The CARNIVAL BY THE SEA

A Catholic Reflection on F. Scott Fitzgerald, Long Island, and the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of *The Great Gatsby*

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DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Foreword

The history of American literature reflects the history of our country and so many dimensions of the development of thought and philosophy, historical events and conflicts, and a desire to create a distinctive identity apart from Europe.

Think of some key American literary luminaries: Benjamin Franklin, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Stephen Crane, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald (who chronicled the North Shore Long Island experience in the 1920s), Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Wallace Stevens, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Toni Morrison. Each of these names brings to mind a wide range of themes, characters, plots, poetry, images and history that reflect the American experience.

The writers – be they novelists, poets, playwrights or screen writers – influence each other and build upon one another. For instance, Herman Melville says his own contributions to American literature were grounded not only in his careful reading of William Shakespeare but also in his careful reading of the novels and literary technique of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent,* T.S. Eliot insists that fine poets of the present absorb in depth the contribution of the poets that went before them. Only because they have absorbed the classics can they make their own unique contribution to poetry.

Just as we traced the luminaries and the mutual influences in our American literature, we can also trace the luminaries and the mutual influences in our classic Catholic spiritual literature.

The Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, St. Paul the Apostle, St. Ignatius of Antioch and the Patristic and Eastern Fathers, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. John Henry Newman, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross and so many, many others – each one builds on those who went before them and provides a foundation stone for those who come after them in their life, their theology, their mysticism and their writings.

Daily spiritual reading from both the classic works of Catholic mysticism and spirituality and contemporary works that show how Catholic spirituality can be lived effectively in the modern world is critical to our spiritual growth.

It is the kindling that focuses and sharpens our mental prayer. The classic texts of Catholic mystics such as St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and the women Doctors of the Church, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Therese of Lisieux, are concrete expressions of these saints interceding at the throne of God for our spiritual progress and our individual call to holiness and mission.

When this spiritual reading is done faithfully each day, reinforcing and complementing our *lectio divina* of the Scriptures, it is amazing how over the course of ten, twenty, fifty years how many fine works can be prayed over and applied practically in a person's life.

Spiritual reading must be done slowly and meditatively. We should see the reading through the lens of both the literary critic and the spiritual theologian.

The literary critic analyzes imagery, symbol, structure, rhetoric, style, and historical setting.

The spiritual theologian analyzes how the work is situated in the history of the Church's spiritual literature and its influence historically and in the present as well as an understanding of how the saint's reflection on their prayer experience is related to the Church's theology of the Trinity, ecclesiology, theology of grace, sacramental theology and anthropology.

This is precisely what Father Brandon O'Brien does in his "The Carnival by the Sea: A Catholic Reflection on F. Scott Fitzgerald, Long Island, and the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of *The Great Gatsby*."

He is not analyzing a classic work of Catholic spiritual literature.

He is analyzing one of the most well-known and read American novels.

Father O'Brien masterfully applies the dual perspective of the Catholic literary critic with the Catholic spiritual theologian in his analysis of the life and works (as well as the film and dramatic adaptations of those works) of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

In his 1999 "Letter to Artists," Pope St. John Paul II emphasized the connection between art and evangelization.

More recently, in a 2024 "Letter of the Holy Father on the Role of Literature in Formation," Pope Francis described the value that literature provides to its readers: "A literary work is thus a living and ever-fruitful text, always capable of speaking in different ways and producing an original synthesis on the part of each of its readers. In our reading, we are enriched by what we receive from the author and this allows us in turn to grow inwardly, so that each new work we read will renew and expand our worldview."[1] In this way, any Catholic who reads *The Great Gatsby* will approach this novel (and any other novel that they read) informed by their Catholic faith and experience. Pope Francis concluded that literature, like any art that is good and true, reflects the Divine and opens us to the Word of God: "Literature can greatly stimulate the free and humble exercise of our use of reason, a fruitful recognition of the variety of human languages, a broadening of our human sensibilities, and finally, a great spiritual openness to hearing the Voice that speaks through many voices."[2]

It is my hope that Father O'Brien's analysis, which represents the Catholic Church's vibrant and compelling 21st Century encounter with American history and American literature, inspires conversation and reflection that enriches, uplifts, teaches and evangelizes on Long Island and well beyond.

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[1] Francis, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Role of Literature in Formation" (July 17, 2024), 3. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2024/documents/20240717-lettera-ruolo-letteratura-formazione.html.

[2] Ibid., 41.

The Carnival by the Sea

A Catholic Reflection on F. Scott Fitzgerald, Long Island, and the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of *The Great Gatsby*

"I had fair years to waste, years that I can't honestly regret, in seeking the eternal Carnival by the Sea."

– F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Early Success" (1937)

Many significant events have taken place on what F. Scott Fitzgerald called "that slender riotous island which extends itself due east of New York."[1] But, before the postwar suburban sprawl of Levittown, before Robert Moses was "The Power Broker," before the creation of Jones Beach State Park, and before Charles Lindbergh's first solo transatlantic flight took off from Roosevelt Field, there was *The Great Gatsby*. Long Island is certainly no stranger to playing host to its share of writers and poets. Walt Whitman was attached to Huntington, W.H. Auden enjoyed visits to Amityville and Sayville, John Steinbeck's cross-country travelogue *Travels with Charley* began at his house in Sag Harbor, the enigmatic postmodernist Thomas Pynchon was born in Glen Cove, and P.G. Wodehouse was buried in Remsenburg, having lived there for nearly a quarter century. But, despite such boasts, few classical literary works have ventured out to our environs here on Long Island.

This is what makes *The Great Gatsby* so special to us as Long Islanders and as Catholics. It is a story about where we have come from and where we are going to, and the fact that Fitzgerald was raised Catholic shapes many of the images and themes in his literary works, including *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's own biography, informed and influenced by numerous Catholic elements and figures (even after he abandoned the Catholic faith), has a significant bearing on the themes of moral ambiguity, self-destruction, and desolation which are found in *The Great Gatsby*. For this reason, this reflection will begin with an overview of Fitzgerald's life, analyzing the people and experiences that influenced his Catholic upbringing and eventually led to his rejection of the Catholic faith. This overview will also analyze the circumstances that led him to become the "voice" of the Roaring Twenties. His personal struggles (with infidelity and alcoholism especially) and his fraught relationship with his wife, Zelda (perhaps the most famous literary spouse of the twentieth century), will also be framed within the context of his lapsed Catholicism.

After analyzing Fitzgerald's biographical background, this reflection will offer a summary of *The Great Gatsby* in order to refresh the minds of those who haven't read the novel in a long time or whose recollection of the story is fragmented. When Fitzgerald's biography is coupled with a summary of the novel, we can begin an in-depth reflection of the novel's themes and images in light of the Catholic faith.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his lapsed religious faith, much of *The Great Gatsby* is concerned with a landscape where faith in God and the saving message of the Gospel have been relegated to the sidelines. While religion is not a prominent theme in *The Great Gatsby*, its absence is noteworthy. The absence of religion in the lives of the novel's characters (similar to the lack of religion in Fitzgerald's adulthood) offers a cautionary tale about the self-destructive consequences of neglecting the spiritual life, reminding us that a religious background rooted in Christ provides a firm, moral foundation for those of faith. This contrast will be borne out concretely through a parallel analysis of the life of Saint Augustine of Hippo and his circuitous journey to the Christian faith.

As we celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the novel's publication in 2025, we have occasion to discover anew the themes and lessons that it teaches us. The novel's author F. Scott Fitzgerald was born 1200 miles away in Saint Paul, Minnesota, but he found himself in the right place (Great Neck, Long Island) and at the right time (the beginning of the Roaring Twenties) to produce what is, arguably, one of America's greatest novels. But how and why Fitzgerald came to be where he was when *The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925 carries with it as many twists and turns as the novel itself.

"Something Ineffably Gorgeous": Fitzgerald's Early Life

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born into a Catholic family on September 24, 1896. His father, Edward Fitzgerald, bequeathed Fitzgerald with an ancestry imbued with centuries of American history. The Fitzgeralds came from English and Irish ancestors who originally settled in the Catholic colony of Maryland. From this side of the family he claimed a distant relation to Francis Scott Key (the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner"). Scott (no one ever referred to Fitzgerald as "Francis")[2] was even more closely related to Mary Surratt, the only female who was hanged in 1865 for participating in the conspiracy to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln.[3] In fact, his family retained a nostalgic support for the Confederacy in the American Civil War which would inform Scott's novels and short stories. Through his Maryland connections, Fitzgerald was also related to the Warfield family of Baltimore, and

Fitzgerald and his mother on Laurel Avenue (Saint Paul, Minnesota), ca. 1897. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

unbeknownst to him, he was, by extension, eighth cousins to Wallis Warfield Simpson,[4] the Duchess of Windsor.[5]

Despite such a colorful family history, Edward Fitzgerald's attempts at succeeding in business as a grocer largely failed. The family moved numerous times, living as far away as Buffalo and Syracuse between 1898 and 1908, until they eventually returned to Saint Paul. Fitzgerald's mother, Mary McQuillan Fitzgerald, who was more immediately descended from Irish immigrants, came from a family that was much more financially secure. In fact, it was through the financial support of Mary Fitzgerald and her family that Scott was able to be raised in an atmosphere of relative wealth and privilege. For the rest of his life Fitzgerald would chase after such comforts, living beyond his means and constantly in debt (even in the last years of his mother's life, he received a number of loans from her).[6] Despite the stature and financial security that he received through his mother's side of the family, he remained embarrassed of her for her careless and erratic behavior.[7]

Ultimately, Fitzgerald received from each of his parents the two things that would mean the most to him throughout his life. From his father he received a name and a family steeped in American history of which he could be proud. From his mother he received the financial prestige and security he needed to live the life which he felt entitled to live. Returning to Saint Paul in 1908, Fitzgerald's family settled in the wealthy Summit Avenue area of the city. Few Catholics lived in the area, and this was one of the many times in his life that Fitzgerald would feel to be, at the same time, an insider (associated with Saint Paul's wealthy society) and an outsider (looked down upon because of his Catholicism).[8] From 1911-1913 he attended the Newman School, a Catholic boarding school in Hackensack, New Jersey. His career at the school was not stellar. Upon his arrival, Fitzgerald's imperious behavior and inflated sense of self quickly made him unpopular among students and teachers alike.[9] Outside of a burgeoning talent for writing, he paid little attention to his course of studies.

In his second year at Newman, Fitzgerald met Father Cyril Sigourney Webster Fay, a thirty-seven-year-old Catholic priest who had recently been ordained after converting from the Episcopalian faith. Fitzgerald was inspired by Father Fay's intellectual sermons and love of ritual, eventually coming to see him as a mentor and father-figure.[10] Fitzgerald wrote in 1922 that Father Fay made the Church "a dazzling, golden thing … giving the succession of days upon gray days, passing under its plaintive ritual, the romantic glamour of an adolescent dream."[11] Father Fay encouraged Fitzgerald's writing and Fitzgerald even spoke occasionally about becoming a priest and novelist in the same vein as writer Father Robert Hugh Benson.[12] Fitzgerald paid tribute to the influence of Father Fay by basing the character of Monsignor Darcy on him in his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. Fitzgerald also dedicated the novel to him.

In addition to Father Fay's influence on his future, Fitzgerald set his sights on continuing to Princeton University after graduating from Newman.[13] However, his undergraduate career at Princeton closely mirrored his academic career at Newman. He began his studies at Princeton under the condition that he would pass several requisite course exams in December.[14] Still, his amateur writing career – which developed as he wrote for the *Triangle Show* and the *Princeton Tiger* humor magazine – along with an active social life became his priority while academics took a back seat. He retained his Catholic faith (with the encouragement of Father Fay who kept in touch with him), however his faith became more perfunctory and matter-of-fact, lacking in the enchantment of his Newman days. He told a Princeton classmate: "I can go up to New York on a terrible party and then come back into the church and *pray* – and mean every word of it, too!"[15]

Scott's career at Princeton included a few starts and stops. One professor later stated that Fitzgerald reminded him of all three of the Karamazov brothers[16] at the same time.[17] Eventually, Fitzgerald was forced to withdraw for a semester in January 1916 "for scholastic deficiencies"[18] and had to repeat his junior year. However, this year happened to coincide with the entry of the United States into the First World War, and according to his biographer Matthew J. Bruccoli, "Fitzgerald considered going to war – not for patriotic reasons but as a way to end what had become a pointless college career."[19] Fitzgerald ultimately left Princeton without receiving a degree, but remained a faithful Princetonian who always fondly looked back on the friendships and social interactions of his college career.[20]

In October 1917, Fitzgerald received his commission as second lieutenant in the infantry.[21] However, he would never see a day of combat. This was something that he was always mindful of, especially when he thought of the dangers faced by so many other men of his generation.[22] It may have been for the best that he never saw combat since Fitzgerald treated his

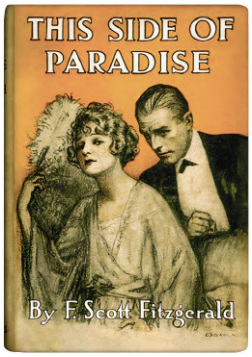
Fitzgerald in his army uniform, 1917. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

military career with the same abandon that he had treated his academic life at Princeton.[23] His orders eventually brought him to Camp Sheridan in Montgomery, Alabama where he was promoted to first lieutenant.[24] In July 1918, Fitzgerald met the eighteen-year-old Zelda Sayre who was the Protestant daughter of an Alabama supreme court judge.[25] Scott was drawn not only to Zelda's beauty but also to her vivacious and carefree independence. In many ways, she was Fitzgerald's ideal of the flapper of the 1920's: a woman who could keep up with any man in smoking, drinking, dancing, and conversation. Fitzgerald was enchanted with her, and while Zelda continued to date other men, Fitzgerald worked hard to win her favor.

