

## The Great Gatsby Historical Context and Satire Analysis



"It was an age of miracles," Fitzgerald wrote of the Jazz Age. "It was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire."

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F. Scott Fitzgerald  
1896-1940

A Short Biography

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Coming from a background of “financial anxiety,” while at Princeton, Fitzgerald developed a fascination with the very rich.

While his grades were low, he excelled in his writings for the Princeton Triangle Club Dramatic Society and the *Princeton Tiger*. Fitzgerald’s writing from that time shows that **he was self-conscious about the differences between himself and his wealthy classmates.**



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Although his grades were suffering, Fitzgerald was more upset with his struggles to make the Princeton football team.

The Wall Street Journal reported in 2014, that Fitzgerald remained obsessed with Princeton football until the day he died. He is said to have called the head coach the night before every game with ideas for strategy. It is even possible that Fitzgerald invented the idea of having football players specialize as either “offensive” or “defensive” players. Princeton won 10 national championships in Fitzgerald’s lifetime.

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Their only child, a daughter named Frances Scott (Scottie) Fitzgerald, was born in October 1921.



Fitzgerald's life in the 1920s was a mirror to events occurring nationally during that decade.

**The Roaring Twenties**, also commonly referred to as **The Jazz Age**, was a time of challenge to the established order, of personal indulgence, and even **self-destructive excess**.

Fitzgerald was its self-proclaimed spokesman and symbol.









Life in the second half of the 1920s became desperate for the Fitzgeralds.

As the Jazz Age drew to its traumatic close with the **stock market crash of 1929**, so did much of Fitzgerald's life and career.

An alcoholic since age 22, Fitzgerald's drinking got out of control, earning him the dubious title, **"America's Drunkest Writer."**



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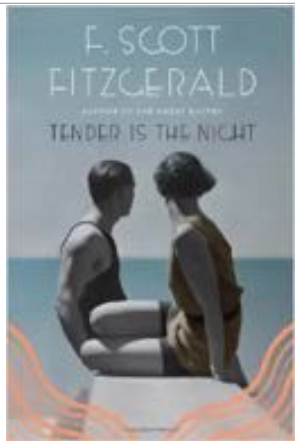
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In 1930 Zelda suffered the first of **several complete nervous breakdowns**. She spent the last eighteen years of her life in sanatoriums in Europe and the U.S.

Fitzgerald's fourth novel, *Tender Is the Night*, was published in 1934. It tells the story of an American **psychiatrist whose promising career is compromised by his wife's madness**. Transparently basing the wife on Zelda, Fitzgerald had once again located a theme on a grand American scale while using the process of writing as catharsis for personal woes.

Released in the midst of the Great Depression, the novel did not sell well, though it had excellent reviews.

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***The Great Gatsby Trivia***

**A commercial flop!**

*The Great Gatsby* did not result in a great pay day for Fitzgerald. Eleven years after its publication, Fitzgerald estimated the novel had sold less than 25,000 copies in the U.S. Fitzgerald’s last royalty statement reported sales of 7 copies of *Gatsby* in the first half of 1940.

**Free copies for soldiers!**

During WWII, Scribner’s published 150,000 complimentary copies to send to men fighting in the war.

**Twenty years later . . . a success!**

By 1945, *The Great Gatsby* was #8 on Bantam Publishing Co.’s top ten titles. Today *Gatsby* is one of the best-selling novels ever; more than ten million copies have been printed. *Gatsby* regularly produces more than \$500,000 a year in a trust for Fitzgerald’s grandchildren.

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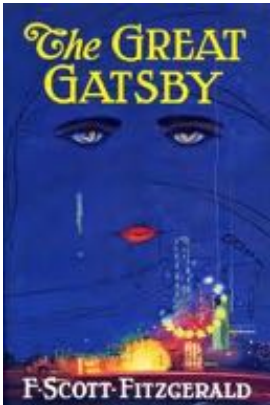
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Francis Cugat’s jacket design for *The Great Gatsby* is the **most celebrated and widely disseminated jacket art in American Literature**. After appearing on the first printing in 1925, it was revived more than a half-century later for the “Scribner Library” paperback editions (1979 – present).

Cugat’s painting is iconic: the sad, hypnotic, heavily outlined **eyes of a woman beam like headlights** through a cobalt night sky. Their irises are transfigured into reclining female forms. From one of the eyes streams a green luminescent tear; brightly rouged lips complete the sensual triangle. Below, on earth, **brightly colored carnival lights blaze before a metropolitan skyline**.

