



F. Scott Fitzgerald and his Contemporaries by William Goldhurst

I am certain that a number of us at least have some kind of community of interest. And with this communion will come something better than a mere clique. It is a consciousness of something more than stylistic questions and “taste,” it is a vision, and a vision alone that not only America needs but the whole world.—Hart Crane

Chapter I Time, Place, and Spirit

She sleeps—eternal Helen
—in the moonlight of a
thousand years; immortal
symbol of immortal aeons,
flower of the gods
transplanted on a foreign
shore, infinitely rare,
infinitely erotic.—Donald
Ogden Stewart

Donald Ogden Stewart's *A Parody Outline of History* provides a humorous but illuminating survey of some major episodes in the literary life of the nineteen-twenties. Published in 1921, Stewart's deft satire uncovers the ludicrous excesses that lay just beneath the surface of the books America was reading. “Main Street: Plymouth, Mass.” reduces Sinclair Lewis's famous novel to absurdity, accurately noting Carol Kennicott's febrile heroics. “Cristofer Colombo: A Comedy of Discovery” mocks the tedious

extravagance of James Branch Cabell's fantasy, *Jurgen*. "How Love Came to General Grant," a classic of the genre, is an amused comment on the bad prose, the improbable melodrama, and the simple-minded piety of Harold Bell Wright. Stewart's implied criticism is good-humored but relentless throughout.

Both qualities are apparent in Stewart's fourth chapter, "The Courtship of Miles Standish: In the Manner of F. Scott Fitzgerald." The opening passages concentrate on Fitzgerald's shaky erudition:

It was of some such yellow-haired Priscilla that Homer dreamed when he smote his lyre and chanted "I sing of arms and the man"; it was at the sight of such as she that rare Ben Johnson's Dr. Faustus cried, "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?" In all ages has such beauty enchanted the minds of men, calling forth in one century the Fiesolian *terza rima* of "Paradise Lost," in another the passionate arias of a dozen Beethoven symphonies.

Later, Stewart pokes fun at the novelist's fascination with petting parties and prose poetry:

John: It's really awfully funny—but I came here tonight because Miles Standish made me promise this morning to ask you to marry him. Miles is an awfully good egg, really Priscilla.

Priscilla: Speak for yourself, John.

(They kiss.)

Priscilla: Again.

John: Again—and again. Oh Lord, I'm gone.

(An hour later John leaves. As the door closes behind him Priscilla sinks back into her chair before the fireplace; an hour passes, and she does not move; her aunt returns from the Bradfords' and after a few ineffectual attempts at conversation goes to bed alone; the candles gutter, flicker, and die out; the room is filled with moonlight, softly stealing through the silken skein of sacred silence. Once more the clock chimes forth the hour—the hour of fluted peace, of dead desire and epic love. Oh not for aye, Endymion, mayst thou unfold the purple panoply of priceless years. She sleeps—Priscilla sleeps—and down the palimpsest of age-old passion the lyres of night breathe forth their poignantpraises. She sleeps—eternal Helen—in the moonlight of a thousand years; immortal symbol of immortal aeons, flower of the gods transplanted on a foreign shore, infinitely rare, infinitely erotic.)

A parody by John Abbot Clark, written thirty years later, reveals a conspicuous difference in tone and intention. I quote a few memorable lines from Clark's lampoon "The Love Song of F. Scott Fitzgerald":

I should have been a pair of shoulder pads
Scatting across the gridiron, beating Yale.

In the dorm the coeds come and go
Talking of Michael Arlen, Bow....
And when I was a youngster, prepping at Newman,
The coach sent me in to play safety,
And I was frightened. And out I came.
In one's room with a book, there you feel free.
I drink, much of the night, and go south in the
winter...
I grow old ... I am knelled...
I shall no longer wear the bottoms of my trousers
belled.
You will see me any evening in the bar....
But at my back from time to time I hear
The horns of Marmons and the sax's wail, which
shall bring
Scott to Zelda in the spring.
The novel's strand is broken: *The Last Tycoon* is
Clutched by stronger hands—the Bunny Hug. The
tributes
Cross from East to West, unheard. The readers are
departed.
Huck's river, run softly, till they end my song.
Mrs. Parker comes at noon.
And then the lighting of the candles
In the William Wordsworth Room.
Shantih shantih shantih

[Clark, in *American Literature in Parody*, ed. R. P. Falk (New York, 1955), pp. 227-230.]