In October 1919, Fitzgerald's infantry was sent to Camp Mills on Long Island in anticipation for a deployment to France that never took place. This was not his first visit to Long Island. In 1917, during his studies at Princeton, he visited the Port Washington home of Congressman Bourke Cockran.[26] Camp Mills, which was located in the Hempstead Plains area of Nassau County, provided Fitzgerald with ready access to New York City where he was able to engage in womanizing and late-night drinking binges.[27] Despite such behavior, Zelda still figured prominently in his mind. As he awaited discharge after the signing of the Armistice in November 1918, Scott considered the possibility of marriage to Zelda. However, Zelda was a smart and savvy young woman, and it was clear that marriage was out of the question until Fitzgerald could prove himself successfully in New York as a serious writer.[28]

He returned to Saint Paul in the summer of 1919 and holed up in his parents' house to write. He also made occasional visits to Father Joe Barron, dean of students at the Saint Paul Seminary. The priest knew that Fitzgerald was straying from Catholicism, a biographer writes, and when Fitzgerald criticized the faith with "a delicate scorn," Father Barron would "hear him out and then say quietly, 'Scott, quit being a damn fool.'"[29] But Fitzgerald's faith had become negligible. He wrote to a Princeton classmate in August 1919: "I am ashamed to say that my Catholoscism [sic] is scarcely more than a memory—no that's wrong its [sic] more than that; at any rate I go not to the church nor mumble stray nothings over chrystaline [sic] beads."[30]

Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, was published in March 1920 and he and Zelda married on April 3 in the rectory of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan.[31] Only a few friends and family members were present. After the brief ceremony, husband and wife left together and continued on to their honeymoon at the Biltmore Hotel. When the Fitzgeralds were evicted because their behavior was disruptive to the other guests, they moved two blocks away to the Commodore Hotel where they celebrated by spinning through the hotel's revolving doors for an hour.[32]



This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald's first novel, was published in 1920. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald quickly became the doyens of the Jazz Age, an era which Fitzgerald became the spokesman of even though he knew little of Jazz[33] and preferred classical music.[34] Their first months as newlyweds were spent jumping into water fountains, riding on the roofs of taxi cabs, and attending any party that would have them.[35] An acquaintance of Fitzgerald's recalls "Scott doing handstands in the Biltmore lobby because he hadn't been in the news that week."[36] Zelda had just as much fun, regaling friends with stories of "going back to the kitchen at the Waldorf and dancing on the table tops, of crashing dishes and being escorted out by the house detectives."[37] As much as their raucous behavior got them into the news and society pages, it just as often got them into trouble, and one biographer recalls that "[t]here were times when you wished they would sober up or go away."[38]

For Fitzgerald, success followed success, and party followed party. He was eager to capitalize on the commercial success of *This Side of Paradise* with a second novel. It is somewhat ironic that Fitzgerald only published four novels in his lifetime while he produced more than 150 short stories. While some of his short stories are well-known and critically acclaimed, Fitzgerald saw them largely as an opportunity to make quick money to support himself while he worked on the long-term goal of writing his novels.[39]

One early story worth noting is "Benediction" which was published in February 1920. The story concerns a nineteen-

Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald photographed together on a road-trip soon after their marriage in 1920. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

year-old woman named Lois, who is in a relationship with a man who writes to tell her that they are unable to marry but also that they cannot part ways. She is traveling to see him but stops in Baltimore to visit with her older brother, a seminarian studying to be a priest. Her day of visiting with her brother and the other seminarians culminates with an emotional experience during Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. At the end of the day, Lois returns to the train station and prepares a telegram offering a permanent farewell to her lover. After the experience of the day with her brother, she is prepared to return to a life of grace and virtue. However, before submitting the telegram, she rips it up and departs in tears with the intention of continuing her sinful lifestyle.

This short story is at least partially autobiographical. In his own life, Fitzgerald recalled visiting his cousin Father Thomas Delihant at Woodstock College, the Jesuit Seminary in Maryland.[40] Lois's rejection of Catholic morals at the dawn of the Roaring Twenties mirrors Fitzgerald's own abandonment of the Catholic faith. For his twenty-first year (1917-1918), he wrote in a ledger: "A year of enormous importance. Work and Zelda. Last year as a Catholic."[41] One month before his wedding, he wrote to a friend: "You're still a catholic but Zelda's the only God I have left now."[42]

Zelda gave birth to their only child, a daughter named Scottie in October 1921. Scottie's birth (and subsequent baptism) took place while Fitzgerald awaited the publication of his second novel *The Beautiful and Damned*. The novel was published in March 1922 and, though it sold well, it was met with some disappointment by reviewers and readers who expected a novel similar to *This Side of Paradise*.[43] Despite stable sales, the income from his second novel was unable to keep up with family expenses, and Fitzgerald was forced to continue writing short stories.[44] Nevertheless, Fitzgerald managed to find a market for re-publishing a number of his short stories, providing him with supplemental income to continue writing his novels. In the 1920's, Fitzgerald was one of the highest paid short story writers in the United States. In 1923, he made more than $28,000 (the equivalent in 2024 of just over half a million dollars), but this wasn't enough to pay all of his bills or to keep up with his lifestyle.[45]

"Dawn on Long Island": Fitzgerald on Long Island

The Fitzgeralds spent the rest of their lives moving from hotel to hotel or rental home to rental home. They never bought a stable residence or had any one place to call their home. This undoubtedly speaks to the restless and detached lives that they and so many of their generation carved out for themselves in the 1920's. But as the 1920's (and Fitzgerald's own prose) would prove, living such a rootless life was unsustainable. In fact, the Fitzgeralds' travels took them as far away as Europe, where Fitzgerald put the finishing touches on *The Great Gatsby* in 1924. However,

much of the novel was composed during his stay in Great Neck from October 1922 until April 1924. In September 1922, Scott and Zelda toured prospective houses in Great Neck with author John Dos Passos. On their way back to Manhattan, Zelda insisted that they stop at an amusement park. Fitzgerald remained in the car with a bottle while Zelda and Dos Passos rode the Ferris wheel.[46]

The Fitzgeralds eventually settled on renting a house on Gateway Drive in Great Neck. This undoubtedly brought back memories to Fitzgerald of his first visit to Port Washington when he was at Princeton. One biographer maintained that after that visit, Fitzgerald "carried away vivid memories of the great estates clustering that part of the Island."[47] According to another biographer, Long Island in 1922 "remained a series of small villages deep in farmland, connected by country roads along which horse-drawn carriages clopped, slowing down the shiny new roadsters."[48]

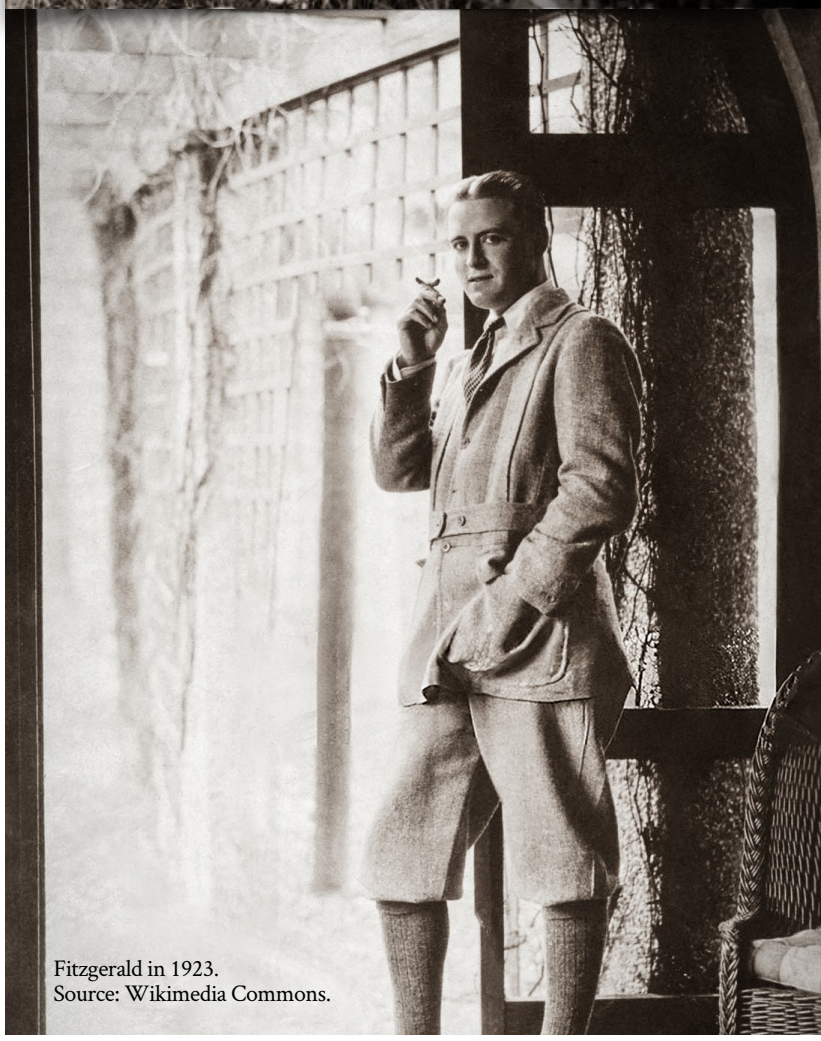
In 1922, there were no middle-class suburbs on Long Island, and the native residents of the Island were leery of visitors from New York City. The Island was home mostly to generations of baymen and farmers who lived off the local resources that the area had to offer, and while the baymen and farmers distrusted visitors from Manhattan, there was a greater force at play which attempted to keep Long Island for itself: "It was wealth – vast, entrenched, impregnable wealth – and the power that went with it. For it was to Long Island that the robber barons of America had retired to enjoy their plunder."[49] A number of the main characters in *The Great Gatsby* would come to personify this vast accumulation of wealth and conspicuous consumption.

Fitzgerald, who was never one to eschew wealth or opulence, quickly acclimated himself to social life on Long Island's North Shore. Great Neck's proximity to Manhattan ensured that Long Island could play host to raucous weekend parties whose guests included the likes of Gloria Swanson, Rube Goldberg, and Dorothy Parker.[50] One society magazine stated in August 1922 that "Great Neck is becoming known as 'the Hollywood of the East,' because of the number of men and women in 'the show business' who pass their summers there."[51] Sports columnist and short story writer Ring Lardner was a neighbor, and he and Fitzgerald became inseparable drinking partners. Once, when they received word that the author Joseph Conrad was visiting the Doubleday estate in Oyster Bay, they made their way to the estate and danced on the lawn with the hopes of inducing a meeting. Instead, they were evicted by a caretaker for trespassing.[52]

Even before moving to Great Neck, Fitzgerald wrote to his editor in June 1922 offering an insight about the third novel that he planned to write: "It will concern less superlative beauties than I run to usually + will be centered on a smaller period of time. It will have a catholic element. I'm not quite sure whether I'm ready to start it quite yet or not."[53] What is interesting about Fitzgerald's statement is that anyone who has a passing knowledge of *The Great Gatsby* will know that there are no discernably overt Catholic elements in the novel.

In June 1924, two months after Scott and Zelda quit Great Neck and sailed for France, Fitzgerald's short story "Absolution" was published. In a letter to his editor soon after

Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald in 1921.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

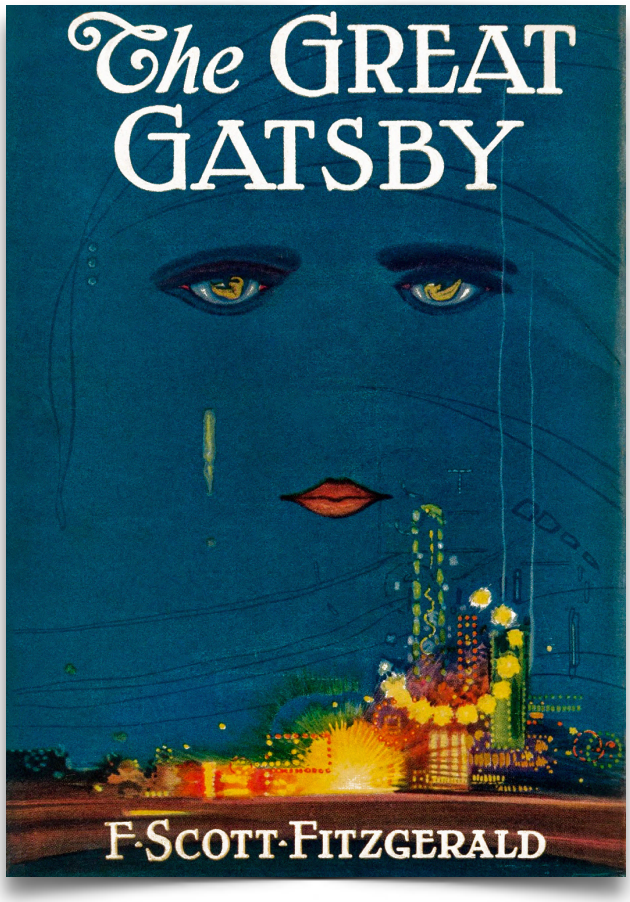


Fitzgerald in 1923.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

its publication, Fitzgerald wrote, "I'm glad you liked Absolution. As you know it was to have been the prologue of the novel [*The Great Gatsby*] but it interfered with the neatness of the plan."[54] This earlier draft of the novel, with a prologue, has not survived. Ultimately, the final draft of *The Great Gatsby* came from the manuscript which Fitzgerald wrote on the French Riviera in the summer and fall of 1924. Later in life, Fitzgerald would explain that "Absolution" was "intended to be a picture of his [Gatsby's] early life, but that I cut it because I preferred to preserve the sense of mystery."[55] It is difficult to answer definitively how "Absolution" and the figure of Gatsby would have related to each other, but it is possible for us to follow certain threads between "Absolution" and the final draft of *The Great Gatsby* to gain an understanding of their original interdependence.

The short story takes place in Minnesota and concerns a conversation between eleven-year-old Rudolph Miller and an aging Father Schwartz. Rudolph tells a lie in confession—by saying that he never lies. He feels guilty but has "reserved a corner of his mind where he was safe from God, where he prepared the subterfuges with which he often tricked God. Hiding now in this corner he considered how he could best avoid the consequences of his misstatement."[56] The next day, he lies in confession again. He is aware that he has now twice treated the Sacrament of Penance in a sacrilegious manner, but he is not contrite. We learn that a "maudlin exultation filled him. Not easily ever again would he be able to put an abstraction before the necessities of his ease and pride. An invisible line had been crossed."[57] At his final meeting with Rudolph, the old priest sounds incoherent. He asks Rudolph if he has been to parties. Rudolph says yes and the priest explains that "when a whole lot of people get together in the best places things go glimmering all the time."[58] He then asks Rudolph if he has ever been to an amusement park and Rudolph says no. "Well, go and see an amusement park," the priest responds, "[g]o 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 everything will twinkle."[59] He then warns Rudolph: "But don't get up close … because if you do you'll only feel the heat and the sweat and the life."[60] These words confirm in Rudolph his feelings of not being affected by sin: "There was something ineffably gorgeous somewhere that had nothing to do with God. He no longer thought that God was angry at him about the original lie, because He must have understood that Rudolph had done it to make things finer in the confessional, brightening up the dinginess of his admissions by saying a thing radiant and proud."[61]

As with Fitzgerald's own abandonment of Catholicism, and Lois's decision to maintain a sinful relationship with her lover in "Benediction," Rudolph in this story has crossed a line and decided to divorce himself from God and from the perceived constraints that God requires.



