SEPTEMBER 1922

If you read the papers, you know there was a big sensation.

1. GLAMOUR OF RUMSEYS AND HITCHCOCKS

> In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.
>
> 'Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.' He didn't say any more but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence I'm inclined to reserve all judgments . . .
>
> When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction . . .
>
> *The Great Gatsby*, Chapter 1

FACT AND FICTION.

This is a book about possibility.

In the spring of 1922, Nick Carraway moved from the Middle West to Manhattan, having consulted with his family, who deliberated the

decision as if they were choosing his prep school. At last they agreed, and he moved east to work for a brokerage firm with a name that might not worry the naive: Probity Trust. Nick found a cottage fifteen miles from New York City, amid the mushrooming mansions built by new-found wealth, surrounding himself for about eighty dollars a month with the consoling proximity of millionaires. He would study finance, learning the secrets of Midas and Morgan and Maecenas. In an era of booming stock market fortunes everyone was making money: why shouldn't he? America was embarking on a spree; the world was rich with promise and there was always more money to be made: 'Bonds were the thing now. Young men sold them who had nothing else to go into.' Nick was ready for a fresh start, enjoying 'that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer'. He didn't yet know that fresh starts can become false starts: it all depends on the ending.

In the autumn of 1922 another young man moved from the Middle West to Manhattan, arriving four days before his twenty-sixth birthday. Unlike Nick Carraway, F. Scott Fitzgerald was not his own fictional creation – at least, nowhere near to the same degree – and he really did move to New York City, in late September 1922. He was not in finance; indeed, he was usually in financial difficulties. He, too, was young, optimistic, fairly pleased with himself; but his own artistic aspirations far exceeded his character's modest admission that he was 'rather literary in college'. Unlike the alter ego he created to tell the story of his novel about greatness, Scott Fitzgerald wanted to be one of the greatest writers who ever lived. His ambitions, he wrote later, 'once so nearly achieved', were to be 'a part of English literature', a part of our inheritance.

Although later readers would persistently confuse them, the similarities between Scott Fitzgerald and Nick Carraway are mostly superficial. Both came from middle-class Midwestern families and acquired Ivy League educations – although Fitzgerald sent Nick to Yale, a university for which, as a loyal Princeton man, he had some competitive contempt. Both Fitzgerald and Carraway tended toward

judgementalism, but also, correlatively, toward idolatry. Both were susceptible to glamour, and both were anxious about its capacity to corrupt. Both enjoyed material luxury but were also moralists who worried about its spiritual poverty.

And both moved to Long Island in 1922, where they would live through an extraordinary sequence of events. They were not exactly the same events, not identical, but their symmetry tilts toward the feeling of a design. For those who could sense the design as well as Fitzgerald, symmetry begins to shade toward prophecy. Art cannot, perhaps, impose order on life – but it teaches us to admire even the unruliest of revelations.

PARTIES BEGIN.

Scott Fitzgerald wired Max Perkins on Monday 18 September that he and Zelda were coming to Manhattan after a year's sojourn in the bored, sprawling Middle West. They were keeping their return a secret: 'Arrive Wednesday tell no one.' He also requested that Perkins wire a thousand dollars to his account, to pay for their trip and for establishing themselves in New York. The next day Scott and Zelda left Scottie with her nanny in St Paul and boarded the train for the two-day journey to New York.

The bard of the jazz age, Fitzgerald heralded its arrival two years earlier with the publication of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, and his marriage to Zelda Sayre exactly a week later. The jazz age 'bore him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did, that something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War', he wrote later. 'A whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure', it was all part 'of the general decision to be amused that began with the cocktail parties of 1921'. In early 1922 he had published his second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, and they had spent an uproarious summer at

the Minnesota resort of White Bear Lake, before they were asked to leave and take their uproar with them. Wearied of such provincialism, they decided to head back to the white chasms of Manhattan, taking a suite at the Plaza Hotel while they searched for a house near the city. On the train going back to New York they had a 'violent quarrel', Zelda remembered later, although by then she had forgotten why.

On the first night of a long train journey, Zelda said, 'there is a feeling of accomplishment that you are installed in your apple-green compartment, moving in a phosphorescent line' through the flickering night. 'The dining car glistens with bright new food; the train is still a part of its advertising pamphlets and has not yet settled down to its own dynamic ends. You can still smoke without tasting brass cartridges in the back of your mouth . . . We were both fascinated by the limitations of life on a train.' In the morning, in preparation for arrival, a porter was available to steam and press travelling suits, and the *Twentieth Century* employed a professional barber, who could give a man a close shave with a straight razor while hurtling along at seventy miles an hour.

About to turn twenty-six, Francis Scott Fitzgerald was a slender young man, with dark golden hair and glittering 'hard and emerald eyes'. With his 'sophomore face and troubadour heart', he was 'such a sunny man', friends remembered; another recalled, 'Fitzgerald was pert and fresh and blond, and looked, as someone said, like a jonquil'. Pencil sketches and medallion-sized cameo photographs of his classic profile were regularly printed in the new gossip magazines and Sunday supplements. Just the week before, on 10 September, the New York *World* ran a large feature naming Fitzgerald one of America's Dozen Handsomest Male Authors.

Fitzgerald was so tall and straight and attractive, remembered H. L. Mencken, 'that he might even have been called beautiful'. At five feet eight inches (his passport added another half-inch), Scott Fitzgerald was not tall, but he was dapper, and exuberant with early success. 'Fitzgerald is romantic,' his friend Edmund Wilson had written earlier that year, 'but also cynical about romance; he is bitter as well as ecstatic; astringent as well as lyrical. He casts himself in the role of

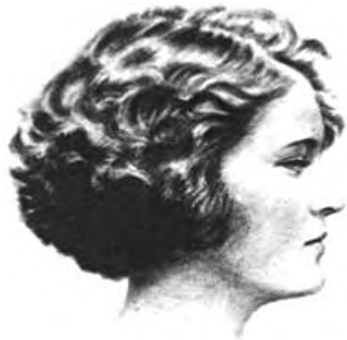
F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1921

playboy, yet at the playboy he incessantly mocks. He is vain, a little malicious, of quick intelligence and wit, and has an Irish gift for turning language into something iridescent and surprising.'

His good looks and charm had helped propel Fitzgerald to instant fame when *This Side of Paradise* sold out its first printing in twenty-four hours: the novel 'haunted [their] generation like a song, popular but perfect'. It was so popular that a newspaper reported the story of a schoolboy who was asked to name the author of *Paradise Lost* and replied unhesitatingly, 'F. Scott Fitzgerald'. Fitzgerald clipped the item and pasted it in his scrapbook.

His wife, chic, provocative Zelda, was considered a great beauty, a woman of 'astonishing prettiness', although it is agreed that photographs never did her justice, failing to convey 'any real sense of what she looked like . . . A camera recorded the imperfections of her face, missing the coloring and vitality that transcended them so absolutely.' Zelda's honey-gold hair seemed to give her a burnished glow and her éclat was soon legendary.

Her greatest art may have been her carefully cultivated air of artlessness; Zelda understood the aesthetics of self-invention, describing



Zelda Fitzgerald, 1922

the flapper as 'an artist in her particular field, the art of being – being young, being lovely, being an object'. Her behaviour was calculated to shock. Meeting Zelda for the first time nine days after her marriage to Scott, his friend Alec McKaig wrote in his diary, 'Called on Scott Fitz and his bride. Latter temperamental small town, Southern Belle. Chews gum – shows knees. I do not think marriage can succeed. Both drinking heavily. Think they will be divorced in 3 years. Scott write something big – then die in a garret at 32.'

Zelda's intelligence was unquestionably acute and she had a singular way with words, a gift for inventive and surprising turns of phrase, said Edmund Wilson. 'She talked with so spontaneous a color and wit – almost exactly in the way she wrote – that I very soon ceased to be troubled by the fact that the conversation was in the nature of free association of ideas and one could never follow up anything. I have rarely known a woman who expressed herself so delightfully and so freshly; she had no ready-made phrases on the one hand and made no straining for effect on the other.' Her conversation was 'full of felicitous phrases and unexpected fancies, especially if you yourself had absorbed a few Fitzgerald highballs'.