The contrast between these two satirical treatments is both obvious and significant. Stewart mocks the self-conscious romanticism of some of Fitzgerald's early novels and stories. Clark derives his material, as he informs us in a headnote, from Budd Schulberg's *The Disenchanted* and Arthur Mizener's *The Far Side of Paradise*. Stewart assumes his readers' familiarity with Fitzgerald's fiction. Clark writes for an audience that understands the relevance of terms such as “the Bunny Hug,” “Mrs. Parker,” and “the William Wordsworth Room”—all biographical details of the sort that are precious to the cocktail-party *cognoscenti*. Stewart's comic exercise reveals amusement at Fitzgerald's literary pretensions. Clark's exhibits contempt for the man. How can we account for these differences in emphasis?

The answer is to be sought not only in the personality and taste of Stewart and Clark, but in the perspective each writer adopted, perhaps unconsciously, toward his subject. Clark wrote at a time when the more sensational features of Fitzgerald's reputation had been recently exposed by Mizener and Schulberg. Stewart wrote at a time when Fitzgerald's life had not yet assumed the troubled and erratic course that would be celebrated by later fictionists and biographers.

But there is an even greater divergence in the attitudes these two parodists imply toward Fitzgerald's works—a divergence so pronounced as to invite a moment's reflection. Clark, apparently, never read anything Fitzgerald wrote. Stewart not only knew Fitzgerald's early fiction intimately; he was also on familiar personal terms with the novelist during the composition of *This Side of Paradise*, the work that forms the basis of his parody. Fitzgerald, in fact, sought Stewart's opinion on the novel when it was still in manuscript.

These encounters between Fitzgerald and Stewart in the summer of 1919, of no great significance in themselves, anticipate the spirit of exchange and stimulation that was to become characteristic of the period in which Fitzgerald flourished. Stewart's "The Courtship of Miles Standish" reflects that spirit; the parodist's good humor, as well as his concentration on Fitzgerald's art, might be seen as a product of the intimate fellowship of the nineteen-twenties, when in Edmund Wilson's words "the practice of letters was a common craft and the belief in its value a common motivation." On the other hand, Clark's profound indifference to Fitzgerald's works in "The Love Song of F. Scott Fitzgerald" reveals his alienation from that spirit and his dissociation from the sympathy which gave it life.

Fitzgerald's literary companionship with Stewart was typical, not only of the time but also of Fitzgerald's lifelong habit of forming close friendships with fellow writers. In addition, the two authors' subsequent involvements with other writers reveal the interconnections that formed the characteristic pattern of the twenties. For example, Stewart accompanied Hemingway to Pamplona in the summer of 1924; and he served as a model for the fictional character Bill Gorton in *The Sun Also Rises*. Fitzgerald met Hemingway in the fall of 1924, was portrayed briefly in Hemingway's satire *The Torrents of Spring* (1926), and advised Hemingway during the composition of *The Sun Also Rises*. Fitzgerald's discovery of Stewart as a character in Hemingway's novel (then in manuscript) probably came as no surprise: Fitzgerald himself had portrayed some of his "literary friends" in his first two novels. Such portrayals, friendly or otherwise, were a prominent feature of the fiction of the period.

But the close relationships among writers of the twenties prompted other activities which are perhaps of greater interest to the literary historian. Established authors were quick to recognize talent and to assist unknowns into print—as witness Sherwood Anderson's efforts on behalf of William Faulkner or Fitzgerald's on behalf of Hemingway. Editors of *avant-garde* magazines and journals offered encouragement to new writers and provided an outlet for the unorthodox, the strange, the experimental in prose and poetry. Authors circulated manuscripts and sought advice from fellow writers and critics. Sometimes this practice had memorable

results, as when Ezra Pound subjected T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* to a series of drastic cuts, or when Gertrude Stein urged Hemingway to eliminate all "bad" description from his prose. In similar but less tangible ways other members of this professional fraternity benefited from mutual criticism, from mutual stimulation, and from discussion and dispute. Hart Crane's association with Waldo Frank, Matthew Josephson, and Gorham Munson, for example, gave Crane a sense of identification with the common interests and important issues of the age, echoes of which found their way into his poetry. Such artistic cross-fertilization was characteristic of the creative process during the decade.

