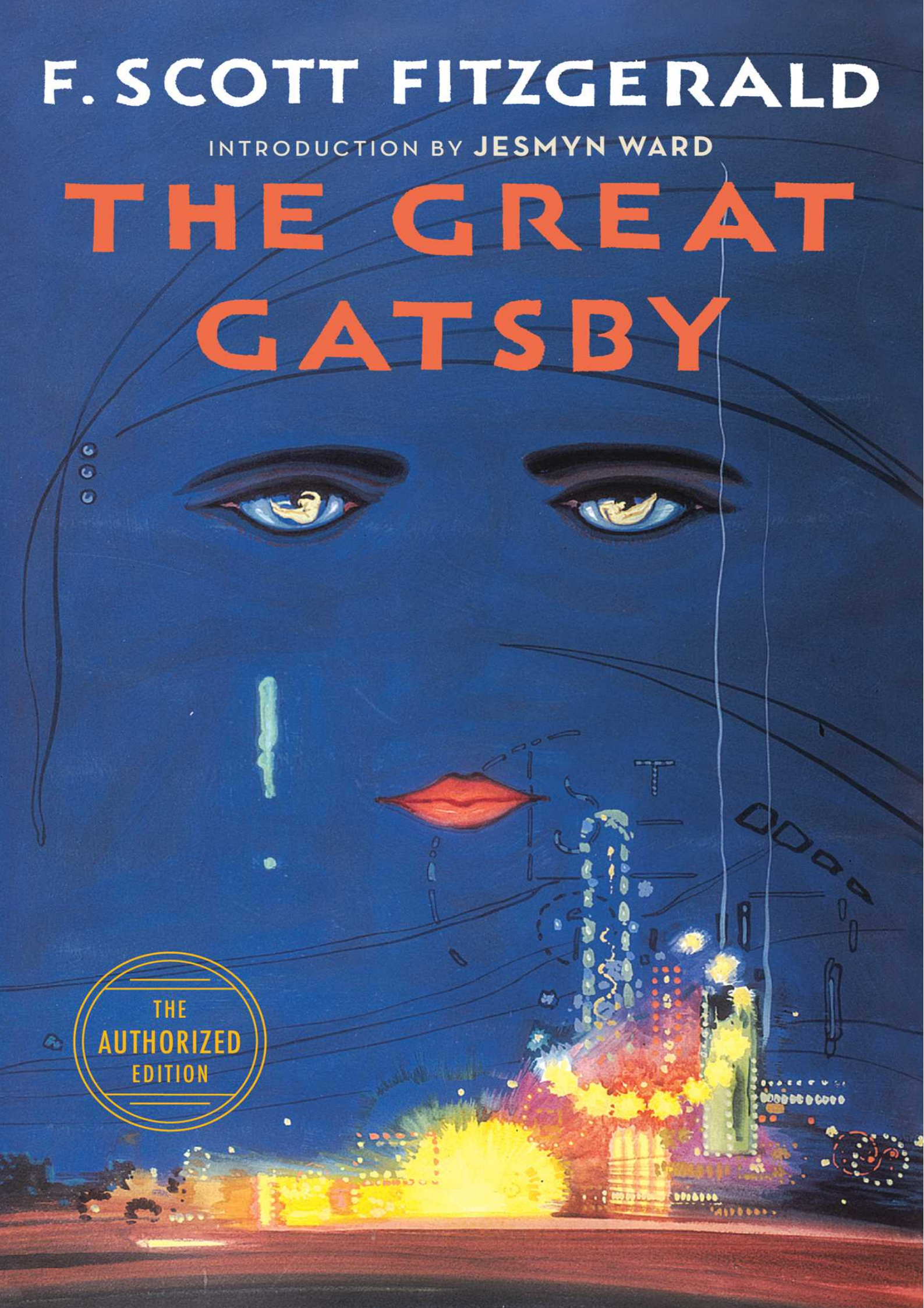
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

INTRODUCTION BY JESMYN WARD

THE GREAT GATSBY



THE AUTHORIZED EDITION

PENGUIN BOOKS

The Great Gatsby

‘One of the best novels to have come out of America: concisely expressed, rich in imagination, lyrical in style’ Anthony Powell, *Daily Telegraph,* Books of the Century

