

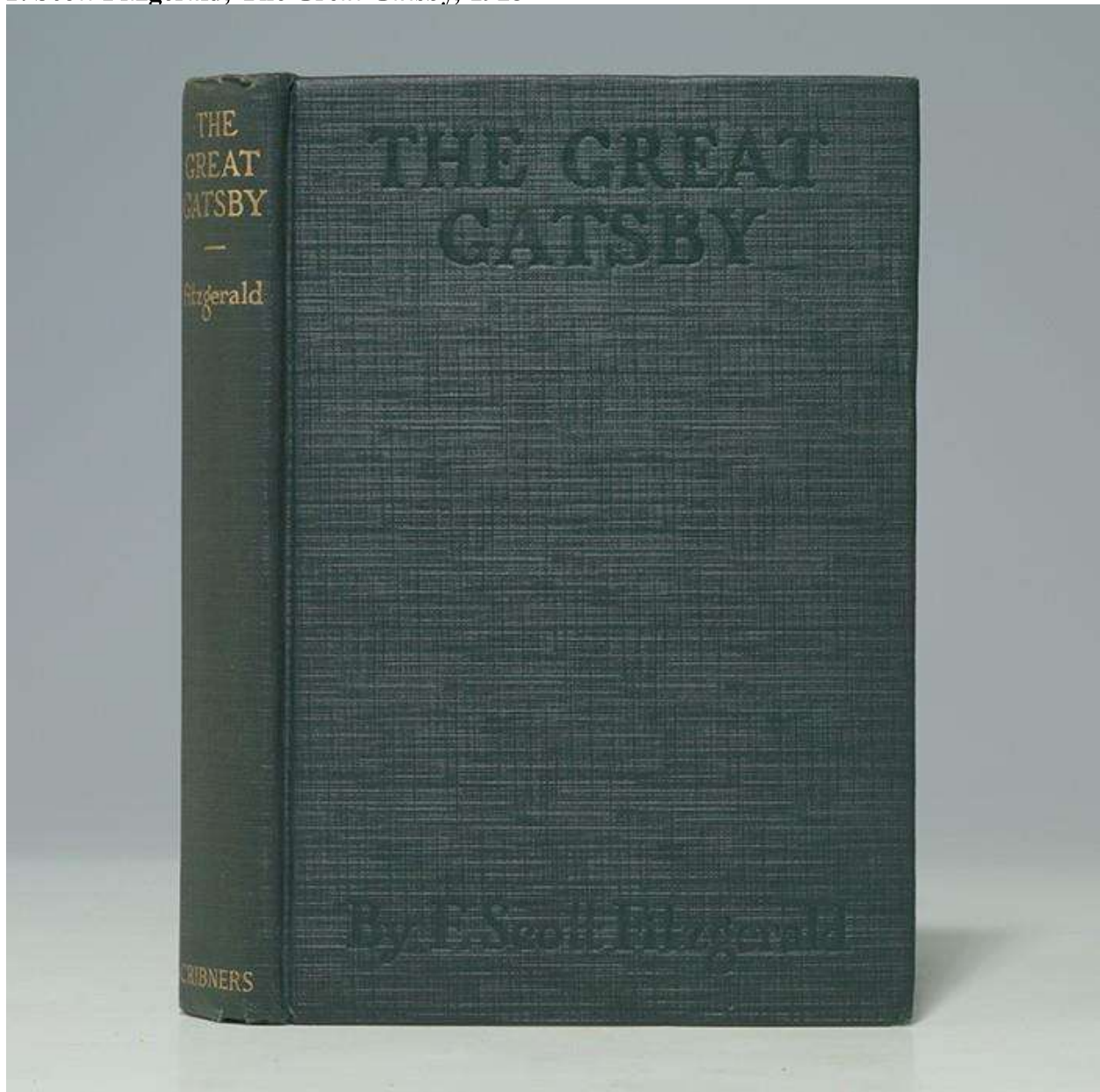
# "The Great Gatsby" (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Canonical Book

Curated by Stephen A. Batman

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## Summary of this Particular Rare First Edition

**F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, 1925**



# THE GREAT GATSBY

BY

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;  
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,  
Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,  
I must have you!"