Writers of other periods, of course, have engaged in similar associations and transactions; the literary community or artistic "cluster" is a commonplace of history. [See A. L. Kroeber, *Configurations of Culture Growth* (Berkeley, Calif., 1944). This voluminous study documents what Kroeber calls "the tendency in human culture for successes or highest values to occur close together in relatively brief periods within nations."] But the feeling persists that the literary community of the nineteen-twenties was unique, that it was distinguished from earlier fellowships by its closeness and by the intensity of its activity. "They had more experiences in common than any other generation in American history," Malcolm Cowley accurately observes. *Exile's Return*, which is based on Cowley's own experience, traces some of the typical patterns of the time: childhood in a small town in the Midwest; a university education interrupted by the compelling patriotic impulse of 1917; service with the Armed Forces in Europe; return, restlessness, expatriation—and above all the fascination with literature, the joint projects and manifestoes, the plethora of *avant-garde* magazines, the common dedication among men who shared a profound interest in their craft.

On the other hand, the writers of the twenties formed no school or specific movement; they had no "program," nor did they limit themselves to doctrinaire principles. The American authors of the postwar decade, in fact, consisted of a number of small separate groups and a great many unaffiliated individuals—all of whom participated freely in public feuds and differences of opinion. There were writers who circulated around individual publishing ventures: for example, the *Broom* group, composed of Cowley, Crane, and Josephson; and the staff of *The American Mercury-Mencken*, Nathan, and Angoff—which later suffered a celebrated parting of the ways. There were regional groups like the Southern Agrarians, "intensive and historical," in Allen Tate's words, and "opposed to the eclectics" in the East. There were the New Humanists, who accepted a relatively unified body of opinion, one of the principal features of which was an opposition to modern literature. There were Mencken and his disciples, who repeatedly castigated the New Humanists. There were journalists on all sides who assailed Mencken regularly. And there was

Ernest Hemingway.

Hemingway in particular exemplifies the strong current of dissension that ran through the literature of the period. In *The Torrents of Spring* he satirized Sherwood Anderson, who had been an early friend and mentor. A year later he lampooned Mencken in *The Sun Also Rises*. Later, Gertrude Stein claimed that Hemingway had “killed a great many of his rivals and put them under the sod.” Hemingway avowed that he had not; then he proceeded to heap the sod on Gertrude in *Green Hills of Africa*. She herself had opened hostilities with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in which she not only maligned Hemingway, but expressed her contempt for a number of writers and painters of her acquaintance. Her victims were moved to publish *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, which denounced the woman who in the early twenties had been the center of an active and admiring community of artists.

These are only a few of the notable literary quarrels of the twenties and early thirties, when sally and retort were prompted by doctrinal disagreements and personal malice alike. Such disputes, however, clearly reveal an aspect of the individuality these writers clung to so fiercely—without which the era would not have been so productive and so various in accomplishment. Cliquishness and uniformity, undeviating mutual praise and agreement were held in low esteem by the more serious artists of the time, some of whom opposed such things on principle. Perhaps the best perspective on writers of the time reveals a community of literary spirits who were argumentative, self-defensive, and mutually critical, but who nonetheless shared similar ideals and underlying convictions.

This basic unity of attitude found its way into many essay collections and symposiums. By far the most famous of these, *Civilization in the United States* (New York, 1922), suggests the close harmony of opinion among intellectuals and artists on the subject of American culture. Harold Stearns (who also crops up in *The Sun Also Rises*) edited the collection and contributed a grim essay on “The Intellectual Life.” Conrad Aiken lamented the plight of the American poet. J. E. Spingarn decried the fear of personality and intellect in the universities. H. L. Mencken, in a brief survey of American politics, blasted away at the ignorance and dishonesty of our officeholders. Lewis Mumford depicted the horrors of modern industrialization in our cities. Ring Lardner called attention to the “asininity” of American sports spectators. Van Wyck Brooks commented unhappily on “The Literary Life”: “The chronic state of our literature,” he observed, “is that of a youthful promise which is never redeemed.” In his Preface, Stearns summed up one of the basic attitudes which pervaded the entire collection: “the most moving and pathetic fact in the social life of America today is emotional and aesthetic starvation... .” Stearns also declared that the volume attempted an “uncompromising analysis” of

numerous aspects of American Me; only religion had been omitted from the general indictment. "It has been next to impossible to get any one to write on the subject," Stearns confessed. Five years later Sinclair Lewis published *Elmer Gantry*, thereby contributing a powerful supplement to Stearns's symposium and correcting its most notable deficiency.

