



The great Gatsby

By F. Scott Fitzgerald

First published in 1925

Genre & subjects

First loves fiction

World War I fiction

Synopsis

The story is narrated by Nick Carraway, who after serving in World War I moves from the Midwest to New York's Long Island. There he picks up with a college friend Tom Buchanan and his wife Daisy, Carraway's second cousin—a feckless, self-indulgent couple of privilege.

He also befriends his mysterious neighbour Jay Gatsby, whose mansion is the scene of lavish nightly parties. Gatsby reveals to Carraway that, as a young man without wealth, he had met and fallen in love with Daisy during the war. Now moneyed, Gatsby is obsessed with winning her back.

What follows are the tragic consequences of his pursuit—and Carraway's return to his roots in the Midwest to contemplate, with new found cynicism, the moral decay and carelessness of privileged.

Author biography

F. Scott Fitzgerald was named for his famous relative, Francis Scott Key, though he was always referred to as "Scott." Minnesota born and Princeton educated, Fitzgerald published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920 to critical and popular acclaim.

That same year, he married Zelda Sayre, the queen of Montgomery, Alabama youth society, and the two lived a boisterous, decadent life in New York City. To better afford their extravagant lifestyle, the couple moved to France, where Fitzgerald befriended Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, becoming part of the legendary group of expatriate writers and artists, which Stein labelled the "Lost Generation." In Paris he wrote his finest novel, *The great Gatsby*.

Zelda was eventually hospitalized in 1930 for the first of many breakdowns, and Fitzgerald moved to Hollywood (William Faulkner was there, too), where his heavy drinking ended his screen writing career. In 1934 he published *Tender Is the Night*. He died there of a heart attack six years later at the age of 44.

Discussion starters

- This book is infused with symbolism, particularly the green light at which Jay Gatsby gazes so intently, and the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg on the billboard. What do these symbols suggest? (Symbolic meanings are fluid, not fixed; they often mean different things to different observers/readers)
- Is Jay Gatsby great? In other words, is Fitzgerald's title sincere...or ironic?
- Discuss the four main characters. Who, if any, do you find most sympathetic? Most important, in what way do the events of the novel affect Nick Carraway? How, or to what degree, does he change? (Some see this work as a coming-of-age story.)
- What statement might Fitzgerald be making about the mores or ethos of American culture—particularly the American Dream?

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