The original 1925 cover of *The Great Gatsby* illustrated by Francis Cugat. Source: Wikimedia Commons. [62]

"That Slender Riotous Island": *The Great Gatsby*

The amusement park with its lights and Ferris wheel that Father Schwartz warns Rudolph about in "Absolution" arrives in *The Great Gatsby*. In fact, even before we have opened to the first page of the novel, the amusement park has already manifested itself. The novel's original cover is unquestionably one of the most famous dust jackets in history. The face of a flapper emerges from a cobalt blue background. Her intense eyes and rouge lips suggest the sensuality of the Roaring Twenties. A green tear drips down on her right cheek, and the face is overseeing an amusement park, resplendent with lights in the foreground. The carnival of glimmering lights and Ferris wheels evokes the loose and carefree atmosphere of the age.

Fitzgerald used the word "carnival" more than once to describe the riotous and decadent Roaring Twenties. In a 1931 essay looking back on the age, he maintained that 1922 constituted the apex of the decade. The uproarious nature of the period continued after this time, but it became more mainstream when adults began to catch on to the spirit of the age. According to Fitzgerald, the period after 1922 "was like a children's party taken over by the elders. . . . By 1923 their elders, tired of watching the carnival with ill-conceived envy, had discovered that young liquor will take the place of young blood."[63] For Fitzgerald, the Jazz Age represented "[a] whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure."[64] The cover of *The Great Gatsby* clearly announces that the flapper, her libertine behavior, and her loose morals are presiding over the carnival of the Roaring Twenties. It is interesting to note that, before

the artist designed the final jacket cover, he attempted a sketch of a similar feminine face above Long Island Sound, her tear dripping into the water.[65] This preliminary design recalls the main setting for the novel: Long Island.

Fitzgerald depicts life on two northern peninsulas of Nassau County which jut out into Long Island Sound: East Egg and West Egg: "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."[66] Based on the context, it is obvious that Fitzgerald is portraying Great Neck as West Egg and Manhasset and Port Washington as East Egg. Few actual Long Island names are referred to in the novel itself, though, at one point, one of the characters calls from Hempstead and states that she is headed to Southampton in the afternoon.[67] The novel is narrated by Nick Carraway, a twenty-nine-year-old veteran of The Great War. Originally from the Midwest, he traveled to New York in the spring of 1922 in order to begin a life in finance.

Nick has settled into a small cottage in "the less fashionable" West Egg while his second cousin once removed, Daisy Fay (another tribute to Father Fay?) and her husband Tom Buchanan lived "[a]cross the courtesy bay [where] the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water."[68] Thus, at the beginning of the novel, Nick points out that there is more than a bay that separates the two Eggs. As was the case in real life at the time, West Egg was populated by arrivistes and the *nouveau riche* including actors and musicians while East Egg was home to "old money" types who came from financially established American families. In real life, established families like the Guggenheims and Astors had estates in Manhasset and Port Washington, while actors and musicians like Groucho Marx, Ed Wynn, and Oscar Hammerstein II lived in Great Neck.[69]

Nick's humble cottage is nestled between two mansions, one of which is owned by the eponymous Mr. Gatsby. Nick has never met Gatsby, but he describes his waterfront mansion as being modeled after Normandy's Hôtel de Ville.[70] One evening, Nick is invited to dinner at the home of Tom and Daisy. He is introduced to Jordan Baker, a professional golfer. When Jordan finds out that Nick lives in West Egg, she asks if he knows Gatsby. Daisy begins to ask about who Gatsby is but is interrupted. Throughout their evening together, much is revealed about the characters. Tom is a brutish Übermensch-type who espouses Darwinian and eugenicist theories about race. Jordan reveals to Nick that Tom keeps a mistress in New York City. Meanwhile, Daisy gives off an air of ethereal aloofness, as if she glides above everyday cares. She describes the birth of her daughter and recounts her remark upon finding out that she had given birth to a girl: "I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."[71]

Returning home that evening, Nick sees Gatsby emerging from his mansion and staring out on the water. In one of the most memorable scenes of the novel, he sees Gatsby make a grandiose gesture toward the darkness: "[H]e stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock."[72]

Aerial view in 1924 of the refuse dump in the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park area of Queens which constituted Fitzgerald's "Valley of Ashes." Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Tom Buchanan eventually invites Nick on one of his journeys to see his mistress. As they take the Long Island Railroad into Manhattan, we are introduced to the "valley of ashes," a seeming no-man's-land that exists in Queens between Manhattan and West Egg. In real life, this region was the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park area of Queens, an area described by one writer as "ugly enough to inspire the creative mind."[73] Nick describes it as "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air."[74]

An old, faded, defunct billboard depicting a large face with eyeglasses presides over the valley. This billboard advertised the practice of an oculist named Doctor T.J. Eckleburg and, according to Nick, "[t]hey look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose."[75] Elsewhere in the novel, the eyes on the billboard are described as the eyes of God, overseeing the human disaster below him. The imagery of the valley of ashes recalls T.S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* and alludes to a World War I battlefield where reason for hope and belief in God have gone up in smoke. The valley of ashes appears as a place where dreams go to die, a place to be forgotten. Gertrude Stein referred to the post-World War I generation of writers as a "Lost Generation" and the figures who populate the valley of ashes appear equally lost and shell-shocked.

Among the residents of the valley of ashes is George Wilson, the owner of a gas station and garage, and his wife

Myrtle. Myrtle is Tom's mistress, and Tom encourages her to meet him at an apartment that they share in Manhattan. Other guests, including Myrtle's sister Catherine, are invited to join what soon becomes a small party where the rules of American prohibition are left at the door. Nick narrates, "I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon."[76] The party devolves into a raucous gathering of gossip and intrigue. When she finds out that Nick lives in West Egg, Catherine states that she has heard of Gatsby and had attended a party of his a month ago. Catherine also explains the relationship between Tom and Myrtle: "Neither of them can stand the person they're married to." But divorce is out of the question, she says, because Daisy is a Catholic "and they don't believe in divorce."[77] This is the only overt reference to Catholicism in the novel and Nick criticizes the misinformation: "Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie."[78]

The experience at the apartment both attracted and repulsed Nick at the same time. He was no longer looking at the Roaring Twenties from a distance, but he was immersing himself in the light of the amusement park, in the life of decadence, debauchery, and carelessness. He was still himself, but at that moment, he was also able to see himself from the outside and comment on his experience: "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 was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life."[79] Nick, like Fitzgerald being a Catholic among the wealthy Protestants in Saint Paul, was an insider and an outsider at the same time.

Eventually Nick receives an invitation to one of Gatsby's renowned parties. This is a unique experience since Gatsby rarely extended invitations in the first place. According to Nick, "[p]eople were not invited – they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park."[80] If the riotous behavior of the Roaring Twenties can be equated to an amusement park or a carnival, then Gatsby's parties exist as a microcosm of the Jazz Age itself.

At the party, Nick runs into Jordan Baker and attaches himself to her for the evening. Nick hears various rumors about Gatsby and the origins of his wealth, but Jordan amusingly states that she doesn't care about where his money comes from. "He gives large parties," she states, "I like large parties. They're so intimate. At small parties there isn't any privacy."[81] At one point during the party, Nick unexpectedly meets the mysterious Gatsby and he describes their first encounter: "He smiled understandingly. . . . It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced – or seemed to face – the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor."[82] Nick is immediately enchanted by Gatsby and his demeanor. A friendship quickly develops and Nick becomes a regular at Gatsby's parties. At one point, Nick notes that, while the world of religion and morality drones on around them, the light and laughter of the carnival continue uninterruptedly at Gatsby's house: "On Sunday morning while church bells rang in the villages alongshore, the world and its mistress returned to Gatsby's house and twinkled hilariously on his lawn."[83]

One morning in late July Gatsby's car pulls up to Nick's door and he invites Nick to lunch in Manhattan. As they drive into the city, Gatsby begins to regale Nick with stories of his success. To this point in the novel, there were plenty of rumors about the origins of Gatsby's wealth and success. His frequent use of the phrase "Old Sport" in conversation carries with it an air of aristocratic charm or affectation, depending on whether someone believes Gatsby or not. "I don't want you to get a wrong idea of me from all these stories you hear,"[84] he tells Nick before explaining that he was born into a wealthy family in the Middle West and studied at Oxford University according to family tradition. He came into money after the death of all of his family members. He proved himself a hero in the First World War and received numerous decorations from the Allied forces including a medal from Montenegro, which he conveniently has on hand and shows to Nick. He also produces a seemingly authentic photograph of himself on Trinity Quad in Oxford. However, when Nick asks Gatsby what part of the Middle West he comes from, Gatsby sows seeds of doubt in Nick when he says, "San Francisco."[85] Gatsby explains that he will be making a request of Nick that day and wanted to make sure that he knew the "truth" about him first.

As the Manhattan skyline comes into view, Nick is enthralled to see the city laid out before him: "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world."[86] The wonder that Nick feels as they travel westward into Manhattan recalls the eternal promise of the

View of the Queensboro Bridge from Manhattan (ca. 1910).
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

New World and American expansion: "Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge."[87] The two of them have lunch at a 42nd Street speakeasy, and Gatsby introduces Nick to an associate of his named Meyer Wolfsheim. Wolfsheim is a nefarious character whom Nick finds disturbing. Nick observes Wolfsheim's "teeth" cufflinks and Wolfsheim explains that they are the "[f]inest specimens of human molars."[88] Wolfsheim corroborates Gatsby's story about an Oxford education: "He went to Oggsford College in England. You know Oggsford College?"[89] When Wolfsheim takes leave of both men, Nick asks Gatsby who the man was, wondering if he was an actor or a dentist. Gatsby flatly states that Wolfsheim was a gambler: "He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919."[90] Beyond being a simple gambler, Wolfsheim was based on Arnold Rothstein (whom Fitzgerald had met),[91] the real-life gangster and racketeer responsible for the 1919 Black Sox Scandal.[92] Nick was amazed to think that one person could be capable of creating so much confusion and chaos on a national level: "It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people – with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe."[93] The lunch between Gatsby and Nick quickly ends when Nick sees Tom Buchanan. They greet each other and Gatsby appears embarrassed to be introduced to Tom. Gatsby makes a quick, nondescript exit, and when Nick turns around again, Gatsby is nowhere to be seen.

That afternoon, Nick has tea at the Plaza Hotel with Jordan Baker. She reveals the mysterious truth about Gatsby going back to October 1917. At that time, Daisy, having just turned eighteen years old, is the belle of Louisville society, and her family hosts a gathering of young military officers in their home. It is here that Daisy meets Jay Gatsby, and though Jordan was introduced to him at the time, she didn't remember him four years later, even after attending his parties in West Egg. Despite the distance between them, Daisy remained attached to Gatsby. A year later, she was prevented by her mother from going to New York to see him off to Europe. Not long after the end of the war in February 1919, she was engaged to Tom Buchanan. Daisy received a letter (presumably from Gatsby) and, on the night before the wedding, threatens to change her mind and call off the wedding. Daisy is convinced to go through with the wedding and she begins her married life with Tom. Soon after their marriage, Tom causes a small scandal when he is in the car with a chambermaid from the Santa Barbara Hotel and gets into a car accident. Daisy gives birth to a daughter, they move to France for a year, and then return to the United States to settle in Chicago before moving to New York. In many ways, the Buchanans' waywardness seems to mirror the restless movements of Scott and Zelda.

Nick thought it was a coincidence that Gatsby and Daisy should so easily return into each other's orbit on the North Shore of Long Island, but Jordan explains that Gatsby bought the house knowing that Daisy was across the bay. Nick then recalled Gatsby when he saw him for the first time looking out onto the water and reaching into the distance: "Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor."[94] It was at this moment that Nick realizes that the glittering parties which Gatsby held were not arbitrary, but that Daisy was the sole purpose of his conspicuous consumption. Jordan reveals Gatsby's request that he had alluded to with Nick earlier in the day: would Nick invite Daisy to tea one afternoon and then have Gatsby over as well? Nick was surprised by the simplicity of the request. Gatsby had built himself up over five years and "dispensed starlight to casual moths" just to come to his small cottage for tea one afternoon.[95]

Nick returns to West Egg at 2:00 in the morning and fears that his house is on fire. The whole area is ablaze with light, and as his taxi comes closer, he realizes that every light in Gatsby's house is on. Upon his arrival home, Gatsby walks toward Nick obviously eager to hear Nick's response to his request. Even without a party going on, Gatsby's home takes on the glimmering appearance of a carnival. The image is not lost on Nick. "Your place looks like the World's Fair," he tells Gatsby. Gatsby hardly seems to notice, but he is eager to please Nick: "Let's go to Coney Island, old sport. In my car."[96] Nick states that it is too late and that he must go to bed, but, before doing so, explains that he will be calling Daisy to invite her to tea to facilitate a reunion between Gatsby and her.

Fitzgerald's genius as a storyteller and the careful planning that went into his novels is on full display by the fact that the reunion of Daisy and Gatsby occurs at the exact middle of the novel. Their meeting is, in a certain sense, the beginning of the end for this American tragedy. It begins awkwardly enough in Nick's cottage, the two of them in shock at seeing each other after nearly five years. Gatsby casually tries to lean his head on a mantelpiece when he hits a broken clock which nearly falls to the ground. He catches it and returns it to its place, perhaps referring to his desire to stop or recapture lost time. Despite the stilted beginning of their meeting, Gatsby and Daisy eventually pick up where they left off. Gatsby wants to give Daisy and Nick a tour of his house and, while they tour the grounds outside, he points out Daisy's house across the bay: "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock."[97] Immediately after Gatsby points out the green light, Nick recognizes that its significance has been diminished. His aspiring outreach across the bay was no longer necessary. All that Gatsby was and did to attract the attention of Daisy reached its culmination, and the romantic build-up was now complete with Daisy in his presence.