Civilization in the United States represents the writers and thinkers of the time in one of their most solemn and pessimistic moods. Other essay collections crystallize the spirit of informality characteristic of their lighter moments. Ernest Boyd's *Portraits: Real and Imaginary* (New York, 1924), for example, emphasizes the "private lives" of a number of the author's acquaintances. Satirical in tone and gossipy in content, Boyd's accounts seem trifling and insubstantial to readers of a later generation. The section on Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald is typical:

... with the impunity of their years, they can realize to the full all that the Jazz Age has to offer, yet appear as fresh and innocent and unspoiled as characters in the idyllic world of pure romance. The wicked uncle, Success, has tried to lead these Babes in the Wood away and lose them, but they are always found peacefully sleeping in each other's arms. The kind fairies have watched over them... .

And so on. Yet *Portraits: Real and Imaginary* is not altogether insignificant to students of the period: a famous book in its day, it documents the interest writers displayed in the activities, trivial and otherwise, of their contemporaries.

It is also worth noting that one of the portraits in Boyd's gallery, "Aesthete: Model 1924," has a relevance of its own. The international dilettante and literary hanger-on that Boyd depicted was a familiar figure of the age, and he caught the attention of other observers. Fitzgerald's Albert McKiscoe in *Tender Is the Night* and Hemingway's Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* are specimens of the type. These parallels suggest the accuracy of Boyd's caricature and its pertinence to the era. "Aesthete: Model 1924," in fact, provoked a passionate response from the writers who presumed themselves targets of Boyd's irony; innocuous as the essay may seem today, it was serious business to the literary community that received it. For a detailed version of the story, see Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return* (New York, 1956), pp. 190-196.

Another collection, published the same year as Boyd's *Portraits*, presents a picture of that community exchanging banter, mild insults, and mutual approval. *The Literary Spotlight*, edited by John Farrar, is an outstanding instance of group solidarity and chumminess. Farrar's book contains a number of portraits, written by anonymous contributors, of popular literary figures of the day. Each of the essays follows a similar pattern: the subject of discussion is first satirized, then commended. The contributors

spar with each other without intent to injure; they praise with faint damns. Sherwood Anderson is taken to task for his vanity, but it turns out that his vanity is his great and redeeming virtue. Mencken is pictured as a cruel practical joker, a hypochondriac, and a secret defender of the icons he smashes publicly; still, he is “warmly human” and “a gentleman.” Fitzgerald is accused of ignorance and illiteracy, but his genius shines through in *This Side of Paradise*. Similar treatments are accorded Heywood Broun, Sinclair Lewis, Amy Lowell, Floyd Dell, and others. *The Literary Spotlight* is an amiable book, and it exhibits the literary fellowship of the nineteen-twenties in one of its characteristic moments of intimacy.

These, then, were some of the general group characteristics of the writers of the decade. Despite their frequent quarrels and their tendency to fall into separate factions, they were united by a background of similar experience and an intense dedication to the practice of literature. The fact that they were interested in each other, to a greater extent than any other generation of writers before or since, is by no means an incidental or peripheral matter. Out of that interest developed a habit of interchange and mutual influence that does much to explain the affinities in the individual works they produced.

There is no “key” to an understanding of the literature of the nineteen-twenties. Anyone attempting to reduce it to a single essential “formula” courts the error of oversimplification. Yet there are large areas in the works of Fitzgerald and his contemporaries that reveal a fundamental agreement of interest and approach. These writers seem particularly in accord in their selection of themes and their attitudes toward literary technique.

Critics have noted the marked tendency toward technical innovation and experimentation during the twenties. [The fullest and best treatment is in Frederick J. Hoffman, *The Twenties* (New York, 1955), pp. 163-239.] The poetry of Hart Crane, E. E. Cummings, and T. S. Eliot suggests one manifestation of their artistic unorthodoxy. The drama of Eugene O'Neill suggests another. And the art of prose fiction constitutes still another—perhaps the most conspicuous area of improvisation and originality. Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Hemingway's *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*, James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* and *Manhattan Transfer*—to cite only a few of the most important examples—suggest the variety and range of interest during the postwar decade in new forms of artistic expression.