‘Fitzgerald confronts no less a problem than what might be involved, what might be at stake, in trying to see, and *write*, America itself. *The Great Gatsby* is, I believe, the most perfectly crafted work of fiction to have come out of America’ Tony Tanner, in the Introduction

‘A modern classic, a key American novel… For once, Fitzgerald really had won what he wanted: to create, amid the glitter and the gold, “a conscious artistic achievement” ’ Malcolm Bradbury, *Mail on Sunday*

‘It must be one of the most perfect novels ever written. Technique and tact and moral sensibility are as finely tuned as in any of Turgeniev’s great novels, and yet it is as American as Hollywood’ John McGahern, *Irish Times*

‘A prose that has the tough delicacy of a garnet’ Brad Leithauser, *The New York Review of Books*

‘Lost time and the irretrievability of the past are themes which filter through almost every page of this exquisite novel’ Jason Cowley, *Sunday Times*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND EDITOR

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born in 1896 in St Paul, Minnesota, and went to Princeton University, which he left in 1917 to join the army. He was said to have epitomized the Jazz Age, which he himself denied as 'a generation grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken'. In 1920 he married Zelda Sayre. Their traumatic marriage and her subsequent breakdowns became the leading influence in his writing. Among his publications were five novels, *This Side of Paradise, The Great Gatsby, The Beautiful and Damned, Tender is the Night* and *The Last Tycoon* (his last and unfinished work); six volumes of short stories and *The Crack-Up*, a selection of autobiographical pieces. Fitzgerald died suddenly in 1940. After his death *The New York Times* said of him that 'He was better than he knew, for in fact and in the literary sense he invented a "generation"… he might have interpreted and even guided them, as in their middle years they saw a different and nobler freedom threatened with destruction.'

Tony Tanner was a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and Professor of English and American Literature. He taught and travelled extensively in America and Europe. Alongside books on Conrad and Saul Bellow, he published *The Reign of Wonder* (1965), a study of American literature; *City of Words* (1970); *Contract and Transgression: Adultery and the Novel* (1980); *Jane Austen* (1986); *Scenes of Nature, Signs of Men* (1987); *Venice Desired* (1992); and *Henry James and the Art of Non-Fiction* (1995). Tony Tanner died in December 1998.

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Introduction

It was not always to be called *The Great Gatsby*. In a letter to Maxwell Perkins Fitzgerald wrote: 'I have now decided to stick to the title I put on the book. *Trimalchio in West Egg' (circa* 7 November 1924). Trimalchio is, of course, the vulgar social upstart of immense wealth in the *Satyricon* of Petronius – a master of sexual and gastronomic revels who gives a banquet of unimaginable luxury in which, unlike Gatsby who is a non-drinking, self-isolating spectator at his own parties, he most decidedly participates. He is a most literal glutton, while Gatsby stands at a curious distance from all he owns and displays, just as at times he seems to stand back from his own words and consider them appraisingly, as he would the words of another, just as he will display shirts he has never worn, books he has never read, and extend invitations to swim in the pool he has never used.

If Fitzgerald thought of Gatsby as some sort of American Trimalchio thrown up by the riotous licence of the Twenties, he certainly subjected him to some remarkable metamorphoses. (He is called Trimalchio just once in the novel.) But there are some distinct genealogical traces of Gatsby's ancient ancestor. In the *Satyricon* Trimalchio is first mentioned in the conversation of two friends discussing where that night's feast is to be held: 'Do you not know at whose house it is today? Trimalchio, a very rich man, who has a clock and a uniformed trumpeter in his dining-room, to keep telling him how much of his life is lost and gone.' Gatsby's concern with time – its arrestability, recuperability, repeatability – is equally obsessive (as was Fitzgerald's – he seemed to write surrounded by clocks and calendars, said Malcolm Cowley). One of the 'punctilious' Gatsby's few clumsy physical movements nearly results in the breaking of a clock. No doubt in some corner of his being he would like to break them all. The obsession is partly the Trimalchian fear of transience – there is always too little time left: more grandly (if more foolishly), it comes from some deep refusal to accept the linear irreversibility of history. 'Banish the uniformed trumpeter!' would be Gatsby's cry: 'I will not hear his flourish.'