Nick eventually takes leave of Gatsby and Daisy. Upon saying goodbye to Gatsby, Nick wonders if, over the past five years, Gatsby has built up this moment with Daisy too much in his head: "I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion."[98]

Nick leaves the two of them "possessed by intense life"[99] and then takes a break in the narration in order to provide further background about Gatsby's mysterious origins. Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island was originally James Gatz of North Dakota. He came from a family of unsuccessful farmers, but was convinced of his own greatness. According to Nick, "[h]e was a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that – and he must be about His Father's

business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty."[100] Convinced of his destiny for greatness, Gatsby created an alter-ego for himself when fate intervened. Gatsby encountered Dan Cody's yacht on Lake Superior. Cody was a millionaire who made his money mining silver. He was drawn to Gatsby's charm and ambition and employed him as a skipper and companion on his yacht. Gatsby learned from Cody how to dress and speak like a gentleman. Gatsby was cheated out of an inheritance of $25,000 after Cody's untimely death, and he was left alone with the bearings of an aristocrat, without any of the financial backing.

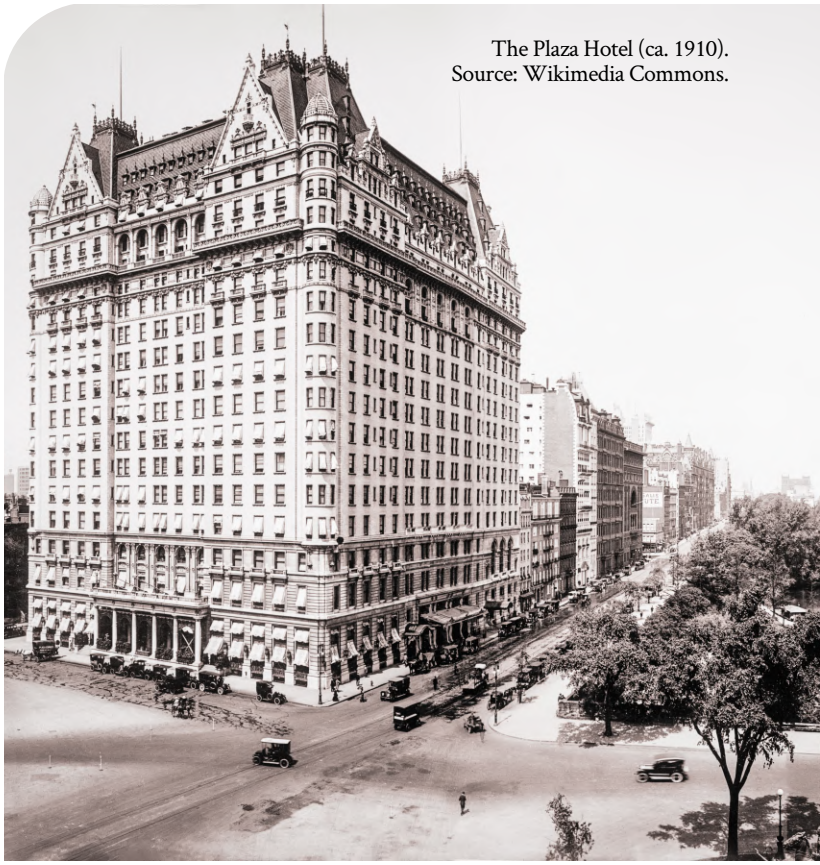
Nick then returns to the present time. He notes that, after Gatsby and Daisy's meeting at his cottage, several weeks went by without his seeing or speaking with Gatsby. Fitzgerald always regretted not fleshing out this portion of the novel by describing what Gatsby was doing during this time.[101] But his silence is very telling in and of itself, offering privacy to Gatsby and Daisy who were undoubtedly resuming their romantic relationship in secret. As the narrative resumes, Nick, Tom, and Daisy all attend one of Gatsby's weekend parties. There is a subtle tenseness in the air of the evening. Gatsby and Daisy dance the fox-trot together, the first time, Nick observes, that he sees Gatsby dance at one of his parties.[102] When Tom excuses himself from the group to join the company of a young lady who is "common but pretty," Daisy gives Tom her gold pencil and says, "if you want to take down any addresses."[103] Later, Tom asks Nick about the origins of Gatsby's wealth, assuming that he gained his money as a bootlegger. Daisy states that Gatsby built up an empire of drug stores. It is worth noting that Fitzgerald intentionally leaves Gatsby's business associations and financial dealings relatively vague. While it is obvious that he surrounds himself with mysterious and nefarious characters, we are never told anything explicitly about the nature of his business dealings and connections.

Nick stays behind after the party has ended and the revelers (including Tom and Daisy) have returned home. Gatsby is visibly disappointed and disturbed. Nick realizes that the present situation does not meet Gatsby's expectations: "He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: 'I never loved you.' After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house – just as if it were five years ago."[104] Thus, not only is Gatsby asking Daisy to negate the past four years of her marriage to Tom, but he is expecting them to return to the salad days of their romantic relationship in 1917. Nick recognizes the dangers of such expectations and tells Gatsby that you cannot repeat the past. "Can't repeat the past?" Gatsby asks him in disbelief, "Why of course you can!"[105]

As the summer wears on, the lights in Gatsby's house fail to turn on. The parties are over. To prevent gossip in town about indiscretions between Gatsby and Daisy, Gatsby dismisses his house staff and hires others recommended by Meyer Wolfsheim. Referring to one of the principal characters in the *Satyricon* by Petronius, Nick notes that Gatsby's "career as Trimalchio[106] was over."[107] On one of the hottest days of the summer, Gatsby, Nick, and Jordan Baker have lunch at Tom and Daisy's house. Nick suspects that Gatsby and Daisy are planning something and assumes that Jordan and he are there to act as a buffer when Daisy informs Tom that she will be leaving him. The gathering becomes more tense until they decide to drive into Manhattan. When there are questions about whose car to drive, Tom suggests that he drive Gatsby's yellow coupé and Gatsby drive his, inferring that, if Tom was sharing his wife with Gatsby, he may as well share his car too. Gatsby objects that his car doesn't have enough gas, but Tom dismisses him: "[I]f it runs out I can stop at a drug-store. You can buy anything at a drug-store nowadays."[108]

Tom, who is driving Jordan and Nick, stops at George Wilson's gas station in the valley of ashes in order to fill up the tank. Wilson is slow to respond because of illness. He fills up the gas tank and tells Tom that he and Myrtle are planning to move West. Nick explains that Wilson had discovered that Myrtle was living a double-life, carrying on an affair with another man. He notes that Tom had made a similar discovery about Daisy an hour earlier at luncheon. Nick observes that the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg are overseeing the events occurring in the valley of ashes. But he also detects Myrtle's eyes in a window looking out at Tom driving the yellow coupé.

The revelation about Wilson and Myrtle's impending departure quietly disturbed Tom: "His wife and his mistress, until an hour ago secure and inviolate, were slipping precipitately from his control."[109] Tom and Gatsby both speed into Manhattan, the group settling on taking a suite at the Plaza Hotel in order to cool off with mint juleps.[110] When they arrive



The Plaza Hotel (ca. 1910).
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

in their suite, Tom begins to confront Gatsby with a series of questions as if to doubt his integrity. Tom asks Gatsby, "[a]ll this 'old sport' business. Where'd you pick that up?"[111] He then asks Gatsby about his career at Oxford. Gatsby explains that he went there for five months after the war at a time when officers were given an opportunity for an education abroad. Tom then asks Gatsby why he is trying to break up his marriage to Daisy. Gatsby explains to Tom that Daisy doesn't love him while Daisy is described as disgusted by Tom's behavior. Tom then attempts to recall all of the tender moments of their relationship, and asks Daisy if she loved him at any of those moments. It is obvious that there were instances when she had.

Daisy breaks down, revealing that she cannot be the woman that Gatsby wants her to be: "'Oh, you want too much!' she cried to Gatsby. 'I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past.' She began to sob helplessly. 'I did love him once – but I loved you too.'"[112] Gatsby is unable to accept that Daisy could ever have loved anyone else besides him. His demand for complete, unrestricted, and exclusive love is unreasonable. Tom then criticizes Gatsby's nefarious business associations. It turns out that one of Tom's colleagues was caught up in some business between Meyer Wolfsheim and Gatsby. As they argue back and forth with each other, the similarities between Tom and Gatsby's business associations become apparent. Daisy wants to return home, Tom insisting that she and Gatsby take the yellow coupé back to Long Island. Tom offers Nick some whiskey before they leave, and Nick, stands despondent and shell-shocked, announcing, "I just remembered that today's my birthday."[113] Amid the heat and tension of the day, he failed to notice that he had turned thirty: "Thirty – the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair."[114] In contrast to the hopeful and promising image of Gatsby and Nick crossing the Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan earlier in the novel, Nick now describes himself in the car with Tom and Jordan driving eastward, passing "over the dark bridge" as "we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight."[115]

There is a commotion as Tom's car comes upon the valley of ashes. There was an automobile accident and a woman has been killed. The group stops and they discover that Myrtle was run over by a speeding yellow car. Earlier a neighbor overheard arguing between Wilson and Myrtle. Myrtle ran from the garage and out to the road. Perhaps remembering Tom driving Gatsby's yellow coupé earlier, she ran waving and shouting only to be run down in the road. The car continued to drive on into the night.

Upon their return to East Egg, Nick waits outside Tom and Daisy's house for a taxi. Gatsby calls for Nick from the bushes where he is hiding in order to make sure that Daisy is able to go to bed without any trouble from Tom. Gatsby explains that Daisy had been behind the wheel, attempting to steady her nerves from the tense day. By the time they saw Myrtle run out into the street it was too late. But Gatsby stated that he would be willing to take the blame for the accident. When Nick suggests Gatsby take some time away until the furor dies down, Gatsby refuses to hear any of it: "He wouldn't consider it. He couldn't possibly leave Daisy until he knew what she was going to do. He was clutching at some last hope and I couldn't bear to shake him free."[116]

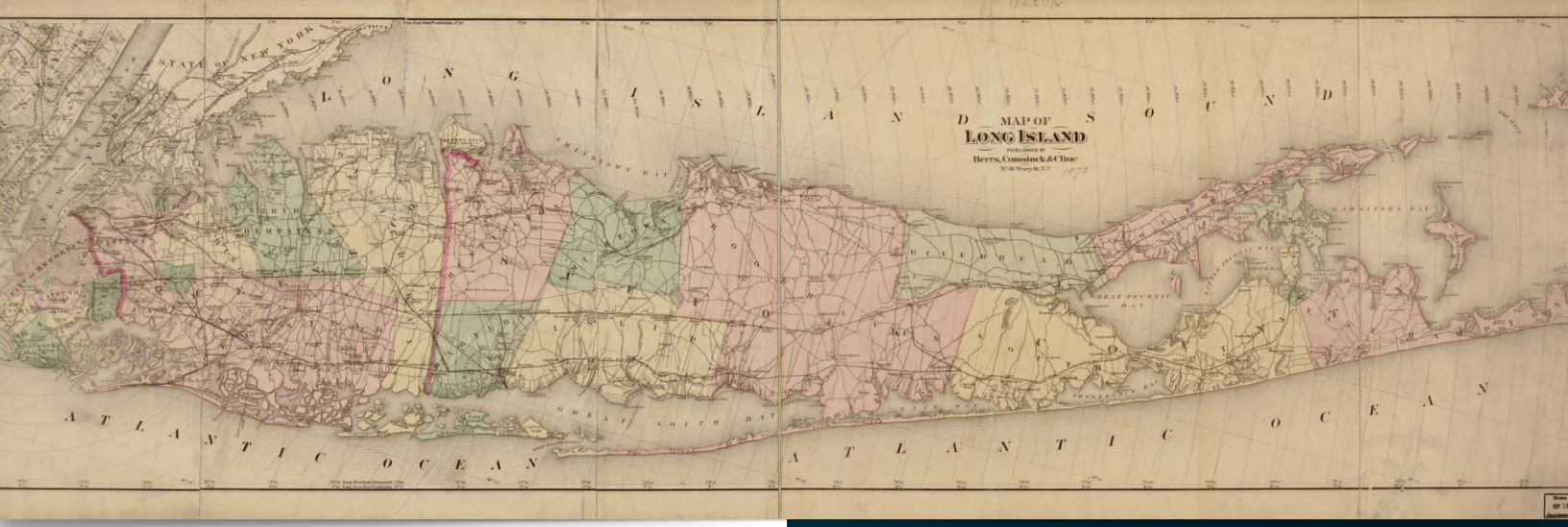
One day passes, and then another. Nick has breakfast at Gatsby's: "It was dawn now on Long Island. . . . [A]nd ghostly birds began to sing among the blue leaves. There was a slow, pleasant movement in the air, scarcely a wind, promising a cool, lovely day."[117] The summer was waning, and the gardener announces to Gatsby that he plans to drain the pool that day before the leaves begin to fall. Gatsby asks him to hold off since he hasn't used the pool all summer. Nick takes leave of Gatsby, promising to call him in the afternoon. "I suppose Daisy'll call too" Gatsby continues to hope.[118] It would prove to be their last meeting. "They're a rotten crowd," Nick shouts across the lawn to Gatsby, "[y]ou're worth the whole damn bunch put together."[119] Nick explains that he was always glad that he departed with these words: "It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end."[120] Gatsby acknowledges his farewell, and Nick remembers their first meeting three months earlier: "[H]is face broke into that radiant and understanding smile. . . . [A]nd I thought of the night when I first came to his ancestral home, three months before. . . . [A]nd he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he waved them good-by."[121]

As Gatsby swims in his pool, Nick wonders if Gatsby had given up on the dream of Daisy: "If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real."[122] Moments later, Gatsby is shot to death by George Wilson who then goes on to shoot himself. The truth of the whole matter is never revealed. Wilson is portrayed in the public as a madman and as a widower in grief, but Nick's suspicions are eventually confirmed to him by Tom himself: Tom gave Gatsby's name to Wilson.

The party is over, the lights have gone out, and the dream has died.