On the cloudy, cool morning of Wednesday 20 September 1922, as

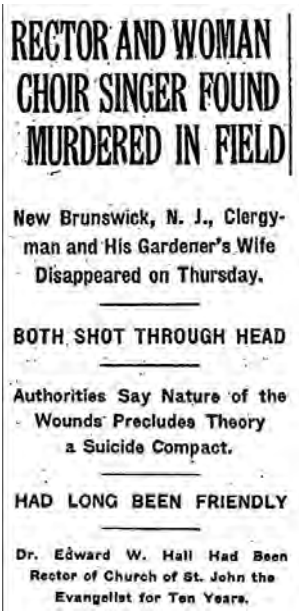
their train pulled from the grey-turning light into the cavernous gloom of Grand Central terminal, disembarking passengers were greeted by the sensations of the nation's busiest train station: motor-driven baggage-trucks, glaring arc-lights, red-capped porters, steam whistles, shouting conductors, hurrying passengers, and the high-pitched cries of the 'newsies'. Every front page in New York that morning was still headlining the lurid murder mystery that had broken three days earlier.


HALL MURDER CLUE
SOUGHT IN OLD HOUSE

Across the Hudson River in New Jersey, a double murder had stunned the small town of New Brunswick. If the headline weren't enough to catch the Fitzgeralds' attention that morning, the location of the crime scene would have: New Brunswick was only a few miles up the recently completed Lincoln Highway from Princeton, which the Fitzgeralds still visited regularly to attend football games and cocktail parties.

The initial details were gruesome, and the press was doing everything it could to sensationalize them. Within four years America learned to call this process 'hype', but in 1922 they called it 'ballyhoo', or 'jazz journalism'.

Edward W. Hall, the well-to-do Episcopal minister of St John the Evangelist church in New Brunswick, had been found dead in a field outside of town on Saturday 16 September. Beside him was the body of Eleanor Reinhardt Mills, a woman who sang in the choir in the rector's church. Both victims were married to other people, but they 'had long been friendly', the *New York Times* insinuatingly reported, and both had disappeared from their homes on the previous Thursday evening. There were two wounds in the back of the rector's head, said the *Times*, and one in Eleanor Mills's forehead; the rector's watch and wallet had been stolen.



RECTOR AND WOMAN CHOIR SINGER FOUND MURDERED IN FIELD

New Brunswick, N. J., Clergyman and His Gardener's Wife Disappeared on Thursday.

BOTH SHOT THROUGH HEAD

Authorities Say Nature of the Wounds Precludes Theory a Suicide Compact.

HAD LONG BEEN FRIENDLY

Dr. Edward W. Hall Had Been Rector of Church of St. John the Evangelist for Ten Years.

The dead bodies were found in an artful tableau: his arm was cradling her head; her hand rested intimately on his thigh. 'Their clothing was arranged as if for burial,' said the *Times*: his panama hat was over his face and a brown silk scarf covered hers. The bodies were found beneath a crab-apple tree near the abandoned Phillips Farm in De Russey's Lane, popular with locals for lovers' rendezvous. Love letters were scattered around their bodies, and the killer had added the piquant, theatrical touch of propping the rector's own calling card on his shoe.

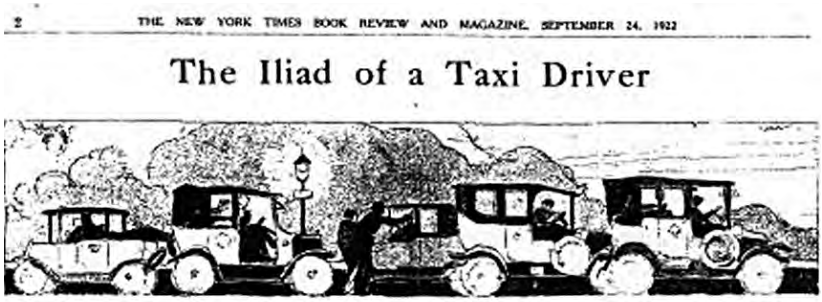
The scandalous murders of Hall and Mills were impossible to miss. They would be front-page news across the country for the rest of 1922 and become one of the most famous murder mysteries of a murderous decade.

New York Vistas

From Grand Central Terminal, the Fitzgeralds took a taxi that Wednesday morning up Fifth Avenue to the elegant alabaster Plaza, their favourite hotel in New York: 'an etched hotel, dainty and subdued', Zelda called it, which means it was the wrong place for the Fitzgeralds. Their cab might have been yellow, but probably wasn't. The Yellow Taxi Company had just been incorporated at the beginning of 1922, and would not achieve a monopoly of New York cabs for decades. In the 1920s, New York taxis came in harlequin colours: moonlight-blue taxicabs, 'discreetly hooded', appealed to those seeking 'a degree of privacy in pairs'; there were grey cabs, and green ones, and

black-and-white ones; Fitzgerald put a lavender taxi into *The Great Gatsby*. Elegant open roadsters in varying styles and colours were marketed at chic women like Zelda, who were encouraged to think of them as accessories: a car in 'Sultan red' was promised to suit 'the florid color of the Latin type of woman', while various shades of blue and grey were recommended for blondes.

In 1922, Fifth Avenue, like all of New York City, was far less


2 THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW AND MAGAZINE, SEPTEMBER 24, 1922

The Iliad of a Taxi Driver

thickly forested with buildings than it would become; the old island of Manhattan that had once welcomed Dutch sailors was not hard to imagine. The new beaux-arts buildings were creamy and unblemished, the city's wide avenues offering 'all the iridescence of the beginning of the world', Scott recalled. New York City then was still crisp and white, as if freshly laundered. The city air was salted by the ocean; rivers flowed fast on either side. 'New York was more full of reflections than of itself,' wrote Zelda a decade later in her autobiographical novel, *Save Me the Waltz*. 'New York is a good place to be on the upgrade.' The Fitzgeralds, glowing and celebrated, were riding the prow of America like the spirit of ecstasy on the hood of a red Rolls-Royce. 'America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history,' Fitzgerald wrote: a spree that peaked, he said, in 1922.

The old world was deliquescing; the new world was delirious. Pleasure had become a principle and a promise – Dr Freud, whom

everyone was quoting, said so. Four years after the end of the Great War, two years into prohibition, America was learning to party.

The old patrician rules still bonded high society together, but social barriers were proving soluble in alcohol. The Volstead Act, prohibiting the production, sale and transport of 'intoxicating liquors', became law on 17 January 1920. Prohibition didn't prohibit much, and incited a great deal. By September 1922 it was already obvious that prohibition (usually spelled with a small 'p' in the 1920s), known with varying degrees of irony as The Great Experiment, was experimenting mostly with the laws of unintended consequences. Its greatest success was in loosening the nation's inhibitions with bathtub gin – what they called 'synthetic' liquor.

Bootlegging was rapidly becoming a national joke, if a disreputable one. A popular wisecrack said that the safest way to get three sheets to the wind was to go to sea, because in the early days of prohibition you could drink in international waters. The day after Eleanor Mills and Edward Hall disappeared, the *Tribune* printed a comical piece about an 'Old Soak' lamenting how much more he drinks during prohibition, and requesting the repeal of the 18th Amendment so that he can return to his more temperate ways. The punchline is that although the Old Soak drinks far too much now, at least he doesn't drink as much as one of Scott Fitzgerald's heroines. By 1922 a flotilla of boats, known as 'Rum Row', was anchored three miles off Long Island Sound, safely in international waters, with holds full of liquor brought up from the West Indies. Under cover of night, bootleggers would chug out in motor-boats and make their purchases from what was effectively a floating liquor store. Some men wait for their ships to come in, it was said – and others meet them beyond the three-mile limit.

Looking back from deep within the Depression, Fitzgerald remembered 'a gala in the air'. Life was a 'gay parade', a carnival of bright colours, lavish and exuberant. Around the same time, he jotted a recollection in his notebooks: 'Laughed with a sudden memory of Hopkins

where going to a party he had once tried taking gin by rectum, and the great success it had been until the agony of passing great masses of burned intestine.'

On this side of paradise, sins needed to feel original. That autumn a girl attracted crowds in Manhattan by strolling along Fifth Avenue in transparent pajamas, walking four cats on leads. The cats were also wearing pajamas. A crowd gathered; the police were called. Eventually an observant policeman worked out that the girl was enacting a current bit of slang, putting on a show of 'the cat's pajamas'. The police dismissed it as an example of that unsettling new phenomenon, a 'publicity scheme', and made the girl go home.

