

The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Living the American Dream

The Author

- F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)
- Born in St. Paul, Minnesota
- Chronicler of The Jazz Age
- 1917: Leaves Princeton to join the Army
- Meets Zelda Sayre—beautiful, talented, and wealthy
 - This relationship provides a foundation for many novels
- Overnight sensation with *This Side of Paradise* (1920)
- Dies in the grip of alcohol and depression...forgotten?

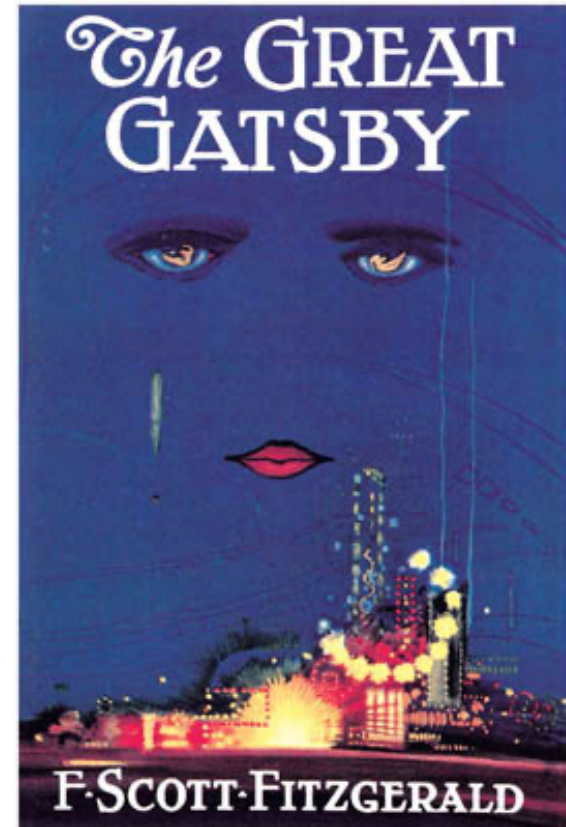


- His novels tend to explore a particular theme
 - A surface of wealth, glamour, and privilege
 - An undercurrent of deception, depression, and insecurity
- Some scholars say that our notion of the modern American Dream can be traced to the many themes and ideas of this one book
 - Rags to Riches Story
 - Myth of the Self-Made Man
 - Triumph of Capitalism
 - Romance of “Stuff”
 - “Only In America” Attitude
 - A Fresh Start; A New Beginning; A New Identity



The Book

- Published 1925
- The “Great American Novel”
- A Perfect Reflection of Its Age
- A Tale of
 - *Myth*
 - *Romance*
 - *Illusion*
- In Short—An American Tale



People to Watch

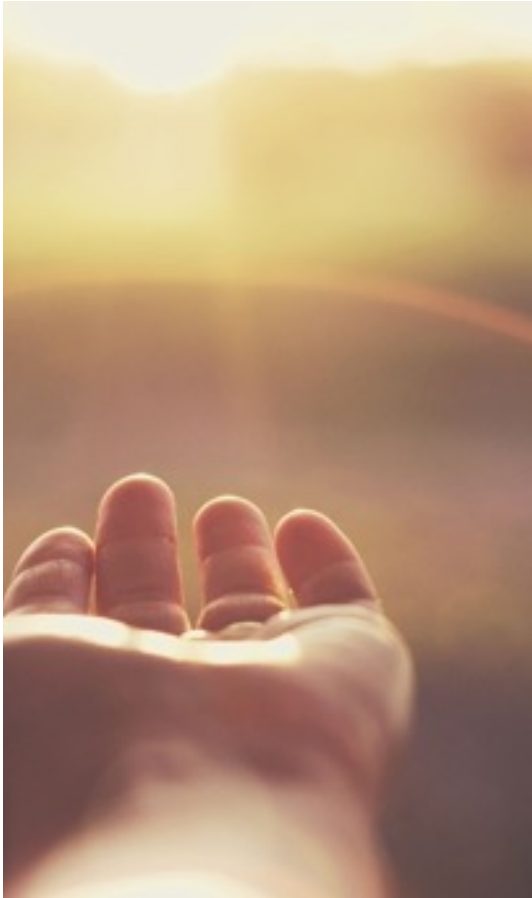
- **Nick Carraway:** Originally from the Midwest, Nick is the narrator of the novel and neighbor to Gatsby
- **Jay Gatsby:** Mysterious and elusive millionaire (“new money”), we learn about Gatsby primarily through others
- **Tom Buchanan:** Arrogant, insecure, and racist, Tom (who comes from “old money”) is the husband of Daisy and neighbor to Gatsby
- **Daisy:** Cousin to Nick and wife of Tom
- **Jordan Baker:** Daisy’s longtime friend



Things to Look For

- Symbolism
 - The “green light”
 - The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg
- Motifs
 - “Old sport”
 - Yawning
 - Second-hand news
 - Paradoxes
- Tone and Style
 - The “dim and hazy,” boozy, almost surreal feel of the book, the characters, and this entire era

It's All about Belief



- Reality rests not on truth, but on what we believe to be true
- Belief is the controlling force behind this story
 - The ability to persuade others to believe
 - Our desire—our need—to believe
- Belief shapes our identity and our destiny
 - What we believe happened in the past
 - What we believe we are experiencing now
 - What we believe we will happen in the future
- Belief is at the center of the novel's biggest paradox: Gatsby

Chapters 1-3: The Myth

Who Is Jay Gatsby?

- Mysterious and elusive
- German Spy?
- Bootlegger?
- Oxford Man?
- Owns a mansion in West Egg
- Throws elaborate parties
- We learn about Gatsby only through others
 - *there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life ... an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person...*

- Is Gatsby a 20th century Ben Franklin?
 - Self-Made Man
 - Rags to Riches
 - A man who crafts his life into a success
- But Gatsby's story is very different from Franklin's prescribed plan of hard work, moderation, and virtue
- Gatsby constructs himself out of smoke and mirrors



Chapters 4-6: The Romance

What Does Gatsby Want?

- Everything Gatsby is, everything Gatsby does, is to recapture one singular lost moment from his past
 - It is on that one moment that his future hinges
 - It is in that one moment that his present is defined
- What drives Gatsby?
 - Money? Ambition? Hope? Nostalgia? Love? Acceptance?
- Has he achieved the American Dream?
- What defines the American Dream?

Chapters 7-9: The Illusion

Can the Romance Survive Reality?

- Is the American Dream a reality?
 - Or is it the chase that fascinates us and occupies a lifetime?
- Is the American Dream a lie?
 - Does it exist outside what we hear, read, and see in the media?
- Can the “dream” survive the “reality”?
 - Can reality ever live up to our dreams?
 - And if so, can we sustain it?
- Or is the American Dream simply an American *Illusion*?