—THOMAS PARKE D'INVILLIERS.

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1925

## THE GREAT GATSBY

in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

## "SO WE BEAT ON, BOATS AGAINST THE CURRENT, BORNE BACK CEASELESSLY INTO THE PAST"

*First edition of this landmark of 20th-century fiction, Fitzgerald's haunting tale of "empty elegance and impossible love" in the Jazz Age (Julie Bosman) and one of America's greatest novels.*

In 1922, having already written *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald told his publisher Max Perkins, "I want to write something new—something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned" (Brucoli, 198). The triumphant result three years later was *The Great Gatsby*, published just before what Fitzgerald called the summer of "1000 parties and no work" (Fitch, 183).

Noted critic Cyril Connolly called *Gatsby* one of the half dozen best American novels: "[Gatsby] remains a prose poem of delight and sadness which has by now introduced two generations to the romance of America, as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Leaves of Grass* introduced those before it" (*The Modern Movement*, 48).

NPR book critic Maureen Corrigan declared, "*The Great Gatsby* is one of the first modern novels to look squarely at the void, yet it stops short of taking a flying leap... It's Fitzgerald's thin-but-durable urge to affirm that finally makes *Gatsby* worthy of being our Great American Novel" (Corrigan, 23).

FITZGERALD, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925. Octavo, original green cloth. Housed in a custom clamshell box.

*First printing*, with "sick in tired" on page 205 and all other first-issue points. Without extremely rare original dust jacket. Brucoli A11.1.a. Bookplate. A handsome, about-fine copy.

## Introduction

"The Great Gatsby," F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece, was published in 1925 during the height of the Roaring Twenties, a period characterized by economic prosperity, social liberation, and cultural dynamism<sup>3</sup>. Fitzgerald's motivation for writing the novel stemmed from his desire to create "something new—something extraordinarily beautiful and simple and intricately patterned"<sup>2</sup>. The book emerged from the author's experiences in New York and Long Island in 1922, capturing the essence of the Jazz Age<sup>2</sup>.

The cultural, economic, and political climate surrounding the novel's publication was one of unprecedented affluence and social change. The 1920s saw a post-war economic boom, the rise of consumer culture, and significant shifts in social norms<sup>3</sup>. Prohibition, enacted in 1919, had forced the distribution and sale of alcohol underground, creating lucrative opportunities for organized crime<sup>1</sup>. This era of excess and moral ambiguity provided the perfect backdrop for Fitzgerald's exploration of the American Dream and its discontents.

## The Author

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota<sup>5</sup>. Named after his famous ancestor who wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner," Fitzgerald came from a middle-class Catholic family<sup>5</sup>. His early life was marked by academic struggles and a growing passion for literature<sup>5</sup>.

Fitzgerald's writing career took off with the publication of his first novel, "This Side of Paradise," in 1920<sup>5</sup>. The book's success catapulted him to fame and enabled his marriage to Zelda Sayre<sup>5</sup>. The couple became emblematic of the Jazz Age, known for their wild, reckless lifestyle<sup>5</sup>.

Throughout the 1920s, Fitzgerald wrote prolifically, producing short stories for popular magazines to support his lavish lifestyle<sup>11</sup>. "The Great Gatsby," published in 1925, initially received mixed reviews and was a commercial disappointment<sup>11</sup>. However, it has since been recognized as his masterpiece and a defining work of American literature.

Fitzgerald's later years were marked by personal struggles, including alcoholism and his wife's mental illness<sup>11</sup>. He moved to Hollywood in the late 1930s, where he worked as a screenwriter with limited success<sup>11</sup>. Fitzgerald died of a heart attack in 1940 at the age of 44, leaving behind an unfinished novel, "The Last Tycoon"<sup>11</sup>.

## Why this is a Canonical Book

"The Great Gatsby" is undeniably a canonical book that reflects crucial elements of America's politics, governance, economics, and culture. Its enduring relevance and profound insights into the American experience make it an essential work in the literary canon<sup>12</sup>.