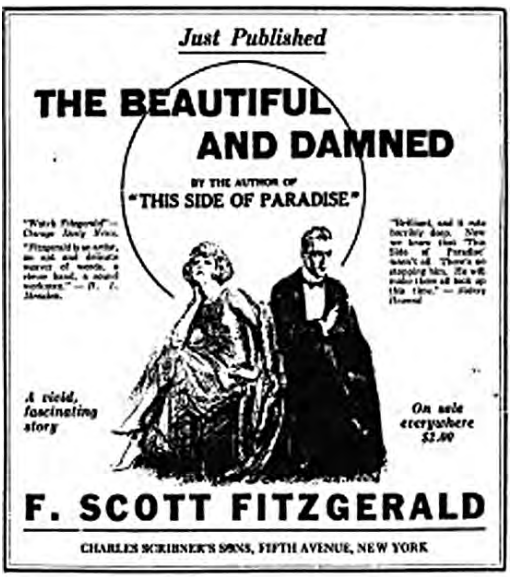
There was no sign of someone trying to be 'the cat's meow' or 'the bee's knees', other popular superlatives of the decade. In early February, Fitzgerald noted the 'adjectives of the year – "hectic," "marvelous" and "slick"'. Zelda remembered her own list of 'current adjectives, "hectic and delirious and killing"'. 'And how!' exclaimed the young men, as they announced they were becoming slaves to highballs; young women advised each other of 'the new and really swagger things' to do in the city. 'It was slick to have seen you,' Fitzgerald told Max Perkins that autumn, while Zelda wrote to a magazine editor, 'Thank you again for the slick party,' apologizing for her behaviour at it: 'But you know how it is to be a drinking woman!'

In 1921 H. L. Mencken published a revised version of his groundbreaking *American Language*, with a whole section devoted to slang and a separate chapter for war slang, including words like 'slacker', which originally meant draft-dodger. In 1925 Virginia Woolf would remark in her essay 'American Fiction': 'The Americans are doing what the Elizabethans did – they are coining new words. They are instinctively making the language adapt itself to their needs . . . Nor does it need much foresight to predict that when words are being made, a literature will be made out of them.'

A list of the words first recorded in English between 1918 and 1923 reads like a jazz-age divination of the century to come, a catalogue of the origins of our life:

cool (1918)
motherfucker (1918)
teenage (1921)
wimp (1920)
debunk (1923)
encode (1919)
hypermodern (1923)
multi-purpose (1920)
power play (1921)
existentialism (1919)
columnist (1920)
cartwheel (1920)
extrovert (1918)
fantasist (1923)
Fascist (1921)
publicized (1920)
mass media (1923)
feedback (1920)
slenderize (1923)
slinky (1921)
sadomasochistic (1921)
homosexually (1921)
post-feminist (1919)
biracial (1921)
racialized (1921)
race-baiter (1921)
to ace (1923)
French kiss (1923)
fucked-off (1923)
psyching (1920)
tear-jerker (1921)
fundamentalism (1923)
bagel (1919)
ad lib (1919)
mock-up (1920)
prefabricated (1921)
atom bomb (1921)
supersonic (1919)
ultrasonic (1923)
hitch-hike (1923)
comfort zone (1923)
junkie (1923)
market research (1920)
off-the-rack (1920)
food chain (1920)
nutritionist (1921)
check-up (1921)
comparison-shopping (1923)
devalue (1918)
white-collar (1919)
posh (1919)
upgrade (1920)
ritzy (1920)
swankiness (1920)
nouveau poor (1921)
sophisticate (1923)
cross-selling (1919)
inflationary (1920)
deflationary (1920)
merchant bank (1921)
arbitrage (1923)
subprime (1920)

The year 1922 alone added brand-name, Hollywood, moviegoing, rough cut, performative, robot, sparkly, schlep, dimwit, no-brow, oops, multilayered, rebrand, mass market, broadcasting and broadcaster, finalize, lamé, sexiness, transvestite, gigolo, to proposition, libidinal, post-Freudian, cold turkey, quantum mechanics, polyester, vacuum, notepad, duplex, Rolex, entrepreneurial and party-crashing to English. In December 1922, E. E. Cummings would give us the first use of 'partied' as a verb, in a letter describing a night spent with the New York literary crowd. And in *This Side of Paradise* Scott Fitzgerald was the first to record the words T-shirt, Daiquiri, hipped ('I'm hipped on Freud and all that') and the use of 'wicked' as a term of approval. Amory Blaine, the novel's protagonist, is advised to collect the new, and told: 'remember, do the next thing!'



The Fitzgeralds always remembered to do the next thing. An article in March that year, responding to *The Beautiful and Damned*, remarked that Scott Fitzgerald's 'up-to-dateness is one of his chief assets. He

believes in the vivid present, the immediate moment'. The Fitz, as they were sometimes known in the early years, danced on tables and rode on the top of taxicabs; both later noted, ruefully, that it costs a good deal more to ride outside cabs than in them. In the early hours of the morning Fitzgerald jumped, fully clothed, into the fountain in front of the Plaza, which was appropriately named 'Abundance'. He insisted he wasn't boiled: the stunt was inspired by sheer exuberance. Never to be outdone, Zelda danced in the fountain at Union Square. They knew that 'a chorus of pleasant envy followed in the wake of their effortless glamour', Scott wrote. 'They thought of themselves as a team, and it was often remarked how well mated they were.'

Zelda boiled the jewellery of partygoers in tomato soup; she rode out of hotel rooms in laundry wagons and was seen involved in 'goings-on' at parties with men who weren't her husband because, she announced, she admired their haircut or was charmed by their nose. Wilson recorded in his diaries that at one party Zelda so inflamed a mutual friend that he likened himself to a satyr, claiming, 'I can feel my ears growing pointed!' 'He became so aroused,' Wilson noted gleefully, 'that he was obliged to withdraw to the bathroom. He was found in a state of collapse and murmured: "She made provoking gestures to me!"' Wilson also noted Zelda's propensity for kissing Scott's friends after they were married: 'When Zelda first began kissing John [Bishop] and Townsend [Martin], Fitz tried to carry it off by saying: "Oh, yes, they really have kisses coming to them, because they weren't at the wedding, and everybody at a wedding always gets a kiss." But when Zelda rushed into John's room just as he was going to bed and insisted that she was going to spend the night there, and when she cornered Townsend in the bathroom and demanded that he should give her a bath, [Fitz] began to become a little worried and even huffy.'

If there was no other way to add a bit of fun to the proceedings, Zelda was reportedly quite willing to take off her clothes. During their honeymoon, Zelda and Scott went to the *Follies* and the *Scandals*, and, moved perhaps by a spirit of homage to such titles, insisted on

laughing loudly at the wrong parts and once began undressing in their seats. The writer Carl Van Vechten, whom they met that autumn, became very fond of both Fitzgeralds, but he felt a special affection for Zelda: 'She was an original. Scott was not a wisecracker like Zelda. Why, she tore up the pavements with sly remarks.' Scott 'was nasty when he was drunk, but sober he was a charming man, very good looking, you know, beautiful almost. But they both drank a lot – we all did, but they were excessive.' Fitzgerald was also known for his truculence when drunk. Of the Playboy Ball in April 1923 Wilson remarked: 'Fitz blew up drunk, as usual, early in the evening and knocked Pat Kearny unconscious in the lavatory.' As H. L. Mencken observed: 'Unfortunately, liquor sets him wild and he is apt, when drunk, to knock over a dinner table, or run his automobile into a bank building.'

At the beginning of the Fitzgeralds' marriage Alec McKaig recorded in his diaries their reaction to some well-meant advice: 'Suggested to Scott and Zelda they save – they laughed at me. Scott said – to go through the terrible toil of writing man must have belief his writings will be eagerly bought forever. Terrific party with two Fitz . . . ' A month later McKaig tried again to urge caution: 'Evening at Fitz. Fitz and I argued with Zelda about notoriety they are getting through being so publicly and spectacularly drunk. Zelda wants to live life of an "extravagant."' After a year of marriage, Zelda became pregnant and they moved back to St Paul to avoid bringing a baby 'into all that glamour and loneliness' in Manhattan. By January 1922 Fitz was writing to Edmund Wilson that he was 'bored as hell' in the Midwest; nine months later, they were returning to New York.

Fitzgerald was writing a play that he was sure would make their fortune, a satire of America's accelerating faith in success stories; it made sense to be near Broadway producers to try to get it staged. Scott and Zelda told each other that they were ready to settle down and be responsible. Their assurance of this intention was that they would stop going out with members of the opposite sex to make each other jealous. With this praiseworthy plan for married life, Scott was confident

he could do some serious work at last. His latest collection of short stories, *Tales of the Jazz Age*, would be published by Scribner's in a few days, on Friday 22 September. And meanwhile Fitzgerald thought he might also get to work on the new, extraordinary, beautiful, simple, intricately patterned novel he had promised Perkins to write.