Nick takes over the plans for Gatsby's funeral; and while droves of people sought out Gatsby's weekend parties when he was alive, not even a handful can be gathered to remember Gatsby in death. Nick calls Daisy a half hour after news of the death only to be told that she and Tom have left home with baggage and left no forwarding address. Meyer Wolfsheim also decides to stay away, reticent about wrapping himself up in any kind of scandal. Gatsby's father, Henry Gatz, eventually arrives, and after the funeral and burial, Gatsby's house empties. One night, Nick is surprised to hear a car stop eerily at the front steps of the mansion. He reasons that "[p]robably it was some final guest who had been away at the ends of the earth and didn't know that the party was over."[123]

At the end of the novel, Nick admits that Gatsby's dream has died, but this does not mean that it will prevent others from attempting to obtain the unobtainable. This thought leads Nick to reflect upon the European discovery of Long Island: "I became aware of the old island here that

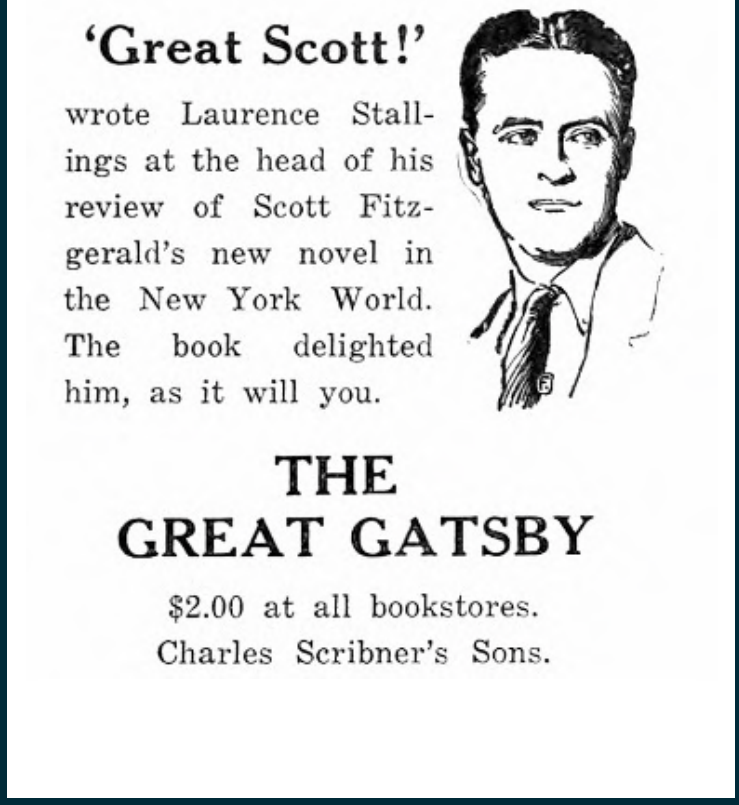


flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. . . . [F]or a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."[124] For Nick, Gatsby's discovery of the green light across the bay was a microcosm of the discovery of the North American continent. Discovery, aspiration, and wonder are nothing new, and they continue through the generations in different forms: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther."[125]

"A Universe of Ineffable Gaudiness": Fitzgerald's Later Life

Fitzgerald was in Europe when *The Great Gatsby* was published in April 1925. The first printing consisted of more than 20,000 copies followed by a second printing of 3,000 in August.[126] Overall, the reviews of the novel were positive, but sales were likely hurt by the fact that the novel was comparatively short.[127] In fact, *The Great Gatsby* was not even among the ten best-selling novels published in 1925.[128] The publication elicited a letter to Fitzgerald from T.S. Eliot who read the novel three times and wrote that *The Great Gatsby* "has interested and excited me more than any new novel I have seen, either English or American, for a number of years."[129] Complimentary letters from other formidable critics and writers such as Gertrude Stein and Edith Wharton began to pour in as well. Fitzgerald had obviously established himself as one of the world's leading American authors. In fact, he had begun to establish himself as such a serious author that publishers began to take his advice on the literary output of other up-and-coming writers. Even before he met Ernest Hemingway, Fitzgerald was praising the twenty-five-year-old writer to his agent in 1924.[130]

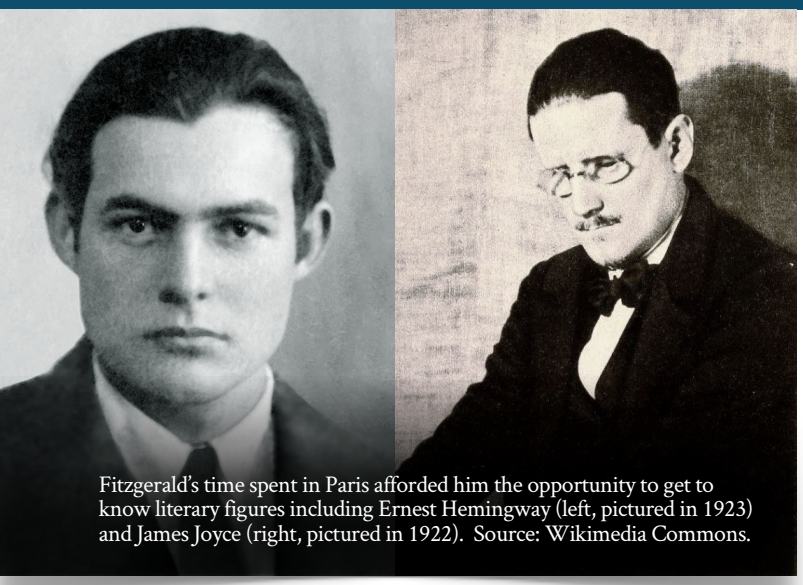
Fitzgerald and Hemingway eventually met in Paris in May 1925, beginning what would become a competitive love-hate relationship with each other. Once in 1929, Fitzgerald served as a timekeeper in a boxing match which Hemingway participated in. Scott was so engrossed in the action that he let one round go on for a minute too long. This resulted in



Advertisement for *The Great Gatsby* which appeared in *The Daily Princetonian* in 1925. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Hemingway being knocked out, and Hemingway accused Scott of intentionally extending the round in order to see him get knocked out.[131] The two authors would often critique each other's writings for the purpose of refining their work, but, Hemingway was just as likely to belittle Fitzgerald's literary output as well as his personality and lack of romantic prowess. Hemingway also criticized Fitzgerald for his inability to get his serious work [132] done.[133]

While *The Great Gatsby* might have announced the end of the party, Scott and Zelda gave no indication of this while



Fitzgerald's time spent in Paris afforded him the opportunity to get to know literary figures including Ernest Hemingway (left, pictured in 1923) and James Joyce (right, pictured in 1922). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

living in Paris. They fell in with the European literary and artistic set and divided much of their time between Paris and the French Riviera. In fact, Fitzgerald's 1934 novel *Tender is the Night* (the last novel published during his lifetime) was inspired by his experiences on the Côte d'Azur. In addition to being acquainted with Hemingway, Fitzgerald met James Joyce in Paris and made the absurd gesture of offering to jump out of the window in tribute to the Irish author's talents.[134] "That young man must be mad," Joyce observed, "I'm afraid he'll do himself some injury."[135]

The constant parties, alcoholic binges, and hard living that the Fitzgeralds engaged in had a deleterious effect on Scott's literary output. It also placed a strain on the relationship between Scott and Zelda. On both of their parts, there were real and imagined instances of infidelity, suggestions of divorce, and suicide attempts. Hemingway, who was hardly abstemious, worried about the amount of alcohol that Scott consumed: "Anything that he drank seemed to stimulate him too much and then to poison him."[136] Hemingway also claimed that, when Zelda asked him if he thought that Al Jolson was greater than Jesus Christ, he knew before anyone else that she was insane.[137]

Hemingway wasn't exaggerating his observations about Zelda. By the time the Fitzgeralds were in France, she began exhibiting instances of paranoia and delusion. Once, while Zelda and Scott walked through a flower market, she claimed that the flowers were speaking to her.[138] Another time, when they were driving back to Paris from the south of France, Zelda grabbed a hold of the steering wheel and attempted to drive them off a cliff, claiming that the car was driving according to its own will.[139] With incidents like these, Zelda began a lifetime of doctor visits and psychiatric treatments. Despite the strains on their marriage, Scott remained idiosyncratically devoted to Zelda. In 1938, he wrote a blunt letter to his daughter Scottie: "I was sorry immediately I had married her [Zelda], but being patient in those days, made the best of it and got to love her in another way."[140]

Scott continued to work and write as much as he could in order to pay for Zelda's ongoing stays at various psychiatric clinics. Despite supporting her treatment, he often reflected on their years of marriage and its gradual dissolution. Looking back on Zelda's years of treatment, Fitzgerald wrote: "I left my capacity for hoping on the little roads that led to Zelda's sanitarium."[141] In 1931, the Fitzgeralds returned home to the United States for good.

While Zelda and Scottie remained in the East, Fitzgerald traveled to Los Angeles in 1937 in order to begin work as a screenwriter. He began work at M.G.M. and received a substantial salary which allowed him to pay for Zelda's treatments and Scottie's education. The income also helped Scott to pay off some of his debts. He worked on several significant films, including *Gone with the Wind* and an unproduced picture for Joan Crawford, but his contributions weren't usually significant enough for him to earn a credit on the film. He also began a long-term extramarital affair with gossip columnist Sheilah Graham.

Fitzgerald's years of alcohol abuse coupled with tuberculosis and cigarette-smoking all contributed to cardiac issues. Throughout 1940 he suffered from chest pains and shortness of breath. He may have had two heart attacks already when on December 21 he died of a heart attack at the age of forty-four.[142]

Fitzgerald's body was transported east to Maryland. However, because of his long-standing abandonment of the Catholic faith, the Baltimore Archdiocese refused his burial in the Fitzgerald family plot at Saint Mary's Church in Rockville, Maryland. Appeals were made to the Archbishop of Baltimore but these went unheeded.[143] Instead, Fitzgerald was interred in Rockville Cemetery and the ceremonies were presided over by an Episcopalian minister.[144] If anyone could have met a sadder end than Scott, it was Zelda. She was not well enough to attend Fitzgerald's funeral, but by this time she was dividing her time between residences. In 1948, during a stay at Highland Hospital in North Carolina, a fire broke out.[145] Zelda died in the fire and had to be identified by dental records.[146] She was buried with Fitzgerald in Rockville Cemetery.

If anything like a happy ending can be ascribed as a coda to their tragic and tortuous lives, it is the fact that in 1975, Scottie successfully petitioned to have her parents' bodies

Passport photographs of Scott, Zelda, and Scottie Fitzgerald (ca. Spring, 1924). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Fitzgerald in 1929. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Fitzgerald's tomb in Saint Mary's Catholic Cemetery in Rockville, Maryland. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

moved to the Fitzgerald Family plot in Saint Mary's Church in Rockville.[147] In 1986, Scottie herself was buried alongside them and, as Ralph McInerny writes, "all three now lie in consecrated ground in Maryland and their fate, like ours, is in the hands of God."[148] On their tombstone is included the final haunting and enigmatic line from *The Great Gatsby*: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."[149]

"A Catholic Consciousness of Reality": A Catholic Reading of *Gatsby*

At the time of Fitzgerald's death, copies of the 1925 second printing of *The Great Gatsby* were still in Scribner's warehouse, no other printings having been ordered in the subsequent fifteen years of his life. By the time that he was spending his last years in Hollywood as a screenwriter, Fitzgerald was largely considered by many to be a washed-up hack who had wasted the best of his talent on non-stop alcoholic binges. But, his untimely and unexpected death quickly led some of his friends and critics to re-evaluate his literary oeuvre. This reappraisal contributed to the popularization of his literary works for a new generation of readers. Coupled with the fact that his third novel is fairly short, this made *The Great Gatsby* the perfect candidate for study in the high school classroom.

Since this reappraisal, *The Great Gatsby* has often been included on the short list of novels that are frequently referred to as the Great American Novel. The concept that there is one "Great American Novel" which perfectly encompasses and encapsulates the American experience and ethos is sometimes dismissed as being (like Gatsby's dreams) unattainable. But this speaks to the very concept itself. Like Gatsby's aspirations, the Great American Novel, is unattainable. But this does not keep authors from trying to reach it.

The staying power of *The Great Gatsby* is found in the breadth of cultural allusions and references along with the artistic representations which continue to appear year in and year out. The novel has spawned multiple stage plays, musicals, and even an opera. A string of film adaptations began with a silent film in 1926 and continued with a 1949 version where Alan Ladd played Gatsby. A 1974 adaptation starred Robert Redford and Mia Farrow. This was followed in 2013 by a version directed by Baz Luhrmann and starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire, and Carey Mulligan. This latest iteration included a soundtrack with music by Jay-Z and Beyoncé in an attempt to impressionistically portray the shocking and avant-garde nature of 1920's Jazz music. In addition, the film's cross-market promotion with American luxury brands including Tiffany & Co.[150] and Brooks Brothers[151] exemplified the true extent of the novel's continuing cultural reach.

Anyone who has read the novel in high school and then returned to it later in life will attest to the fact that each time that *The Great Gatsby* is read, new lessons are learned and new images and themes are appreciated. It is incredible to think that a tragic life such as Fitzgerald's could have produced some of the most beautiful, florid, and truthful words of prose written in the twentieth century. Fitzgerald's friend, short story writer John O'Hara, once opined to John Steinbeck that "Fitzgerald was a better just plain writer than all of us put together. Just words writing."[152] Fitzgerald's prose is so rich that it always offers us more to consider and reflect upon.

The Great Gatsby is a novel that hardly makes any reference to religion. When it does, religion is pushed to the margins. But this is one of the points that Fitzgerald is trying to

The attention to detail in Baz Luhrmann's 2013 film adaptation is impressive. On the film set, a billboard advertises "Gold Hatted Tailors" (above), an allusion to one of the early titles which Fitzgerald proposed for the novel (*Gold-Hatted Gatsby*).

An entire Brooks Brothers clothing line was also inspired by the costumes in the film (below). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

make. The glitz and glamor along with the sin and the degradation of the Roaring Twenties were able to come about because traditional morality and religious belief were being pushed aside. This is why *The Great Gatsby* is a tragic story. The exaltation of man has replaced the worship of God, and when any of the characters face practical or emotional difficulties, they do not have the stable foundation of a religious faith to anchor them in tempestuous times.

As we commemorate the centennial of the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, there are countless themes and images that readers of the novel can appreciate, analyze, and interpret. With all of these themes in mind, I would like to focus on three concrete images that not only illuminate the narrative but also profoundly resonate with our Christian faith. The first consists of the carnival or amusement park image, the second concerns the green light at the end of the Buchanans' dock, and the third focuses on the conceptual understanding of the past and future in relation to the directions of east and west.