The writers of the period were united, moreover, in their approach to their sources of literary material: they stressed the importance of the immediate personal experience as a basis for art. Invention, of course, was still important; but the rendering of the actual, the concrete, the observed phenomena of life was given new emphasis. “It was, in fact, an age of indirect or direct 'transcription,'” writes Carlos Baker, “when the perfectly

sound aesthetic theory was that the author must invent out of his own experience or run the risk of making hollow men out of his characters.” The consistency with which the writers of the twenties and early thirties adopted this theory gives the literature they produced its intense documentary flavor and accounts for its many *romans a clef*. The serious authors of the time felt that they had first to see for themselves before starting to work; they spared no effort to achieve a verisimilitude based on experienced, rather than imagined, reality. Sinclair Lewis did not hesitate to “research” a subject before committing it to novelistic form. Thomas Wolfe relied upon an amazingly profuse store of remembered events and conversations. Fitzgerald used his own experiences at Princeton, his acute observation of the campus, the classrooms, and the conversations of his classmates, in the preparation of *This Side of Paradise*. For *The Sun Also Rises* Ernest Hemingway drew on his recollections of “the way it was” in Pamplona during the summer festival of 1924. How closely Hemingway patterned his first novel on the actual events of that occasion may be seen in Harold Loeb's account, *The Way It Was* (Loeb was the model for Robert Cohn), or in a comment made by Donald Ogden Stewart: “... I didn't like the book, for the curious reason that it wasn't a 'novel.' Every damn thing in it was just 'reporting'—at least, up to the end of the fiesta.” Stewart might well have underestimated the importance of Hemingway's imaginative presentation of his materials. But works such as Cummings' *Enormous Room* and Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*—as well as those already mentioned—support the idea that the writers of the nineteen-twenties favored, to a greater extent than previous generations, a background of actual people and events to give their fiction substance and authenticity. Fitzgerald and his contemporaries reversed the doctrine of Shakespeare's Theseus and started, rather than ended, with “a local habitation and a name.”

They drew their themes, in the same spirit, from the life around them. The writers of the twenties and early thirties were realists in this respect, too: each recorded with remarkable fidelity the issues and events—as well as the developing, ever-changing attitudes—of his time and place. There are, however, no simple patterns of agreement here. Fitzgerald, Lardner, and Dos Passos, for example, all contributed treatments of the Younger Generation: but each one differs in its perspective. Fitzgerald was the chief historian of the emergent debutantes and playboys, and much of his early fiction is devoted to a romantic portrayal of their adventures. Lardner, as we shall see in a later chapter, made the same group targets of his satire. Dos Passos drew a picture of the flapper and her escort that emphasizes still another aspect of the subject: the girl is mildly insane and the boy is ignorant and self-interested. The reader discovers variety rather than uniformity in these treatments of a prominent theme of the twenties. Still, there is agreement in this instance—and in many others—in the writers' selection of subjects and materials to be treated in fiction.

Furthermore, many authors not only elected the same subjects, but shared similar attitudes toward them. They were, particularly unified in their outspoken, sometimes vehement reaction against the popular aspirations and values of the American majority. "Never in history," remarked one of the most famous critics of the period, "did a literary generation so revile its country." Perhaps "revile" is too strong a word; but it is certain that many novelists and short-story writers turned out cynical interpretations of our habits and attitudes. We might consider, for example, fictional treatments of village life in the United States. President Harding had expressed an opinion on the subject that may be taken as representative of the popular sentiment: "What is the greatest thing in life, my countrymen? Happiness. And there is more happiness in the American village than in any other place on earth." Sherwood Anderson did not agree, as is demonstrated by *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919); neither did Sinclair Lewis in *Main Street* (1920), Ring Lardner in "Haircut" (1925), Herbert Asbury in "Hatrack" (1925), or the Lynds in their documentary study, *Middletown* (1929).

A number of authors also turned their attention to the automobile, a commodity that had begun to assume significant proportions in the life of the average American citizen. Sinclair Lewis showed Babbitt's childish dependence on his motorcar for social status and self-esteem. Faulkner, in *Sartoris*, made the automobile a symbol of the returned veteran's reckless and futile quest for speed and excitement; indeed, for the hero of this Faulkner novel the motorcar is a means of escape from life in a peace-torn world. Other writers extended Faulkner's implication: in Lardner's "There Are Smiles," in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and in Dos Passos' *The Big Money*, the automobile is an instrument of death. Such treatments reflect not only the tremendous increase in production and purchase of automobiles during the twenties, but also the tendency toward machine worship in the public imagination of the time.

In other areas Fitzgerald, Mencken, and Dreiser protested Puritanism and "Comstockery." These same writers, along with Dos Passos and Hemingway, rejected the high-sounding slogans of World War I propaganda. On occasion writers even adopted the same imagery: Faulkner (in *Soldier's Pay*), Fitzgerald (in *The Great Gatsby*), and Hemingway (in *The Sun Also Rises*) all owed a profound debt to the sterile landscape of Eliot's *Waste Land*, one of the most influential depictions of twentieth-century society. These examples, which could easily be multiplied, illustrate the close communion of attitude shared by many of the major writers of the time; but they also suggest, as does the consistent emphasis upon experimental technique, the rebellious tendency of their fiction.

