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THE GREAT GATSBY AND ITS 1925 CONTEMPORARIES

By

MARJORIE ANN HOLLOMON FAUST

Under the Direction of Dr. Thomas L. McHaney

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on twenty-one particular texts published in 1925 as contemporaries of *The Great Gatsby*. The manuscript is divided into four categories—The Impressionists, The Experimentalists, The Realists, and The Independents. Among The Impressionists are F. Scott Fitzgerald himself, Willa Cather (*The Professor's House*), Sherwood Anderson (*Dark Laughter*), William Carlos Williams (*In the American Grain*), Elinor Wylie (*The Venetian Glass Nephew*), John Dos Passos (*Manhattan Transfer*), and William Faulkner (*New Orleans Sketches*). The Experimentalists are Gertrude Stein (*The Making of Americans*), E. E. Cummings (& aka "Poems 48-96"), Ezra Pound (*A Draft of XVI Cantos*), T. S. Eliot ("The Hollow Men"), Laura Riding ("Summary for Alastor"), and John Erskine (*The Private Life of Helen of Troy*). The Realists are Theodore Dreiser (*An American Tragedy*), Edith Wharton (*The Mother's Recompense*), Upton Sinclair (*Mammonart*), Ellen Glasgow (*Barren Ground*), Sinclair Lewis

(Arrowsmith), James Boyd (*Drums*), and Ernest Hemingway (*In Our Time*). The Independents are Archibald MacLeish (*The Pot of Earth*) and Robert Penn Warren (“To a Face in a Crowd”).

Although these twenty-two texts may in some cases represent literary fragmentations, each in its own way also represents a coherent response to the spirit of the times that is in one way or another cognate to *The Great Gatsby*. The fact that all these works appeared the same year is special because the authors, if not already famous, would become famous, and their works were or would come to represent classic American literature around the world. The twenty-two authors either knew each other personally or knew each other’s works. Naturally, they were also influenced by writings of international authors and philosophers. The greatest common elements among the poets and fiction writers are their uninhibited interest in sex, an absorbing cynicism about life, and the frequent portrayal of disintegration of the family, a trope for what had happened to the countries and to the “family of nations” that experienced the Great War.

In 1925, it would seem, Fitzgerald and many of his writing peers—some even considered his betters—channeled a major spirit of the times, and Fitzgerald did it more successfully than almost anyone.

INDEX WORDS: Sherwood Anderson, James Boyd, Willa Cather, E. E. Cummings, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, T. S. Eliot, John Erskine, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ellen Glasgow, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Archibald MacLeish, Ezra Pound, Laura Riding, Upton Sinclair, Gertrude Stein, Robert Penn Warren, Edith Wharton, William Carlos Williams, Elinor Wylie

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MARJORIE ANN HOLLOMON FAUST

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of

Ph.D.

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2008

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2008**

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Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2008

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear mother who became tired of waiting on me to complete it and went on to heaven in 2005 to join Daddy, who preceded her in 1982. They both say, “It’s about time you finished school.” Daddy did not even make it to high school. And Mother always said she did well just to graduate from high school. Although she did not really understand what I was doing in attending school so long or why, Mother loved me and always said, “Whatever makes you happy, Margeann.” Occasionally she would ask, “Now tell me again why you’re still going to school?” She was at my graduation from Georgia State University when I received my B.A. degree in 1990, and she was at my graduation when I received my M.A. degree from East Tennessee State University in 1995. She will be there in spirit when I receive my Ph.D. degree in 2008.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I must express my gratitude to Reverend Nancy Noblin, who lent me her garage apartment rent-free, giving me the financial opportunity to earn my Ph.D. degree. Second, I owe the completion of this dissertation to my director Dr. Thomas McHaney. Through his patient recommendations and editing, the manuscript took shape and gradually developed into a finished product. In addition, I extend my appreciation to Dr. Matthew Roudané and to Dr. Pearl McHaney, members of my committee, who also lent their valuable editorial skills to this presentation. Next, I would like to thank all the librarians, many of whom remain nameless—librarians at Georgia State University; University of Georgia; Albany State University; Georgia Tech University; Library of Congress; Sue Presnell, Reference Associate, The Lilly Library, Indiana University; and Debbie Yerkes, Documents Microform Department, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina. Finally, my thanks to the presenters of the Thesis/Dissertation Formatting Workshop—Amber Amari, Academic Advisor for the Office of Graduate Services; Sara Fuchs, Digital Technologies Librarian; and Joel Glogowski, Learning Commons Librarian.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on important literary authors who each published a significant text in the year 1925. Midway between the two great wars, and between the end of World War I and the Great Depression, “1925,” the critic R. P. Blackmur wrote, “was part of the Golden Years of the modern age . . . when suddenly an ‘explosion of talent took place’ in the Western world that has dwarfed everything since” (qtd. in Pratt xxiii). Although these twenty-two texts may in some cases represent literary fragmentations, each in its own way represents a coherent response to the spirit of the times. The fact that all these works appeared the same year is special because the authors, if not already famous, would become famous, and around the world their works were or would come to represent classic American literature. The twenty-two authors either knew one another personally or knew one another’s work, were commonly influenced by one another and by writings of international authors and philosophers, and “produced a body of work that promises to be read for a long time” (McCormick *Middle* 114). The greatest common elements among the poets and fiction writers are their uninhibited interest in sex, an absorbing cynicism about life, and the frequent portrayal of disintegration of the family, a trope for what had happened to the countries and to the “family of nations” that experienced the Great War. An interesting fact about the six poets included here is that they were all born about the same time: William Carlos Williams (1883); Ezra Pound (1885); T. S. Eliot (1888); John Crowe Ransom (1888); Archibald MacLeish (1892); and E. E. Cummings (1894). Since “there is not much validity in comparing themes in poetry” (McCormick *Middle* 111), all we can say is

that “The Hollow Men,” “Summary for Alastor,” *The Pot of Earth*, *A Draft of XVI Cantos*, and “To A Face in the Crowd” may nonetheless be said to be poems based in large part upon “classical, medieval, and Renaissance literature” and at the same time are “experimental in language” in their “exaltation of originality” (McCormick *Middle* 112) and thematically are in keeping with one or more of the modernists’ preoccupations. The differences among the prose works are many, yet all seem to meditate on an individual life in a time of change with similar expressions of human values lost or sought. *Mammonart* (Sinclair) is a series of philosophical commentaries on various aspects of the human predicament; *Drums* (Boyd) is really no more than a *bildungsroman* that uses the Revolutionary war as a backdrop, a not unusual theme since “no fewer than 123 historical novels were published between 1919 and 1932” (McCormick *Middle* 112); *New Orleans Sketches* (Faulkner) and *In Our Time* (Hemingway), each a group of experimental vignettes, feature young observers in exotic environments; *The Venetian Glass Nephew* (Wylie) and *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (Erskine) are novels rooted in mythology; *The Making of Americans* (Stein) is another experiment in writing the self as a literary and personal fragmentation; *In The American Grain* (Williams), a group of essays in a poetic mode; *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald), *Arrowsmith* (Lewis), *Dark Laughter* (Anderson), *The Professor’s House* (Cather), *Manhattan Transfer* (Dos Passos), and *An American Tragedy* (Dreiser) feature male protagonists who in one manner or another are lost souls and could be any of the observers among the narrative voices in the other works; *Barren Ground* (Glasgow) and *The Mother’s Recompense* (Wharton) are novels featuring female protagonists who come to grips with fates

that might have disillusioned many of the other narrators or protagonists in this range of books from 1925.

Despite various differences in style and content several “schools” of writing may be discerned in this set of texts. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, William Carlos Williams, Elinor Wylie, John Dos Passos, and William Faulkner will be discussed as “The Impressionists”; Gertrude Stein, E. E. Cummings, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Laura Riding, and John Erskine as “The Experimentalists”; Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton, Upton Sinclair, Ellen Glasgow, Sinclair Lewis, James Boyd, and Ernest Hemingway as “The Realists”; and Archibald MacLeish and Robert Penn Warren as “The Independents.”

A word is in order about the “little magazines” of the era that encouraged the first steps of so many of these authors of 1925, for these magazines were the forward element of the *avante garde* and a major conduit of spreading so many of the influences, styles, attitudes, and quirks surfacing in so many works in 1925. *The Fugitive*, which ceased publishing in 1925 as some of its founding contributors graduated Vanderbilt University or took on other literary enterprises, cost only twenty-five cents and did not circulate widely, yet it started the literary careers of Robert Penn Warren and Laura Riding. *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*; *The Little Review*; and *The Dial* were even more important. *The Dial* (January 1920 to July 1929) published Expressionists, Cubists, Imagists, and Futurists, making “everything that went before seem obsolete” (Brown 5) and is considered “superior to any literary periodical in American letters before or since” (Brown 5). *The Double Dealer* in New Orleans published Hemingway and Faulkner. The careers of

Anderson, Williams, Eliot, MacLeish, and Cummings were only the most obvious among those propelled by such independent and often short-lived publications, which, if they did not publish all these authors, often reported on or reviewed them. Though in many instances ephemeral, the international literary magazines of the 1920s represent the battle flags of the legion of new writers who took up the pen against the forces of war, corrupt politics, malignant materialism, cultural suppression, sexual repression, and general intolerance that they saw in the spirit of the times.

The year 1925 may be considered a literary *annus mirabilis* for many reasons, not least because nine of these American writers either began their successful publishing careers in that year or published unacclaimed works—Warren, Dos Passos, Erskine, Riding, Boyd, Cummings, Faulkner, Hemingway, and MacLeish; two of the authors, who had worked themselves into established careers, broke through and became famous in 1925—Glasgow and Fitzgerald; eight of the authors, who were already famous, published important works in 1925—Wharton, Williams, Wylie, Sinclair, Stein, Eliot, Lewis, and Pound; three approaching the end of their careers published works in 1925 that remain very important—Anderson, Cather, and Dreiser.

Though there have been various books on the Twenties or on American Modernists (John McCormick, Warren French, Modris Eksteins, Paul Fussell, Allen Douglas, and Julian Symonds are especially useful), no one has written a study exclusively focusing on this particular publication year. A concentration on literature published in 1925, six years following World War I (1914-1918), four

years before the Great Depression, and thirteen years before World War II (1939-1945), permits an unusual look at how writers of that halcyon time anticipated so many cultural changes that were quietly brewing. The following unrelated facts that occurred in 1925 give a hint of how the year might have been regarded as without real drama or hints of disaster. *Dinah* and *Sweet Georgia Brown* were hit songs. Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington made their first recordings. Nellis Ross, of Wyoming, became the nation's first female governor. *Rin Tin Tin* and *The Phantom of the Opera* opened at movie theaters. Flagpole sitting became a national fad. Earl Wise invented the potato chip. Medical supplies to combat an outbreak of diphtheria reached Nome, Alaska, on dog sleds, inspiring the annual Iditarod race across Alaska. The Chrysler Corporation was formed by Walter Chrysler. New York's new Madison Square Garden opened. Crossword puzzles became fashionable. James Weldon Johnson published *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, Countee Cullen published *Color*, and the Harlem Renaissance anthology *The New Negro*, edited by Alain Locke, appeared. *The New Yorker* magazine circulated for the first time, and *The Grand Ole Opry* in Nashville, Tennessee, began its radio broadcast. On the literary front, Charles Finger won the Newbery Medal for children's literature with *Tales from Silver Lands*; Sidney Howard won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama with *They Knew What They Wanted*; Edwin Arlington Robinson won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry with *The Man Who Died Twice*; and Edna Ferber won the Pulitzer Prize with the novel *So Big (What Else Was Happening?)*. (These three Pulitzer Prize winners were not included in the

discussion herein because a select group of authors had already been chosen by the time a search revealed the importance of these three authors of 1925.)

Simultaneous with the publishing of Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in 1925, premonitions of war rumbled overseas and forty-thousand KKK members marched in Washington, District of Columbia. President Calvin Coolidge insisted that "the business of America was business," and religious fundamentalism and modern science clashed in Dayton, Tennessee, in the trial of John Scopes for teaching evolution in a public school. An international mandate for theatrical realism and social criticism came when George Bernard Shaw won the Nobel Prize for literature.

Mapping American literary contributions in the year 1925 offers the opportunity to consider relationships not necessarily examined in this light heretofore. This approach to twenty-two familiar writers proposes to discover how or whether their texts may be linked or contrasted in ways that illuminate the spirit of the times, the literary movements of the era, the condition of America, and the role of the literary artist in the pre-Depression era of the period between the two world wars. As the texts are considered individually, connections will be made among the various authors, and relationships will be shown among issues and events of the times, as well as among matters of content, style, and import that refract upon one another from book to book, author to author, interlocking streams of culture and social concerns of that literarily remarkable year as well as to the individual expressions of one another. But chief among the observations inspired by this project is how so many of these texts underscore and illuminate *The Great Gatsby*,

one of the most striking and iconic texts of this year, how they help one appreciate Fitzgerald's achievement, and how succeeding generations have come to value the acute dramatizations of his social culture. With an eye always toward how each of these texts relates to *The Great Gatsby*, we shall see how the modern era in American literature still remains a remarkable period.

CHAPTER 2 – THE IMPRESSIONISTS

Everyone knows that F. Scott Fitzgerald, at the age of twenty-nine, published a 1925 novel that has become a classic, but there are many explanations of why it is a classic and what sort of box one can put it in. Some critics see it as realist, others as literary impressionism, still others as simply modernist, and even some as post-modernist. (Jackson Pollock's "*peinture engagée*" also "comes to mind," as an example of both Fitzgerald's and Pollock's "emphasis on violence") [Ponente 99]. But still, almost everyone who reviewed or who has written about it seems to agree that it is unique. What the following investigation seeks to show is that *The Great Gatsby* may transcend simple definitions or categorizations, and on many terms it is indeed not unique except in the way its reputation has grown. This can be shown by investigating how much it has in common, in a couple of dozen different ways, with a set of often equally remarkable or important texts that were published in the same year.

Thus, one premise of this study is that 1925 was almost as much an *annus mirabilis* as the 1922 of *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, *Babbitt*, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and the one-volume abridgement of Sir James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The investigation confines itself to other American texts—and of course, many of these texts are as much influenced by such writers as James Joyce, Sigmund Freud, Frazer, Joseph Conrad, and Eliot as was Fitzgerald. In general, however, they come out too much together to have exerted any influences on one another, a fact that makes such a study even more fascinating, for there are a striking number of correspondences between their themes, characters, allusions, and apparent

meanings and the themes, characters, allusions, and apparent meanings in *The Great Gatsby*.