RECTOR AND SINGER
CLAWED BY WOMAN
BEFORE THE MURDER

Throughout the week following the discovery of their bodies, details emerged daily about the murder of Edward Hall and Eleanor Mills. Hall had married a wealthy woman from South Carolina whom the *Times* said had inherited a fortune of a million dollars from her mother. Frances Stevens Hall had two brothers, one of whom, Willie Stevens, lived with her and the rector, and was locally known to be 'eccentric'. Eleanor Mills, 'a slight and pretty woman', was ten years younger than Edward Hall. Their bodies had been discovered early Saturday morning by a couple the *Times* reported as 'two children'. On the night of the murder, a woman in a light-grey polo coat had been seen entering the Hall mansion in the small hours, a detail made much of in the press. Soon Mrs Hall admitted that she had been out looking for her husband the night he disappeared, and had been wearing just such a coat: 'MRS HALL, THE "WOMAN IN A POLO COAT," SAYS SHE VISITED CHURCH', shouted the headlines.

One of the jazziest of the jazz-age newspapers, the New York *World* said that Eleanor Mills had been known locally for her vigorous personality, to the point of being pushy: 'Mrs Mills, twenty-eight and the mother of two children, was a woman of artistic tendencies, who had by sheer personality come to be a member of the best circles.' The

Tribune wasted no time in characterizing the principals in the story in their front-page coverage: the rector had a 'rich wife' at home, while James Mills was 'a pale, nervous little man', who worked as a janitor and sexton at Reverend Hall's church, and 'never did understand' his forceful, ambitious wife. On the night of the murder Eleanor Mills had left her house around 7.30 p.m.; when her meek husband asked her where she was going, she taunted him, 'Why don't you follow me and find out?' She had then rushed out of the house and never returned.

The *New York Times* reported that, in addition to being shot, both Hall and Mills appeared to have been 'clawed' by 'deep finger-nail scratches', which indicated, it was felt, that a woman must have attacked the couple first, before they were 'killed by a companion, probably a man'. But then the papers admitted that the bodies had so deteriorated from exposure that the wounds might have been made with a weapon, or even acid, instead of fingernails. 'The marks on the clergyman's hands and arms, being similar to the supposed scratches on Mrs Mills's face, indicated that he threw himself between the two women and was clawed by the other woman in her tigress fury. It was this moment, it is believed, that the other man drew his pistol. Now was heard a woman's scream . . . this is taken to mean that the second woman was surprised at the sight of the pistol and attempted to prevent the murder.'

The report is circumstantial, eager and untrue, almost pure speculation. In fact, there was no evidence at all to suggest the sex, or number, of killers. But once the rumour had started the story was off and running, and the idea of the guilty woman would never leave it again.

Papers also eagerly reported on Mrs Hall's brother. Willie Stevens spent most of his time lurking around the local fire station, where he was tolerated as a harmless near-simpleton. On Friday 15 September, the day after Hall and Mills disappeared but before their bodies had been discovered, Willie had rushed into the fire station, blurting out: 'Something terrible is going to happen,' but refusing to say anything

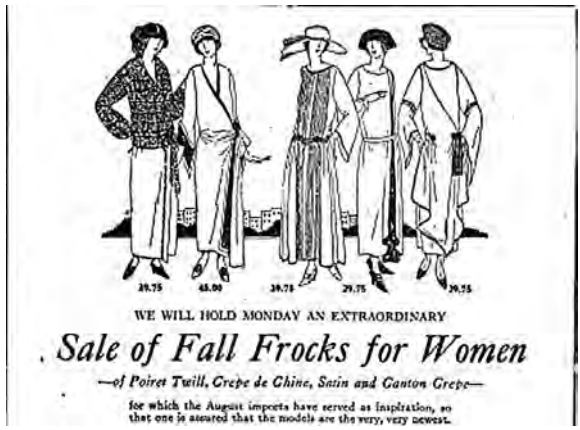
further, 'because I am tied by my sister's honor and that of my family'. Witnesses reported having heard screaming out beyond Buccleuch Park on the night of the murders.

When Nick Carraway introduces himself as *The Great Gatsby* opens, he explains that his family has 'a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother', a merchant who came west in 1851, 'sent a substitute to the Civil War and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today'. As it happens, Nick is greatly concerned with honour too, although this may be a coincidence. But fraudulent family origins will return the story to the vicinity of Buccleuch Park before long.

THE AGE OF JAZZ.

Strolling along wide New York avenues, young men with pompadours or hair parted in the middle and slicked straight back under jaunty white straw hats wore the standard three-piece suit with stiff collar and tie. Women flicked past in vivid colours and low heels; they, too, wore hats. The women were using talcum powder to keep themselves 'hygienic'; Listerine had recently invented something called halitosis and told women to avoid it by using their mouthwash. Zelda later imagistically described a yellow chiffon dress, a dress as 'green as fresh wet paint', a white satin dress and a 'theatrical silver dress' from those days in New York. That Sunday, below a headline breaking the story of the Hall–Mills murder, the *New York Tribune* had advertised 'Draped Frocks of Classic Lines', explaining that the new mode was returning to silhouettes of the past, while the *New York Times* showed 'Fall Frocks for Women':

Dresses in 1922 were not as short as received knowledge holds: in fact, that year hemlines lengthened considerably, to much comment. That Sunday, the *New York Times* ran a feature called 'The Long and



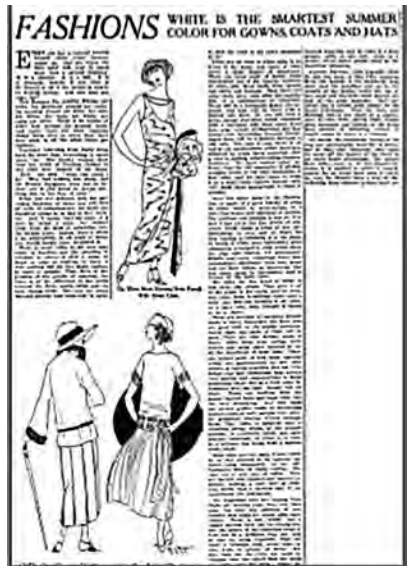
17 September 1922

Short of New York', remarking on the surprising fact that skirts had lengthened so much, and virtually overnight.

Working away at *Gatsby* across the summer and through the autumn of 1924, Fitzgerald looked out at a world in which fashion had only briefly flirted with hemlines as high as most people today picture them; in the bold days of early 1920 and 1921, hemlines had suddenly flown up to the knees, in what Fitzgerald later called 'the first abortive shortening of the skirts' – but not beyond, for any but the most daring. And then skirts dropped again. In 1922, they were nearly down to the ankles.

And that summer, dresses were white. On 11 June 1922 the *New York Times* reported that white was 'the smartest summer color': 'the vogue for [white] this year is much more than a natural [summer] tendency. It is a passion. It is a fad. It is a necessity . . . This Summer the evening dresses are white, the afternoon dresses are white, the morning dresses are white, the suits are white, the coats are white, the capes are white.'

As *Gatsby* opens, Nick Carraway tells us that his story begins one evening in June 1922, when he visited his cousin Daisy Buchanan and her husband Tom at their stately home on Long Island, ten days before


FASHIONS WHITE IS THE SMARTEST SUMMER COLOR FOR GOWNS, COATS AND HATS

11 June 1922

the longest day of the year. Nick finds Daisy and her friend Jordan Baker both dressed all in white, with their skirts fluttering around them in the breeze. It is one of the most evocative passages in American fiction, a setpiece that flirts with the surreal, a lingering picture of a claret-coloured room and the two women floating on a sofa in the centre of it.

Jordan is a golf champion, we soon learn, but Nick can't place her, and finds it surprising to discover that she's 'in training', which means she is not wearing a *sportif* little golfing number. What one wore mattered in a world that still judged character by conduct and appearance. In 'Echoes of the Jazz Age', Fitzgerald remarked that 'gentlemen's clothes' were a 'symbol of "the power that man must hold that passes from race to race"'. Clothes may make the man, but he has to know which clothes to buy; the mark of aristocracy is the assurance of knowing the rules. For the less certain, there were manuals like Mrs Post's bestselling *Etiquette*, first published that July, offering instructions for

arrivistes trying desperately to arrive, including the useful suggestion that gentlemen keep an old tuxedo suit for informal dining at home. *Etiquette* is a shopping catalogue of silverware, napkins, wine glasses and stationery, talismans of the good life. Fitzgerald once 'looked into Emily Post and [was] inspired with the idea of a play in which all of the motivations should consist of trying to do the right thing' – and failing.

Not knowing the rules is a dead giveaway. Tom Buchanan will recognize Jay Gatsby as an impostor because of the gauche way he dresses: 'An Oxford man! ... Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit.' When Gatsby comes to woo Daisy, he wears a silver shirt and a gold tie: his clothes are as gaudy as his dreams.