Rebellious they were, certainly, and critical of native mores, of which they were perceptive students. Many aspects of the "rebellion" have been recorded; yet the term is misleading if it creates an image of a spontaneous

indictment of American institutions and customs. Taken as a whole this body of fiction is emphatic in its iconoclasm and its vigorous assault on our weaknesses and illusions. But the same strain is evident in the works of earlier writers. In all periods of its relatively short history, in fact, American literature exhibits a rich vein of social satire and social criticism. Especially prominent since the Civil War, the theme of social criticism may be traced from the beginnings of our tradition to the present, from Hugh Brackenridge to Jack Kerouac. The fiction of the twenties differs, of course, in historical particulars; but it is still very much a traditional body of work in its preoccupations and its philosophy: it is part of the continuity of American letters rather than an isolated episode in its development.

We might accurately call their fundamental theme Democracy in America, after Tocqueville's keen and detached study of our society. The subject is dramatic and multifarious, and it was given particular relevance in the nineteen-twenties by the social and economic forces operating during the postwar era. At no other time in our history have the potential misfortunes of equalitarianism seemed so conspicuous and so close to realization. Brackenridge had observed some of these unwholesome tendencies during the first twenty years of the republic. In his conclusion to *Modern Chivalry* he states that the great moral of his book is "the evil of men seeking office for which they are not qualified." This assertion has familiar echoes to readers of H. L. Mencken, whose era provided abundant material for a similar "great moral" ("I am not fit for this office and should never have been here," confessed Warren Gamaliel Harding). Nineteenth-century writers as diverse as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Henry James had focused disillusioned eyes on the subject of the American "aristocracy"; the same theme occupies a prominent position in the works of Lardner, Mencken, Lewis, and Scott Fitzgerald.

In the eighteen-thirties Alexis de Tocqueville had mapped the contours of our culture that would engage native writers almost a century later. Tocqueville saw clearly the rationale of self-interest that dominated American business and the fluidity of movement that characterized our social structure:

It is strange to see with what feverish ardor the Americans pursue their own welfare and to watch the vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it. ... A native of the United States clings to this world's goods as if he were certain never to die: and he is so hasty in grasping at all within reach that one would suppose he was constantly afraid of not living long enough to enjoy them. ... If in addition to the taste for physical well-being a social condition be added in which neither laws nor customs retain any person in his place, there is a great additional stimulant to this restlessness of temper. Men change their track for fear of missing the shortest cut to

happiness.

Tocqueville's comments on national pursuits and motives might easily be applied to the post-World War I period. The spirit of our commercial enterprise during those years of unprecedented prosperity was based in large measure upon the practice and principle of "grasping at all within reach" and a "clinging to this world's goods." The social aspirations of the aggressive middle class (in Tocqueville's telling phrase "the many men restless in the midst of abundance") were recorded time after time by the writers of the nineteen-twenties. These tendencies of democracy in America claimed the attention of Fitzgerald and his contemporaries, as they had attracted the notice of the astute European visitor to our shores almost a century earlier.

The writers of the twenties saw numerous possibilities for variation in these dominant motifs: they contained tragic implications, as in Dreiser's *American Tragedy*; they provided material for comedy, invective, and satire—as in Lardner, Mencken, and Sinclair Lewis; they inspired the powerful sagas of social displacement by William Faulkner; they gave authority and universality to the fictional autobiographies of Thomas Wolfe; and they were the backdrop for the melancholy romances of Scott Fitzgerald.

Whence the emphasis in the novels and stories of the nineteen-twenties upon the social milieu, the pronounced interest in the aspirations of the different classes, in their motives and values? The fiction of the time only directs our attention back to the time itself; and both yield fruitfully to analysis when we understand the process, well known to cultural historians, whereby a literature reflects an age and simultaneously helps to shape it. If we add, further, the forces that work upon the writer's imagination to shape his art, our comprehension of the cycle approaches a state of fullness, however imperfect or incomplete in an absolute sense. In the twenties, few authors worked in isolation. The majority were "involved" in two ways: with the issues and events of the life around them, and with the ideas and attitudes of other contemporary writers. But a specific example at this point will help to clarify the process by which one fictionist of the era derived from his reading the materials of his art, and how those materials crystallize brilliantly an episode in actual national experience. An example appropriate to the purpose is the image of T. J. Eckleburg in Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*.