Robert L. Gale's *An F. Scott Fitzgerald Encyclopedia* summarizes the novel thusly:

Jay Gatsby, born James Gatz in 1890, and called Jimmy by Henry C. Gatz of Minnesota, his father, is a combination of idealistic, romantic, and courteous host, war hero, dishonest businessman, and ostentatious roughneck. He was wealthy prospector Dan Cody's companion (1907 to 1912) but lost out on an inheritance from him. While training in the army in Louisville (1917), Gatsby fell in love with Daisy Fay; she did not wait for him to return from the war but married rich Tom Buchanan instead. Gatsby buys a house in West Egg, on Long Island, and hosts lavish parties to lure Daisy, who is living in more fashionable East Egg. . . . She rendezvouses [sic] with him at Nick Carraway's house and in Gatsby's mansion but is reluctant to give up Tom's way of life. She lets Gatsby take the blame when she drives his car back from New York and kills Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson. Myrtle's husband, George B. Wilson, shoots Gatsby to death and then kills himself. (150)

John McCormick says that "if we put Fitzgerald to the psychological test, we mis-read him," for "Fitzgerald's gift" lies in "fantasy" (31). Perhaps so, but Tom Buchanan voices a real concern, a concern quite familiar with folks today with respect to immigration issues, when he remarks to Nick, "Civilization's going to

pieces.’ . . . ‘I’ve gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read “The Rise of the Colored Empires” by this man Goddard?’” (9). *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* by Lothrop Stoddard was “one of the most talked about books of the early 1920s,” and Fitzgerald employs “Buchanan’s opinions to create a tone of moral panic, a pessimistic atmosphere sustained by the existence of a far-reaching debate on the collapse of white prestige” (Bonnett 38). Furthermore, Ronald Berman says,

Tom Buchanan desperately aspires to patrician leadership: he wants to know the right people and to make sure that his wife doesn’t know the wrong people. He wants everyone to listen to his ‘ideas,’ a phrase often on his lips. Yet in almost every respect he fails to live up to the criteria of real social leadership that had been stated by Henry Adams and affirmed in the 1920s by Mencken and George Santayana. (73-74)

Daisy Fay Buchanan is a version of the female character represented in poet Laura Riding’s “Summary for Alastor” (1925), a six-stanza poem based on mythological themes. For instance, Daisy’s boldness broadcasts an enigmatic appeal to the male, reminiscent of the mythological Sirens. As Riding’s poem goes, “Because my song was bold / And you knew but my song, / You thought it must belong / To one brave to behold” (1-4). Creating compelling curiosity about his character, Fitzgerald explains the male’s fascination with Daisy: “Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult

to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered ‘Listen,’ a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour” (6-7). McCormick says that “part of Fitzgerald’s power as a writer derived from his incapacity for abstract thought. Lacking intellectual tidiness, he was forced to grope his way through narrative, through the fictional comings and goings of his characters, to an essence which he himself grasped imperfectly and fleetingly” (32). To be sure, Fitzgerald probably patterns Daisy after Ginevra King, “a celebrated beauty from Chicago,” whom he knew 1915-1916; she “gave substance to an ideal Fitzgerald would cling to for a lifetime; to the end of his days, the thought of her could bring tears to his eyes” (Mizener 1987 28). But she also represents aspects of Fitzgerald’s wife, Zelda Sayre, and also abstractly fulfills both associations with her name (Middle English *dayesye*) and her association with the solar and vegetation myth deployed in the novel. Fitzgerald also owes a nod to Henry James’s *Daisy Miller*.

In addition to the chiaroscuro effect Fitzgerald often employs in *Gatsby*, he captures another modern artistic technique—perhaps an idea borrowed from Pablo Picasso’s paintings, which Fitzgerald knew (Bryer 33)—especially in his portrayal of Myrtle Wilson’s disproportionate body parts, indicated at one point when Nick observes her body growing bigger and the room smaller while her character changes from natural vitality to objectionable “hauteur.” This apparently stems from her false belief in her importance to Tom, and her perception that his interest in her warrants her acting like an upper class snob. Nick scrutinizes her “laughter, her gestures, her assertions [that] became more violently affected moment by

moment, and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her, until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air” (20). Myrtle’s portrayal here may be likened to any number of Picasso’s female paintings. We might say that Myrtle’s “extreme angularity” in form and “savage brutality” in the distortion of her figure, using Anthony Blunt’s terminology, are reminiscent of the new style which Picasso conceived and executed in the last months of 1906 and 1907, a style that would culminate in the revolution of Cubism (Blunt 95).

Much of the plot and the satire in Fitzgerald’s book is anti-materialist social criticism, but Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* seems not to fit Upton Sinclair’s 1925 complaint in *Mammonart* that the modern artist succeeds only “through the service and glorification of the ruling classes; entertaining them, making them pleasant to themselves, and teaching their subjects and slaves to stand in awe of them” (7). Though he was Fitzgerald’s older contemporary, the reformer Sinclair did not anticipate the truly *new* literature of the modernists, but he did anticipate the rich like Tom and Daisy, who smash things up and move on. Never truly a best seller or a winner of the Pulitzer Prize that another contemporary, Sinclair Lewis, turned down in 1925, Fitzgerald was as much a social critic as was the author of *Mammonart*. Sinclair and Fitzgerald both were highly critical of the rich and powerful and both have been classified as Naturalists by more than one commentator [George J. Becker, Malcolm Bradbury, Henry Claridge, Lilian R. Furst, and Peter N. Shrine] (Applegate xxii). The Naturalistic and Symbolistic Period in American Literature is generally put between 1900 and 1930 and “is sharply divided by the First World War, the part before the war being dominated

by Naturalism, and the part after by a growing international awareness, a sensitivity to European literary models, and a steadily developing symbolism in literature” (Harmon 330). Upton Sinclair was not among the Lost Generation, but was as much “disillusioned with American idealism and crassness” (Harmon 331) as Fitzgerald and the others. Harmon summarizes the expatriate generation briefly:

One group, largely from the East, went back to Europe and there published little magazines, waited on Gertrude Stein, took part in Dadaism, and formulated a polished and symbolistic style—among them were F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway . . . E. E. Cummings . . . and Sherwood Anderson; another group, largely from the Middle West came east and in Cambridge, New Haven, and Greenwich Village produced satire aimed at the standardized mediocrity of the American village—among them was . . . Sinclair Lewis; and another group, largely Southern, repudiated the meaningless mechanism of capitalistic America by looking backward to a past that had tradition and order—these were the poets and critics who published *The Fugitive* in Nashville and were Agrarians, and another group, who contributed to such magazines as the *Double Dealer* in New Orleans, including William Faulkner, was responsible for the modern Southern novel and much of the New Criticism. (331)

A more popular writer than either Faulkner or Fitzgerald, Willa Cather, at the age of fifty-two, also attacked the crassness of American materialism in 1925, but in a way as oblique as Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby*. Cather’s *The Professor’s House* is

the story of Godfrey St. Peter, a middle-aged history teacher at Hamilton College, with a wife (Lillian), two daughters (Rosamond and Kathleen), and two sons-in-law (Louie Marcellus, Rosamond's husband, and Scott McGregor, Kathleen's husband). What has Godfrey St. Peter done? Godfrey, as lecturer of history at Hamilton College (perhaps Cather's University of Nebraska), has taught an independent genius, Tom Outland, who discovers Cliff City, a great ancient Native American site. Godfrey also wins the Oxford Prize for History, five thousand pounds, for his scholarly work on *Spanish Adventurers in North America* (Cather 26). Godfrey's former student Outland has died fighting with the foreign legion in the great war. Ironically, this much younger man is a kind of symbolic figure like Gatsby himself whose mentor Cody bears the surname of Buffalo Bill, a reminder also of one of the symbolic figures William Carlos Williams writes about (*In the American Grain*), such as Daniel Boone (Williams 130).

Akin to many of Cather's other novels for its regional setting, *The Professor's House* is set in a Midwestern university town near Lake Michigan. Like Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, *The Professor's House* takes place a few years after World War I, and both novels feature male protagonists who are writers. Although Bruce Dudley in *Dark Laughter* is amenable to change, Godfrey St. Peter is not. Quite the contrary, *The Professor's House* focuses on St. Peter's inability to accept change in his reluctance to leave his old house for the new house he has had built with his prize money from *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, which he worked on for fifteen years in the old house on "the third floor . . . under the slope of the mansard roof" (16) as his center of operations: "There had been delightful excursions . . .

[b]ut the notes and the records and the ideas always came back to this room. It was here they were digested and sorted, and woven into their proper place in his history” (26). The new house represents the American Dream, but not St. Peter’s dream. Rather, it represents privilege and style for his family, just as Gatsby’s mansion in East Egg does for the Midwesterner Gatsby. Godfrey and Gatsby do, however, share a common characteristic in that both of them live in the past—Godfrey reminiscing about the adventurous life he might have had, but “because he was very much in love and must marry at once, out of the several positions offered him he took the one at Hamilton, not because it was the best, but because it seemed to him that any place near the lake was a place where one could live” (31). Gatsby, on the other hand, does not get to marry his young sweetheart, which causes him to live also in the past in the hopes that he will win her back. While Gatsby has enjoyed many exploits unencumbered by family duties and has the opportunity to look at the past in a more detached manner, Godfrey lives vicariously at times through remembering the adventures of his unusual student Tom Outland, an explorer and inventor, or blaming his marriage for tying him down.

There is more to compare in these two American males both “out” of love by different means, the self-begat Gatsby and the “God free” St. Peter up in his outdated attic in a house his wife and children have abandoned. Like St. Peter, Gatsby is a dissatisfied man, despite his success. The man with whom Gatsby, or James Gatz, failed to complete an American Odyssey, Dan Cody, brings to mind both Daniel Boone and Buffalo Bill, the real and the self-manufactured frontiersmen. St. Peter has Tom Outland, who discovered and “lost” the “Blue

Mesa”—a blues era symbolization of Mesa Verde—before he enrolls in St. Peter’s college (named for the arch Federalist Alexander Hamilton) and invents an oddly symbolic machine suggestive of godlessness and the void, a vacuum pump that will make one of St. Peter’s daughters very rich. *The Great Gatsby* and *The Professor’s House* have many affinities—St. Peter’s daughters might be compared to Daisy Fay Buchanan and Jordan Baker, and Marcellus, the husband of one, has affinities with Tom Buchanan and Meyer Wolfsheim, *Gatsby’s* mentor. Tom Outland, a patriot, dies in World War I, having willed his yet unperfected vacuum pump to his fiancé, St. Peter’s daughter, who will marry the shrewd Marcellus.

While St. Peter’s wife Lillian looks forward to the new house purchased with St. Peter’s literary prize of five thousand pounds, St. Peter relapses into a dread of change. Although some men of that period would look outside the bonds of marriage for change, St. Peter shrinks within himself. The attic of the old house symbolizes the restraint he feels in making any changes in his life. Before his marriage, St. Peter had visions of adventure, but the exigencies of marriage restrained him from physical adventure, a loss he sublimated in his historical research and writing. Now he has reached the point that he is unable to face the unknown; he must cling to the familiar. Life is much too strange for him now, and his family has become alien to him as well.

St. Peter’s protégé Outland becomes an everlasting influence on St. Peter and his family. While Outland remains a symbol of adventure to St. Peter, Outland’s primary value for the family is what happens when the design of “the Outland vacuum” is left to St. Peter’s daughter Rosamond, his fiancée, when Outland is

killed in the war. Rosamond later marries Louie Marcellus, who markets the invention and makes a fortune. Rosamond and Louie grow rich from Outland's invention and build a grand house. St. Peter, however, is interested only in the adventures Outland engaged in before arriving in Hamilton. Had Outland returned from the war and married Rosamond, no doubt St. Peter and Outland could have maintained their intellectual relationship for the rest of their contented lives, even if the invention was marketed. When Outland is killed, it is as though St. Peter has lost a son, a fellow traveler, an intellectual companion, and a dream.

St. Peter himself nearly dies when he falls asleep in his study and a storm blows out a gas stove, symbolically a near-suicide by the man who refuses to leave the old house (276). Scholar Frank Edler points out: "With this near-death experience, St. Peter recognizes that life ultimately is subject to the finitude of nature and its temporality" (22). In his solitary retreat from the outside world, St. Peter reexamines Tom Outland's influence, but it is clear that Tom's adventures in the southwest remain the magnificent attraction St. Peter has for the young man.

Fitzgerald held Cather in high esteem and "had consciously striven to emulate [her] literary technique [as manifested in previous novels] in *The Great Gatsby*; but, more important, she had exerted a greater influence upon him than even he seems to have realized, in matters of incident and story as well as style and technique" (Quirk 176). Tom Quirk continues,

Although *My Antonia* and *A Lost Lady* are the only Cather novels Fitzgerald mentions in his letters, he showed a special respect for one of her short stories, 'Paul's Case.' This story is suggestive because of

certain similarities it has to *Gatsby* and its thematic similarity to one of Fitzgerald's own stories, 'Absolution,' which had been originally intended as a prologue to *The Great Gatsby* and which would fill in details about Gatsby's early life. (179)

In summary, affinities between *The Professor's House* and *The Great Gatsby* exist in that both feature male protagonists who live in the past, share a love of the water, prefer solitude, and are heavily influenced by male associates.

Cognate to *The Great Gatsby* in another way, Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* was first published in September 1925 when Anderson was forty-nine. Of the seven novels published in his lifetime, *Dark Laughter* is the only one that became a best seller. Anderson is best known in the annals of literature for his modernist story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio*, published in 1919. The principal character in *Dark Laughter* is Bruce Dudley, formerly known as John Stockton, a Chicago newspaper reporter who suddenly abandons his profession and his wife and heads down the Mississippi River stopping in a small town to work in a factory. Bernice, the abandoned wife, is also a reporter and writes magazine stories on the side; her professional life somewhat of a phenomenon in the 1920's. But Bernice's writing, according to her husband, is just as superficial as she, and so are her literary friends. Bernice's lack of talent and her boisterous friends gall her husband, who is more interested in writing something meaningful than in writing something just to get it published. The reader never learns what section of the country Bernice comes from, but she represents a society gone amok, a society that has lost its sense of values, one that has strayed from the grassroots values of the river town in Illinois

where John Stockton originates. Her values oppose those of her husband, and although she writes shallow pieces for the newspaper and magazines, she feels superior to Stockton and thinks he is dull. She is probably carrying on affairs with other men. What particularly annoys Bernice is that John smiles a lot, and John imagines that Bernice will always remember him as laughing at her (31), foreshadowing the theme of the novel, “dark laughter.”

Anderson divides the novel into two segments, represented by the two names of the protagonist—John Stockton and, when he flees Chicago, his assumed name Bruce Dudley, a parallel to Gatsby’s similar act on Cody’s yacht, going from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby. Although these protagonists’ travels reflect perhaps a different kind of transformation, some elements of the two books have a basis for discussion. As Bruce Dudley, Anderson’s character is no longer a journalist but a drifter and ordinary working man. Unlike Gatsby, Dudley prefers that no one attach any importance to him and intends to survive with menial jobs. As in Chicago, however, Dudley seems at a loss, floundering in a sea of doubt, a man with a lost identity, so we then see a reversal of identities between Dudley and Gatsby.