When Gatsby's illustrious forebear Trimalchio is first seen he is 'busily engaged with a green ball. He never picked it up if it touched the ground.' Gatsby comes to orient his life in relation to not a green ball but

a green light. ‘You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock,’ he says to Daisy. Seen from across the water – and everything else – that separates him from Daisy, the green light offers Gatsby a suitably inaccessible focus for his yearning, something to give definition to desire while indefinitely deferring consummation, something to stretch his arms towards, as he does, rather than circle his arms around, as he tries to. The fragile magic of the game depends on keeping the green light at a distance or, we might say, on keeping the green ball in the air. The green ball fallen to the ground would be too much of a reminder of that ineluctable gravity that pulls all things back to the earth, balls and dreams alike. Likewise with the annulment of distance: lights too closely approached may well lose their supernal lustre and revert to unarousing ordinariness. You can wish only on the star you can’t reach.

Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.

Possibly – and possibly not. Or possibly something different. Certainly in this book there is abroad a hunger for ‘enchanted objects’, a taste for the ‘colossal’ and a concern to try to establish and differentiate those times – moments, configurations – when a light might be a star of ‘colossal significance’ as opposed to just another dock light. This is Nick Carraway’s version, and we may wonder whether, in retrospect, the green light didn’t shine more brightly for him even than, possibly, for Gatsby.

Of the many exotic courses served at Trimalchio’s banquet I want to single out one:

a tray was brought in with a basket on it, in which there was a hen made of wood, spreading out her wings as they do when they are sitting. The music grew loud: two slaves came up and at once began to hunt in the straw… Peahen’s eggs were pulled out and handed to the guests… we took our spoons and hammered at the eggs, which were balls of fine meal. I was on the point of throwing away my portion. I thought a peachick had already formed. But hearing a practised diner say, ‘What treasure have we here?’ I

poked through the shell with my finger and found a fat baccafacio rolled up in spiced yoke of egg.

In October 1922 the Fitzgeralds moved to a house in Great Neck, Long Island, on a peninsula at the foot of Manhasset Bay. Their house was a relatively modest one compared with the opulent summer homes of the seriously rich old American families – the Guggenheims, the Astors, the Van Nostrands, the Pulitzers – on another peninsular across the bay. This, of course, provided Fitzgerald with the basic topography for his novel: new-money Gatsby and no-money Nick on one side of the bay and 'old-money' (but what is 'old' money in America?) Buchanans on the other. In the course of being transposed into the novel the 'Necks' became 'Eggs'.

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 wonder to the gulls that fly overhead. To the wingless a more interesting phenomenon is their dissimilarity in every particular except shape and size.

A deep, generating question behind the whole book is just this. As a result of the 'domestication' of the great wild continent discovered by Columbus, what has been hatched from it? What will you find if you take your spoon to the great egg – or is it eggs? – of America? A disgusting, aborted, stunted and still-born thing, fit only to be thrown away? Or a treasure, something special (baccafacio, a small bird, was considered a great delicacy) and marvellous and rare? Are the true products of America as 'dissimilar' as the two Eggs might suggest, with the East Egg Buchanans representing and embodying the sort of devouring, self-pleasuring and hypocritical materialism that the stupendous and ruthless success of nineteenth-century capitalism fostered and enabled, and the West Egg alliance of Nick and Gatsby holding out for the possibility, the necessity, of that something else, something more, which materialism can never satisfy – a nostalgic yearning for some sort of ideal that refuses to concede any absolute dominion to the merely accidental triumphs of the matter and matters of the day? From this point of view, if you went back far enough into