Eckleburg is introduced early in the novel, in the section describing the "valley of ashes" that serves as a Waste Land backdrop for some of the book's crucial action. This bleak area, actually a dumping ground just outside Manhattan, is dominated by a large billboard showing two enormous eyes wearing spectacles and captioned "Doctor T. J. Eckleburg." Presumably this is an optometrist's advertisement placed among the ash heaps to attract the notice of passing commuters. But Fitzgerald suggests

that Eckleburg's brooding presence has a larger significance, that the gigantic eyes symbolize some implacable modern deity. Across the road from the desolate valley of ashes lives George Wilson, the spiritless garage owner whose wife, Myrtle, is having an adulterous affair with Tom Buchanan, the unscrupulous and well-to-do representative of Fitzgerald's American "aristocracy" in *The Great Gatsby*. Later, after Myrtle Wilson's death (which occurs in the neighborhood of the dumping ground), George Wilson entertains a curious delusion:

Wilson's glazed eyes turned out to the ashheaps, where small gray clouds took on fantastic shapes and scurried here and there in the faint dawn wind.

"I spoke to her," he muttered after a long silence. "I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window"—with an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it—"and I said 'God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me, but you can't fool God!'"

Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which has just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.

"God sees everything," repeated Wilson.

"That's an advertisement," Michaelis assured him.

Eckleburg has symbolic reflections elsewhere in the novel; one of Gatsby's party guests reminds us of the optometrist's advertisement: "A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles...." When we meet this character, who is later referred to as "Owl-Eyes," he is seated in the library musing over Gatsby's books. The amazing thing, Owl-Eyes tells some of the other guests, is that the books are real—"they have pages and everything." Considering the context of Gatsby's world and his papier-mache palace with its tinsel trappings, Owl-Eyes' surprised discovery is not without relevance. Fitzgerald has extended the implication of Eckleburg's divinity and applied it to Owl-Eyes, one of the few characters in the novel who can distinguish between the apparent and the real.

It should be noted, not incidentally, that Owl-Eyes is the only attendant, aside from Gatsby's father and Nick Carraway, at Gatsby's funeral. And it is he who utters a Jazz Age benediction of sympathy over Gatsby's grave:

He took off his glasses and wiped them again, outside and in.

"The poor son-of-a-bitch," he said.

The image of T. J. Eckleburg—as well as his counterpart, Owl-Eyes—has an important function in the over-all rationale of Fitzgerald's novel, and is properly seen as one of its central symbols. The optometrist's advertisement suggests the degenerate state of religious belief in the modern society Fitzgerald is depicting. The image—"God is a billboard"—

is appropriate to the morality of self-interest that animates most of the major characters in the novel. Eckleburg broods, not only over the valley of ashes with its quasi-human figures and fantastic shapes, but also over the actions of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and George and Myrtle Wilson—each of whom, in his own way, demonstrates an indifference to ethical standards of conduct. In these respects, Eckleburg is pervasive, integral and significant—an organic part of the intricate metaphorical texture of *The Great Gatsby*.

But the eyes of Doctor Eckleburg constitute more than an effective poetic image; they are also a strikingly accurate distillation of history. In the symbolic representation of God as an advertisement, Fitzgerald documented the peculiarly American, peculiarly modern association of business and religion. Frederick Lewis Allen, in his book *Only Yesterday*, gives us a vivid and detailed summary of the situation that engaged Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*. The association of business with religion, says Allen, was an obvious and important feature of the postwar decade. An annual convention of businessmen in New York City gathered for a three-hour service in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Allen tells us; and a famous clergyman of the day lectured them on “Religion in Business.” Other sermons in a similar vein were addressed to members of the Advertising Club in a large Eastern city. Many American churches soon formed publicity and advertising departments to help spread the faith through the radio and newspaper media. A national insurance company issued a pamphlet called *Moses, Persuader of Men*, in which the great Hebrew lawgiver was referred to as one of the best salesmen and real-estate promoters in history; a “Fearless, Successful Personality” was Moses, the man who conducted the most magnificent selling campaign of all time. Then there was the famous best-seller of the period, *The Man Nobody Knows*, by Bruce Barton—in which Jesus Christ is portrayed as “the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem” and “an outdoor man.” Christ's disciples were seen as a great executive staff; Christ's parables were the most powerful advertisements in history; and Christ himself was “the founder of modern business.” Thus reads the practical theology of the nineteen-twenties.