'The Passing Show of 1922'

In September 1922 *American* magazine had just published Fitzgerald's facetious 'autobiographical' essay, 'What I Think and Feel at 25', in which he said that, placing 'one hand on the Eighteenth Amendment and one hand on the serious part of the Constitution', he would offer his own articles of faith. They included such essentials as whether to have your front teeth filled with gold (no), and an injunction to 'dislike old people' because 'most of them go on making the same mistakes at fifty and believing in the same white list of approved twenty-carat lies they did at seventeen'. What he feared most in life, Fitzgerald said, was 'conventionality, dullness, sameness, predictability'. The most important lesson he'd learned was to have faith that he knew more about his own work than anyone else.

Over the summer, Scott had been mulling over an offer to star, with Zelda, in a film adaptation of *This Side of Paradise* – the first, and perhaps last, time in history a celebrity author was asked to star as a fictionalized version of himself in the film adaptation of his own autobiographical novel. The new 'mass media' meant that clippings provided an easy way to calibrate a person's significance. Scott and

Zelda carefully collected every magazine and newspaper account about them in what Zelda described as 'four bulging scrapbooks full of all the things people envied them for'. Gatsby also keeps clippings about Daisy and shows them to her as a tribute to his faithfulness when they reunite at last. If you are 'Mr Nobody from Nowhere', as Tom dismissively calls Gatsby, then you must compensate for your exclusion from the old order: being original might substitute for a lack of origins.

Gatsby later fears that people will think he is just some 'cheap sharper', but in fact Gatsby also resembles a stalker, an idea that would have been available to the novel's characters, although Fitzgerald never uses it: a 1923 *Harper's* magazine article referred to a young woman who enjoyed rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous as a 'celebrity stalker'. Similarly, Gatsby cannot extricate his relentless desire for Daisy from her glamour and her wealth. Her voice was 'full of money', he tells Nick. 'That was it,' Nick agrees. 'I'd never understood before. It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it . . . High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl . . . '

In her scrapbook Zelda kept a clipping noting the novelty of rumours about the Fitzgeralds: 'We are accustomed enough to this kind of rumor in regard to stage stars, but it is fairly new in relation to authors. The great drinking bouts, the petting may be what the public expects of Fitzgerald whose books told so much of this kind of life.' From the beginning, Fitzgerald's books were inspiring public interest in his life, an interest that could be traded upon.

Gossip was beginning to acquire a life of its own. When Nick comes to dinner at the Buchanans' that night in mid-June, Daisy asks him about rumours of his engagement back home, insisting, 'We heard it three times, so it must be true.' Nick protests that he had 'no intention of being rumored into marriage'. Rumours aren't just active and abroad: they're coercive, prophets of self-fulfilment, and any phantom suspicion can be rumoured into fact. Gatsby himself consists only of a patchwork of rumours and myths for much of the novel. Rumour is an act of

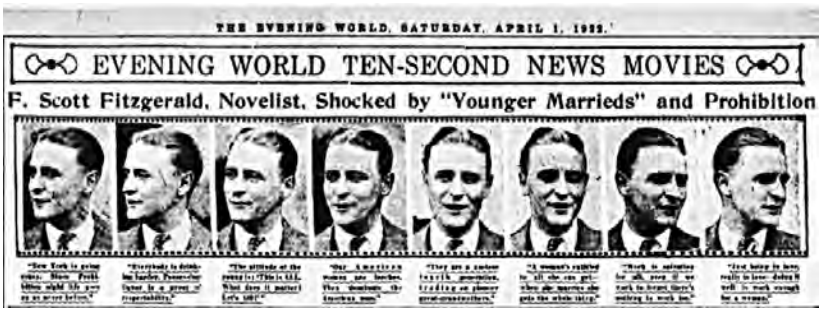
interpretation, however incomplete or inaccurate: gossip is careless fiction for careless people, and it fuelled the celebrity culture driving through America.

In 1922 Zelda began writing for the first time, publishing a few magazine pieces that traded on her celebrity name, including a tongue-in-cheek review of *The Beautiful and Damned*, and an article in June called 'Eulogy on the Flapper', in which she defended the right of a woman 'to experiment with herself as a transient, poignant figure who will be dead tomorrow'. 'Flapperdom,' she declared, 'is making them intelligent and teaching them to capitalize their natural resources and get their money's worth. They are merely applying business methods to being young.'

Zelda understood early that fame was something that could be sold. In *Save Me the Waltz*, when the heroine Alabama learns from the newspapers that she and her husband are famous, she spends the morning 'dancing happily about . . . feeling very graceful and thinking of ways to spend money'. In fact, Zelda was breathtakingly extravagant, 'as proudly careless about money as an eighteenth-century nobleman's heir', and her reckless improvidence worried all of Scott's friends. Women tended to be held accountable for such things: in fact Scott was spendthrift too. Their heedless profligacy was their trademark and their bond: as Edmund Wilson remarked, 'If ever there was a pair whose fantasies matched it was Zelda Sayre and Scott Fitzgerald.' A note Fitzgerald once made about drinks could serve as a sketch of the shape of things to come: 'You can order it in four sizes; demi (half a litre), distingué (one litre), formidable (three litres), and catastrophe (five litres).' From distingué to catastrophe was only a matter of measurements.

Earlier in the year, the New York *World* had run a film-strip montage of photos to headline an interview with Scott Fitzgerald, in a regular feature they called 'Evening World Ten-Second News Movies'. Beneath each picture were memorable quotations extracted from the piece: the sound bite had arrived.

'New York is crazy!' the interview began. Drinking had become a


THE EVENING WORLD, SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 1922.

EVENING WORLD TEN-SECOND NEWS MOVIES

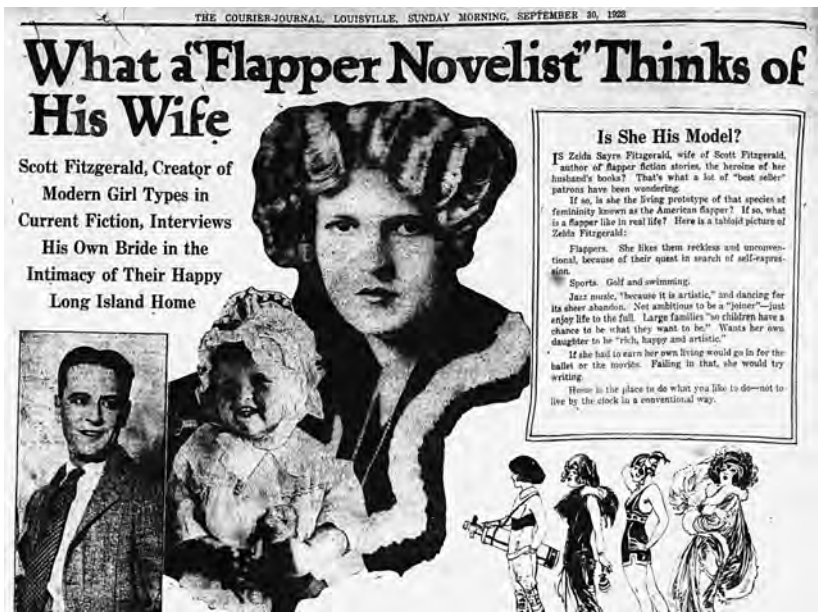
F. Scott Fitzgerald, Novelist, Shocked by "Younger Marrieds" and Prohibition

status symbol, Fitzgerald observed, while young people no longer 'believe in the old standards and authorities, and they're not intelligent enough, many of them, to put a code of morals and conduct in place of the sanctions that have been destroyed for them'. After he read the piece, Fitzgerald politely wrote to the reporter, Marguerite Mooers Marshall: 'I liked your interview immensely. Thank you for the publicity which it gave to me.'

For almost two years, the papers had been declaring Fitzgerald 'the recognized spokesman of the younger generation – the dancing, flirting, frivoling, lightly philosophizing young America', who would soon be dubbed 'Flaming Youth' after Warner Fabian's 1923 bestseller. One clipping that Fitzgerald kept asked: 'Does the "younger generation" mean, perhaps, F Scott Fitzgerald alone, with his attendant flappers, male and female?' On the same scrapbook page a review of *The Beautiful and Damned* observed: 'for a man of imagination young Fitzgerald is strangely lacking in ideas outside his own as yet rather uneventful life. Every scene he writes seems to be personal experience; and one who knows him recognizes in certain minor characters acquaintances of his that he has dared to transfer to the printed page just as they are . . . He invents little.' The New York *World* agreed: 'Yes, *The Beautiful and Damned* is true . . . Some day, when he has outgrown the temptation to be flippant, Mr Fitzgerald will sit up and write a book that will give us a long breath of wonder.'