American history, then, archetypally, Benjamin Franklin was the driving genius of East Egg, while Jonathan Edwards would be the tutelary spirit of West Egg. This is a comprehensible and justifiable reading of the striking 'dissimilarity' of two of the more striking types hatched by America – Nick himself speaks of 'the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast' between the two Eggs. But, in his own terms, this is the perspective of the 'wingless'. Seen from a sufficiently soaring height, it is their 'resemblance' that is a source of 'perpetual wonder'. This novel will indeed concern itself with dissimilarities and resemblances, and there is no disputing the differing aspirations and fates of the necessarily wingless protagonists. But near the end Nick makes a summarizing statement: 'I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all – Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.' Is there a Buchanan egg and a Gatsby egg? This one an abortion, that one a treasure? Or, allowing for mutations and variations, does the barnyard produce only one animal? It depends, perhaps, on how high you fly, how far away you stand – which points to a crucial matter raised by the book: what is and is not 'distorted' vision? What mixture of proximity and distance affords the best, the most appropriate, perception? How should Nick look at what he has seen?

In 'Winter Dreams', a story Fitzgerald wrote in 1922, Dexter Green is the son of a grocery-store owner in Minnesota, a quick, alert Midwestern lad who is 'unconsciously dictated to by his winter dreams'. The winters are characteristically 'dismal'; the dreams, reactively, turn towards intimations of the 'gorgeous'.

> But do not get the impression, because his winter dreams happened to be concerned at first with musings on the rich, that there was anything merely snobbish in the boy. He wanted not association with glittering things and glittering people – he wanted the glittering things themselves. Often he reached out for the best without knowing why he wanted it – and sometimes he ran up against the mysterious denials and prohibitions in which life indulges… He made money. It was rather amazing.

Dexter Green is an embryonic Gatsby, and we may note a rather curious distinction on which the narrator insists–'not association with glittering things and glittering people [but] the glittering things themselves': not association but *possession*. But what would, or could, or

might it be to possess a glittering thing or a glittering person? Can the attempt to go beyond association into appropriation ever *not* encounter 'denials and prohibitions'? These are tacit questions that will haunt the later novel.

Like many aspiring children of immigrant parents, Dexter cannot afford to be natural and spontaneous, for that might betray something of his 'peasant' origin. He assembles himself, as he assembles his wardrobe, with care. 'He recognized the value to him of such a mannerism and he had adopted it…' This is to build the self from the outside, as it were. The result is successful – 'He made money. It was amazing' – but vulnerable and precarious. The more he gets, the less he has. On one level he simply allows himself to be ensnared and enthralled – and used and abandoned – by a heedless, capricious, whimsical, dizzy, shallow rich girl, Judy Jones, who announces and reveals herself in her smile, 'radiant, blatantly artificial – convincing' (like Gatsby's smile). But she is perhaps no more artificial, self-constructed, than Dexter himself, and we might think of it as a matter of artifice reaching out and responding to artifice. We might, a little, think of Gatsby and Daisy that way too. For Dexter it is simply immaterial whether Judy is sincere or acting when she again takes him up before she again lets him down: 'No illusion as to the world in which she had grown up could cure his illusion as to her desirability.' It might seem as though Judy is the glittering thing-person of his winter dreams, but in a curious way she is a rather incidental figure, almost a function around which he can assemble and indulge a personal lexicon of ineffable glitteringness – 'beautiful', 'romantic', 'gorgeous', 'ecstasy', 'magic of nights', 'fire and loveliness'. His relationship is with these words more than with her. Early in their relationship he says to her: 'I'm nobody… My career is largely a matter of futures.' But – and this is the other, more important, level of his relationship with her – his future is largely a matter of pasts.

As a boy Dexter was a caddy. Now a wealthy young man, he can afford caddies of his own when he goes golfing. But he keeps glancing at them, 'trying to catch a gleam or gesture that would remind him of himself, that would lessen the gap which lay between his present and his past'. The greatest intensity of feeling comes not from possession but from intimation of imminent or actual loss. Fairer through fading, writes Emily Dickinson: glittering because going, Fitzgerald implies ('It was a mood of intense appreciation, a sense that, for once, he was

magnificently attuned to life and that everything about him was radiating a brightness and a glamour he might never know again'), glittering because the radiance is about to dim. And when it has dimmed and the world seems definitively deglamorized, then emotionally the only future that matters really *is* the past.