Fred Grey, for whom Bruce works in a river town, supposedly has accomplished the American dream—a successful business, a lovely home and wife, all in a small town, to which Dudley relocates in search of new values. Instead of incorporating the “values” reflected in the life of Fred Grey, however, Dudley finds that the style of living that is supposed to represent the American dream is no better than the bourgeois life he hated in Chicago. Anderson portrays Fred’s life as pretense, just as Bernice’s life is pretense. So what good does it do to run from one

form of pretense to another? Fred and Bernice both apparently represent the false values characteristic of the 1920s, like Tom and Daisy or the people who come to Gatsby's parties. Bernice and Aline Grey, Fred's wife, can be compared to the women in Gatsby—Jordan, Daisy, and Myrtle—in that they all represent in one way or another the meaninglessness and the promiscuity that has crept into the 1920s. Bernice runs with a crowd of gay men, but may be having an affair. Aline has an affair with John Stockton also known as Bruce Dudley.

Aline, herself a rebel against convention, apparently represents the new values for which Bruce searches, although this is difficult to fathom. Perhaps she would not have had time for an affair with Bruce had she had children. Fred is portrayed as impotent, sterile, and just too busy with his business for sex; thus Fred represents the sterility engendered by the all-consuming materialism of the times. Bruce immediately impregnates Aline.

The new values sought by Bruce Dudley seem to be epitomized in the character of Sponge Martin, Bruce's fellow worker at Fred Grey's factory. Sponge and his wife are admired by Bruce for their sexual relationship and relaxed lifestyle. Anderson does not state outright that John Stockton and Bernice had no longer enjoyed sex, but Anderson implies as much because they no longer share the same bedroom. As Bruce Dudley, in a provincial town, however, he becomes attracted to Aline, and he spends much spare time with Sponge and wife, whose claim to Bruce's affection is that they live very simply and have no great ambition.

Sex is an underlying theme throughout the work. Bruce refers to "a new book by the Irishman Joyce, 'Ulysses,'" and he thinks of Bloom's wife "in her

bedroom at home. The thoughts of the woman—her night of animalism—all set down—minutely” (73). These thoughts remind him of Sponge and his wife “in their hour of pleasure in each other” (14), which Bruce ponders several times throughout the book. He is evidently fascinated by the sex habits of this older couple.

The title *Dark Laughter* may be attributed to the ridicule the Greys’ maids quietly exhibit toward their white employers, but Bruce’s “detached, half-malicious smile,” which he “used to wear sometimes in Bernice’s presence,” also seems a bit dark because Bruce smiles purposely in a way that “always drove her half mad” (77). Stockton was intent upon ridiculing his wife, but in *Old Harbor* the black maids laugh behind Bruce and Aline’s backs also. They are never aware that the maids watch their illicit affair: “You can’t ever tell what a negro woman thinks or feels. They are like children looking at you with their strangely soft innocent eyes. White eyes, white teeth in a brown face—laughter. It is a laughter that does not hurt too much” (Anderson 165), so the maids are not purposely offending Bruce and Aline. Thus the theme of “dark laughter,” which runs throughout the story, has decided sexual overtones. The dark ridicule begins with a husband irritating his wife, followed by maids making fun of their betters, and ending with the maids watching the breakdown of a deserted husband. The maids think the secretive ways of Aline and Bruce are funny: “In the kitchen of the house the two negro women looked at each other and laughed. When a negro woman wants to go live with another man she does” (Anderson 179).

The crux of the Anderson novel is that two bored people become infatuated with each other. Though Anderson wrote this book in 1924, several years after

World War I had ended, he set some of the background in *Dark Laughter* around the war. We learn that Aline meets “her husband Fred at Rose Frank’s apartment in Paris, connecting the name *Rose* with Gertrude Stein’s “a rose is a rose is a rose.” That was during the summer “after the so-called World War came to an end” (85). Aline had lost not only her brother George but, like Godfrey St. Peter’s daughter, also her fiancé in the war. In addition, her encounter with the lesbian Esther Walker scared her and “had made Aline the more ready to marry Fred Grey” (94) when she met him at Rose Frank’s apartment. It did not hurt in the least that Fred was “an only son with a rich father, then a soldier, a rich man rather grandly enlisting as a common private—to help win a war—then in an American training camp—later in France” (89), all interesting connections to *Gatsby*. The title words “dark laughter” come up again with respect to the war: “The war for righteousness—to make the world Free. The young men sick, sick, and sick of it. Laughing, though—dark laughter” (121).

Fitzgerald’s novel comments on both the war and the working man too, but the world of his novel is so corrupted—a machine-age wasteland—that *Gatsby*’s machine gun battalion and the shell-shocked George Wilson’s auto shop are more negative symbols than is Fred Grey’s factory.

These 1925 novels, with so many analogous elements, may truly reflect the “American grain” evoked by William Carlos Williams, the pediatrician and writer, regarded as one of the most important and original American poets of the twentieth century. This reputation was well established before publication of the collection of essays *In the American Grain* in 1925 when he was forty-two. Educated in Geneva,

Switzerland; the University of Pennsylvania; and the University of Leipzig, Austria, Williams was led to reflect upon the uniqueness of American life and its literary uses and implications. In the foreword to *In the American Grain*, he writes: “In these studies I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character [of America] lies hid.” In this recovery of the American “grain,” he investigated those who first explored America--Red Eric, Christopher Columbus, Cortez, Juan Ponce de Leon, De Soto, Sir Walter Raleigh, Samuel de Champlain, and some of those who, in effect, disputed its character: Thomas Morton, Cotton Mather, Père Sebastian Rasles, Daniel Boone, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, Jacataqua, Aaron Burr, Edgar Allan Poe, and Abraham Lincoln.

The essays that explore the conflicting American views of these historical figures are meant to represent Williams’s dispute of professional historians’ formulation of false versions of American place and American names and his satirical views of their profession. “History, history!” says Williams (Gregory Introduction ix), and then with brilliant asperity continues. “We fools, what do we know or care?” (Introduction ix). Horace Gregory says in his introduction to *In the American Grain* that “Of course we have always known that history, like poetry, is an ancient trap laid for the credulous and literal-minded” (x). In his historical studies about the founding of America, Williams’s vivid poetic imagination is continuously in play. Gregory writes: “It is in this relationship between what is sometimes called *fabulae* and what is sometimes called fact that the ‘historical imagination’ plays its part” (Introduction xi). Williams takes the so-called facts and

incorporates dramatic “fabulae” that make the essays almost like folk tales, while they simultaneously sharpen the reader’s knowledge of historical events. Gregory writes:

One might almost say that the active fabulae of a human culture are the means through which it lives and grows. They enter deeply into the very idiom of national speech; their meanings shift as the spoken language changes. On this continent, they are “in the American grain” and it is humanly impossible to adopt an impartial or what was once called a scientific attitude toward them. (Introduction xi-xii)

Let us think, then, of *Gatsby*, as Williams proposes that American values are changing, and connect these value changes to World War I. Dalton and MaryJean Gross point out that “the lives of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, like the scandals of the 1920s, show how greatly values had changed since before World War I. Especially notable were changes in the social and economic roles women played and were expected to play” (xiii). The Grosses continue.

Fitzgerald’s world view in *The Great Gatsby* is, in part at least, of a piece with the spirit of the United States in the 1920s—a strange mixture of cynicism and outraged idealism, of despair and hysterical vitality. The primary reason was that the United States had just emerged from World War I, a war that had come as a surprise to most people. For the preceding two generations there had been a feeling that civilization was at last outgrowing war. Soon there would be no more wars. At the same time poets and philosophers

yearned for the nobility and self-sacrifice that they believed war produced. (6)

With similar feelings, Williams goes all the way back to the beginning in citing the multitude of changes that take place in the discovery of America and in the establishing of its values. Gregory offers this further insight:

The point is that Dr. Williams' book exerted an influence that rose from the subsoil of the time in which it was written, and like all work of highly original temper and spirit and clarity it survives the moment of its conception. In this respect the book has something of the same force to generate the work of others, the same brilliance, the same power to shed light in darkened places that we have learned to respect in Miss Marianne Moore's poetry and in Miss Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*.

Another association that *In the American Grain* brings forcefully to mind is the period of critical impressionism in America, that hour in the 1920's when Mr. Sherwood Anderson published his note books and D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* were read. (Introduction xiii-xiv)

Gregory's remarks fail to pay adequate homage to the ways in which Williams's text is a clear part of the spirit of 1925, reflected in *The Great Gatsby* and other works of that year. Robert Coles refers to *In the American Grain* as a "minor but unique masterpiece" (xiv).

Williams is taking on American icons much as Fitzgerald does [the mechanic George Wilson, who murders Gatsby, carries the names of the two Anglophone leaders of the Western allies, King George and Woodrow Wilson]. Unless the reader knows in advance that Williams's chapters are essays, one may consider the book a group of short stories. Indeed they are more like stories than essays, and there is more verbal continuity in them than in Hemingway's *In Our Time*. Williams starts by impersonating a "fictional" version of Eric the Red, the Northman who explored the edge of North America: "I cannot get my hands on it: I, murderer, outlaw, outcast even from Iceland. Because their way is the just way and my way—the way of the kings and my father—crosses them: weaklings holding together to appear strong. But I am alone, though in Greenland" (1).

Gatsby, too is alone, though in New York, having completed his odyssey with Dan Cody and in the war. Not a murderer like Eric the Red, Gatsby does associate with crooks and bootleggers, many of whom Fitzgerald patterned after known gangsters. Arnold Rothstein, for example, "served as the inspiration for Meyer Wolfsheim" (Sifakis 286). Rothstein is "[r]emembered as a gambler and fixer in baseball's Black Sox scandal of 1919 . . . and was actually the bankroller and spiritual father of American organized crime" (Sifakis 286).

Possibly both Fitzgerald and Williams, among others, also react to Henry Adams's *History of the United States* and his *The Education of Henry Adams* (privately printed in 1907 and commercially printed in 1918), an ironic memoir about the failure of that education to fit a "man" for the twentieth century, possibly

an influence on Hemingway's Nick Adams and through him on Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway, who is telling this story as if it represents his education.

Williams's essays in *In the American Grain* are based in reality, and though they are certainly satirical, they also impress the reader in their fantastical way of presenting America's heretofore revered historical giants. After reading Williams's version of history, the reader may well cast a different eye on Eric the Red, Columbus, and scores of others, just as the assumed name of James Gatz reflects the monopolist Jay Gould or the financier J. P. Morgan, and his enterprises are the wholly illegal equivalents of many things done by the Robber Barons. Yet *Gatsby* is also a story of the American dream.

An even more fantastic fable than *Gatsby's* is Elinor Wylie's *The Venetian Glass Nephew*. Like William Carlos Williams, Elinor Wylie is better known for poetry than for prose, but in 1925, at the age of forty, she published her only novel. This unusual book is a fairytale presenting the protagonist Virginio as a male character made of glass. Wylie writes:

At this very moment, by one of those pleasing coincidences more common in romantic fiction than among the ineptitudes of mortal life, the Cardinal Peter Innocent Bon, Count Carlo Gozzi, and the Chevalier de Langeist sat together within a turret chamber of the haunted palace of Saint Canziano; upon the countenance of each gentleman there brooded an expression of thoughtful melancholy.

(86)

They are gathered together, as Gozzi says, “to discuss the future of two ingenuous young creatures in whom I for my part, take the warmest and most fatherly interest” (90). Gozzi later says, “Oh, it will be an extremely charming little romance, a fairy-tale come true, not desiccated and compressed within the pages of a book, but alive and kicking its scarlet heels, as the ancient Bergamesque proverb puts it” (97).

Wylie’s Italian tale is divided into three sections named after the principal characters--“Peter Innocent,” “Virginio,” and “Rosalba,”—each section comprised of eight or nine chapters. She fills her novel with names drawn directly from the pages of Italian history. “Peter Innocent” comes from the name of thirteen popes called Pope Innocent, but specifically refers to Innocent XIII. Virginio, Innocent’s glass nephew, is the middle name of the famous Italian astronomer Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli (1835-1910). Rosalba is the name of Rosalba Carriera, the Italian Rococo Era painter (1675-1757).

In 1782, at the age of eighty-one, Cardinal Peter Innocent Bon returns to the “Republic of Venice” (9) after thirty years. In poetic fashion, Wylie likens the cardinal’s heart to a balloon: “His heart was lighter than a flower; indeed, it danced so high [One of Fitzgerald’s rejected titles for *Gatsby* was “high-bouncing lover.”] and airily, and teased the tenuous cord of his mortality with such persistent malice, that he conceived of it as a toy balloon, an azure plaything in a pantomime, caught by a thread of gold to stable earth, and germane to the sky” (9). Breezingly beginning her tale, Wylie sets the tone of simple joy in living, an atmosphere sought for in the tale told by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*, but destroyed by the

viciousness of the Buchanans and the disillusionment of the post World War I world. Scholars such as Patricia Bizzell, Neila Seshachari, Robert Ian Scott, Malcolm Bradbury, Theodore L. Gross, and John Kuehl refer to *Gatsby* as either a tale or a kind of fairytale, and a few comparisons and contrasts between *Nephew* and *Gatsby* seem appropriate. *Nephew* presents the light-hearted, spiritual nature of the elderly cardinal who is delighted to be home, and *Gatsby* evokes the “colored lights, gay music, and magically abundant food and drink, occasional trivialities [that] merely serve to create an air of fragility appropriate to a magical creation. *Gatsby*, the magician, is appropriately mysterious, but the rumors about his business exploits all contain an element of dangerous illegality or outright violence” (Bizzell 116).

Wylie dispels the notion that her novel will be about the moral and ethical example of a fatherly priest who has lived his life for the Lord. Innocent’s human nature overtakes his ecclesiastical, replacing it with one of the most characteristically human frailties since Cain and Abel—jealousy. Proverbs 27:4 questions humanity’s ability to conquer jealousy: “Fury is cruel, and anger is a flood, but who can withstand jealousy?” Innocent’s jealousy germinates within his humble breast when he sees the pope’s nephew in chapter two— “Consider the Lilies”: “The pope’s nephew, the blond and arrogant Braschi Onesti, grandee of Spain and prince of the Holy Empire, stared somewhat haughtily upon these self-possessed patricians; he wore a coat of carnation velvet, and the little finger of his left hand was all but hidden by an emerald of fabulous value” (18-19). While Innocent sets out to attain a nephew like Braschi Onesti, *Gatsby*, says Seshachari,

who likens *Gatsby* to a “Celtic fairy tale,” searches for “his lost wife (or lost love) because he has been eternally wedded to Daisy in mystical rites and comes to claim what he believes to be, not somebody else’s, but his own” (100). *Nephew* and *Gatsby* are alike in that both portray Celtic characteristics, include human conquests, and effect bizarre consequences.