It was clear to everyone that Fitzgerald invented little, according

to their definitions of invention, although being original is not simply a matter of making people up. They were continually recording their impressions of Fitzgerald's sources; one of the most frequently invoked models was Zelda, consistently identified as her husband's muse and inspiration, the model for all of his women. In 1923 a Louisville paper interviewed Zelda, and asked her to name her favourite of her husband's characters. "I like the ones that are like me!' she responded. 'That's why I love Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise* . . . I like girls like that . . . I like their courage, their recklessness and spendthriftness. Rosalind was the original American flapper.' 'Is She His Model?' asked the article breathlessly. 'Is Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, wife of Scott Fitzgerald, author of flapper fiction stories, the heroine of her husband's books? . . . If so, is she the living prototype of that species of femininity known as the American flapper? If so, what is a flapper like in real life?' Soon Zelda would help inspire another of her husband's heroines, Daisy Fay Buchanan, who hails from Louisville.



THE COURIER-JOURNAL, LOUISVILLE, SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 30, 1923

What a "Flapper Novelist" Thinks of His Wife

Scott Fitzgerald, Creator of Modern Girl Types in Current Fiction, Interviews His Own Bride in the Intimacy of Their Happy Long Island Home

Is She His Model?

IS Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, wife of Scott Fitzgerald, author of flapper fiction stories, the heroine of her husband's books? That's what a lot of "best seller" patrons have been wondering.

If so, is she the living prototype of that species of femininity known as the American flapper? If so, what is a flapper like in real life? Here is a tabloid picture of Zelda Fitzgerald:

Flappers. She likes them reckless and unconventional, because of their quest in search of self-expression.

Sports. Golf and swimming.

Jazz music, "because it is artistic," and dancing for its sheer abandon. Not ambitious to be a "joiner"—just enjoy life to the full. Large families "so children have a chance to be what they want to be." Wants her own daughter to be "rich, happy and artistic."

If she had to earn her own living would go in for the ballet or the movies. Failing in that, she would try writing.

Home is the place to do what you like to do—not to live by the clock in a conventional way.

They were 'plagiarising their existence', one critic said. In search of originals and prototypes, readers were finding their models in fiction and writers were finding their models in life. Jay Gatsby sprang from his Platonic conception of himself, says Nick: people reinventing themselves need a prototype, an ideal towards which they aspire.


RECTORY STORY OF MURDER IS DOUBTED
WALL STREET FINAL EDITION
The Evening World.
WALL STREET CLOSING TABLES

As the days passed, the murder of Edward Hall and Eleanor Mills continued to dominate the nation's headlines, but the investigation was making no headway at all. Reporters were scouring the crime scene, as were the curious, all of whom were wandering around at will. Sightseers arrived by the carload. On the day the bodies were discovered, the authorities had made no effort to cordon off the scene or protect it from reporters and gawkers, who picked up the rector's calling card and dropped it again, and read the letters before scattering them on the ground; it was impossible to know whether any letters had been taken or lost. The forensic validity of the relatively new technique of fingerprinting was still disputed. Whether because of uncertainty or carelessness, no effort was made to preserve fingerprints, nor were any photographs or notes taken. The funeral of the rector had been held two days after the bodies were found; the Mills family held a service for Eleanor the next day in an undertaker's shop.

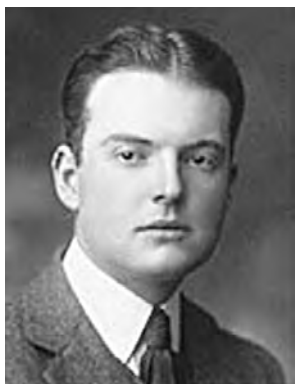
The prosecutor's office announced that police were searching for a light green car in connection with the murder. 'This case is a cinch,' a detective said breezily, 'but we have not enough evidence on which to act.' Meanwhile the county coroner's physician firmly refuted a growing rumour about how many bullets had been found in the bodies: 'Mrs Mills was slain by a bullet which entered her head above the right

eye and not by four bullets, as has been reported by a physician in New Brunswick,' he told the *New York Times*.

At the end of *The Great Gatsby*, the police will also be told to look for a light green car in connection with a homicide. A tiny detail, too small to qualify as circumstantial evidence, it is probably just another coincidence, but coincidence has its own beauties. Even such small historical symmetries can suggest there are patterns all around us, reminders of how expansive the possibilities truly are.

FLAMING YOUTH.

The night after they returned to New York, Edmund Wilson visited the Fitzgeralds at their suite at the Plaza Hotel. Universally known by his childhood nickname of Bunny, Wilson had been working at *Vanity Fair* and the *New Republic*, and was rapidly becoming one of America's most influential critics. He was also enjoying the hectic gaiety of the age of jazz as much as anyone. Recovering from a painful affair with Edna St Vincent Millay, Wilson was now seeing the actress Mary Blair and writing in his notebooks analytic descriptions of his many sexual encounters with other women. Not yet inclined to corpulence, and still a handsome



young man with red hair and large, intent eyes, Wilson had his own ideas about his success with women: he said he talked them into bed.

He was learning a great deal about the art of persuasion from the handsome, rakish Ted Paramore, with whom he shared an apartment. Paramore spent most of his time drinking and 'wenching' and regaled Wilson with the raunchy stories he gleefully recorded in his diaries, such as a room littered with partygoers who were out cold: there were so many people passed out on the floor that the place 'looked like Flanders Field'. The Yale Club was constantly trying to throw Paramore out, Wilson said: 'the room was always swimming in gin and garlanded with condoms'. When a previous roommate asked Wilson to send on a few things he had left behind, as a joke Wilson included an old box of condoms and the friend quipped, 'I wonder you can spare them.' Another friend received a package of condoms for his birthday: 'he was tickled to death,' said Wilson, 'and went around showing them to everybody at the Harvard Club' by blowing them up. Of one man he particularly admired that year, Paramore reported, 'You couldn't have him in the room with a girl fifteen minutes but you'd find a condom behind the clock.' They were all getting wise, as they said: modern young women wore 'wishbone' diaphragms, which were no more reliable than their name suggests. That winter, the scandal sheet *Town Topics* ran a story featuring an ultra-modern young flapper who pertly informs her mother, 'I suppose I'd be a nicer girl if I thought that birth control had something to do with the Pullman Company.'

Paramore's own favourite stratagem for seduction was to deploy the new fad for sex manuals, which were promoting what sociologists in 1924 termed 'companionate marriage', a new vision of marriage as a partnership based on egalitarian ideals including mutual pleasure and the novel possibility of a female orgasm. During the Great War, the US government had launched a national sex-education campaign to combat the spread of venereal disease, which, combined with modern theories about marriage and the increasing popularity of Freud's ideas, meant that anyone who wanted to be cool was talking about sex. 'One of Ted's principal pastimes,' Wilson wrote, 'was seducing his more inexperienced girlfriends.

His principal instrument for this was a pioneer guidebook to sex . . . by a certain Dr Robey, which aimed to remove inhibitions by giving you permission to do anything you liked. He would put "old Dr Robey" into the hands of the girls and count upon their yielding reactions.'

The first time Edmund Wilson had met Zelda had been just after she married Scott; they drank orange blossoms and he found her 'very pretty and languid'. She told Wilson that hotel rooms excited her 'erotically'. Although he was deeply unimpressed by this Freudian pose and was at first inclined to view Zelda with suspicion – he wrote to John Bishop saying he hoped she'd run off with a bellhop – Wilson soon appreciated her vivacious charm and sharp wit, not to mention her beauty.

On Thursday 21 September the three friends sat high in their white tower as the early evening clouds bloomed red above New York, with what Wilson called 'the rumorous hum of summer' coming up through the windows, and talked about their plans for the future. 'Fitz goes about soberly transacting his business and in the evenings writes at his room in the hotel,' Wilson wrote to John Bishop the next day, with some astonishment. 'I had a long conversation with him last night and found him full of serious ideas about regulating his life.' The Fitzgeralds had even stopped drinking, a temporary state of grace that Wilson predicted would prove a 'brief interregnum' in their quest to make life an eternal party. You could only tell the story of the Fitzgeralds, Wilson wrote later, if you somehow did justice to the exhilaration of those days.