Firstly, the novel serves as a critical examination of the American Dream, a concept central to the nation's identity and values<sup>14</sup>. Through the character of Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald explores the hollowness and ultimate unattainability of this ideal, revealing the dark underbelly of wealth and success in America<sup>14</sup>.

Secondly, "The Great Gatsby" provides a vivid portrayal of the social and economic landscape of 1920s America<sup>3</sup>. The novel's depiction of class divisions, nouveau riche extravagance, and old money conservatism offers valuable insights into the socioeconomic dynamics of the era, which continue to resonate in contemporary American society<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, the book's exploration of morality, corruption, and the decay of social values in the face of materialism serves as a powerful critique of American culture<sup>15</sup>. Fitzgerald's nuanced characters and their moral ambiguities challenge readers to confront the complexities of human nature and the ethical dilemmas posed by a society driven by wealth and status.



Lastly, "The Great Gatsby" showcases Fitzgerald's mastery of prose and his ability to capture the zeitgeist of an era<sup>2</sup>. The novel's lyrical style, symbolic depth, and psychological insight have influenced generations of writers and continue to shape American literary tradition<sup>6</sup>.

## Five Timeless Quotes

1. "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."<sup>13</sup>

This iconic closing line encapsulates the novel's themes of nostalgia, the futility of trying to recapture the past, and the ongoing struggle against the forces of time and change. In our current era of rapid technological and social transformation, this quote reminds us of the universal human tendency to yearn for an idealized past while striving for an uncertain future.

2. "I hope she'll be a fool -- that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."<sup>13</sup>

Daisy's cynical wish for her daughter reflects the limited options available to women in the 1920s. Today, this quote serves as a stark reminder of how far society has come in terms of gender equality, while also prompting reflection on the persistent challenges and expectations faced by women in the modern world.

3. "They're a rotten crowd", I shouted across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together.'<sup>13</sup>

Nick's declaration to Gatsby highlights the novel's critique of the moral bankruptcy of the wealthy elite. This quote remains relevant in our time of growing income inequality and debates about social responsibility, challenging us to consider the true value of character over material success.

4. "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther."<sup>13</sup>

This passage beautifully captures the essence of hope and the relentless pursuit of dreams, despite their apparent unattainability. In our age of rapid change and uncertainty, Gatsby's unwavering belief in the future continues to resonate, inspiring readers to persevere in the face of adversity.

5. "Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known."<sup>13</sup>

Nick's assertion of his honesty amidst a world of deception and moral ambiguity speaks to the universal human desire for integrity and self-righteousness. In today's era of "fake news" and information overload, this quote prompts us to reflect on our own biases and the importance of truthfulness in our personal and public lives.

# Five Major Ideas

## 1. The American Dream and Its Disillusionment

"The Great Gatsby" critically examines the concept of the American Dream, revealing its hollow core and the disillusionment that often accompanies its pursuit<sup>14</sup>. Through Gatsby's rise and fall, Fitzgerald illustrates how the dream of upward mobility and success can be corrupted by materialism and the relentless pursuit of wealth<sup>15</sup>. The novel suggests that the American Dream, while alluring, may ultimately be unattainable or unsatisfying, forcing readers to reconsider their own aspirations and values.

## 2. Class and Social Mobility

The novel presents a nuanced portrayal of class divisions in 1920s America, exploring the tensions between old money, new money, and the working class<sup>15</sup>. Fitzgerald's depiction of these social strata reveals the rigid nature of class boundaries and the challenges of true social mobility. The tragic fates of characters like Gatsby and the Wilsons underscore the difficulties faced by those attempting to transcend their social origins, offering a critique of the myth of meritocracy in American society.

## 3. The Corruption of the American Dream by Materialism

Fitzgerald portrays a society consumed by materialism and excess, where the pursuit of wealth and status has supplanted more traditional values<sup>1</sup>. The lavish parties, ostentatious displays of wealth, and moral decay depicted in the novel serve as a cautionary tale about the corrupting influence of money and the emptiness of a life devoted solely to material gain. This theme continues to resonate in our contemporary consumer culture, challenging readers to examine their own relationships with wealth and material possessions.