In Chapter V, “Piavola de Franza,” Innocent asks M. de Chastelneuf, Chevalier de Langeist, and Alvisè Luna, the glass-blower of Murano: “Do you think, by any fortunate chance, that you could make me a nephew?” (41). Innocent’s determination to have a nephew causes him to condone magic, and the title of Chapter VI is “Aveeva Vadelilith,” a Latin evocation [loosely translated as Ave Evah = Hail Eve; Vade Lilith = Go Lilith] used by magicians, and in this case words used by one magician as the other “withdrew into the shadows, where he waved slowly an enormous fan of swan’s feathers” (52). Now Innocent has committed not only the sin of jealousy, but has engaged the unholy services of magicians. One of the major contrasts between Innocent and *Gatsby* appears to be that one is in a religious order and the other is not. Bradbury calls *Gatsby* “a coarse Platonist, devoted to the pursuit of a ‘vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty,’ but his dream sustains its force, partly because the book allows him to invest naturalist fact with his personal intention, and recognizes the symbolist necessity, partly because it is mediated through a narrator, Nick Carraway, who consciously stills the voice of judgment” (52).

The title of Chapter VII, “Conjuration of the Four,” refers to the natural elements of air, water, fire, and earth, as the magician Chastelneuf produces a boy

for Innocent, who gazes at his artificial nephew “with infinite love and wonder in his eyes” (58). Gatsby, standing on the shore and staring at Daisy’s house, is somewhat similar. Theodore L. Gross points out that “Fitzgerald could not describe Gatsby’s affair with Daisy, for the mythical element in Gatsby’s character would be lost; Gatsby would seem too human and the implications of his tragedy would appear too ordinary. By forcing us to consider Gatsby in terms of his past, Fitzgerald established the tragic tone of his tale” (29). A tone in some contrast to that in *Nephew* is one of humorous romance. In Book Two, for instance, Virginio “drew the curious ring which the Chevrier de Langeist had given him,” and gives it to his bride-to-be Rosalba “upon the fortunate occasion of [her] natal day” (75). Rosalba recognizes the writing on the gold ring as English: ‘It says—but this is extraordinary—it says, “Fear God and love me.”’ Since Rosalba herself is a poet, she is able to recognize the sentiment involved in the words, but Virginio does “not have the slightest conception of the meaning of” the term *deist* (76). Virginio has no idea what Rosalba means to say, yet the words bind Rosalba to Virginio in a very romantic, albeit spiritual, way. Similarly, Gatsby, both a hero and a romantic, feels he will always be united with Daisy, but he is “not a hero simply in the conventional sense of being the main character in the novel. Fitzgerald thought of him as a hero in the older sense of demigods and knights of myth, romance, and fairy tale” (Kuehl 15), much as Virginio turns out to be the hero in *Nephew*. Gatsby and Virginio both “inspire romantic speculation in the reader” as they do among the people who surround them (Kuehl). Unlike *The Great Gatsby*, however, *The Venetian Glass* *Nephew* ends quite happily: “At any moment they may awake; Virginio will put on

his pearl-coloured greatcoat and wrap an ermine tippet about Rosalba's throat, and the season being winter and very clear and cold, they will hurry to a fashionable pastry cook's to eat whipped cream and wafers" (182).

The decadent idleness of Wylie's eighteenth-century Venice is reflected in the hazy corrupt world of New York which Nick Carraway visits with Buchanan, and this is the subject of John Dos Passos's first major work, the 1925 novel *Manhattan Transfer*, composed of an episodic string of vignettes, integrated newspaper quotes, and the ever-looming image of World War I that hangs in the background at a bar frequented by the major characters: "At the bar under a picture of the Lusitania [a ship torpedoed by a German submarine on May 7, 1915] stood a dark man in a white coat distended by a deep gorilla chest," the man being the bartender Congo (223).

Even though *Manhattan Transfer* is a novel with no apparent plot, there are several threads and themes holding the segments of narrative together. Minor characters link the major characters in some manner, and a major theme—the sale or abuse of alcohol by some of the characters, including the bootlegger Congo, the drunkard Joe Harland, and the drunkard Stan Emery—runs throughout the novel. Other themes include (1) the sacrifices for career and social advancement experienced by Ellen Thatcher and George Baldwin; (2) unhappy marriages of Ellen Thatcher and John Oglethorpe, Gus and Nellie McNeil, Ellen Thatcher and Jimmy Herf, Cecily and George Baldwin; (3) promiscuity as illustrated by Ellen Thatcher and Stan Emery; (4) adultery portrayed in the lives of Ellen Thatcher, Nellie McNeil, and George Baldwin; and (5) suicide, which is committed by Stan

Emery (fire) and the drifter Bud Korpenning who jumps off the East River bridge. The most important theme, however, as this litany of misfortunes and mistakes suggests, is the inexorable decline of American lives in the wake of the war, thus revealing the novel's common bond with *The Great Gatsby*. Dos Passos's characters are people whose lives spin out of control as they try to cope with dark taboo topics—promiscuity, homosexuality, pregnancy, abortion, and syphilis—in a repressive materialistic and puritanical society, a story also told in Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*.

Manhattan Transfer was one of many writings that criticized the state of the nation in the 1920s, but rather than focus on a few particular characters in writing about the faults of that decade, Dos Passos threw his intellect around the problems themselves, so the reader never gets to know his characters well. James T. Farrell, perhaps failing to catch the symbolic import of the novel, wrote that Dos Passos showed an “apparent unwillingness to create fully rounded characters” (Carr 396). One might best compare them to the people who came to Gatsby's house that summer:

From East Egg, then, came the Chester Beckers and the Leeches, and a man named Bunsen, whom I [Nick] knew at Yale, and Doctor Webster Civet, who was drowned last summer up in Maine. And the Hornbeams and the Willie Voltaires, and a whole clan named Blackbuck, who always gathered in a corner and flipped up their noses like goats at whosoever came near. And the Ismays and the Chrysties (or rather Hubert Auerback and Mr. Chrystie's wife), and

Edgar Beaver, whose hair, they say, turned cotton-white one winter afternoon for no good reason at all. (40)

While it is true that Fitzgerald's readers become quite familiar with several of his well-rounded characters and have no trouble recalling their names even today, there is a long list of bit players. Dos Passos' characters in effect give life to the kinds of people who come to Gatsby's parties, minor players in the scheme of things, but *not* satirized as in *Gatsby*.

As ill-fated heroine, Ellen Thatcher may be the most tragic and sympathetic figure in *Manhattan Transfer*. She cements the episodic story, simply because of her recurring appearance. Like Gatsby, her centrality is not because of lending any strength or morality, for she never realizes a mature, happy life. Does she inherit her tendency toward disaster from her mother who falls into a depressive state and dies when Ellen is a child? Her father Ed Thatcher dedicates his life to raising Ellen, but evidently spoils her. And with no mother and her father away at work, she grows up without anyone to guide her many lonely hours, which results in juvenile, immature behavior in her adulthood. Her father provides for her the best he can, but they live poorly, and her transition into marriage with John Oglethorp furnishes little more in the way of material comfort, as depicted in their apartment: "Ellen had just hung a chintz curtain in the window to hide with its blotchy pattern of red and purple flowers the vista of desert backyards and brick flanks of downtown houses" (186). Nevertheless, like Theodore Dreiser's Carrie Meeber, Ellen acts her way to financial success, and for a time she enjoys a glamorous lifestyle: "Ellen sits in a gown of nilegreen silk in a springy armchair at the end of a

long room jingling with talk and twinkle of chandeliers and jewelry, dotted with the bright moving black of evening clothes and silveredged colors of women's dresses" (Dos Passos 182). Her progression of husbands and lovers results in her being labeled a promiscuous, adulterous woman. She is always a lost soul, and she eventually ends her short life.

Congo is one of the most financially successful characters in Dos Passos's novel, for like Gatsby after the war he takes up bootlegging within time of prohibition. His business naturally involves some violence, and in one episode he must engage the Coast Guardsmen who are trying to stop a shipment of illegal liquor, but otherwise like Gatsby he leads an illegally successful life. He is a colorful character, easy to remember, who connects most of the other characters in some way, like Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*. For example, Congo is the bartender in the restaurant where Gus McNiel stops George Baldwin from shooting Ellen Thatcher, and Jimmy Herf is there to send her home in a taxi.

The most apparently functional and successful people in the book are the minor characters Jeff and Emily Merivale, Jimmy Herf's uncle and aunt. They look down upon Jimmy's chosen profession of newspaper reporter, a parallel to John Stockton's dissatisfaction with his profession in Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, and hope that Jimmy will go into law or banking. They also look with scorn upon his friends in the theatre business, much as John Stockton looks down upon his wife Bernice's superficial artsy friends in Chicago. Simple people like Mr. and Mrs. Gatz, they disapprove of anything out of the ordinary, and we are also reminded of Jay Gatsby's problem of profession. Tom Buchanan heaps scorn on him, and even

Nick Carraway is appalled by some of his associates. John Dos Passos, however, implies many times that his sympathies lie outside the world of the Merivales. In one example, Jimmy silently refuses to work in his uncle's office: "Does that mean you'll go to work for a month this summer in my office? Get a taste of how it feels to make a living, like a man in a man's world, get an idea of how the business is run?" Jimmy nods his head. Uncle Jeff and his office can go plumb to hell" (119-20), Jimmy thinks to himself. Later, however, Jimmy tells another story in a conversation with Stan Emery, the only man Ellen really loves: "My mother's leftover money supported me until I was twentytwo and I still have a few hundreds stowed away for that famous rainy day, and my uncle, curse his soul, gets me new jobs when I get fired'" (176).

The promiscuity and adultery of Dos Passos's characters reflect in harsh and tragic ways the so-called sexual liberation of the Freud-inspired 1920s, so aptly portrayed by Fitzgerald in the grotesque affair of Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson, an affair that was blatantly carried on before Daisy, their friends, and Nick Carraway. Ketaki Kushari Dyson speaks of "Freud-inspired sexuality" as being at "the core of the modernist" period (198).

In 1925, at the age of twenty-eight, William Faulkner began publishing short vignettes initially in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* newspaper and later in *The Double Dealer*, the New Orleans literary magazine. Although Faulkner's vision turned to fiction, he published two poems in *The Double Dealer* during April and June 1925, "The Faun" and "The Lilacs," respectively. *The Double Dealer* also printed his April 1925 essay "Verse Old and Nascent: A Pilgrimage"—an "account

of the development of Faulkner's tastes in poetry and its indication of the influences which may have operated upon his own work" (Millgate 15).

Faulkner projected a little volume titled "Sinbad in New Orleans" that would have featured the sketches the same year as Hemingway's second, longer version of the collection titled *In Our Time* (1925), the first one being published in Paris as *in our time* (1924). Faulkner's pieces and Hemingway's *In Our Time* are both the equivalent of "fragmentary" novels consisting of "a series of successive sketches" (Lawrence 19), like Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, and both are based on actual experiences. Their characters and scenes, however, are vastly dissimilar. Faulkner focuses "on the gangsters, racetrack touts, poor blacks, and other social outcasts who inhabited the French Quarter" in New Orleans (Singal 60).

Hemingway writes about one "man's life," beginning

by one of the big lakes in America—probably Superior . . . when Nick is a boy. . . . Then come fragments of war—on the Italian front. Then a soldier back home . . . in the little town way west in Oklahoma. Then a young American and his wife in post-war Europe; a long sketch about an American jockey in Milan and Paris; then Nick is back again in the Lake Superior region . . . and tramping across the empty country. (Lawrence 19)

Faulkner's *New Orleans Sketches* and Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* share certain characteristics of style in their use of personal voice and poetic language. Thomas L. McHaney, in writing about "The Artist," suggests that at this early period in his life, Faulkner still identifies with the poet, not the fiction writer (78). In

corroboration, Lothar Hönninghausen writes that the portrait entitled “The Artist” in *New Orleans Sketches* is still dominated by the “traditional poetological images of ‘dream’ and ‘fire,’ suggesting the artist’s visionary power and his divine ‘afflatus’ (‘A dream and a fire which I cannot control’)” (93). “There emerges,” Hönninghausen continues, “in this early text, as background to ‘the joy to create,’ that specific Faulknerean fatalism . . . later popularized through the eschatological pathos surrounding creativity in the Nobel Prize speech” (93). Touching upon the fundamental principles of America’s background, Faulkner’s ideas concur with some of Upton Sinclair’s remarks in *Mammonart*: “*The artist is a social product, his psychology and that of his art works being determined by the economic forces prevailing in his time. And second: The established artist of any period is a man in sympathy with the ruling classes of that period, and voicing their interests and ideals*” (21). McHaney points out that

Faulkner or his personae lament, even in the New Orleans sketches, the desire for a handhold on the instruments of art: in “The Artist,” he writes, “where is that flesh, what hand holds that blood to shape this dream within me in marble or sound, on canvas or paper, and live?” In “Out of Nazareth,” in his own person he proclaims invidiously that his friend William Spratling’s “hand has been shaped to a brush as mine has (alas!) not.” (78)

Although Faulkner’s sketches are just “street scenes . . . almost without exception they dramatize the difficult old truths of the heart’s sharp conflict with itself: pride

and shame, jealousy and love, folly and courage, cruelty and sympathy, disillusion, despair and hope” (McHaney 76). Many “sharp conflicts” appear also in *Gatsby*.

Kenneth Tynan says, “In order to persuade us that Gatsby is a man of poetic sensibility, Fitzgerald takes the dangerous, nohands [sic] course of simply saying so, in language we cannot resist. There was ‘something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away’” (39). And, Tynan continues,

as the narrator Nick Carraway tells us, Gatsby “had an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person,” believing, Nick says in the great coda that rounds off the book, in “the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning.” (39)

Only one of Faulkner’s eleven short sketches originally published under the title “New Orleans” [*Double Dealer*, VII (January-February 1925)] has named characters—“Frankie and Johnny.” It tells of a “young tough who protects the girl, Frankie, from a drunken bum and then falls tenderly in love with her” (Kirk 298). Johnny says to Frankie:

“Listen, baby, before I seen you it was like I was one of them ferry boats yonder, crossing and crossing a dark river or something by myself; acrossing and acrossing and never getting nowheres and not knowing it and thinking I was all the time. . . . Listen, baby: before I

seen you I was just a young tough like what old Ryan, the cop says I was, not doing nothing and not worth nothing and not caring for nothing except old Johnny. . . . It was like when you are in a dark room or something, and all on a sudden somebody turns up the light, and that's all." (Faulkner 5-6)

A more refined version of Johnny appears in Fitzgerald's novel as Jay Gatsby. Geismar points out, "it is in th(e) shifting focus of Fitzgerald's values that James Gatz of North Dakota assumes his importance—this obscure western adolescent whose first glimpse of life came on the millionaire Cody's yacht, whose first glimpse of Daisy crystallized this childhood vision, and who, raising his empire of 'drug-stores,' transformed himself into the mysterious Jay Gatsby" (11). Bloom says that Daisy "is to Gatsby as his enchanted Dulcinea is to Don Quixote: a vision of the ideal" (2). Kuehl refers to Daisy as "'the king's daughter, the golden girl' who lives 'high in a white palace' . . . and Gatsby "[a]s a true knight . . . is faithful to his lady" (16). Faulkner's sketch, "Frankie and Johnny," says W. Kenneth Holditch, also "is based on the folk legend about awestruck lovers" (269). According to the musical version, however, Frankie "Pulled out a little '44. / A rooty toot toot, three times she shot / Right through that door. / Yes, she shot her man; / He was doing her wrong. . . . Frankie said to the warden, / 'What are they going to do?' / 'The warden, he said to Frankie, / 'It's the electric chair for you, / 'Cause you shot your man,' / 'Cause he done her wrong'" (Wolf). Ironically, Daisy's husband is doing her wrong, and the cuckolded husband of Tom's mistress shoots the innocent Gatsby.