1. The Carnival/Amusement Park

The first image that I would like to touch upon is one that I alluded to earlier: that of the carnival or amusement park. Fitzgerald used this image in *The Great Gatsby* and elsewhere to epitomize the carelessness of the Roaring Twenties. The horrific events of the First World War (exacerbated by the inability of political systems, governments, and religious institutions to bring about peace) left a population feeling unstable and uncertain. Off the heels of The Great War came the 1918-1920 flu pandemic which killed tens of millions of people worldwide. The breadth of the pandemic's reaches left people feeling helpless and impotent. Looking back on these events in 1937, Fitzgerald noted that when 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."[153] Elsewhere he described the Roaring Twenties as "the most expensive orgy in history."[154]

In the Jazz Age, America emerged from the brutal reality of World War I trench warfare in Europe. The brutality of trench warfare led people from idealism and the "war to end all wars" to a drifting and numbing cynicism. The loss of hope and the bitter experience of the loss of promising young men in the trenches of Europe led to the sort of medicating Jazz Age dancing, hedonism, and consumerism that is so effectively portrayed in *The Great Gatsby*. Every character in the novel has lost their moorings and they are spinning on a road to self-destruction. Gatsby has an idealized and unreal idolatry of Daisy Buchanan. Daisy and Tom Buchanan are referred to as "careless people" who retreat into their opulence after having selfishly and carelessly destroyed a number of lives. Jordan is accused of cheating in her golf career. Even Nick carries on a series of half-hearted, part-time, love affairs with numerous women until he allows them to peter out and dissipate.

If the traditional religions, political ideologies, and institutions were unable to provide the Lost Generation with meaning or direction, the generation would have to seek it out elsewhere. This is why Gertrude Stein held that Fitzgerald's generation was "Lost." Although Hemingway disagreed with her characterization, she once insisted to him and his generation: "You have no respect for anything. You drink yourselves to death."[155] We see this behavior reach its zenith at Gatsby's weekend parties. Bishop Robert Barron observes that "Gatsby's parties were, we might say, the liturgies of the new religion of sensuality and materiality; frenzied dances around the golden calf."[156]

The wanton and desultory descent into pleasure and conspicuous consumption is the amusement park that Father Schwartz warned Rudolph Miller about in Fitzgerald's "Absolution." Viewed from a distance, it can be seen as a whole: a glittering, reverberating carnival by the sea. Father Schwartz warns against getting too close and becoming immersed in its seedy excesses and gritty aimlessness. His advice is reminiscent of the dictum that the Christian should "be in the world, but not of the world." This means that the Christian, like every member of the human race, is born into the world and subject to the same environments, experiences, and temptations that anyone else experiences. However, Christians are not supposed to give themselves over to worldly comforts or allurements. It is because of this that Jesus says to his followers that "[i]f you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you."[157] Thus, the Christian is meant to maintain a certain degree of detachment from this world, being immersed (like everyone else) in the daily cares, concerns, and trials of life while maintaining an eye toward Heaven as our ultimate goal and destination. Saint Paul reminds us of this aspiration in his Letter to the Colossians: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth."[158] Ultimately, this sense of earthly detachment and orientation toward Heaven allows the Christian to view human existence in its fullness similar to the narrator of a novel. Nick Carraway manages to do this to a certain degree in *The Great Gatsby*, but fails when he fully immerses himself in the carnival. At the end of the novel he is left feeling disgusted and disillusioned with his experiences.

Fireworks at Coney Island. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (attributed to Gerard Seghers, 17th Century). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine of Hippo described his relentless search for satisfaction in all the wrong places.[159] Analyzing his childhood, he recalled his own youthful acts of sin, rebellion, and self-indulgence before he embraced the Christian faith: "I lost myself among many vanities. For I even longed in my youth formerly to be satisfied with worldly things, and I dared to grow wild again with various and shadowy loves … and I became corrupt in Your eyes, pleasing myself, and eager to please in the eyes of men."[160] Augustine recounts a famous scene in his youth when he and a group of friends stole pears from a pear tree in a vineyard. This theft took place not due to poverty or hunger, he stated, but for the theft and sinful nature of the act in and of itself.[161] In fact, Augustine states that he reveled in the act: "It was foul, and I loved it. I loved to perish. I loved my own error – not that for which I erred, but the error itself."[162]

Augustine notes that the theft of the pears took place late in the night. Just as he speaks of "shadowy loves," Augustine uses darkness to denote sin, dissipation, and distance from God. Similarly, the image of the amusement park shows us that the light emanating from it is artificial, deceptive, garish, and transitory. It only provides a temporary escape and distraction, after which, one is confronted by the antiseptic light of day. This image of light and darkness is one which is also found frequently in Saint John's Gospel. For the Evangelist, light is characterized by faithfulness to and belief in Christ, while darkness represents sinfulness and faithlessness. In fact, in his Prologue, Saint John refers to Jesus as "light" itself: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."[163] Meanwhile, figures who are lacking in faith are associated with darkness. Nicodemus visits Jesus at night[164] and we are told that, at the Last Supper, as he departs to betray Our Lord, Judas "took the morsel and left at once. And it was night."[165]

At the same time, we can contrast this lack of faith with the enlightenment that comes from experiencing the Risen Lord. Saint John tells us that Mary Magdalene came to Our Lord's tomb on the morning of Easter Sunday "while it was still dark."[166] It is only when Mary finally sees and recognizes Jesus in his glory, that she is truly enlightened and is able to declare to the disciples: "I have seen the Lord."[167] Saint Augustine experienced a similar progression in his own life. Toward the end of his *Confessions*, he proclaims his own enlightenment which begins with "the disordered and darkened eyesight of my mind"[168] and ends with his finding truth, love, and rest in God Himself: "I entered, and with the eye of my soul … saw above the same eye of my soul, above my mind the unchangeable Light. . . . He who knows the Truth knows that Light; and he that knows it knows eternity."[169]

In contrast to the Christian who embraces the light of truth and faith, the characters in *The Great Gatsby* perpetuate the amusement park, descending into sin and degradation in the darkness of night. It is at night that Gatsby's raucous parties take place. Gatsby reaches out "toward the dark water" to the false hopes and promises of the green light at night. After the conflict at the Plaza Hotel, the group passes over a "dark bridge" driving "toward death through the cooling twilight," and Myrtle is killed in the valley of ashes at night.

Meanwhile, it is in the light of day that the characters are confronted with the truth and must reckon with reality, however much they may continue to delude themselves. [170] Gatsby picks Nick up one July morning, and he drives them into Manhattan, regaling Nick with stories of his family wealth and military service to the point that Nick begins to question their veracity. It is at afternoon tea that Jordan reveals the origins of Gatsby and Daisy's romance to Nick. In the clarity of day, when Gatsby plans his reunion with Daisy, he fears that it might not go as planned. In the afternoon of their reunion, Nick wonders if "Daisy tumbled short of [Gatsby's] dreams" after the reality of their meeting. The confrontation scene between Tom and Gatsby occurs in the midday heat at the Plaza Hotel, and the account of the day of Gatsby's murder begins by noting that "[i]t was dawn now on Long Island." Many of the events of the daytime consist of incidents and confrontations which the characters are not spiritually or emotionally prepared to deal with. This is because the reality that they have created for themselves is tethered to a darkness which is propped up by the false, delusional, unrealistic, and unobtainable promises of the carnival.

While we live a century beyond the carnival of the American Jazz Age, we see the same doomed efforts to find some hope or meaning in twenty-first-century life. Catholics who read *The Great Gatsby* realize the gift of their Catholic faith in a world so often blinded by sin, a world that so often loses its moral and spiritual moorings, a world so often haunted by "the globalization of superficiality." Even Fitzgerald, whose dalliances with women and alcohol were well-known, recognized the dangers and pitfalls of the unending carnival. According to Bishop Barron, "Fitzgerald, in *The Great Gatsby*, was as uncompromising and morally clear-eyed as an evangelical preacher. He tells us that the displacement of God by wealth and pleasure leads by a short route, to the corroding of the soul."[171]

As Catholics, our moorings in Christ and the Church are built on the firm rock of the truths of our Catholic faith, truths that set us and all of humanity free. In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI made an Apostolic Visit to the United States. In a homily given at Yankee Stadium, he praised the United States as a land of opportunity and freedom, pointing out that "[t]rue freedom blossoms when we turn away from the burden of sin, which clouds our perceptions and weakens our resolve, and find the source of our ultimate happiness in him who is infinite love, infinite freedom, infinite life."[172] As Catholics, we are called to spiritual, moral, and relational depth grounded in our love for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is why Dante Alighieri can say with confidence that "in His will is our peace"[173] and Saint Augustine can write so profoundly: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord."[174]

2. The Green Light

As Catholics, the color green is a color which we see throughout the liturgical year during Ordinary Time. For us, the color green is a symbol of growth, hope, and aspiration. All of these symbols (in a distorted fashion) can certainly be ascribed to the green light at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock. But we should also include the green color of money and consumerism to the light's symbolism. Toward the end of the novel, Gatsby describes Daisy's voice as "full of money."[175] In the green light we see Jay Gatz's childhood dreams in North Dakota for a better life. But has Gatsby realized this hope in the novel? His wealth was gained through dubious channels and business dealings. His life becomes a case of the crass and obscene acquisition of goods. Whether seen through the greeting "Old Sport" or the fact that none of the books of his library have been read,[176] Gatsby's sense of social status is artificial and affected. He willingly encourages and engages in marital infidelity. Were these the dreams of the young Jay Gatz in North Dakota? Ultimately, all of Gatsby's hopes and aspirations are doomed because of one fatal flaw: the belief that he can repeat the past.

In fact, Gatsby not only believes that he can repeat the past, but he believes that he can build upon or perfect the past. He believes that the past can be corrected to accord itself with the way that he had originally intended his relationship with Daisy to be. In Gatsby's mind, the five years between meeting Daisy and their reunion can be erased and they can return to the moment in time when they first fell in love, before Daisy met Tom. But Daisy did meet (and marry) Tom and five years have passed. There is no erasing this. The dictum of Heraclitus[177] still stands: "You cannot step into the same river twice." Ultimately, Gatsby's looking back into the past is his downfall because it is misguided, unhealthy, and unrealistic.

The Great Gatsby is a cautionary tale for anyone who thinks that they can recreate or relive the past in the same way that they once experienced it before. In more than one way, we can contrast *The Great Gatsby* with another twentieth-century novel that deals with past memory and experience:

Evelyn Waugh, the author of *Brideshead Revisited*.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Brideshead Revisited. This 1945 novel written by Evelyn Waugh, a convert to Catholicism, consists of Charles Ryder's memories of his relationships with members of an English aristocratic family. Agnostic in his adulthood, his experience of the family's Catholicism eventually leads to his own conversion to the Catholic faith. By the end of the novel, he is in the chapel in the family's manor house. The sanctuary lamp burns, indicating that the Blessed Sacrament is present. As he prays, we are aware of all that Charles has given up in life (including a sinful romantic relationship) that he thought would bring him pleasure and happiness. It is because he has sacrificed all of these worldly pleasures in order to live a life in relationship with Christ that he is described as emerging from the chapel "looking unusually cheerful."[178]

The characters in *Brideshead Revisited* experience many of the same human weaknesses and sins of the characters in *The Great Gatsby*. The difference is that the objective truth of Christ's presence in the world in the Holy Eucharist leads the figures in *Brideshead Revisited* from the path of tragedy and self-destruction to the path of conversion, virtue, grace, and holiness. Unlike the characters in *The Great Gatsby*, the characters in *Brideshead Revisited* have a deeply-seated relationship with God which is rooted in their Catholic

Tabernacle and sanctuary lamp.
Source: Unsplash.

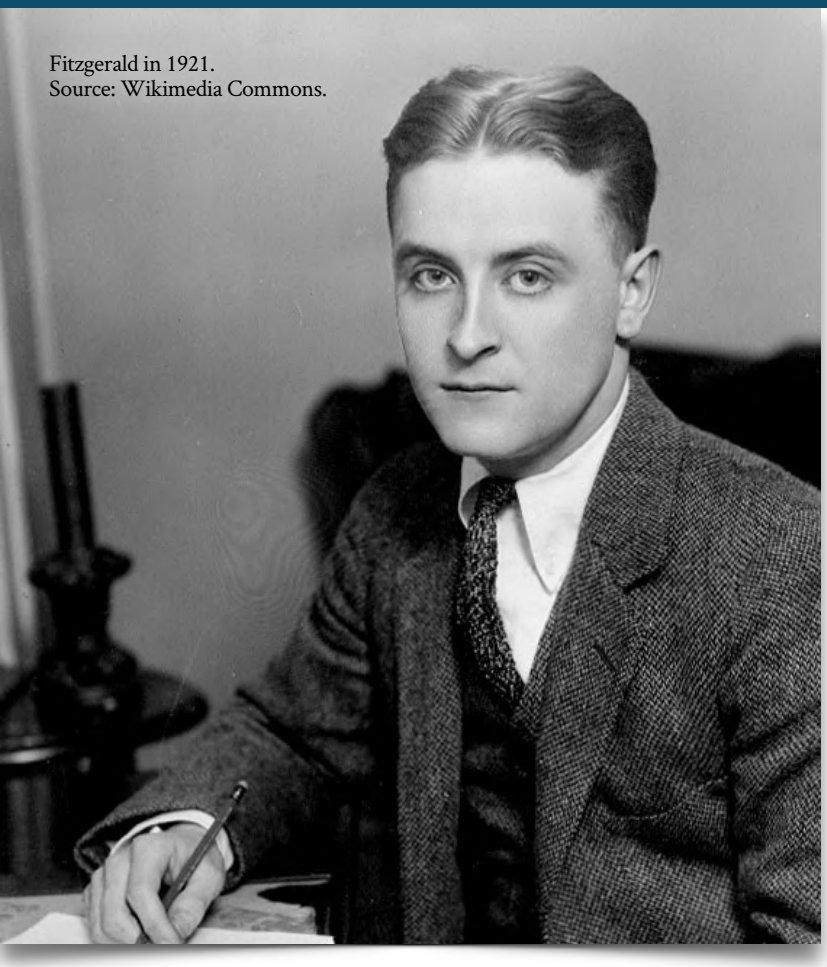
faith. Much like Fitzgerald's own continued use of Catholic themes and images (especially in his short stories) long after abandoning his faith, the figures in *Brideshead Revisited* retain a link to God even when they are at their most dysfunctional and self-destructive. One of the characters in the novel quotes the author G.K. Chesterton and compares this link and connection to God with the image of a fishing line and hook "which is long enough to let [one] wander to the ends of the world and still to bring [one] back with a twitch upon the thread."[179] In this way, a relationship with God can never be lost or severed completely. An ineffable link always remains, and God's grace often works at the most unusual of times and in the most unlikely of places.