SAYS NEWSPAPERS AID FICTION WRITING

The next day the Fitzgeralds prepared to celebrate the publication of Scott's fourth book and second collection of short stories. *Tales of the Jazz Age* collected the magazine fiction that was enabling the Fitzgeralds to pursue life as extravagants, and it was obvious to its first readers that here

was a chronicle of their era. One far-sighted reviewer predicted that if 'any scholar of the future shall seek to learn the habits and conditions of this age and its people in something of the way that a scholar of to-day might study the stone age, let this advice be recorded for him now: in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Tales of the Jazz Age" he will find an invaluable source for his researches'. Another clipping said that Fitzgerald's 'fiction will be the treasure trove of the antiquarian of the future, when the flapper, like les precieuses, is imbedded in the amber of time, so graphically does it reproduce the eccentricities of a perverse, hysterical, pleasure-crazed age'.

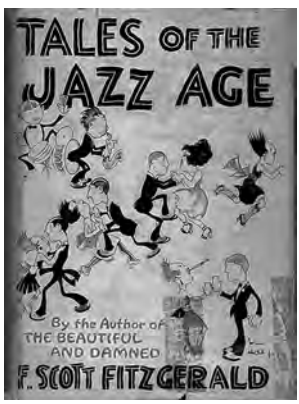
In June Fitzgerald had sent Perkins a few suggested blurbs (themselves a new advertising concept, not yet ten years old) to market *Tales of the Jazz Age*: 'In this book Mr F has developed his gifts as a satiric humorist to a point rivaled by few if any living American writers. The lazy meanderings of a brilliant and powerful imagination.' If that didn't suit, how about: 'Satyre upon a Saxophone by the most brilliant of the younger novelists'? Fitzgerald concluded: 'That's probably pretty much bunk but I'm all for advertising it as a cheerful book.' It was only six years since Henry Ford had declared in the *New York Times* that history was bunk, so why shouldn't a young man of ambition write himself into it? The reason for the great popularity of Fitzgerald's work, said another clipping he kept, was its portrait of 'a certain phase of life that had not been portrayed before. In other words, what we are looking for is news. We want to know, as accurately as possible, what is going on.'

Fitzgerald was always excited by a new publication, which is presumably why they arrived in New York in time to celebrate *Tales of the Jazz Age*. Wilson had been taken aback when Fitzgerald ingenuously announced during their undergraduate days: 'I want to be one of the greatest writers who have ever lived, don't you?' John Peale Bishop was also amused by Fitzgerald's ambition: 'even then he was determined to be a genius, and since one of the most obvious characteristics of genius was precocity, he must produce from an early age. He did, but wanted through vanity to make it even earlier.' Fitzgerald may have been prone to posing, but his aspirations were also serious, and none of his friends yet fully appreciated that those ambitions were as artistic as they were

commercial. It was during this time that Wilson jotted in his notebooks something that Fitzgerald had told him:

> When I'm with John [Bishop], I say: 'Well, John, you and I are the only real artists,' and when I'm with Alec [McKaig], I say: 'You and I are the only ones who understand the common man' and when I'm with Townsend [Martin], I say: 'Well, Townsend, you and I are the only ones who are really interested in ourselves,' but when I'm alone, I say: 'Well, Fitz, you're the only one!'

From the Plaza it was a stroll of just ten blocks down Fifth Avenue to the Scribner's building at the corner of West 48th Street, with the offices of the publishing house on the top floors and a bookshop on the ground floor. It is hard to imagine that Scott, who admitted to lingering in Fifth Avenue bookstores in hopes of hearing someone mention his books, neglected the opportunity to mark the occasion – especially as it was just two days before his twenty-sixth birthday. His career was still beginning: he must have felt that it was about to flame into life. Scribner's doubtless featured in its shop window the new book by one of its most famous writers, with its eye-catching, modern dust jacket, courtesy of illustrator John Held, Jr, of bobbed-haired, smoking flappers and young philosophers dancing while jazz musicians play in the background.



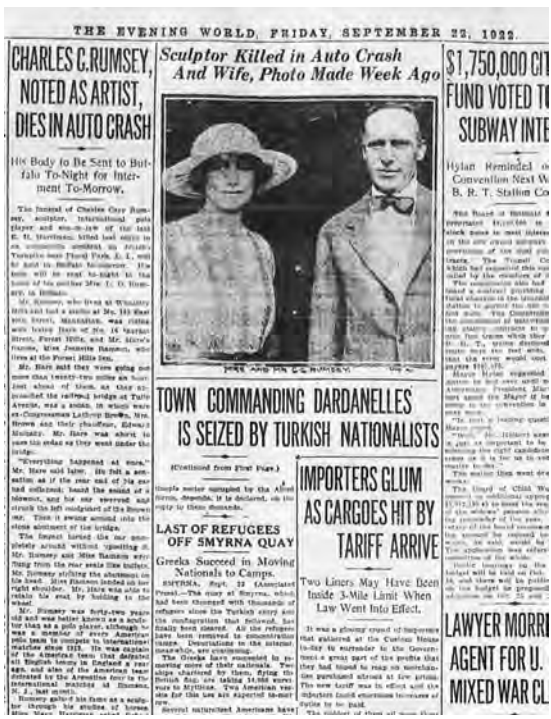
The word jazz, as Fitzgerald explains in 'Echoes of the Jazz Age', first meant sex: out of discretion or ignorance he neglects to mention that the word probably derives from 'jism'. Jazz was as disreputable as the term that spawned it: 'the flapper springs full-grown, like Minerva,' wrote Zelda in 1925, 'from the head of her once-déclassé father, Jazz, upon whom she lavishes affection and reverence, and deepest filial regard'. In 1922 Fitzgerald's association with déclassé jazz still damned him in the eyes of many readers: 'The unholy finger of jazz holds nothing sacred – leaves nothing untouched . . . What Irving Berlin has done to music, F. Scott Fitzgerald and his like are doing to literature . . . Fitzgerald is master of his school. He is the acme of all that is jazz. He is attune [*sic*] with jazz. His foundations are jazz. He can never rise to the things that are bigger; because his rhythm is jazz.' In fact, Fitzgerald was writing a jazz history of America, but the nature of his composition eluded most of his audience.


CHARLES C. RUMSEY
DIES IN AUTO CRASH
ON JERICHO TURNPIKE

As the Fitzgeralds awoke at the Plaza on the morning of Friday 22 September, preparing to welcome the publication of *Tales of the Jazz Age*, headlines announced that a car crash had occurred the previous evening, while they were enjoying their surprisingly sober chat with Bunny Wilson. At a train station about twenty miles east of Manhattan the famous sculptor and polo player Charles Cary Rumsey had climbed into the back of an open roadster with some friends he'd invited to dinner. His wealthy wife, Mary Harriman Rumsey, was at a wedding at the estate of Clarence H. Mackay nearby. Rattling along the old Jericho turnpike a few miles south of the village of Great Neck, their car approached a bridge under the Long Island Rail Road. Pulling up

to pass another car – the driver later insisted he'd been driving at moderate speed – their car clipped the other vehicle. Rumsey's roadster spun around and he was thrown out of it, hitting his head. He died at the scene, about ten minutes later.

Pad Rumsey, as he was known, was a hard-drinking playboy sculptor and polo player who had married the daughter of the Gilded Age robber baron E. H. Harriman. When Harriman died in 1909, he controlled the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific railroads, which together were worth $1.5 billion, and employed more men than the standing army of the United States. Harriman was one of the richest men in America, and nationally famous for his cut-throat feud with the St Paul tycoon James J. Hill.



THE EVENING WORLD, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1922.

CHARLES C. RUMSEY, NOTED AS ARTIST, DIES IN AUTO CRASH

His Body to Be Sent to Buffalo To-Night for Interment To-Morrow.

Sculptor Killed in Auto Crash And Wife, Photo Made Week Ago

MRS. AND MR. C. C. RUMSEY

TOWN COMMANDING DARDANELLES IS SEIZED BY TURKISH NATIONALISTS

LAST OF REFUGEES OFF SMYRNA QUAY

Greeks Succeed in Moving Nationals to Camps.

IMPORTERS GLUM AS CARGOES HIT BY TARIFF ARRIVE

Two Liners May Have Been Inside 3-Mile Limit When Law Went Into Effect.

$1,750,000 GI FUND VOTED T SUBWAY INTE

LAWYER MORR AGENT FOR U. MIXED WAR CL

22 September 1922

Rumsey was frequently commissioned by the polo and hunting set to model their horses in bronze; one of his better-known sculptures was for his friend and teammate, Thomas Hitchcock, Jr, a war hero who had been awarded the Croix de Guerre and the most famous polo player in America. In September 1922 Hitchcock was preparing to move back to Manhattan: he had returned to America that summer after a year studying at Oxford on a scholarship offered to officers after the Armistice. Regularly likened to Babe Ruth and other sports heroes, Hitchcock was the first American player to popularize polo. When Scott Fitzgerald mused over the origins of *The Great Gatsby* twenty years later, beginning his outline in *Man's Hope* with the 'Glamour of Rumseys and Hitchcocks', these were the people he was remembering.