“The Sailor” in *New Orleans Sketches* presents the happy-go-lucky life of a professional roamer, who occasionally yearns for what the land has to offer, but the sea constantly beckons. The importance of the sea and land in this story recalls the theme of sea and earth in Archibald MacLeish’s *The Pot of Earth*: “The tide came over the dunes, the tide came” (16) and “the earth stretched out upon those fields” (278). The sea signifies freedom and the land confinement in both Faulkner and MacLeish. Faulkner’s career revolved around what Donald M. Kartiganer calls “gesture, an action that signals intention, a purpose, but is never completed; or, in intellectual terms, gesture occurs when realization appears to be impossible at the very outset” (55). Faulkner’s sailor must travel the world, as Gatsby travels with Cody on the yacht, an

arrangement that lasted *five years*, during which time the boat went *three times* around the Continent. . . . In the mythological formula that outlines the basic life of the hero, the skiff or boat forms, as Joseph Campbell has noted, a very major symbol. With the aid of this, the hero is able to cross the turbulent waters (which is yet another symbol) that endangers his life. The boat or yacht is the symbol of the special talent or virtue that the hero possesses, by which he is ferried across the waters of the world. (Seshachari 96-97)

Both Faulkner’s sailor and Jay Gatsby, then, take on certain aspects of the mythological hero while each also represents certain aspects of the American dream. Numerous scholars have commented upon Gatsby’s dream. William Troy writes, in Gatsby is achieved a dissociation, by which Fitzgerald was able to

isolate one part of himself, the spectatorial or aesthetic, and also the more intelligent and responsible, in the person of the ordinary but quite sensible narrator, from another part of himself, the dream-ridden romantic adolescent from St. Paul and Princeton, in the person of the legendary Jay Gatsby. It is this which makes the latter one of the few truly mythological creations in our recent literature—for what is mythology but this same process of projected wish-fulfillment carried out on a large scale and by the whole consciousness of a race.

(10)

Fitzgerald, Cather, Anderson, Williams, Wylie, Dos Passos, and Faulkner all create characters by similar impressionist means that fit into Jesse Matz's "troubled theory of perceptual totality . . . important to the history of modernity, intervening (historically) between romantic unities and modernist fragmentation, and (conceptually) between utopianism and social critique" (2). Impressionism was not the lifelong style of all these authors, but in 1925 it was a style with a lot of adherents and many uses, a style relatively new in literature but one not as obscure as the experimentalist styles could sometimes be--wherein if a "truth doesn't seem to make sense to me, I can call it false" (Morris 167).

CHAPTER 3 – THE EXPERIMENTALISTS

The writers taken up in this chapter, all radical experimentalists, are perhaps less closely connected to *Gatsby* than the modernist impressionistic writers I have discussed in the previous chapter, but in the themes and in their use of mythology, symbolism, irony, and poetic language are still very relevant to Fitzgerald's novel. Two of this group, Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot, were already famous in 1925 when Stein published *The Making of Americans* and Eliot published "The Hollow Men." John Erskine, far less well known now, had published eight volumes of poetry and essays before writing *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1925). Laura Riding's poetry first appeared in *The Fugitive* in 1924, the tiny literary magazine out of Nashville, and it was in this little magazine that "Summary for Alastor" appeared in 1925. E. E. Cummings had published in *Eight Harvard Poets* (1917) and issued his post-war novel *The Enormous Room* (1922) before privately printing his first small volume cryptically titled *&* (1925). Widely known in America and England as an American poet, musician, and critic, Ezra Pound published at least twenty-three poems, essays, and translations before *A Draft of XVI Cantos* appeared in 1925. These 1925 literary works share a common element: each text is the product of a modernist experimentalist. Cummings experimented with typographical play, slang, no titles; Eliot with themes and fragmented expression related to his enormously influential *The Waste Land* of 1922; Riding with themes of meaninglessness, intellectualism, and feminism; Pound with themes of economics, governance, culture, and multicultural references; Erskine with historical or legendary characters, social ideas, and "themes of intelligence, ideal

beauty, individual liberty” (Ohles 438); Stein with Cubism, which reached literary form through incessant repetition and conspicuous erudition.

Although much of Gertrude Stein’s writing was not commercially successful, her Paris salon, her public image, and her informal gallery of paintings made her writing variously influential in her time. Stein and the other Experimentalists seem, perhaps consciously, to turn their backs on America and on any American tradition. Though Stein’s dislocations and language experiments may have grown out of William James’s Psychology lab at Harvard, they are the antithesis of the elder James’s clarity of thought and expression. Her refusal to make “common sense” or tell a coherent story put her out of the American market, making one wonder, in fact, why she appealed so much to Sherwood Anderson, unless it was because he was a late arrival in early modernism, a late bloomer in fact, and felt a bit outside the pack, welcoming her interest in him from her Paris gallery of the most modernist art. Thus, for him and others, she was a quick ticket to the *Avante Garde*.

In commenting about Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, Donald Sutherland points out that “the project of describing all possible kinds of people ‘as they are to themselves inside them’ was all but completely done, in 1908” (67). Kenneth Frieling says that the work was “intermittently written and extensively revised between 1903 and 1911 (158). Steven Meyer notes that after Stein finished the manuscript in October 1911, she thenceforward “doggedly pursued publishers with the help of friends on both sides of the Atlantic, but with no success. . . . Finally, in 1925 the American expatriate Robert McAlmon agreed to publish an edition of 500 copies” (Meyer xxxvi).

Stein develops intense arguments in *The Making of Americans* such as the description of the characteristics of the “dependent independent” protagonist. She applies these terms either together or singly at different times in different ways to the same character, and were it not for her incessant repetition, the reader could never tell the “dependent” from the “independent” nor the “dependent independent” from the “independent dependent.” Another phrase, “important feeling,” is applied to certain characters who are able to experience the “feeling of importance” while others never do. In many instances, when the character is unable to experience this “important feeling,” other characters look upon that person as unimportant.

Although Jeanne Larsen comments with respect to the poetry of Stein, Mina Loy, and Laura Riding that they all three depend upon “difficult experimental language, conspicuous erudition, and profound displays of intellectual force” (204), the same assessment may be applied to Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, which she published at the age of fifty-one. Larsen also comments that Stein and Riding “explored epistemological, metaphysical, and aesthetic issues, rejecting traditional concepts of femininity through a rigorous and unsentimental analysis of female experience and consciousness in patriarchal culture . . . through brilliant complexities of thought and linguistic innovation. Their avant-garde qualities deprived [them] of a broad popular audience, but at least they could not be belittled in terms suggesting a shallow girlishness” (205).

E. E. Cummings, a literary admirer of Stein, also became recognized for his experimental poetry. Richard S. Kennedy notes that “[a]lthough some of the

unusual sonnets Cummings was writing . . . are marked by ugliness and squalor, others are really in the anti-Petrarchian tradition of Shakespeare's 'dark lady' sonnets, providing intellectual pleasure through their complex ironies. One of these, published in *&*, is full of tough-minded assertions that run counter to the convention of the poet's extravagant praise of his mistress" (*Dreams* 169). Kennedy speaks of poem number 66, the first line of which begins, "my girl's tall with hard long eyes." In "The Meaning of a Literary Idea" (1950), Lionel Trilling points out that the best of our poets are, as good poets usually are, scholars of their tradition. There is present to their minds the degree of intellectual power which poetry is traditionally expected to exert. Questions of form and questions of language seem of themselves to demand, or to create, an adequate subject matter; and a highly developed aesthetic implies a matter strong enough to support its energy. We have not a few poets who are subjects and not objects, who are active and not passive. One does not finish quickly, if at all, with the best work of, say, Cummings, Stevens, and Marianne Moore. This work is not exempt from our judgment, even from adverse judgment, but it is able to stay with a mature reader as a continuing element of his spiritual life. Of how many writers of prose fiction can we say anything like the same thing? (616)

Critics often write about Stein's technique with respect to its affinities with Anderson and Hemingway. It is well to note that "[f]rom Gertrude Stein, Hemingway is supposed to have learned his simplified syntax, the clauses connected

by ‘and’ rather than subordinated in the traditional manner; she is also supposed to have taught him the trick of repetition of word and perhaps of idea” (McCormick 48). Stein bemoans a novel Hemingway had begun as having “a great deal of description and not particularly good description,” this ironic criticism rendered during her work on *The Making of Americans*. She also accuses Hemingway of looking “like a modern” but smelling “of the museums” (Stein 25-33). Moreover, we know firsthand from Sherwood Anderson’s *A Story Teller’s Story* that he was influenced by Gertrude Stein seven years before he met her because he picked up her book *Tender Buttons* in 1914: “Here were words laid before me as the painter had laid the color pans on the table in my presence. . . . The result was I thought a new familiarity with the words of my own vocabulary. I became a little conscious where before I had been unconscious. Perhaps it was then I really fell in love with words, wanted to give each word I used every chance to show itself at its best” (362). Cummings also “owned a rare copy of Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, which delighted and bewildered” him (Kennedy 78-79).

In noticing key phrases on each page of *The Making of Americans*, the reader grasps the argumentative threads holding the plotless work together. True, several characters reappear throughout the novel—the Dehnings, the Herslands, the Hissings, the Shillings, Phillip Redfern—but they are of secondary importance, because Stein’s concentration concerns her argumentative ideas, not the families themselves. Stein, therefore, confines herself predominantly to the intellectual, unlike Cummings. In his critique of Cummings’s *Enormous Room*, Paul Rosenfeld notes that “occasionally, as in all the provinces of life, the individual obedient to the

promptings of the senses, and exuberant and magnanimous, does put in his appearance among literary men; and something of the beat of what exists gets into poem or story” (200).

In *The Making of Americans* Stein constantly baits the reader by stating her intention to discuss in detail each member of the Hersland and Dehning families, but after naming the particular family member, she drifts off on a tangent in discussing other family members. Rather than pursuing a forthright tale about Henry Dehning, for example, the narrator discusses the Dehning parents, the Dehning children, and the Dehnings in general, but the character never speaks for himself or herself, disallowing an “inside” look, to coin one of Stein’s terms.

Another example finds us learning that Henry Dehning’s daughter Julia inherits her father and grandmother’s European disposition, traits linking her to a quite different world than the American. Did Stein ever intend to discuss the various characters in a normal fashion, or did she become enamored with early twentieth century Cubist distortion? Stein, of course, was quite familiar with the Cubist movement. For example, Picasso’s 1905-6 painting of her shows that “in a three-quarter view the far side of the mouth is almost duplicated, while the disparity between the eyes further accentuates the sense of breadth” (Golding 76). Howard Gardner says that this famous painting “stands out because of the artist’s process: Picasso asked his subject to remain for over eighty sittings; then he went away for the summer, annihilated the recognizable facial features, and finished the portrait away from Stein, substituting masklike features for realistic ones” (155). The distortion of Stein’s features is reminiscent of Fitzgerald’s distortion of Myrtle

Wilson's character in *Gatsby*. For example, Nick speaks of Myrtle's dramatic change in appearance between the time he first meets her at her husband's garage and later in an apartment-house at 158th Street: "The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment, and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her, until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air" (20).

Fitzgerald was a reader of Stein's material. While working on *The Great Gatsby*, he was reading the first parts of *The Making of Americans* in *The Transatlantic Review* as well as her novel *Three Lives* (*Brucoli Letters* 80, 109), so let us pause to consider whether the use of those who came to Gatsby's parties owes anything to the Herslands, Hissings, and Shillings in *The Making of Americans*. Upon research, we find that Fitzgerald seems to debunk this theory in a June 1, 1925, letter to Maxwell Perkins in which he lists his opinion of the critics of *The Great Gatsby*. Among the several who Fitzgerald mentions is Stein: "The real people like Gertrude Stien [sic] (with whom I've talked) and Conrad (see his essay on James) have a respect for people whose materials may not touch theirs at a single point" (*Brucoli Letters* 119). On December 27, 1925, he wrote Perkins: "Its [sic] good you didn't take my advice about looking up Gertrude Stien's [sic] new book (*The Making of Americans*). Its [sic] bigger than *Ulysses* [sic] and only the first parts, the parts published in the *Transatlantic* are intelligible [sic] at all" (*Brucoli Letters* 132). Despite this typical denunciation of one author drawing from another, Fitzgerald certainly may have gleaned the idea of charting human types as Stein

does in *The Making of Americans* (Sutherland 10-11). He may have drawn as well as the idea of repetitious attendance of these human types at Gatsby's parties.

Stein's interest in Cubism manifests itself in her fragmented and repetitious sentences. Janice L. Doane points out that "Stein's repetitious phrases help her to hold on to an idea, an idea which she is initially unable or unwilling to explore in its full ramifications. Repeated phrases help her . . . to review the starting point. In a sense, this movement speaks to her struggle with narrative momentum" (95). As the Cubists continued the Impressionists' and Experimentalists' assault on the conventions of Realism, making their paintings not *about* reality but objects themselves, filled with personal suggestiveness, so Stein assembled words as if they were individual expressions of self derived from memory, observation, and what her teacher at Harvard, William James, referred to as the stream of thought—that is, the stream of consciousness.

E. E. Cummings began to write poetry while at Harvard, using as his poets of influence James Joyce and Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot's long-time friend and ally; Pound would later also become one of Cummings's closest friends and allies in making literature "new." Besides more than nine hundred poems, two novels, numerous essays, he became an accomplished painter, and "no estimate of his literary work can begin without noting" the "important fact" (Munson 9) that he "had before him the example of Picasso" (Bishop 103).

Although Cummings, at the age of thirty-one, published two collections of poems in 1925—& and *XLI Poems*—the collection to be considered herein will be what he called "poems 48-96," which he privately published circa May 1925 under

the title &. In 1925, Cummings surprised the world of poetry with his new style, although, according to Dickran Tashjian's 1975 essay, by 1917, "with the publication of *Eight Harvard Poets*, and in such a poem as 'i will wade out' . . . there is a glimpse of typographical play, a dispersal of the line pattern that would suggest his later efforts" (91). Although Cummings introduced his new style with the 1925 collection of dark poems, the ampersand of course symbolizing the word *and*, "it does somehow go with the iconoclasm of the twenties, but . . . it does not at all embed Cummings in that period" (Dumas 366). These forty-eight poems are evidence of the influence of jazz; they are also filled with contemporary slang and characterized by an innovative use of punctuation and typography. Bearing no titles, the poems are simply numbered from forty-eight to ninety-six, indicating, like numbers identifying music compositions in order of appearance, an invisible earlier body of work, the absent other side of "&." The poems are extremely short, most not even covering a page, and most contain run-on words the reader must consider carefully. Tashjian states that the poems make "no special demands upon the reader" (94), as even in a cursory reading of each poem, the reader is able to understand them, but Tashjian seems not to perceive that this makes them objects in themselves, expressions that can be seen as self-standing, each referential within its own frame, the words, as with Stein, like the strokes of a brush, a patch of color, a familiar but not extra-referential line. Randall Jarrell wrote in 1950, "Cummings's poems, despite their originality, lack a necessary moral dimension" (Young 80). This lack of moral dimension is seen in the sexual connotation of Poem 48, which begins with the pronoun "her." In typical Cummings fashion, "her" is never identified, which

may be Cummings's way of saying that the relationship he is about to describe is impersonal, abstract, begun as loosely as sand flowing into a chute, but eventually developing into either a relationship as anonymous as a block of concrete on the one hand or into a solid, close relationship on the other.