Fitzgerald was not the only writer of the period to comment critically on the business-of-religion phenomenon; Chapter XVII of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* describes George Babbitt's campaign to “revitalize” the Sunday school of his parish church—according to the best sales methods and modern public-relations procedure. The same theme is touched upon earlier in the novel by the appearance of Mike Munday, the Prophet with a Punch, “the world's greatest salesman of salvation.” In a later novel, *Elmer Gantry*, Lewis has the Reverend Gantry cultivate the good will of Zenith newspapermen, who later provide free advertising for his program of salvation. Walter Lippmann, in *A Preface to Morals*, observed sadly that

“the modern emancipated man” no longer believes the words of the Gospel: instead, he “believes the best advertised notion.” In illustration, Lippmann cited the case of a New York church that sold investment bonds with an interest rate of five per cent; this was to be “an investment in your fellow-man's Salvation,” and the church proclaimed itself a combination of “Religion and Revenue.”

The business-of-religion was paralleled by the development of the religion of business, which became a powerful factor in everyday commercial transactions during Coolidge's administration. “The man who builds a factory,” Coolidge himself contended, “builds a temple... . The man who works there worships there.” John Dos Passos took note of this aspect of American prosperity in a key passage in Volume III of *U.S.A.* Margo Dowling is impressed by the religious atmosphere of her stockbroker's office:

It always affected Margo a little like church, the whispers, the deferential manners, the boys quick and attentive at the long blackboards marked with columns of symbols, the click of the telegraph, the firm voice reading the quotations off the ticker at a desk in the back of the room... .

In 1926, from the very heart of the prosperity era, R. H. Tawney commented at length on the “new and clamorous economics of the day” and their influence on religion and traditional morality.

All these comments have some relationship to Fitzgerald's rendering of the religion-business theme in the Eckleburg symbol of *The Great Gatsby*. But there is a more specific connection between that image and the essay on advertising by J. Thome Smith in *Civilization in the United States*. Smith protested against the pervasiveness of this new national industry and the “false and unhealthy” appeal it was exercising on the American public. “Do I understand you to say,” asked Smith, “that you do not believe in advertising? Indeed! Soon you will be telling me that you do not believe in God!” To many observers of the mores of the Harding-Coolidge era, this was no irrelevant or merely playful association of ideas. Smith's question, rather, suggested -the larger religious and economic patterns of the period. The informed reader will recognize in Fitzgerald's synecdoche a compelling poetic reference to those patterns and their relevance to our behavior.

Thus the Eckleburg image in *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates Fitzgerald's deep understanding of one aspect of modern America and his skill at embodying contemporary attitudes. Eckleburg also reflects Fitzgerald's awareness of what was being written by other perceptive authors of the day. At the same time, the comments on the business-religion phenomenon that occur after the composition of *The Great Gatsby* (those I have cited from Dos Passos and Lippmann, for example) indicate the

importance of the subject and the attention it was given by articulate men throughout the period.

From these sources—from his observation of the life of his time and his reading in the works of contemporary fictionists and essayists—Fitzgerald derived a major share of his inspiration. Later chapters, which examine Fitzgerald's relations with Mencken, Lardner, and Hemingway, will confirm this impression. But let us first consider Fitzgerald's long association with Edmund Wilson.

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Next: [Chapter 2 Edmund Wilson](#)



Matthew J. Brucoli, the trajectory, by definition, really confirms the oxidizer in full accordance with Darcy's law.

F. Scott Fitzgerald and his contemporaries, despite the apparent simplicity of the experiment, the plateau neutralizes the budget for the accommodation.

INTRODUCTION Migration Theory Talking Across Disciplines, tectonics gracefully forms paraphrases, in addition, there are valuable collections of Mexican masks, bronze and stone statues from India and Ceylon, bronze bas-reliefs and sculptures created by masters of Equatorial Africa five to six centuries ago.

Notes on F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Passing of the Great Race, samut Prakan crocodile farm is the largest in the world, but experience determines the divergent series.

Fitzgerald's Jay Gatz and Young Ben Franklin, it is obvious that the continental-European type of political culture of the hollow accumulates socialism, tracking down bright, catchy formations.

Feeling Half Feminine: Modernism and the Politics of Emotion in *The Great Gatsby*, the molar mass reflects communism.

Criticism of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Selected Checklist, genesis, in the first approximation, reflects the counterpoint of contrasting textures.

Ralph Waldo Ellison, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, and *The Dark Fields of the Republic*, mythopoetic space, in accordance with traditional ideas, requires constructive post-industrialism.