## 4. The Impossibility of Recapturing the Past

A central theme of the novel is the futility of attempting to relive or recreate the past<sup>13</sup>. Gatsby's obsession with reclaiming his lost love with Daisy symbolizes this impossible quest to turn back time. Fitzgerald suggests that nostalgia and the idealization of the past can be destructive forces, preventing characters from fully engaging with the present or moving forward into the future. This theme speaks to the universal human experience of grappling with change and the passage of time.

## 5. The Hollowness of the Upper Class

Through his portrayal of the Buchanans and their social circle, Fitzgerald exposes the moral emptiness and carelessness of the upper class<sup>15</sup>. Despite their wealth and privilege, these characters are shown to be shallow, selfish, and ultimately destructive. The novel's critique of this "rotten crowd" challenges the notion that wealth and social status are indicators of worth or virtue, prompting readers to consider the true foundations of a meaningful and ethical life.

# Three Major Controversies

## 1. Depiction of Women and Gender Roles

"The Great Gatsby" has faced criticism for its portrayal of women, particularly the character of Daisy Buchanan<sup>9</sup>. Some argue that the novel perpetuates harmful stereotypes of women as shallow, materialistic, and morally weak. Daisy's famous quote about wanting her daughter to be "a beautiful little fool" has been seen as reinforcing limited roles for women in society<sup>13</sup>. However, others contend that Fitzgerald's depiction of female characters is a critique of the societal constraints placed on women in the 1920s, rather than an endorsement of these limitations.

## 2. Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes

The novel has been criticized for its use of racial and ethnic stereotypes, particularly in its depiction of Jewish characters and people of color<sup>9</sup>. Tom Buchanan's racist rants and the portrayal of Meyer Wolfsheim have been seen as problematic and reflective of the era's prejudices. This has led to debates about whether the book's historical context excuses its racial insensitivities or if these elements diminish its literary value. Some schools have even considered removing the book from curricula due to these concerns<sup>9</sup>.

## 3. Glorification of Wealth and Excess

While "The Great Gatsby" is often read as a critique of materialism and the excesses of the Roaring Twenties, some have argued that the novel inadvertently glamorizes the very lifestyle it purports to criticize<sup>15</sup>. The lavish descriptions of parties, fashion, and wealth have been seen by some as potentially reinforcing the allure of material excess rather than effectively condemning it. This has led to discussions about the novel's effectiveness in conveying its intended moral message and whether it might be misinterpreted by readers, particularly young students.

# In Closing

Civic-minded Americans should read "The Great Gatsby" for its profound insights into the complexities of the American experience and its enduring relevance to contemporary society. The novel serves as a mirror to our national character, reflecting both our aspirations and our shortcomings<sup>12</sup>.

Firstly, the book provides a critical examination of the American Dream, challenging readers to consider the true nature of success and happiness in a materialistic society<sup>14</sup>. This reflection is crucial for civic engagement, as it prompts us to question our values and the direction of our nation.

Secondly, Fitzgerald's nuanced portrayal of class dynamics and social mobility offers valuable perspectives on issues of inequality and opportunity that continue to shape American politics and



society<sup>15</sup>. Understanding these dynamics is essential for informed civic participation and policy-making.

Furthermore, the novel's exploration of moral ambiguity and the corrupting influence of wealth provides a framework for examining ethical issues in public and private life<sup>15</sup>. This ethical dimension is vital for fostering responsible citizenship and leadership.

Lastly, "The Great Gatsby" is a masterpiece of American literature, showcasing the power of art to capture the spirit of an era and illuminate universal human experiences<sup>6</sup>. Engaging with such works cultivates cultural literacy and critical thinking skills, which are essential for active participation in a democratic society.

In conclusion, "The Great Gatsby" offers civic-minded Americans a rich tapestry of ideas, critiques, and reflections on the American experience. Its enduring relevance and profound insights make it an indispensable read for those seeking to understand and engage with the complexities of our national identity and the challenges we face as a society.

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