The sexual theme continues in Poem 49, and again the partner remains anonymous. G. S. Fraser's essay of 1955 addresses the situation in splendid fashion when he writes that Cummings seems first to celebrate "the sexual appetites and achievements of the hearty male animal" and secondly to celebrate "a kind of mystical attitude toward life in general that may indeed spring from a happy and stable relationship between a man and woman, but need not always do so" (Young 84). As Cummings "had before him the example of Picasso" (Bishop 103), again, one thinks of Picasso's female figures, so closely observed that the result is visual distortion. Cummings's 1925 poetry was indeed quite different from what others were doing, and far different from the love poetry of the past, but Cummings was certainly not alone in writing about sex in that heady Freudian time.

In Poem 51, Cummings names the female subject "Marj," but this fact bestows no honor upon the female, as she is shown to be a prostitute. To be sure, the prostitute does not enjoy a high-class clientele, which proves the point made in Robyn V. Young's introduction to critical essays on Cummings: "Most of the works he produced reflected his fascination with the lower-class and its environs. The bordellos, pubs, and burlesque shows that Cummings visited in Boston, Paris, and New York became the subject matter for dozens of his poems, drawings, and paintings" (68). For this, too, one might credit Picasso, whose landmark cubist

work, *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, uses a bordello scene to express the contraries of human existence. In Poem 52, Cummings may be describing another large female, yet another possible reference, this time to the painter's giant bathers. It is difficult to say, for as R. P. Blackmur writes in his essay of 1931: "In short, Mr. Cummings' poetry ends in ideas *about things*" (79). Nevertheless, Cummings also may have in mind one of Jean Cocteau's drawings which features a male at the piano, enraptured with a piece of music—"one of the most extravagant of the Cocteau drawings, satirizing the composing methods and execution of the French Expressionists of music," a graphic reprinted in George J. Firmage's *E. E. Cummings: A Miscellany Revised* (103). Whether the piano player in Poem 52 is male or female, the spectator describes the especially large back and hands of someone who, one imagines, is playing the piano in a bordello: "ta / ppin / g / toe / hip / popot / amus Back / gen / teel-ly / lugu- / brio us / eyes / LOOPTHELOOP / as / fathandsbangrag." Sascha Feinstein says this is "a portrait of a ragtime pianist" (22), but again as Picasso might have seen him. Feinstein goes on to quote Rushworth Kidder's explication of "the jazz influence on this short-lined poem. "Just as jazz syncopates rhythms by carrying phrases across the normal divisions of measures and beats," he writes, "so here the accent on 'ppin' comes a little ahead of its expected place in the syllable 'ping,' and the phrase carries over into the next measure before it ends" (51). Kidder's analysis may be a little too pat; even though his statement about jazz music rings true, it is also true that Cummings achieved this syncopation in many of his poems, very few of which concerned jazz. Perhaps,

then, Cummings did not learn this technique from listening to jazz music; his artistic mind just created a poetic beat that coincided with the music of the time.

The famous arrangement of Cummings's lines somewhat naturally derives from the ready availability of the typewriter, but also from an art movement that owed something to Cubism: "His typographical experimentation, its intuitive derivation notwithstanding, and his other anti-art attitudes were validated by the emergence of Dada, with which he was familiar prior to 1920, when he lived in New York" (Tashjian 90). As R. P. Blackmur points out, "It is possible to say that Mr. Cummings belongs to the anti-culture group; what has been called at various times vorticism, futurism, dadaism, surrealism, and so on" (73), for the vision of a fat piano player banging away at the keys is a typical surrealistic portrayal and Cummings himself is playing on a typing machine. The hippopotamus back may amuse or disgust the reader, but there is a kind of heartlessness in the humor.

With Cummings, the reader considers: "What delights and amuses and disgusts us he has represented; but all that is heartbreaking in the world, the pity and helplessness and love that were called, once, the tears of things, the heart of heartlessness—these hardly exist for him" (Jarrell 81). Cummings's intention, much like Picasso's—with his bulls, satyrs, and disorienting nudes—is toward the flaunting of man's inherent animalistic drive. In Poem 53, Cummings portrays a young, maybe even adolescent, sexual partner, but Cummings begins poem 54 by calling his females "irreproachable ladies firmly lewd" (np).

The theme of prostitution in these poems may be the result of Cummings being a spectator at many of New York's night clubs and speakeasies. According to

George E. Worthington's article "The Night Clubs of New York," published in *Survey*, January 1929, out of the three hundred seventy-three night clubs and speakeasies investigated, only "52 are believed to be 'respectable.' From the remaining 321, there are reports on 806 hostesses and other women employees, of whom 487 acknowledged that they were prostitutes. In addition, there are reports on 418 other prostitutes who were permitted to solicit customers and 260 procurers, connected with the business of commercialized prostitution, who were found in these clubs" (110). John Dos Passos, the poet's close friend and Harvard classmate, once commented that "[Cummings] had the Brahmin's disdain for anyone who didn't live up to certain specifications" (qtd. in Dumas 368). Notwithstanding, Bethany K. Dumas points out that "Cummings always objected strenuously to certain aspects of American life, but he did not turn from it in disgust" (369). In fact, Cummings led a bohemian lifestyle during the twenties, which included a studio in Greenwich Village and travel and sojourns in France, hence the urbanity of his poetry, and his more European view of sexuality, which would not have shocked the French.

In poem 57, Cummings returns again to the theme of obesity, and Poem 58 takes up the theme of the female who is retarded, representing a "school-boyish nose-thumbing side by side with grave tenderness" (Untermeyer 568). This is one of the longest poems in *&*, consisting of eleven stanzas. Poem 59 recalls Stephen Crane's New York in that it depicts the sordid environment occupied by the lower classes. Cummings's talent as a painter can be seen in this poem, as one may readily imagine the pitiful life framed in the woman's smile and the repetitiousness of viewing life through an insignificant window. Indeed, Cummings's "sense that life

was always in process” may be why he “wrote untitled poems without beginnings and endings, consisting of fragmentary lines” (Holland 1390).

The eccentric, eclectic Ezra Pound was Cummings’s ideal poet, so the reader must ponder about their quite different styles, though Pound’s early infatuation with Villon and the French troubadours seems reflected in Cummings’s personas and themes. In the *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, Pound states that the poet is “the antennae of the race,” so when he finds “this idea more or less restated by Allen Upward as anthropological observation of the witchdoctor’s function,” he writes in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965* that he “seized on it and drew it thus into the bases of the Cantos” (qtd. in Makin 10). This “poet-historian” (Dekker *Sailing* 132) was born Ezra Weston Loomis Pound in 1885 in Hailey, Idaho, but from the age of three he grew up in suburban Pennsylvania. One of the most influential expatriates, Pound lived in London, Paris, and Italy. Pound and Eliot are recognized as major figures of the modernist movement of early twentieth-century poetry. Indeed, the “mid-1920s are marked in most histories of modern American poetry by the completion and publication of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and the publication of Pound’s *Draft of XVI Cantos*” (Thurston 21). Known throughout the world as an American poet, musician, and critic by the time he published *A Draft of XVI Cantos* in 1925 at the age of forty, Pound had already established himself as a master poet and a mover and shaker in the literary world, having done for Eliot and William Butler Yeats something akin to what Stein and Sherwood Anderson did for Hemingway.

In the November 24, 1952, article “A Birthday for Poetry” (*Life Magazine*) appears the caption beside his picture: “One of the most controversial and galvanic

figures in U.S. letters, Ezra Pound . . . became *Poetry's* foreign correspondent for its first six years. His letters to Harriet Monroe, she said, 'were a tonic and inspiration. . . . I firmly believe he was the best critic living . . . his acid touch on weak spots was as fearsomely enlightening as a clinic.' Pound studded his poetry with obscure references, preened himself on being multilingual, made critics hate his arrogance and admire his artistry" (113).

Pound said, "I knew at fifteen pretty much what I wanted to do. And I resolved that at thirty I would know more about poetry than any man living" (Kenner 34). Pound was admitted to the University of Pennsylvania at the age of fifteen because of his ability in Latin. It is understandable, therefore, that he became proficient as a translator of several languages, including Italian, and that he would entitle his masterpiece after an Italian word—*The Cantos*. *The Cantos* became a long, incomplete poem in one hundred twenty sections that Pound worked on from 1915 to 1962. Sixteen poems, *A Draft of XVI Cantos*, was published by Three Mountains Press, Paris, June 1925. Of course Pound did not actually write these sixteen poems in 1925. Max Halperen points out in his essay "How to Read a Canto" that "When [Pound] began *The Cantos* in 1917, he described it in a letter as a 'new long poem (really L O N G, endless, leviathanic)'" (335).

Michael Thurston writes:

In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920), Ezra Pound had written that "the age demanded an image / Of its accelerated grimace" (*Personae* 86). Classic literary models had lost all cultural purchase in the degraded postwar age, and readers wanted simply "a mould in

plaster, / Made with no loss of time.” But if the age clamored for, and perhaps deserved, nothing more than a portrait of its own fragmentation and chaotic speed, Pound thought he saw what the age really required. In place of either the “prose kinema” or the “sculpture” of rhyme,” figures for the popular culture and “genteel tradition” against which high modernism defined itself, Pound, in 1925, published his first installment of the remedy the age unknowingly demanded, *A Draft of XVI Cantos*. (13)

In 1925, the age evidently did not demand what *The Great Gatsby* had to offer, for the sales of *Gatsby* were disappointing (Brucoli “A Brief Life” xxi), but Fitzgerald thought it the “best American novel even written” (Brucoli *Letters* 80). On November 18, 1924, Perkins wrote Fitzgerald: “it has vitality to an extraordinary degree, and glamour, and a great deal of underlying thought of unusual quality. It has a kind of mystic atmosphere at times that you infused into parts of “Paradise” and have not since used. It is a marvelous fusion, into a unity of presentation, of the extraordinary incongruities of life today. And as for sheer writing, it’s astonishing” (Brucoli *Letters* 86). Pound would have accepted such a description if it had been applied to his poem.

Pound began *The Cantos* “as a fantasia on classical, Dantesque, Renaissance, and modern themes” (Bogan 87), a work that would also turn out to contain “fascist and anti-Semitic views” (Marsh 155). The first few lines of Canto I announce *in medias res* an ongoing sea voyage being undertaken by none other than Odysseus and his men: “And then went down to the ship, / Set keel to breakers, forth on the

godly sea, and / We set up mast and sail on that swart ship” (1-3), and, as we read on, Canto I turns out to be “an intricately designed epitome of the whole,” constituting “a prototype for a series of analogously formed instalments,” metamorphosing into another and accruing toward a whole that is “prophesied by historical materials and realized by the activity of what claims to be an archetypal revolutionary mind” (Read ’76 x). The poem refers to the “godly sea” and “Circe’s craft,”—the “godly sea” of course being governed by Poseidon. “Swart,” an archaic word meaning dark-colored, identifies one of the Greek’s black ships in Homer. The speaker carries the sheep probably to use later because all the gods require sacrifice, and he is not leaving Ithaca or Troy, but Circe’s island, so we find him in mid-voyage home. In Homer’s account, the enmity of Poseidon has heretofore prevented Odysseus’s return to Ithaca for many years following the ten years he spent on the plain outside the besieged city Troy. Tiresias and Circe have advised Odysseus that in order to placate Poseidon, the warrior must take one last voyage even after his return home, though it seems unfair that after all his travails Odysseus must leave home for good and go to meet his death. Thus, as Forrest Read observes, Pound goes “a step further than Joyce, for instead of beginning with Stephen-Telemachus and instead of concluding in the bed of the desirable female, The *Cantos* opens with Odysseus leaving Circe’s bed for an even more arduous adventure” (*Pound/Joyce* 11).

The Great Gatsby resonates closely with all these experimental efforts to make twentieth-century literature new. In *Gatsby*, it is Fitzgerald’s remedy for the phoniness, the imitation of high culture, that the “age” demanded. It is his *The*

Making of Americans with its own allusions to Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and the mythical method. Like those 1925 texts by Stein, Pound, Cummings, Joyce, and Eliot, *The Great Gatsby* takes significant liberties with conventions of language and conventions of the hero. His vagueness in detail resembles the style of Stein's book—that is, it is suggestive, not the deeply biographical fiction of the nineteenth century. It is his cummingsque paean to the lurid forbidden pleasures of New York, seen through the distortions of Nick's drunkenness. It is Cody as American myth deflated, Be-Gatz as self-begotten tragic failure. It is flowers (Daisy and Myrtle) amidst the landscape of a waste land, and a life within gardens and water. It is a play on the American Dream amidst "hazy" recollections of contradictory events. Symbolic and "unsymbolic" names parody New York's social register. Machine-age symbols dominate a regimented world where the social order makes some lives unassailable, others of no importance. It is his Poundian deconstruction of the economic forces secretly ruling society—greed ["he just saw the opportunity" (Fitzgerald 48) versus toying with the faith of the people].

Fitzgerald and Pound may never have met. They certainly were not friends nor correspondents, but Fitzgerald was indeed aware of Pound's huge popularity and influence because on October 10, 1924, Fitzgerald wrote to Max Perkins, his publisher, that Pound had published a collection of Hemingway's "short pieces in Paris, at some place like the Egotist Press" (Brucoli *Letters* 82). Furthermore, Fitzgerald had probably read Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* by the time he was writing *The Great Gatsby* during the summer and fall of 1924 while he and Zelda were settled at Villa Marie, Valescure, St. Raphael, France. Pound's poem was one

among several works of the era by Cather, Dreiser, Anderson, and others whose “dominant theme . . . is the artist’s need to resist commodification and to work outside of marketplace constraints” (Curnutt 88).

