

## Summary

With F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1920 publication of *This Side of Paradise* he became an instant literary success. The novel, itself a literary *tour de force*, cast Fitzgerald as the voice of his generation. He became the representative icon for the American era of the "Jazz Age", a term which Fitzgerald himself coined. He symbolized its delights, dangers and defeats: his spectacular early success as a writer, his frantic pursuit of pleasure, his troubled relationship with his wife Zelda, and his decline into alcoholism, obscurity and premature death represents the path of his generation. Although his fiction is never clearly autobiographical, his life and work are intricately interwoven. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald created one of the most pervasive and appealing modern American myths, which still permeates American society today. Fitzgerald's life and his greatest creative endeavor are indelibly entrenched in the very fabric of the generation he represented. The themes and movement of his life permeate his work, and this is especially so with *Gatsby*.

One of the most prominent themes of his boyhood, which can also be found in *Gatsby*, was "social insecurity". He later wrote that he "developed a two-cylinder inferiority complex" because of the division between the dual strands of his parents' background: an Irish strand with the money, and an old American strand with "the usual exaggerated ancestral pretensions" and the "series of reticence and obligation that go under the poor old shattered word 'breeding'." The disparity between "money" and "breeding" remains one of the key concerns of *Gatsby*, as it was with Fitzgerald's own life in his pursuit of his wife Zelda, a lifestyle beyond exaggeration and literary greatness. Fitzgerald wove into *Gatsby* his own pursuit of love, which is reflected through Gatsby's

pursuit of Daisy. It is in this pursuit that the social difference, which Fitzgerald himself admits to having felt is expressed through *Gatsby*.

As things stand today, Fitzgerald's literary greatness is attested to by *Gatsby*, which remains his most popular and most potent novel. *Gatsby* is constantly attracting new readers and capable of generating an apparently infinite range of meanings. It stands in time as a testament to Fitzgerald's literary legacy, which transcends its time, like any enduring work of art, very much of its time, emerging in, representing and contributing to a very specific historical context, the decade when America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history. Furthermore, *Gatsby* symbolizes the "Roaring 20's" in a way that no other work, fictional or non-fictional, does by introducing a multitude of cultural and social motifs that reflect the mentality of that party. There were multiple intertwining causes for this great and gaudy spree; including the after-effects of the First World War; the impact of prohibition; the growth of organized crime; the emergence of the gangster as an object of fear and fascination; the economic boom and the conspicuous consumption of the rich; the accelerating pace of technological innovation in the areas of transport, communication and popular entertainment; the growth of advertising and consumerism; the loosening of sexual and martial constraints; and the emergence of more independent kinds of women. All of these cultural themes feature to a greater or lesser extent in *Gatsby*.

Aside from the cultural and social influences on Fitzgerald in his creation of *Gatsby*, popular literature also played a role in influencing both Fitzgerald's development as a writer and the creation of *Gatsby*. The most immediate Modernist influence on *Gatsby* was T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland". Eliot's vision of the city and modern life, his capacity to capture the extremes of entropy and ecstasy, his use of the residual traces of

myth and religion to provide a shadowy structure for his mobile fragments, all play through out *Gatsby*. However, Fitzgerald's Modernism is of a quieter kind than Eliot's and the strongest influence on his third novel was the slightly more distant one of Joseph Conrad. From Conrad, Fitzgerald learned more about how to use a first-person narrator who is a participant-observer and how to scramble chronology effectively. These techniques helped Conrad to pursue the aim he expressed in his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, which Fitzgerald reread just before he produced *Gatsby*. Fitzgerald was also influenced by other popular writers, like Henry James and Edith Wharton in his attempt to make the reader hear, feel and see through the power of the written word. Through these influences, Fitzgerald created in *Gatsby*, not only a reflection of 1920's society and it's cultural significance, but a reflection of the art which 1920's society was producing. This being said, Fitzgerald created in *Gatsby* a testament to time and place in American culture that exceeds the limitations of its own period.