The story concludes with an incident that occurs many years after Dexter has resigned himself to the fact that Judy has disappeared from his life. From a chance encounter Dexter learns that Judy has married a boor who 'drinks and runs around' – shades, or rather intimations, of Tom Buchanan – that she probably loves him and that her looks have gone: squalor and degradation all round, in other words. And now Dexter feels a further loss:

> The dream was gone. Something had been taken from him. In a sort of panic he pushed the palms of his hands into his eyes and tried to bring up a picture of the waters lapping on Sherry Island and the moonlit veranda, and gingham on the golf-links and the dry sun and the gold color of her neck's soft down. And her mouth damp to his kisses and her eyes plaintive with melancholy and her freshness like new fine linen in the morning. Why, these things were no longer in the world! They had existed and they existed no longer.
>
> For the first time in years the tears were streaming down his face. But they were for himself now. He did not care about mouth and eyes and moving hands. He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more. The gates were closed, the sun was gone down, and there was no beauty but the grey beauty of steel that withstands all time. Even the grief he could have borne was left behind in the country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.
>
> 'Long ago,' he said, 'long ago, there was something in me, but now that thing is gone. Now that thing is gone, that thing is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more.'

This is – very young man's prose, and such a plangent lament for not only loss but also the loss of the sense of loss comes across as barely post-adolescent. I quote the passage at length partly to suggest how much Fitzgerald had to excise or, let us say, otherwisely to absorb before he could achieve the perfect tonal command of *The Great Gatsby*. One feels here, as so often with Fitzgerald's earlier writing, that the author has very imperfectly distanced himself from the emotional turbulence of his own autobiography. He needed to put something, someone, between himself and his writing if he was to avoid ending up in a sentimental cul-de-sac.

The passage also reveals, in inchoate form, an insight that I believe is absolutely central to Fitzgerald's work; namely, that the American Dream – whatever one takes that phrase to mean – is not an index of aspiration but a function of deprivation. But, as Gatsby shows, there can be another turn to the screw. Dexter sinks rather wallowingly into his sense that his future is largely a matter of the past. Gatsby too recognizes this, but he will not let the issue rest there, for he insists that the past can be turned into the matter of the future by someone who has made so much, including himself. And begone the uniformed trumpeter!

'It might interest you to know that a story of mine, called "Absolution""… was intended to be a picture of Gatsby's early life, but that I cut it because I preferred to preserve the sense of mystery' (to John Jamieson, 15 April 1934). How much the stature of *The Great Gatsby* depends on what Fitzgerald cut out is a matter to which I will return. Here we might consider what he had initially decided to write in as a crucial episode in Gatsby's childhood.

Eleven-year-old Rudolph Miller – young Gatsby – has rebelled against his 'ineffectual' father and been forced to attend confession, during the course of which he lies. He has come to tell his story to Father Schwartz, to whom he admits that he is guilty of 'not believing I was the son of my parents' (a fantasy Fitzgerald himself owned to – 'that I wasn't the son of my parents, but a son of a king, a king who ruled the whole world' – exactly Freud's 'Family Romance'). For the dismalness of being Rudolph Miller he substitutes the gorgeousness of imagining himself to be Blatchford Sarmenington. 'When he became Blatchford Sarmenington a suave nobility flowed from him. Blatchford Sarmenington lived in great sweeping triumphs.' But he keeps the lie in the confessional to himself; indeed, the secret lie, like the secret fantasy, comes to constitute his essential self.

> An invisible line had been crossed, and he had become aware of his isolation – aware that it applied not only to those moments when he was Blatchford Sarmenington but that it applied to all his inner life. Hitherto such phenomena as 'crazy' ambitions and petty shames and fears had been but private reservations, unacknowledged before the throne of his official soul. Now he realized unconsciously that his private reservations were himself – and all the rest a garnished front and a conventional flag. The pressure of his environment had driven him into the lonely secret world of adolescence.