Pound believed in 1913 (“Patria Mia”) that an “American Risorgimento” (intellectual awakening) was imminent: “This will have its effect not only in the arts, but in life, in politics, and in economics. If I seem to lay undue stress upon the status of the arts, it is only because the arts respond to an intellectual movement more swiftly” (Cookson 111). Pound’s confidence was not in vain even though he did voice some skepticism in the next decade. Although Fitzgerald was not one of Pound’s protégés, Joyce, Eliot, and Hemingway were, and the younger ones also had the example of older American writers such as Dreiser, Anderson, and Cather, “who were doing some of their best work in the postwar years” (Cowley “Taps” 65). Clearly aware of his contemporaries, as Malcolm Cowley observes, Fitzgerald was among those “great spinners and weavers of legend” himself:

Most obviously the gift was shown in the legendary heroes they presented as models that would be followed, in each case, by thousands of their readers; here one thinks of the Hemingway young man like an Indian brave, the Fitzgerald young man who believed in the green light. . . . Behind such heroes are larger patterns of myth . . . Hemingway and Faulkner most of all, but other writers as well, seemed to plunge deep into the past, or into themselves, to recover a prehistoric and prelogical fashion of looking at the world; then they looked in the same fashion at events of their own time and thereby

surrounded them with a feeling of primitive magic (as Faulkner did in “The Bear” and Hemingway in “Big Two-Hearted River”). Perhaps that feeling explains the legendary quality of other stories, by these and other writers. In a sense the men of the generation were all working together to produce a cycle of myths for a new century which—so they had felt from the beginning—was to be partly a creation of their own. (Cowley “Taps” 65)

For Fitzgerald, probably Pound was more of an indirect inspiration through the works of Joyce and Eliot than he was a direct influence. Nevertheless, as Cowley observes, Fitzgerald, winding his way through Europe during the 1920s, was inspired in similar ways to see that the wanderings of Odysseus and the fates of other mythical figures were paradigms for contemporary fiction.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, Pound’s protégé, critic, and friend, became a legendary poet, as well as a significant playwright and literary critic of the modern era, enjoying international recognition well before *The Dial* printed “The Hollow Men” in March 1925 when Eliot was thirty-seven years old. Grover Smith critiques “The Hollow Men” as an “extension of the same design of quest and failure” found in *The Waste Land*. Such a design offers a compelling *entrer* in analyzing the miserable poet/speaker of “The Hollow Men,” especially as it reflects upon the flawed hero of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, for both the poem’s speaker and Gatsby “go round the prickly pear” (Eliot ll 68-71) upon more than one occasion. Eliot and Fitzgerald met personally in 1933, several years after the American publication of *The Great Gatsby*. Eliot, however, knew about Fitzgerald’s

novel in 1925 because Eliot “had tried unsuccessfully to acquire the English rights to *The Great Gatsby* after he had first arrived at Faber and Gwyer,” a general publishing house launched in 1925 (Ackroyd 199). In a letter to Maxwell Perkins, February 20, 1926, Fitzgerald wrote:

Now, confidential. T.S. Eliot for whom you know my profound admiration—I think he’s the greatest living poet in any language—wrote me he’d read Gatsby three times + thought it was the 1st step forward American fiction had taken since Henry James.” (Brucoli *Letters* 137)

“The Hollow Men” begins with the words “Mistah Kurtz—he dead,” referring to the fictional character from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. A. D. Moody points out that “behind *The Waste Land* (and “The Hollow Men” also) is a pervasive allusion to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and to Kurtz who was ‘hollow at the core’ with the hollowness of his culture” (193). In addition, Michele Valerie Ronnick lists four other sources that have been identified for the various images in “The Hollow Men”: (1) effigies burned in celebration of Guy Fawkes Day; (2) the marionette in Stravinsky’s ballet *Petrouchka*; (3) harvest rituals celebrating the death of the fertility god or Fisher King; and (4) the dead spirit of *The Golden Bough* that revives in the spring when the apple trees begin to blossom (91). Ronnick suggests, moreover, that the “Roman ritual of the Argei” poses a likely source, and she cites a ritual described by W. Warde Fowler in his book *Roman Religious Experience*. In this ritual the Vestal Virgins cast straw puppets (called Argei, a Greek name) into the Tiber from the Pons Sublicius as late as the age of the

Punic wars. Stirring up memory of the historically infamous Gunpowder Plot, section I of “The Hollow Men” begins with the epigraph “A penny for the Old Guy” (123), an allusion to the Englishman Guy Fawkes, an explosives expert, who conspires with other provincial English Catholic extremists in 1605 to kill King James I, his family, and most of the Protestant aristocracy by blowing up the Houses of Parliament. The authorities capture Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirators, and, following the King’s specific order to allow torture, the conspirators either die from the torture or are executed (Croft 9).

Eliot’s poetry written subsequent to World War I invariably comments upon the general feeling of meaninglessness that prevailed in the Western World from 1918 through 1925. He “remarked that 1926 was the year in which the features of the post-war world emerged and that the intellectual and artistic work of the previous seven years ‘had been the last work of an old world, not the first one of a new’” (Ackroyd 154-55). Lines five through ten in “The Hollow Men” emphasize his point: “Our dried voices, when / We whisper together / Are quiet and meaningless / As wind in dry grass / Or rats’ feet over broken glass / In our dry cellar.” A scene depicting silence as opposed to noise, these lines harken back to *The Waste Land* when the poet says: “Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak. / What are you thinking of? What thinking? / What? / ‘I never know what you are thinking. Think. / I think we are in rats’ alley’” (112-15). Imagine Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* questioning Nick’s silence as they sit on a train overlooking a “the dead land” (Eliot 39), a valley of ashes bounded on one side by a small foul river and overlooked by the “defunct oculist” whose initials are T. J. E., almost

Eliot's, with a J—for Jehovah?—replacing the S. Tom never knows what Nick is thinking, but the entire book is actually composed of Nick's thoughts (Fitzgerald 1-121).

Many years later, this theme of meaninglessness would also perfume Eliot's *The Four Quartets* (1943): (1) "Burnt Norton," "My words echo / Thus, in your mind. / But to what purpose . . . I do not know" (14-18). (2) "East Coker," stanza I, "Comets weep and Leonids fly / Hunt the heavens and the plains / Whirled in a vortex that shall bring / The world to that destructive fire" (64-67); stanza II: "That was a way of putting it – not very satisfactory: / A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion, / Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter" (69-72). (3) "The Dry Salvages," "We had the experience but missed the meaning, / And approach to the meaning restores the experience / In a different form, beyond any meaning / We can assign to happiness" (95-98). (4) "Little Gidding," "Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning, / Every poem an epitaph" (225-26).

An example of Eliot's keenness of perception and feeling appears in lines eleven and twelve of "The Hollow Men." These two lines contain images that draw upon scenes from hell, implied by the code words "shape" and "shade": "Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without motion." "Shape without form" and "shade without colour" bring to mind Milton's motifs—the many opposites in *Paradise Lost*. Does Eliot stare into Hades also to observe that man has no shape there and that he exists as a colorless shade? This shape without form symbolizes a worthless entity because it cannot function, which is another pair

of opposites because any kind of force in order to be forceful needs to be active.

While lines eleven and twelve in “The Hollow Men” relay an abstract vision of Hades, lines thirteen through eighteen speak to those who have ascended to heaven. Troy Urquhart criticizes Eliot for being “hindered by his inability” to reconcile humanity’s “existence with death’s other Kingdom,” Eliot’s “idea of the afterlife”: “Those who have crossed / With direct eyes, to death’s other Kingdom / Remember us—if at all—not as lost / Violent souls, but only / As the hollow men / The stuffed men” (“The Hollow Men” ll 13-18). Those inhabiting Heaven, perhaps Dante’s intermediary Beatrice or the equivalent of Joseph Campbell’s “redeeming hero” (30) have little interest in saving the “hollow” men who are too soulless for redemption. This may relate more to Gatsby than meets the eye despite Nick’s alarm that Gatsby turned out all right, for Gatsby’s death is a nihilistic fate and absurd.

Section II of “The Hollow Men” reveals two more opposites—fear and acceptance of death (ll. 19-28). In section III, again the poet falls prey to the contemplation of the meaninglessness of life as he quests after the “other kingdom.” Like Gatsby reaching for the distant light on Daisy’s dock, he holds out his hand under a fading star that has not yet lost its twinkle, which means that occasionally he glimpses some understanding, but this is not accompanied by hope, for he fears death again when he is alone. In section IV, the poet focuses on another pair of opposites--sightless eyes (ll. 52-67). The poet steps into the disguise of an astronomer in comparing empty men to the death throes of a dying star. They have no hope because their life has no value. The cold, calculating, selfish people of

Eliot's "Hollow Men" can be identified also with the image of a dying star that signifies the spiritual inertness of the poet. The last section (V) begins with a nursery rhyme in which Eliot substitutes "prickly pear" for "mulberry bush": "Here we go round the prickly pear / Prickly pear prickly pear / Here we go round the prickly pear / At five o'clock in the morning" (ll. 68-71). The poet declares that the earthly world offers no assurances; black and white merge into gray; this gray casts a shadow over everything humanity tries to achieve. Children dance merrily around the fairyland mulberry bush to the tune of a lively nursery rhyme, but when they grow up, the dance changes, and the fruit of the tree is ironic.

As "The Hollow Men" illuminates the themes, the situations, the settings, the characters, the props, and the issues of the times, Fitzgerald "clearly shaped *The Great Gatsby* under the spell" of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*:

He echoed and parodied Homeric material, as Joyce had done, by Dan Cody's ten-year cruise around the continent, the catalog of those who came to Gatsby's parties, and the use of Petronius' mock-Odyssey, *The Satyricon*, which was the source of one of the working titles of the book. He provided a "waste land" atmosphere for his novel, chiefly with emphasis upon the ash heap region dominated by the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg but also in his depiction of Tom Buchanan's city love nest and in his portrayal of other characters and events. . . . In his notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot states that he used Frazer's study of magic and religion, pointing specifically to the volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, and *Osiris*. (Bird 125)

It is no wonder that in a December 31, 1925, letter to Fitzgerald, Eliot declared that *The Great Gatsby* was “such a remarkable book . . . the first step American fiction has taken since Henry James” (Fitzgerald qtd. in *Crack Up* 310).

Laura Riding, another writer who, we might say, danced around the prickly pear during her unusual lifetime, published some twenty-two books and twenty-eight stories, essays, and letters in various periodicals; her works still appear in at least seven anthologies. *The Fugitive* published three of her poems in its March 1925 issue when she was twenty-four years old—“Summary for Alastor,” “Virgin of the Hills,” “The Only Daughter”—and the theme of alienation dominates each, a theme the Nashville poets particularly favored at that time: “Though none of them expressed the feeling as strikingly as T. S. Eliot had in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,’ or Ezra Pound in ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,’ the sense of intellectual alienation was one they shared with the leading poets of the age” (Pratt xxv).

In a 1939 review of Riding’s poems, William Carlos Williams states:

There are those who might say, with some justice, these are monochromes painted by a lame person; they suggest colors and movements—but nothing distinguished. That should not, in Laura Riding’s definition, limit them as poems. The “reasons for poetry” are neither painting nor the dance. It is a dour theme—an undifferentiated, aluminous femaleness of art—at its worst but ably defended as a poetic wombdarkness, where only a few aimless kicks are permitted. (97)

By the time Williams penned this review of Riding's poetry, she had published several more poems since her 1925 piece "Summary for Alastor"—"The Close Chaplet" (1926); "Voltaire: A Biographical Fantasy" (1927); "Love as Love, Death as Death" (1928); "Though Gently," "Twenty Poems Less," and "Poems: A Joking Word" (1930); "Laura and Francisca" (1931); "Poet: A Lying Word," "The First Leaf," and "The Life of the Dead" (1933); "Americans" (1934); "Collected Poems" (1938)—so he had a considerable body of work from which to form his unimpressed opinion. Deborah Baker writes, "In the spring of 1938 Riding had turned her attention to novels, painting, music, and public morality because she had already written the last of her published poems" (361). Baker tells of Riding's peculiar life during which she turned against poetry entirely, claiming that it was part of a "dying romantic tradition—Literalism was the culminating ideology of a line of thought that would lead to Riding's renunciation of poetry" (362).

Although Riding's first patrons, the young Fugitives [Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Donald Davidson], established no particular program, they agreed on some basic points; therefore, despite Riding's lack of attendance among the group, apparently the several poems published in *The Fugitive* satisfied their poetic and political credo during what William Pratt has called the Fugitives' most formal phase (1922 to 1925) (xiii). John M. Bradbury lists some of John Crowe Ransom's criteria of the formalists: Ransom insists "in formalist fashion, that the poem is a 'living integrity,' to be separated into its component elements only for the purpose of analysis, and he insists that 'the character of the poem resides . . . in its way of exhibiting the residuary quality.'"

However, in an essay on Edna St. Vincent Millay, Ransom proposes “as a ‘stale consideration’ that ‘the poetry on whatever level must make as consistent sense as prose.’ Ransom wants a ‘professional’ criticism, thoroughly organized and ‘scientific,’ one that disregards the emotional component of poetry as nonobjective and undiscussible, and concentrates on properly aesthetic considerations” (Bradbury 133).

In contrast to the work of Stein, Eliot, and Pound, Riding’s 1925 poem, “Summary for Alastor,” seems very American. Its use of classical myth is straightforward, clear allusion. The displacement to the classical realm, where one can find a female “judge” or adviser for a woman’s plea in a case of adultery, is a necessity in Puritan patriarchal America, and so the device works. Here we have a poem perfectly in accord with Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, except from the female point of view. The three women in *The Great Gatsby*—Daisy, Myrtle, and Jordan—and the issues of innocence, seduction, adultery, and betrayal work themselves to a more tragic end precisely BECAUSE the setting is materialistic, hypocritical America—except in Fitzgerald’s twist, a man is the innocent and is the one who loses everything (and the most sexually direct woman perishes at the hands of Daisy while Jordan Baker, named for two fancy automobiles, will keep cheating and lying). In beginning Riding’s “Summary for Alastor”—Alastor being the mythological Greek personification of familial feuds—an adulteress speaks to her lover. Perhaps Riding speaks to Allen Tate, because “Tate’s passionate interest in ‘Mrs. G.’ had been returned in more than equal measure in the few months since his visit to her in Louisville” (Baker 59). The poem opens, “Because my song was bold /

And you knew but my song, / You thought it must belong / To one brave to behold”
 (ll. 1-4). Recalling that appearances are often deceiving from Aesop’s *The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing*, we realize that the adulteress purposely fools her lover in assuming the role of a Siren, and that beneath her façade lurks the fear that her lover will find out that the boldness of her words is not matched by physical freedom.

“Alastor’s” second stanza juxtaposes the characteristics of the Siren with those of an Eve—not only an original distinction, but also fresh and spontaneous in Riding’s hands: “But finding me a shy / And cool and quiet Eve, / You scarcely would believe / The fevered singer was I” (ll. 5-8). The mention of a “fevered singer” again connects to the bold singer or Siren in the first stanza and, of course, the Sirens of Greek mythology. The adulteress in “Alastor’s” third stanza now puts her reluctance to act on her words in terms of innocence: “And you caressed the child / That blushed beneath your eyes, / Hoping you might surprise / The hidden heart and wild” (ll. 9-12). Not literally a child in years, the adulteress allows the lover to hope her pretense of innocence disguises a passionate nature. When he learns that she has duped him, he reacts disappointingly. In a brief review of the poem thus far, the reader recalls the female’s aggressive behavior in the first stanza; in the second, the female’s passive manners; in this third stanza, the female’s virtuous conduct. Acting contradictorily in each stanza, the female masquerades as a Siren, a child, and an Eve, yet all three stanzas reflect the poetic persona’s feeling of alienation from her own desire. The fourth stanza of “Alastor” condemns the foolish woman who lifts the veil of mysteriousness, a veil which the lusty male figure

finds colossally intriguing: “And being only human, / A proud, impetuous fool / Whose guise alone was cool, / I let you see the woman” (ll. 13-16). She looks back now to the figure of Eve who was too proud and impetuous to follow God’s instructions in the Garden of Eden. When the Eve figure drops her charade as the upstanding female, the lover discovers a passionate woman. Therefore, this stanza continues the poet’s contradictory personalities.