That autumn, Tommy Hitchcock moved into a townhouse on East 52nd Street with George Gordon Moore, a businessman alleged to be mixed up in various shady deals. Before long, rumours began to circulate that Moore was using Tommy Hitchcock as a front man for his disreputable ventures. Speakeasies had false fronts, barrels had false bottoms, drunk drivers gave false names to the police and upstarts depended on making false impressions. When Tom Buchanan first brings Nick Carraway to George Wilson's wretched garage, Nick thinks that the 'shadow of a garage must be a blind and that sumptuous and romantic apartments were concealed overhead'. Everyone was putting on airs; anything could be purchased, even the past – or, at least, the illusion of the past.

This was as true on the Gold Coast as anywhere else. During the late nineteenth century, the tycoons of Manhattan – the Astors, Vanderbilts, Fricks, Guggenheims, Harrimans, Morgans – had built vast estates along the North Shore of Long Island where they could indulge their imperial fantasies, recreating factual imitations of Old World aristocracy, complete with fox hunting and exact replicas of castles from Ireland or chateaux from Normandy. New York's rich and powerful moved out to Long Island to acquire the space to enjoy – and flaunt – their fortunes by building extravagant mansions with manicured, tumbling lawns, sundials and brick walls and sunken Italian gardens, topiary mazes, and

ha-has, swimming pools, beaches, tennis courts and golf courses. Long Island was a moneyed idyll, rapidly become a familiar national symbol of aspirational wealth, an object lesson in mendacious traditions.

A 1926 *New Yorker* profile registered Scott Fitzgerald's critical interest in America's new aristocracy. The reporter explained that Fitzgerald's 'research is in the chronicles of the big business juntos of the last fifty years; and the drama of high finance, with the personalities of the major actors, [E. H.] Harriman, [J. P.] Morgan, [James J.] Hill, is his serious study. He saw how the money was being spent; he has made it his business to ferret out how it was being cornered.' And Fitzgerald predicted, all too accurately, what would happen to an America that accepted the creed of unbridled capitalism, an ignorant, credulous faith espoused by the negligible Henry C. Gatz, Gatsby's father, who continues to believe in his son's potential for greatness, even after the sordid fact of his murder: 'If he'd of lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country.' Nick 'uncomfortably' admits that Gatz is right, for he feels that this is nothing to brag about. Hill, 'the empire builder', is also admired by the equally ineffectual father in Fitzgerald's 1924 story 'Absolution', originally composed as part of the first draft of *Gatsby*.

Fitzgerald saw clearly the damage being done to American society by making money the measure of all its values. This is the mistake made by Jay Gatsby – whose name suggests not James J. Hill, but Jay Gould, one of nineteenth-century America's most corrupt financiers and robber barons. When Jay Gould died in 1892, Mark Twain declared: 'The gospel left behind by Jay Gould is doing giant work in our days. Its message is "Get money. Get it quickly. Get it in abundance. Get it in prodigious abundance. Get it dishonestly if you can, honestly if you must."' Fitzgerald knew his Twain, and has Jay Gatsby believe in the same gospel of wealth as he goes about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty.

Fitzgerald recognized the Gilded Age tycoons and financiers for the glorified crooks they were. Many years later, he remarked in his notebooks, 'Rockefeller Center: that it all came out of the chicaneries of

a dead racketeer', and warned his daughter to beware of a certain type of 'Park Avenue girl': 'Park Avenue girls are hard, aren't they? My own taste ran to kinder people, but they are usually the daughters of "up-and-coming" men and, in a way, the inevitable offspring of that type. It is the Yankee push to its last degree, a sublimation of the sort of Jay Gould who began by peddling buttons to a county and ended with the same system of peddler's morals by peddling railroads to a nation.' Fitzgerald later claimed that he 'would always cherish an abiding distrust, an animosity, toward the leisure class – not the conviction of a revolutionist but the smouldering hatred of a peasant . . . I have never been able to stop wondering where my friends' money came from.'

Knowing where their money comes from tells a great deal more about their character than knowing where their families come from. The American east-coast aristocracy saw itself as fitting into the mould of European aristocracy. But what it took the Europeans centuries to accrue, families like the Morgans and the Harrimans did in a generation, sufficient time in America's rapidly cycling class system. The difference between old and new money is, after all, purely relative: it just depends on when you start counting.

After Pad Rumsey's death Mary Harriman bought an estate on Sands Point, at the tip of Manhasset, Long Island, and spent several years building a replica of a Norman castle. In April 1923 Scott and Zelda would attend lavish parties at Mrs Rumsey's estate, where they also met Tommy Hitchcock. When he was transposed into fiction Hitchcock would retain his first name and his skill at polo but not his honour, becoming a frequently acknowledged model for the dishonourable and malicious Tom Buchanan. 'The Rumseys and Hitchcocks' are a frequent footnote to the genesis of *The Great Gatsby* (although many erroneously say that the Fitzgeralds knew Charles Rumsey, when they only knew his widow) but merely explaining who these people were overlooks a gleam in history: that two days after his return to New York, on the very day *Tales of the Jazz Age* was published, Fitzgerald was reading of Charles Rumsey's death in one of the

car crashes that were becoming all too common on Long Island in 1922.

A FRESH START.

Sunday 24 September was a sudden bright, hot, humid day in the midst of two weeks of mild weather. Cecil B. DeMille released a film called *Manslaughter*, about a reckless society woman who runs over a man with her car, which would become one of the biggest cinematic hits of 1922. That Sunday was also Scott Fitzgerald's twenty-sixth birthday, and although the Fitzgeralds left no clues as to their activities on this day, a friend of theirs did.

Burton Rascoe was the literary editor of the *New York Tribune*, one of the two newspapers that Fitzgerald names in *The Great Gatsby*. (The *Tribune* was founded by Horace Greeley, remembered in American history for four famous words, 'Go west, young man,' a catchphrase that symbolizes much of Jay Gatsby's life.) Rascoe was one of the Fitzgeralds' most enthusiastic supporters, writing that *This Side of Paradise* 'bears the impress, it seems to me, of genius', and hiring Zelda to add some 'sparkle' to his pages by reviewing *The Beautiful and Damned*. Rascoe also wrote a weekly Sunday column called 'A Bookman's Day Book', in which he listed notable literary happenings of the previous week: mostly they involved the authors with whom he had partied. Just four years older than Fitzgerald, Rascoe had a fine critical intelligence, and an inclination towards name-dropping. In fact, Burton Rascoe was an inveterate gossip.

Rascoe's column that Sunday opened, as current literary conversations often did, with a reflection on the state of American letters in 1922: 'Aspiration and discontent are the parents – if not of paradise, then – of change . . . No serious book is written in America nowadays which does not carry its implied or direct criticism of our ideals, our scheme of life, our cultural attainments.' That night, Rascoe reported

in his next column, he went over to the house of Thomas R. Smith, editor-in-chief at Boni & Liveright and a friend of Scott Fitzgerald's. Finding other literary friends there, he had a fine evening, but Smith soon 'proved too generous a host', and Rascoe's wife Hazel had to help get him home. He was in bed by 9 p.m.; then, 'at 12:30 [a.m.] F. Scott Fitzgerald called up. He and Zelda, Mary Blair, and Edmund Wilson Jr. wanted to come out, or have us join them, I forget which, but I was too sleepy either to encourage the one or consent to the other.'

Fitzgerald cut out Rascoe's mention of their merrymaking that night, and saved it in his scrapbook. Undated and unattributed, the tiny piece of paper offers no hint that it was a birthday present from burgeoning celebrity culture – or that it might be a gift to the future, an inkling of how Scott Fitzgerald celebrated his twenty-sixth birthday.

Sacred Objects

As the first chapter ends, Nick returns home after dinner at the Buchanans' and in the distance sees his neighbour for the first time, 'Mr Gatsby himself, come out to determine what share was his of our local heavens.' But just as Nick thinks he will call out and introduce himself he hesitates, watching Gatsby, 'trembling', stretch out his arms toward the dark water of Long Island Sound. Looking to see what he is reaching toward, Nick can distinguish 'nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock'. The green light has become one of the most famous symbols in literature, as readers debate its various meanings: green for envy, for hope, for spring, for the colour of money? Did green mean 'go' in 1922?

Having reached out to the green light that he couldn't grasp, Gatsby vanishes, leaving Nick alone 'in the unquiet darkness' as the tender night begins to fall.