Effectively, the boy is rejecting his biological father and rebelling against his spiritual father, as if to say: most importantly, essentially, I *am* my 'private reservations' – my refusals, my repudiations, my fantasies, and, yes, my guilty lies. If you want *me,* don't ask for Rudolph Miller. Ask for Blatchford Sarmenington. Ask for Jay Gatsby.

But the most interesting aspect of the story is the curiously disturbed state of Father Schwartz. (I am not concerned here speculatively to relate this figure to such people as Father Sigourney Webster Fay, who undoubtedly had an important influence on Catholic Fitzgerald. André le Vot has done this well in his biography, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Penguin, 1983.) At the start the Father is clearly disturbed by 'the hot madness of four o'clock' – a 'terrible dissonance' made up of the rustle of Swedish girls, yellow lights, sweet smells and the Dakota wheat that is 'terrible to look on'. After he has listened to the boy's story the Father breaks into a trembling, monologue, which is distracted, if not deranged.

'When a lot of people get together in the best places things go glimmering… The thing is to have a lot of people in the centre of the world, wherever that happens to be. Then… things go glimmering… my theory is that when a whole lot of people get together in the best places things go glimmering all the time… Did you ever see an amusement park?… It's a thing like a fair, only much more glittering. Go to one at night and stand a little way off from it in a dark place – under dark trees. You'll see a big wheel made of lights turning in the air, and a long slide shooting boats down into the water. A band playing somewhere, and a smell of peanuts – and everything will twinkle. But it won't remind you of anything, you see. It will all just hang out there in the night like a colored balloon – like a big yellow lantern on a pole… But don't get up close… because if you do you'll only feel the heat and the sweat and the life.'

These are, in fact, the dying words of the Father, and we may take them as expressing his delirious regret for all the sexuality and glamour, the heat and light, that, as a celibate priest, he has repressed and kept his distance from. But as the expression of an eager, tremulous excitement aroused by the thought, the sense, the apprehension, of some kind of glittering glimmeringness – sexual and immaterial, incandescent and transcendent – generated by a forgathering of the beautiful and the blessed (or damned), the glamorous and the gorgeous, at a mythical, unreachable 'centre' – a heavenly amusement park – these words testify to a confused and inarticulate longing – for what? The light that never was on land or sea? – that is somewhere at the heart of Fitzgerald's work,

to be indulged or dealt with as the case may be. It is a sort of uninstructed neo-Platonism gone somewhat berserk amid the endless wheat, the untouchable girls and the occasional brilliances of an otherwise dreary and dismal Middle West.

But there is a crucial difference between Dexter Green's desire to possess the glittering things and Father Schwartz's advice to stand back from the glimmering light, and it lies precisely in the latter's apprehension that getting too close might be dangerous, ruinous to the vision of earthly (and heavenly?) delights. Rudolph Sarmenington Gatsby is partly Green and partly Schwartz (and André le Vot has shown how careful Fitzgerald was with his colour ascriptions – of which more later). He thinks he can possess – repossess – the glittering girl. Indeed, he attempts to make his house into a glimmering, glamorous centre to attract her: 'Your place looks like the World's Fair,' says Nick to him, seeing his house 'lit from tower to cellar'. We know that as a boy Fitzgerald was very struck by the brilliance of the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901, where there was 'a Goddess of Light whose glow could be seen as far away as Niagara Fall' (le Vot, p. 27), and Gatsby also uses the magic of electricity (he is after all a dedicated reader of Benjamin Franklin) to signal what he hopes and believes is a more than electrical glimmering. But for all the dedication of his quest for repossession, re-enactment, he can enjoy, indeed experience, his desire and his dreams better at a distance. He is not really at home in the light he has himself turned on and is more usually to be found, as the good Father advised, standing 'a little way off from it in a dark place'. When he does 'get up close' and encounters 'the heat and the sweat and the life' – particularly in the form of Tom Buchanan, the crude but confident snobbery of his discourse, the class-supported brashness of his hypocrisy, the brutality of his 'cruel body' – Gatsby is indeed destroyed. The Green is gone: all is Schwar(t)z.