In *Brideshead Revisited*, the green light of consumerism and conspicuous consumption gives way to the red sanctuary light, recalling the Blood of Christ and the passion with which the Sacred Heart of Jesus beats for each of us. In his Installation Homily as fifth bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre in 2017, Bishop John O. Barres noted the juxtaposition of these two images[180]: "That fading Green Light must surrender to another light, the cosmic Red Light of the sanctuary lamps that shine on the Tabernacles of our parish churches in Nassau and Suffolk counties and in every part of the world – where we celebrate the real presence of Jesus Christ, the real presence of Jesus, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Eucharist."[181] As J.R.R. Tolkien wrote at the end of his life: "I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament…. There you will find romance, glory, honor, fidelity, and the true way of all your loves on earth."[182]

If we compare the juxtaposition of these green and red lights more literally, we can see in them an inversion of the usual connotation which traffic lights receive. Traffic accidents (figurative and literal) are the very essence of *The Great Gatsby*. While the green "go" of a traffic signal has liberating and good connotations, the red "stop" is alarming and arresting.[183] However, these connotations are inverted in the novel. The green light leads to false starts and misdirection whereby multiple "careless people" become the cause and victims of emotional, relational, and physical accidents. The characters in *The Great Gatsby* are on a trajectory toward self-destruction. Meanwhile, the red light of *Brideshead Revisited* indicates a place where one can stop to reflect, rest, and find peace. This true peace and everlasting rest can only be found in Jesus who promises as much in the Gospels: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."[184]

The green light also exists concretely as one of Gatsby's idols and "enchanted objects." It symbolizes his idolization of Daisy and mirrors Fitzgerald's own idolization of Zelda when he definitively abandoned his Catholicism and stated that "Zelda's the only God I have left now." But even this idolization of another person represents a perversion of what true love is. True love does not seek to possess another for the purpose of self-gratification or self-fulfillment. Instead, true love seeks the good of the other person. True love is rooted in Christ's Paschal Mystery in which husband and wife die to sin in a fallen world and raise each other in holiness and grace. This is why the Austrian Emperor, Blessed Charles Hapsburg, declared to his wife on the night before their wedding: "Now we must help each other to get to Heaven."[185] In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI offered a meaningful exposition on this Christlike love: "[T]his word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character. . . . Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice."[186]

Blessed Charles Hapsburg with his wife Zita at their wedding in 1911 (his great-uncle Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria looks on).
Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Fitzgerald in 1921.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

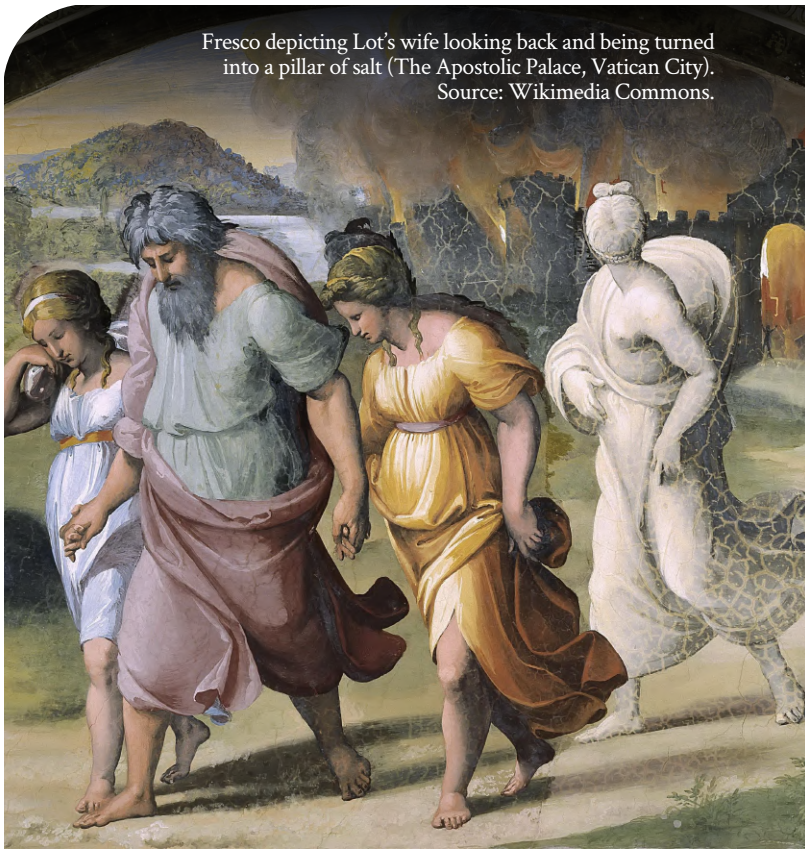
3. Past and Future, East and West

When we contrast *The Great Gatsby* with *Brideshead Revisited*, we find in *Brideshead Revisited* an example of a healthy looking back on and return to the past. For multiple characters, lessons have been learned, sacrifices have been made, and an unexpected, interior happiness remains. Similarly, in his own recollections, Saint Augustine was able to make peace with his sinful past by recognizing the fact that memory, inspired by God's grace, allows us to look back on the past in light of God's Providence. Like the characters in *Brideshead Revisited*, Saint Augustine was able to reckon with his past in an honest, realistic way because he did so illuminated by God, who is truth itself: "For where I found truth, there I found my God, who is Truth itself, which from the time I learned it have I not forgotten. And thus since the time I learned You, You abide in my memory; and there do I find You whenever I call You to remembrance, and delight in You."[187]

Meanwhile, the last line of *The Great Gatsby* denotes a constant tension between looking backward and moving forward. There is a Pelagian resistance to reality and truth. Truth is the way forward, and the characters in *The Great Gatsby* turn their back on the truth to dwell in the past. In the Gospels, we see a similar, constant struggle between Jesus and the Pharisees, who are not only caught up in the past, but are caught up in a false conception of the past.[188] In Saint Matthew's Gospel, Jesus condemns the Pharisees who self-righteously praise and honor the ancient prophets of Israel while ignoring the fact that their ancestors rejected and persecuted those whom God sent to them: "[Y]ou build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood.' Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets."[189] Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for looking back on an idealized, whitewashed past which prevents them from embracing reality and growing in the spiritual life. This rejection of reality keeps them from recognizing Jesus for who he is. They fall into the same pattern of their ancestors and treat Jesus (the truth) in the same manner that their ancestors treated the prophets of Israel: they hand him over to be persecuted, condemned, and put to death.

Similarly, Gatsby is unable to face the truth and he is left disillusioned because the conception of the past which he has built up in his mind will never be able to meet his expectations. This leads to his demise, since, as Saint John Paul II wrote, "[t]ruly, there can be no turning one's back upon the truth, ceasing to proclaim it, hiding it, even if it is a hard truth that can only be revealed at the cost of great suffering."[190] Fitzgerald wrote in a 1934 essay (co-authored with Zelda) that "it is sadder to find the past again and find it inadequate to the present than it is to have it elude you and remain forever a harmonious conception of memory."[191]

Throughout Sacred Scripture, we find various instances in which looking back proves counterintuitive and contrary to God's mission. In the Book of Genesis, as God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife looks



Fresco depicting Lot's wife looking back and being turned into a pillar of salt (The Apostolic Palace, Vatican City).
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Statue of Saint Junípero Serra in Statuary Hall (United States Capitol, Washington D.C.). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

back toward the destruction while she is fleeing and is immediately turned into a pillar of salt.[192] In Saint Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks of those who express their desire to follow him but who then qualify this desire with various excuses for delay. Jesus remains clear, when someone makes the decision to follow him, there is no turning back, there is only the way forward: "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."[193]

This sense of missionary service to the Kingdom of God and the Gospel is even personified in the life and example of the saints. For example, we see in the life of Saint Junípero Serra, a zealous and courageous eighteenth-century Franciscan priest who did so much to evangelize the native peoples of America. His personal motto was "Always go forward and never turn back." This motto speaks to the confident and fearless American drive into the unknown future. At the Mass celebrating Saint Junípero Serra's canonization at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. in 2015, Pope Francis stated that, for Saint Junípero Serra, moving forward "was the way to continue experiencing the joy of the Gospel, to keep his heart from growing numb, from being anesthetized. He kept moving forward, because the Lord was waiting. He kept going, because his brothers and sisters were waiting. He kept going forward to the end of his life."[194] This tireless, dynamic drive forward stands in contrast to the anesthetized, shell-shocked members of the Lost Generation, whom T.S. Eliot compares to "a patient etherized upon a table" in his 1915 poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."[195]

Saint Junípero Serra's missionary activity recalls the relationship between East and West. Since the discovery of the New World, the West has symbolized the hope and future of limitless potential and expansion. This aspirational drive is personified by the Latin motto of New York State ("*Excelsior*") which means "ever upward" or "ever higher." In contrast, the European East symbolizes the past of the old world. One American author pointed out that "[n]either Europeans nor Americans can die eastward. The unknown lies the other way. They cannot, it seems, live or hope eastward, either."[196] When we think of this divide, we see a similar situational division between East Egg and West Egg. East Egg represents the old world of established wealth and privilege while West Egg recalls the new world of American grit and determination. It is worth recalling that, at the beginning of *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby is stretching out toward the green light which shines eastward. Thus, Gatsby is transfixed on the old world. There will be no growth and development for him as he longingly reaches out toward the past. After Gatsby's death, his father unknowingly makes a similar observation: "Jimmy always liked it better down East. He rose up to his position in the East."[197]

Ultimately, whether of "new" or "old" money, all of the characters in *The Great Gatsby* are doomed because they are turning their back on any possible future of growth or development. By doing so, they are all without hope. The novel sets up a clear division between East and West, and with such a dualism there will always be tension or friction. This is in direct contrast to the way of God which desires to gather together all people, in all places, for all time: "From the rising of the sun [East] to its setting [West] let the name of the Lord be praised."[198] This all-encompassing mission of Jesus finds its realization in his calling of the Twelve Apostles. The multiplication of the number three (the number of perfection for the Semitic world) by the number four (symbolizing the four cardinal points or directions in the world) results in the number twelve, symbolizing the "universal destination" of Jesus' mission by bringing "salvation to the very ends of the earth."[199] Thus, the dichotomy between East and West, personified in the novel by Gatsby stretching out his arms toward the green light, is overcome by the unifying and universal embrace of Jesus who stretched out his arms on the Cross out of love for us.

In another sense, *The Great Gatsby* inverts the traditional Christian conception of East and West. Perhaps this is why so many of the characters are disoriented and meet their demise. When the characters journey toward the West in the novel, they journey toward that which is new, fresh, and exciting. Meanwhile, the East is associated with the past and death. However, in reality, the East has always been the focus of Christian worship since its origins. Christian prayer has always

been directed toward the East where the sun rises, dawn breaks, and a new day begins. Beyond the daily expectation of the rising sun in the East, the Christian anticipates Christ, the Risen Son of God to come again from the East. Jesus states in the Gospels that "just as lightening comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be."[200] The seventh-century Church Father, Saint John Damascene, explains that the East is where the Christian finds reason to hope and anticipate the Second Coming of Christ: "[S]o we worship, striving after Him. And when He was received again into Heaven He was borne toward the East, and thus His apostles worship Him, and thus He will come again in the way in which they beheld Him going towards Heaven."[201]

Although *The Great Gatsby* is a story about life on America's East Coast, Nick concludes that the story is one about the West: "[A]fter 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."[202] But, just because they are of the West, does not make them paragons of virtue. Nick refers to Tom and Daisy as "careless people" who "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."[203] Whether they were in Santa Barbara, Chicago, or New York, scandal always followed in their wake. This phrase recalls a statement by Jordan much earlier in the book. Nick accuses her of being a reckless and careless driver. She admits as much, but states that it won't have an effect on her because "[i]t takes two people to make an accident."[204] Nick asks her what would happen if she ever meets someone as careless as she is, and Jordan responds that she hopes she never will: "I hate careless people."[205] It goes without saying that multiple accidents (literal and figurative) are caused by the self-indulgent relationships that Daisy has with Tom and Gatsby respectively.

Fitzgerald (ca. 1926). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

"A Single Gorgeous Moment": Conclusion

Pope Francis and Fitzgerald have something in common. They both warn us against the pursuit of "artificial paradises." Pope Francis writes at the beginning of *The Joy of the Gospel*: "The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. . . . That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ."[206] These words remind us that the American dream, when it is focused narrowly on the acquisition of material wealth, status, and power becomes a self-destructive nightmare. Consumerism is an idol. It can never truly engage the depths of the human heart and soul. It only stunts them.

As we commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, we are reminded that the novel portrays the choice of immense wealth tethered to a superficial materialistic approach to life which ends in self-destruction. Contrast this with the life of Saint Junípero Serra – a life of grace and holiness, a life of tireless evangelization and missionary zeal. His inspiration shows us what really counts and what really lasts in life. His example encourages us to lay down our lives generously and courageously, investing them completely in the Kingdom of God.

"So we beat on, boats against the current" concludes the final line of *The Great Gatsby*, implying a movement forward with a concurrent pull backwards "borne back ceaselessly into the past."[207] This simultaneous movement results in a certain stagnancy. Fitzgerald similarly saw himself as experiencing this paradoxical tension in his own life. Upon the occasion of the Catholic re-burial of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Archbishop William Baum, the Archbishop of Washington, observed that Fitzgerald "found in the faith an understanding of the human heart caught in the struggle between grace and death. His characters are involved in this great drama, seeking God and seeking love. As an artist he was able with lucidity and poetic imagination to portray this struggle."[208]

The sun sets off the coast of Long Island. Source: Unsplash.

For those of us Catholics who find ourselves on that "old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes," the image of boats against the current is particularly salient. Perhaps these boats symbolize the personal, spiritual battle that so many people (after the example of the characters in *The Great Gatsby*) perennially wage against God's mercy and Providence. We see in our world today many examples of people who continue to resist God's desire to draw them out of their sorrow by the "twitch upon the thread." In one sense, as far as fallen human nature goes, this is nothing new. C.S. Lewis once remarked that human beings are "half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us."[209] "We are far too easily pleased," he went on to assert, "like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea."[210] Lewis rightly maintains that we were not created for the material, temporary, and childlike distractions which the world offers to us each day. Instead, we have been made for that which is greater: infinite joy which can only be found in God. These sentiments are echoed by Pope Benedict XVI who wrote in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* that "[m]an was created for greatness – for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched."[211]

Writing three years before his death, Fitzgerald looked back longingly on the "all too short period" in the 1920's when "the fulfilled future and the wistful past were mingled in a single gorgeous moment – when life was literally a dream."[212] Fitzgerald acknowledged, without regret, the years that he spent "seeking the eternal Carnival by the Sea."[213] "Eternal" is the operative word in this phrase, indicating a desire or expectation that the party would last forever. But, all those of faith know that the "Carnival by the Sea" is a house built on sand, lacking a firm foundation.[214] The earthly and the material are finite and they will pass away. The lights do eventually go out, the music will cease, and the guests will depart. Only God remains.