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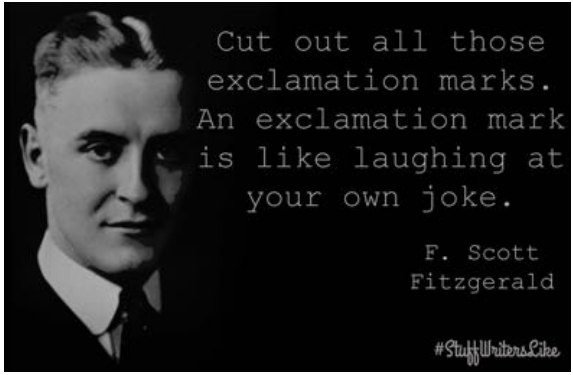
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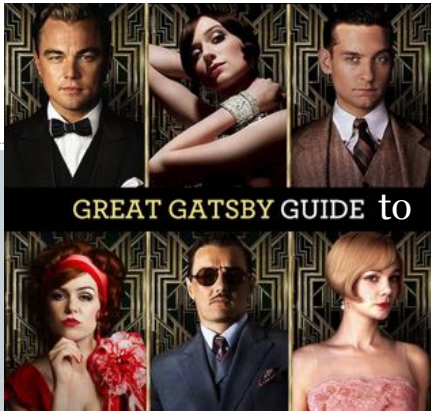
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**GREAT GATSBY GUIDE to** Characters

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## Jay Gatsby

The title character. Jay Gatsby is a former mid-westerner who moved East in order to win over Daisy Buchanan, the love he lost five years earlier.

His desire to win over Daisy leads him from poverty to extreme wealth. He is considered “new money.”



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## Nick Carraway

The novel's narrator. Nick is also a mid-westerner who moved East.

He happens to be Daisy's cousin.

Nick happens to move to a small house next to Gatsby's mansion in West Egg.

His mid-western sensibilities give us an outsiders perspective on how the wealthy socialites like the Buchanans lead their lives.



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## Daisy Buchanan



Daisy is beautiful and “delicate”. Gatsby is obsessed with winning Daisy back. Even the sound of her voice he finds absolutely mesmerizing.

She grew up in a wealthy and privileged family. She married a very wealthy man, Tom Buchanan, who is considered part of the “old money” elite.



## Tom Buchanan



Daisy's hulking brute of a husband. Tom comes from an old, wealthy Chicago family and takes pride in his rough ways.

He leads a life of luxury in East Egg, playing polo, riding horses, and driving fast cars. He commands attention through his wealth, physical size, and obnoxious behavior.



## Jordan Baker



Professional golfer known for her questionable integrity.

A friend of Daisy's, she also represents women of this elite social class. She is used to being admired by women wherever she goes.

Fitzgerald often wrote about athletic women who played sports such as golf or tennis. This was considered very modern at the time.

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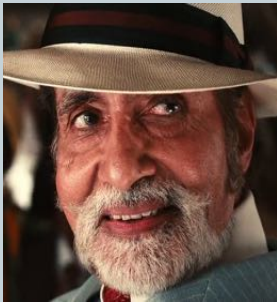
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## Meyer Wolfshiem

Gatsby's business associate and link to organized crime.

A professional gambler, Wolfshiem is attributed with fixing the 1919 World Series.



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# George and Myrtle Wilson



A local auto mechanic



George's wife (Tom's mistress)

Handwriting practice lines consisting of ten horizontal lines on a white background.

# Settings in The Great Gatsby

- West Egg- where Nick and Gatsby live, represents new money
- East Egg- where Daisy lives, the more fashionable area, represents old money



Handwriting practice lines consisting of ten horizontal lines on a white background.

### Settings in The Great Gatsby



- The City- New York City, where the characters escape to for work and play
- The Valley of Ashes- between the City and West Egg, where Wilson's gas station is



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### Symbols in The Great Gatsby



- Green Light- at the end of Daisy's dock and visible from Gatsby's mansion. Represents Gatsby's hopes and dreams about Daisy.



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## Old Money Vs. New Money

- New Money:
- Someone who has achieved the American Dream
- Not as respected in the 1920's



- Old Money
- Money from family wealth
- Born rich
- Not earned through work done by yourself
- Respected above all in the 1920's

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## The American Dream

- Gatsby is the ideal image of one who has achieved the American Dream.
- What is the American Dream and who has achieved it in our time?



### WHAT IS THE AMERICAN DREAM?

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**"The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with the opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."**

-James Truslow Adams



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### Important Quotes

- "I hope she'll be a fool- that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."  
Daisy's description of her daughter
- "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." –the last line of the novel

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### Important Quotes

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

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American Dream Cont.



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