Fitzgerald planned *The Great Gatsby* during the summer of 1922 but wrote it during the summer of 1924 while living on the Riviera (he – crucially – revised the proofs in Rome during January and February of the following year). This is just when Nick Carraway is writing *his* book about his summer with Gatsby of two years earlier – but he is back in the Midwest. Fitzgerald has introduced a narrator between himself and his omniscient indulgences. Fitzgerald's book is Nick's book, but Nick is not Fitzgerald, however many refracted biographical fragments we may

imagine we can discern. Nick is a character, of confessedly limited literary abilities (he has written only 'a series of very solemn and obvious editorials for the Yale News'), and while Nick is trying to write Gatsby, we are also reading Nick.

Among writers he admired Fitzgerald had plenty of precedents for the introduction of a narrator. Henry James, discussing how a writer can extract maximum significance from his material, stresses the value of sometimes choosing a particular kind of narrator: 'By so much as the affair matters *for* some such individual, by so much do we get the best there is of it.' He points out the need for 'a reflecting and colouring medium' and adds:

> We want it clear, goodness knows, but we also want it thick, and we get the thickness in the human consciousness that entertains and records, that amplifies and interprets it… prodigies, when they come straight, come with an effect imperilled; they keep all their character, on the other hand, by looming through some other history – the indispensable history of somebody's *normal* relation to something.

Gatsby is a self-styled, self-styling 'prodigy' of some sort – prodigiously criminal, prodigiously romantic – and Nick is, or so he would insist, nothing if not 'normal', though he would add, 'abnormally honest'. Gatsby certainly looms – looms and fades, looms and fades – through Nick's 'history', and Nick certainly 'amplifies and interprets' – amplifies, we might come to think, quite inordinately.

Joseph Conrad made some of his most important innovations in the art of fiction through the introduction and deployment of his sailor-narrator Marlow, particularly as Marlow tries to put together a narrative that will somehow make sense of Lord Jim. Was Jim a coward or an idealist? Coward *and* idealist? What is the significance, what are the implications, for 'us' – us sailors, us British, us decent and reliable white Westerners – of his aspirations and failures, his dreams and defections? Marlow has a lot invested in Jim, and in his attempts at narrative recuperation and evaluation. For surely Jim was 'one of us'. And yet… *Mutatis mutandis*, much of this is paralleled in the relationship of the bondsman-narrator Nick with the enigmatic Gatsby. Is Gatsby criminal or romantic? Criminal *and* romantic? What are the implications for us Americans of his grandiose plans and their dubious grounding? Of his glamorous dreams and the 'foul dust' that, inevitably, 'floated in the wake of his dreams' and in his wretched waking from them? Nick has a

lot – a *lot* – invested in Gatsby and in his own written attempt at the retrieval and, indeed, elegiac celebration of the man. ‘They’re a rotten crowd… You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.’ So they are, and so – Nick can make us feel – he is. For surely America can produce something better than Buchanans, more splendid than Carraways. And yet…

The extent to which the book *is* Nick’s version can hardly be overstressed. To be sure, he assembles his material from different sources. In addition to his own memory, there are documents, like the youthful Gatsby’s copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* with its Franklinesque ‘SCHEDULE’ on the flyleaf and Nick’s own infinitely suggestive list of Gatsby’s guests of the summer of 1922, which is now ‘disintegrating at its folds’, suggesting perhaps the inevitable disintegration of other depositories of time – including the memory of the narrator. Then there is the long oral account of the first phase of the relationship between Gatsby and Daisy, given to him by Jordan Baker, and the accounts of Gatsby’s early life, Dan Cody and the war years given to him by Gatsby himself during the doomed and hopeless vigil after the night of the fatal road accident. But it is Nick who transcribes these accounts; how much he may be requoting his sources and how much translating them – transforming, embellishing, amplifying, *re*wording – we can never know. By the conventions of fictional narrative, if a narrator gives the words of another character in quotation marks, then these were indeed the very words: he is allowed a (slightly implausible) perfect recall. Now, by my admittedly rough count, about 4 per cent of the book is in Gatsby’s own words, and it is revealing to discover that Fitzgerald considerably *reduced* the amount of direct speech given to Gatsby in the draft of the novel. For example: ‘ “Jay Gatsby!"” he cried suddenly in a ringing voice. “There goes the great Jay Gatsby. That’s what people are going to say – wait and see."” ‘ With such outbursts Gatsby would too crudely and unequivocally have announced and revealed himself. By systematic deletion Fitzgerald makes Gatsby a far more shadowy, less knowable, more ultimately elusive figure. Instead we get more of Nick’s hypothesizing, speculating, imagining – and perhaps suppressing, recasting, fantasizing.