It is only in Christ that we find true freedom and it is only through him that we find everlasting peace and eternal life. Like the merchant who willingly sold all that he had in order to acquire the pearl of great price,[215] the Christian who desires eternal life with God knows the value of trading the temporary, childlike distractions of Fitzgerald's "Carnival by the Sea" for the true rest in the Lord found in Lewis' "Holiday at the Sea." The "carnival" is characterized by the temporary, frenetic, anxious, and unpredictable while the "holiday" is marked by peaceful contentedness, uninterrupted joy, and rest from our burdens.

Four hundred years after Dutch sailors first set their eyes upon Long Island, we might wonder if this slender island still offers us anything to marvel at or to discover. But the Christian knows that Long Island, like anywhere else where the Gospel is proclaimed, will always flower for the eyes of those who seek the truth. Whether visiting the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, the Shrine of Our Lady of the Island, the Basilica of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, or any of our parish churches in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, we are constantly encountering the Risen Lord. It will always be "dawn on Long Island" whenever the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered and wherever the Most Holy Eucharist is adored in our diocese. It is in the Risen Lord that we find true rest and everlasting peace. The Church will always proclaim this saving message. It is Christ who supports and sustains us through all ages and for all time. May Jesus, who "is the same yesterday, today, and forever,"[216] lead us to the eternal joy which we all seek. †

Biography: Father Brandon O'Brien, J.C.L., is a graduate of Chaminade High School and Hofstra University (where he studied English literature). He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Rockville Centre in 2013 and in 2021 he received a Licentiate in Canon Law (J.C.L.) from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. He currently serves as a Tribunal Judge and Adjutant Judicial Vicar for the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

Endnotes

[1] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 4.

[2] Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 13.

[3] Ibid., 11.

[4] Wallis Warfield Simpson's relationship with England's King Edward VIII precipitated a constitutional crisis which resulted in the King's abdication in 1936. She married the former-King who was created the Duke of Windsor by Letters Patent after his abdication.

[5] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 497.

[6] Ibid., 355.

[7] Ibid., 22.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 30.

[10] Ibid., 34.

[11] Qtd. in F. Scott Fitzgerald, *A Life in Letters*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 480.

[12] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 35.

[13] Ibid., 31.

[14] Ibid., 41.

[15] Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 51.

[16] *The Brothers Karamazov* was a novel published by Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky in 1880. The personalities of the three brothers differ greatly. The eldest brother (Dmitri) is passionate and swept up by his emotions while the middle brother (Ivan) relies on logic and reason. The youngest brother (Alexei) is gentle and compassionate.

[17] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 58.

[18] Ibid., 60.

[19] Ibid., 68.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 79.

[22] Maureen Corrigan, *So We Read On: How "The Great Gatsby" Came to Be and Why it Endures* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2014), 66.

[23] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 82.

[24] Ibid., 82.

[25] Ibid., 87.

[26] Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 133.

[27] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 90.

[28] Ibid., 91.

[29] Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald*, 98.

[30] Fitzgerald, *A Life in Letters*, 29.

[31] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 128.

[32] Corrigan, *So We Read On*, 104.

[33] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 130.

[34] Corrigan, *So We Read On*, 97.

[35] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 131.

[36] Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald*, 110.

[37] Ibid., 115.

[38] Ibid., 107.

[39] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 107.

[40] Ibid., 32.

[41] Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 86.

[42] Ibid., 111.

[43] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 159.

[44] Ibid., 163.

[45] Ibid., 188.

[46] Ibid., 170.

[47] Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald*, 133.

[48] Sarah Churchwell, *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem, and the Invention of "The Great Gatsby"* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 50.

[49] Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 148.

[50] Corrigan, *So We Read On*, 118.

[51] Qtd. in Churchwell, *Careless People*, 56.

[52] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 173.

[53] Fitzgerald, *A Life in Letters*, 60.

[54] Ibid., 76.

[55] Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 187.

[56] F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Absolution," in *The Best Early Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 258.

[57] Ibid., 262.

[58] Ibid., 266.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 266-67.

[62] The novel's original cover, designed by Francis Cugat, is one of the most famous dust jackets in literary history, capturing the essence of *The Great Gatsby* in a haunting, symbolic image. The face of a flapper emerges from a vibrant cobalt blue background, her intense, makeup-rimmed eyes and deep red lips evoking the glamour and sensuality of the Roaring Twenties. A single green tear rolls down her cheek, symbolizing melancholy and perhaps the elusive nature of the American Dream. Below her, a cityscape resembling an amusement park glimmers with dazzling lights, Ferris wheels, and glowing marquees, reflecting the carefree, indulgent spirit of the Jazz Age. This carnival-like scene, with its bright lights and allure, mirrors the novel's themes of excess and fleeting happiness, while also hinting at the disillusionment and inner emptiness that defines Gatsby's world. Cugat's artwork masterfully encapsulates both the era's seductive beauty and the underlying heartbreak that Fitzgerald would immortalize in his story.

[63] F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Echoes of the Jazz Age" in *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920-1940*, ed. James L.W. West III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 132.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Charles Scribner III, "Celestial Eyes: From Metamorphosis to Masterpiece," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 53 (Winter 1992), 148.

[66] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 4-5.

[67] Ibid., 155.

[68] Ibid., 5.

[69] See map in Corrigan, *So We Read On*, 119.

[70] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 5.

[71] Ibid., 17.

[72] Ibid., 20-21.

[73] Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1083.

[74] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 23.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., 29.

[77] Ibid., 33.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 35.

[80] Ibid., 41.

[81] Ibid., 49.

[82] Ibid., 48.

[83] Ibid., 61.

[84] Ibid., 65.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 68.

[87] Ibid., 69.

[88] Ibid., 72.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., 73.

[91] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 179.

[92] Rothstein attempted to induce several players on the Chicago White Sox (including "Shoeless" Joe Jackson) to throw the 1919 World Series in favor of the Cincinnati Reds.

[93] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 73.

[94] Ibid., 78.

[95] Ibid., 78.

[96] Ibid., 81.

[97] Ibid., 92.

[98] Ibid., 95.

[99] Ibid., 96.

[100] Ibid., 98.

[101] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 218-19.

[102] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 105.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., 109.

[105] Ibid., 110.

[106] Trimalchio was a character in the first-century Latin work *Satyricon* by Petronius. He was a former-slave who has risen in Roman society and serves as a satire of the comically vulgar *nouveau riche* [See "Introduction" by William

Arrowsmith in *Satyricon* by Petronius, trans. William Arrowsmith (New York: Meridian, 1994), viii.]. Trimalchio hosts rich, lavish, and grotesque parties. Fitzgerald's comparison of Gatsby to Trimalchio went to such an extent that, for a time, he wanted to name the novel *Trimalchio* or *Trimalchio in West Egg* (other proposed titles included *Among Ash Heaps and Millionaires*, *Gold-Hatted Gatsby*, *Gatsby*, *The high-Bouncing Lover*, *On the Road to West Egg*, and *Under the Red, White, and Blue*) [See Corrigan, *So We Read On*, 201]. Maureen Corrigan points out that the Trimalchio comparison is not perfect: "Gatsby is not a bombastic type; his parties – which he doesn't seem to enjoy – are a lure for Daisy, the one person he wants to impress." [Ibid.]

[107] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 113.

[108] Ibid., 121.

[109] Ibid., 125.

The Polo Grounds (1923). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

[110] Interestingly, Fitzgerald originally planned to preface the confrontation scene at the Plaza Hotel with the group taking in a baseball game at the Polo Grounds in Upper Manhattan. Nick describes the game as taking place between the Chicago Cubs and "New York." While 1922 was the last year that the Polo Grounds played host to both the New York Giants (not to be confused with the New York Football Giants who played at the Polo Grounds from 1925-1955) and the New York Yankees (Yankee Stadium opened for the 1923 season), we know that the Cubs were playing the Giants since interleague play was not introduced in Major League Baseball until 1997. In the original draft of the novel, Fitzgerald intimates the division between Tom and Daisy by indicating that Tom (perhaps loyal to their previous residence in Chicago) is rooting for the Cubs while Daisy and Gatsby are rooting for the Giants. Historically, the Cubs played the Giants on September 13, 14, and 15 in 1922. (See "The Baseball Game Cut Out of The Great Gatsby": https://www.baseballprospectus.com/news/article/64027/off-the-rubber-the-baseball-game-cut-out-of-the-great-gatsby/). Fitzgerald ultimately decided to remove this scene in the final draft of the novel (Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 212-13).

[111] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 127.

[112] Ibid., 132.

[113] Ibid., 135.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid., 135-36.

[116] Ibid., 148.

[117] Ibid., 152.

[118] Ibid., 154.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid., 161.

[123] Ibid., 179.

[124] Ibid., 180.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 217.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., 217-18.

[129] F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Three Letters About 'The Great Gatsby'" in *The Crack-Up*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: New Directions Books, 2009), 310.

[130] Fitzgerald, *A Life in Letters*, 82.

[131] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 279.

[132] Despite difficulties with the "serious work" of his novels, Fitzgerald's short stories continued to carry him financially each year. In 1929, he earned $27,000 from eight short stories and only a little more than $30 from novel sales (See Bruccoli, 278).

[133] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 281.

[134] Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 581.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Scribner, 1992), 174.

[137] Ibid., 186.

[138] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 288.

[139] Ibid., 282.

[140] Fitzgerald, *A Life in Letters*, 363.

[141] Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 362.

[142] Corrigan, *And So We Read On*, 161.

[143] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 488.

[144] Ibid.

[145] Corrigan, *And So We Read On*, 239.

[146] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 491.

[147] Ralph McInerny, "From the Publisher: Which Side of Paradise?" *Crisis Magazine*, December 1, 1990, https://crisismagazine.com/vault/from-the-publisher-which-side-of-paradise.

[148] Ralph McInerny, *Some Catholic Writers* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 54-55.

[149] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 180.

The Tiffany and Company Building.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

[150] At the end of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick encounters Tom outside of a jewelry store on Fifth Avenue. This was likely the old Tiffany and Company Building on 37th Street and Fifth Avenue (Corrigan, *So We Read On*, 78). Nick reluctantly greets Tom before Tom goes into the store. Nick presumes that Tom is buying a pearl necklace or a pair of cufflinks (references to the two significant pieces of jewelry in the novel).

[151] After receiving his military commission in 1917, Fitzgerald went to Brooks Brothers in Manhattan in order to acquire some of his necessary equipment. (Fitzgerald, *A Life in Letters*, 13).

[152] Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 475.

[153] F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Early Success" in *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920-1940*, ed. James L. W. West III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 188.

[154] Fitzgerald, "Echoes of the Jazz Age," 137.

[155] Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, 29.

[156] Robert Barron, *Seeds of the Word* (United States: Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, 2016), 67.

[157] John 15:19.

[158] Colossians 3:1-2.

[159] The author attributes this connection to insights shared with him by Father Louis Cona, S.T.L. of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York.

[160] Augustine, *Confessions*, II.i.1. https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1101.htm.

[161] Ibid., II.iv.9.

[162] Ibid.

[163] John 1:9.

[164] John 3:2.

[165] John 13:30.

[166] John 20:1.

[167] John 20:17.

[168] Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.viii.12.

[169] Ibid., VII.x.16.

[170] The author attributes this analysis of light and dark themes in the novel to insights shared with him by Father Joseph Scolaro, S.T.L. of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York.

[171] Barron, *Seeds of the Word*, 67.

[172] Benedict XVI, "Holy Mass: Homily, Yankee Stadium, Bronx, New York (April 20, 2008)" in *Pope Benedict in America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 140.

[173] *Paradiso*, Canto III.

[174] Augustine, *Confessions*, I.i.1.

[175] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 120.

[176] Ibid., 46.

[177] Heraclitus was a Greek Philosopher of the fifth century B.C.

[178] Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012), 402.

[179] Ibid., 254.

[180] Bishop Barres attributes this connection between the two novels to insights shared with him by Father Michael Jones, S.T.D. of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

[181] Most Reverend John O. Barres, "Installation Homily," Saint Agnes Cathedral: Rockville Centre, New York (January 31, 2017).

[182] "Letter to Michael Tolkien: March 6-8, 1941" in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 53-54.

[183] The author attributes this connection between the green and red lights to The Very Rev. Dom Daniel Stephen Nash, Can. Reg. of the Canonry of Saint Leopold.

[184] Matthew 11:28.

[185] James Bogle and Joanna Bogle, *A Heart for Europe* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), 35.

[186] Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html.

[187] Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xxiv.35.

[188] The author attributes this connection to insights shared with him by Father Lee Descoteaux, J.C.L. of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York.

[189] Matthew 23:29-31.

[190] John Paul II, *Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way* (New York: Warner Books, 2004), 190.

[191] F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda Fitzgerald, "Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number –" in *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920-1940*, ed. James L. W. West III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 124-25.

[192] Genesis 19:6.

[193] Luke 9:62.

[194] Francis, "Holy Mass and Canonization of Blessed Fr. Junípero Serra: Homily, National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C." (September 23, 2015). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150923_usa-omelia-washington-dc.html# :~:text=For%20him%2C%20this%20was%20the,the%20end%20of%20his%20life.

[195] The author attributes this connection to Most Reverend John O. Barres.

[196] Wallace Stegner and Page Stegner, *American Places* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 223-24.

[197] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 168.

[198] Psalm 113:3.

[199] Benedict XVI, "General Audience" (May 3, 2006). https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060503.html.

[200] Matthew 24:27.

[201] *Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus.* Series II, vol. 9 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1898), 550.

[202] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 176.

[203] Ibid., 179.

[204] Ibid., 58.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 2. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

[207] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 180.

[208] William Doino Jr., "Searching for Paradise: F. Scott Fitzgerald," *First Things*, June 24, 2013. https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/06/searching-for-paradise-f-scott-fitzgerald.

[209] C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (HarperOne: New York, 2001), 26.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi* (November 30, 2007), 33. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html.

[212] F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Early Success," 191.

[213] Ibid., 190.

[214] See Matthew 7:24-27.

[215] See Matthew 13:45-46.

[216] Hebrews 13:8.

Panorama of New York 1918. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

"So we beat on,
boats against the current,
borne back ceaselessly
into the past."

– F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (1925)

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The CARNIVAL BY THE SEA

A Catholic Reflection on F. Scott Fitzgerald, Long Island, and the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of *The Great Gatsby*

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