His account is constantly marked by such words and phrases as the following: ‘I suppose’, ‘I suspect’, ‘I think’; ‘possibly’, ‘probably’, ‘perhaps’; ‘I’ve heard it said’, ‘he seemed to say’, ‘there must have

been', 'I have an idea that', 'I always had the impression'. 'As though' and 'as if' (used over sixty times) constantly introduce his own transforming similies and metamorphosing metaphors into the account. 'Possibly it occurred to him…' – and possibly it didn't. We can never know. What we do know is that it occurs to Nick. However we assess or respond to 'Gatsby' – 'the man who gives his name to this book', as Nick rather interestingly scruples to spell out – we should always remember that we are responding to what Nick has made of him. From Gatsby's first appearance ('a man of about my own age') to the moment after Gatsby's death, when Nick is mistaken for Gatsby by a telephone caller and he subsequently experiences 'a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all', we are aware of a strong tendency on Nick's part to identify with Gatsby as well as to make him a hero. This is why it is so important for him to be able to feel that the account Gatsby gives of his life is 'all true', why he is glad to have 'one of those renewals of complete faith in him that I'd experienced before'. Outside business hours, when he is mainly moving around the money that money makes, Nick invests everything in Gatsby – *his* Gatsby.

Nick reveals, or portrays, himself as the very antithesis of Gatsby, as one of Fitzgerald's 'Sad Young Men'. (There is some resemblance here to the emotionally timid Lockwood putting together his narrative account of the passionate Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights.)*

> I knew the other clerks and young bond-salesmen by their first names, and lunched with them in dark, crowded restaurants on little pig sausages and mashed potatoes and coffee. I even had a short affair with a girl who lived in Jersey City and worked in the accounting department, but her brother began throwing mean looks in my direction, so when she went on her vacation in July I let it blow quietly away.

When it comes to emotional or sexual involvements, what he doesn't let blow quietly away he blows away himself – as he did an earlier 'engagement', as he does Jordan Baker. He is a self-isolating voyeur (characteristically, at one point: 'I was conscious of wanting to look squarely at everyone, and yet to avoid all eyes'. In this he is like the sexually anxious Isabel Archer in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady,* who wants 'to see but not to feel'.). When it comes to the erotic, life in fantasy is safer than real life.

I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others – poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner – young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life.

As against this – and this is surely 'dismal' – it is perhaps not surprising that Nick looks hungrily for signs of the 'gorgeous' – one of his favoured words – in the life and style of Jay Gatsby. He, he implies, is everything that Gatsby is not. 'Thirty – the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair' – thinning everything. As opposed to, and perhaps to compensate for, these gathering attenuations and impoverishments, Gatsby surely embodies more flourishing and fecund, less emotionally etiolated and self-retractive, possibilities and potentialities.

Nick is a spectator in search of a performer. He sees Gatsby in gestural terms: 'If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life…' No little pig sausages and mashed potatoes for Gatsby, not anyway in Nick's version. His own preferred position, on the other hand, observational and non-gestural, is at the margins. At the first party in New York his instinct is to 'get out', but he keeps getting 'entangled' and 'pulled back'. 'Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I saw him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.' Whether he knows it or not, he is quoting Whitman almost verbatim ('in and out of the game, watching and wondering at it'), and 'wonder' – the instinct, the need, the capacity for it – is as important for Nick as it has been for so many American writers. Wondering *at* often involves and requires distance and betokens a disinclination, if not an incapacity, for participation – a distaste for, if not a fear of, all that sweat and heat and life, and one senses that Nick, for all his regrets, somehow prefers the role of 'casual watcher in the darkening streets'. A difference