Baker writes, “Riding was not, of course, the only intellectual of the time attempting to define and understand the worrisome topic of sex, but her conclusions and proscriptions were often the most radical” (238). In effect, Riding’s “Summary for Alastor” possesses the underlying theme of adultery, for the poem speaks of a wife who entices an unsuspecting lover. The male never truly knows in advance whether the female embodies a Siren, an innocent, an Eve, or a willing sexual partner. In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy dons the role of the Siren who continues to entrance the Odyssean voyager. To Gatsby, however, Daisy is the Odyssean goddess Calypso who genuinely cares for him and does not want to let him go. Because the adulteress in “Alastor” is unconcerned with the capture and release of her lover, going so far as to inform Alastor that her innocence remains intact, she may also be compared with the goddess Circe, who does not show any feelings for Odysseus. Daisy is both Calypso, who sporadically cares about Gatsby, and Circe, who displays no like or dislike for Gatsby, merely enchanting him. Gatsby has two encounters with Daisy, one we see from Jordan Baker’s point of view:

“One October day in nineteen-seventeen”—(said Jordan Baker that afternoon, sitting up very straight on a straight chair in the tea-

garden at the Plaza Hotel)—“I was walking along from one place to another, half on the sidewalks and half on the lawns. I was happier on the lawns because I had on shoes from England with rubber nobs on the soles that bit into the soft ground. I had on a new plaid skirt also that blew a little in the wind, and whenever this happened the red, white, and blue banners in front of all the houses stretched out stiff and said TUT-TUT-TUT-TUT, in a disapproving way. The largest of the banners and the largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay’s house. She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville. She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster, and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young officers from Camp Taylor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night. “Anyways, for an hour!” When I came opposite her house that morning her white roadster was beside the curb, and she was sitting in it with a lieutenant I had never seen before. They were so engrossed in each other that she didn’t see me until I was five feet away.” (49)

Ironically, four years later, it is Jordan Baker who helps Nick Carraway arrange the second awkward encounter between Gatsby and Daisy. This encounter is witnessed by Nick:

For half a minute there wasn’t a sound. Then from the living-room I heard a sort of choking murmur and part of a laugh, followed by Daisy’s voice on a clear artificial note:

“I certainly am awfully glad to see you again.”

A pause; it endured horribly. I had nothing to do in the hall, so I went into the room.

Gatsby, his hands still in his pockets, was reclining against the mantelpiece in a strained counterfeit of perfect ease, even of boredom. His head leaned back so far that it rested against the face of a defunct mantelpiece clock, and from this position his distraught eyes stared down at Daisy, who was sitting, frightened but graceful, on the edge of a stiff chair.

“We’ve met before,” muttered Gatsby. His eyes glanced momentarily at me, and his lips parted with an abortive attempt at a laugh. Luckily the clock took this moment to tilt dangerously at the pressure of his head, whereupon he turned and caught it with trembling fingers, and set it back in place. Then he sat down, rigidly, his elbow on the arm of the sofa and his chin in his hand. (57)

Like Fitzgerald, Riding has experimented with Greek mythology. She has set the anonymous characters of her poem to be observed in a certain way only to change the succession of facts to be observed in a different way. She has placed her characters “in certain conditions” that copy mythology but that are more in tune with the modern-day writer’s compulsion to employ “the simple and complex process of investigation to vary or modify, for an end of some kind, the natural phenomena, and to make them appear under circumstances and conditions in which they are not presented by nature” (Zola 103).

John Erskine, like Laura Riding, is less well known as a contemporary of Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald does not mention Erskine in his published letters, nor does any reference to Fitzgerald appear in Erskine's autobiography, *The Memory of Certain Persons*. Erskine specialized in Elizabethan literature, enjoyed a distinguished career as a concert pianist, served as president of the Juilliard School of Music, presided as director of the Juilliard Musical Foundation, and headed the Metropolitan Opera Association. Erskine's literary career, however, began with the publication of the novel *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* in 1925 when he was forty-six years old. Stanley Kunitz notes, "Until the publication of *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* . . . Erskine's works had been mostly for the scholarly reader. But within a month that book attained a larger sale than any other book in the country" (117), an irony that might not have been lost on Fitzgerald, whose Helen was Daisy Fay. Published in October 1925, *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* enjoyed much greater success than had the April publication of *The Great Gatsby*. Kunitz goes on to quote Erskine's thoughts on why the novel became so popular: "'The reason Helen of Troy was popular,' he says, 'is not so much my fault as it is that since Homer she has been consistently celebrated—an eternal favorite'" (117). Despite its popularity, however, Hardin Craig writes that Erskine "was assailed by some of the leading scholars of the world in his disregard of the principle of the historical imagination"; regardless, Craig, a Shakespearean scholar himself, goes on to give his opinion as to why Erskine's novel became so popular:

Helen first runs away with Paris from the home of her husband Menelaus. Paris takes her to Troy, and the Trojan War ensues.

Then, after the fall of Troy, she is received back into the home as the wife of Menelaus. As you will see at once, both of these episodes, her running off with a lover and her being taken back by her husband, are of such a character as to engage the cordial interest of our age in that department which we think of as our morals. Running away from husbands with lovers is the stock in trade of our fiction; and when it comes about that the husband takes the “erring” wife back into his home, we have something in the realm of the extraordinary and the enticing; there is something to be accounted for. (67)

Craig’s point is well taken, for in 1925 alone many works of fiction relate to the subject of “running away from husbands.” Riding’s poem, “Summary for Alastor,” certainly hints of an illicit affair. In Anderson’s *Dark Laughter*, Aline leaves her husband, Fred Grey. Daisy Buchanan makes a half-hearted attempt to leave her husband Tom and Myrtle Wilson succeeds in her extramarital affair in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Ellen Thatcher leaves two husbands, John Oglethorpe and Jimmy Herf in John Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer*. Ellen Glasgow’s Dorinda Oakley in *Barren Ground* never sleeps with her husband, Nathan Pedlar. And Kate Clephane runs away with Chris Fenno in Edith Wharton’s *The Mother’s Recompense*. *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* focuses on Helen’s viewpoint throughout the novel, but for dramatic purposes she must have someone to argue with, such as her husband, her child, her neighbors, her friends, and her servant, wherein they discuss “the sanctions and tabus of society” (Cohen 70-71). One critic has called the novel “the longest colloquy in the English language . . . and though

there is enough that is fresh and new to keep the reader stimulated, the dialogue is unvaried and dangerously near to being boring” (Nitchie 178). Nevertheless, in arguments where one might say she uses reverse psychology, Helen comes across as quite practical and sensible.

The novel is divided into five parts—“Helen’s Return,” “The Younger Generation,” “Their Elder,” “Death and Birth,” and “Helen’s Beauty.” When Erskine first submitted the book to the Bobbs-Merrill Company, he had entitled it *The Argument of Helen* (Erskine *Memory* 356). When people asked him to explain the title of his book, he would reply, “It’s the private life of Helen of Troy” (Erskine *Memory* 356), which inevitably led him to change the title of the book. To calm the fear of his publisher, Erskine “reminded him that it was Helen’s public life which was scandalous; in private she was as I had represented her, a conventional woman, differing from her sisters only in looks and in brains. The brains were my gift to her. In Homer and the Greek dramatists Helen is inspiring to look at but not to listen to” (Erskine *Memory* 356-57). Even though Erskine’s concentration is upon classical literature, Helen’s philosophy of life fits within the parameters of several of the heroines of other works published in 1925: i.e., Kate Clephane, Joyce Arrowsmith, Lena Kanty, Dorinda Oakley, Ellen Thatcher, Aline Grey, Myrtle Wilson, Daisy Buchanan, and Jordan Baker.

Erskine discusses the difference between the stories of Homer and Virgil in a *New York Times* article, May 12, 1940: “The Trojan Horse: Symbol For Our Time”:

Virgil’s telling the story from the Trojan angle makes the treachery of the Greeks a bit over-elaborate and childish, but it also emphasizes

the stupidity of the Trojans. To Virgil even famous men, even Aeneas and his relatives, were pitiful rather than glorious. . . . The Greek version of the Wooden Horse contains much the same details but places on them a different emphasis. Homer makes both Trojans and Greeks admirable, on the whole, since he liked to stress whatever glory he could find in men and never to pity them if he could help it. The treachery of Sinon [the Greek warrior pretends to desert the Greeks and as a Trojan captive tells them that the wooden horse the Greeks have left behind is intended as a gift to them] doesn't interest him, but he dwells on Helen's relation to the horse, bringing out her mischievous talent for disturbing, in one way or another, man's peace of mind. In the eighth book of the "Odyssey," Demodocus, the blind minstrel, sings a general account of the horse, with one special emphasis; he says that when Menelaos climbed down from the ambush, bent on vengeance, he went straight to the house of Delphobus [Deiphobus]. Perhaps you should be reminded that Delphobus was a brother of Paris. Helen married him after Paris died. . . . Homer's Helen, as all the world knows, though fascinating, had certain limitations; [Homer] makes her seem far better than the vicious trollop of earlier legend, but he accomplishes this apparent reformation by letting her tell her own faults, which gets her some credit for honest thinking. (110)

In christening Helen as one of the intelligentsia, Erskine joins the ranks of the other experimentalists of 1925—Stein, Cummings, Pound, Eliot, and Riding—all of whose works relate in various ways to Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Stein's "important feelings" may be applied to *Gatsby*. Stein writes, "A man in his living has many things inside him." What things? "He has in him his important feeling of himself to himself inside him." What's that? "He has in him the kind of important feeling of himself to himself that makes his kind of man" (viii). Cummings's "sexual appetites" concern Tom and Myrtle's affair. Pound's Odyssean voyage is analogous to *Gatsby*'s five trips around the world. Eliot's "waste land" exists under the eyes of T. J. Eckleburg. Riding's multi-dispositioned poet can be seen in the different personalities of Daisy. And Erskine's "intelligence" reminds us of Jordan. Bold, experimental, nevertheless, the writings of the four poets and two novelists all relate in one manner or another to the impressionistic *Gatsby*.

CHAPTER 4 – THE REALISTS

Theodore Dreiser, near the end of his career in 1925, published one of his most notable books—*An American Tragedy*. Two other realists already famous also published important works in 1925—Edith Wharton (*The Mother's Recompense*) and Upton Sinclair (*Mammonart*). Though her career began in 1897 with *The Descendant*, Ellen Glasgow did not become famous until 1925 with her novel *Barren Ground*. James Boyd (*Drums*) and Ernest Hemingway (*In Our Time*) are two beginning realists in 1925; Sinclair Lewis, who began his publishing career as a novelist with *Main Street* in 1920, followed up rapidly with what has become his signature novel, *Babbitt* in 1922, published *Arrowsmith* in 1925. In 1930, he would become the first American writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Thus, in this short list of notable books or books by notable American writers in 1925, we see that *The Great Gatsby* had to contend for praise not only with iconic modernist poets but also with best-selling novelists from previous years and over previous generations.

A hallmark of the realist school is that the content of their novels and stories is based loosely on verisimilitude, and their style is straightforward narrative. The school of realism is generally recognized as flourishing in America in the period from late mid-nineteenth century until its end, when it was replaced by Naturalism. Arthur McDowall wrote in 1918, “Realism does not mean seeing things worse than they are any more than it means seeing them better than they are; it means seeing them as they are” (66), a perspective succeeding generations, even when concerned with history and everydayness, might regard as naïve.

Theodore Dreiser found his material for *An American Tragedy* in the Chester Gillette-Grace Brown murder case of 1906, a case that continues to engage the imagination of writers and composers and one that apparently also had stayed on Dreiser's mind for two decades. A melodramatic, fictionalized account of a true-life story, *An American Tragedy* has become as much an American classic as *The Great Gatsby*, though it will never win any prizes for its prose style. Dreiser's genius, however, was to interpret the simple story as a distinctly "American"—that is, materialistic—crime.

Like Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Theodore Dreiser interprets an American Dream gone bad. He reinterprets a lesson from Matthew 5:27-32 that says lust in the heart is the same as committing the act. Dreiser's version of the events depicts a young man who has thoughts of murder in order to free himself from a girl of his own class and to continue his rise into a class far above. But whether Clyde actually murders Roberta is moot. Her death is an accident that Clyde's plans for murder make into what looks like murder to an ambitious prosecutor. Thus, American ambition makes the events portrayed in the novel a double tragedy fueled by very American values.

There is little doubt that his own life experiences influenced much of the fabrication Dreiser lent to the true-life story of Chester Gillette and Grace Brown. As a student at Indiana University, Dreiser studied T. H. Huxley, John Tyndall, and Herbert Spencer, studies that increased his already "pessimistic view of human helplessness in the face of instinct and social forces" (White 2). T. H. Huxley ardently defended Darwin's theory of natural selection in 1859, John Tyndall is

“known as the popular spokesperson for scientific naturalism, the belief that the boundaries of scientific knowledge could not be limited or superseded by religious convictions” (Ostrander 17), and Herbert Spencer is recognized for his view of human freedom. From *Sister Carrie* (1900) to *American Tragedy*, Dreiser wrote fiction in which “natural” forces played dominant roles.

Although the realistic period in American literature had ended by the time *An American Tragedy* was published, Dreiser’s naturalism “places a strong emphasis on the truthful representation of the action” (Holman 368), while it is a “crude but powerful” example “of the naturalistic novel” (Holman 287). The American Dream theory in a manner of speaking applies, then, but as something corrupted, as in the life and business affairs of Jay Gatsby, who sees no contradictions between the rags to riches stories of the great American businessmen of previous eras and his own involvement with swindlers, counterfeiters, and bootleggers. Clyde’s mother is one of the more religious characters in modern literature, albeit she is herself, like Clyde’s victim Roberta, “nothing but an ignorant farm girl, brought up without much thought of religion of any kind” before she marries his father Asa (16). Dreiser develops a very believable extended family for Clyde, but his mother and Samuel Griffiths (his uncle) are the major influences, and, as the novel dramatizes, they spoil him. Clyde’s background reminds us of Gatsby’s in that both come from humble middle-western families, both leave their homes behind in search of wealth, both attain lofty positions through irregular means, both become enamored of a female from a higher class, and both possess an air of innocence regarding the implications or consequences of

their ambitions. Each pursues an unfillable dream that leads to an innocent death, and both meet violent ends themselves.

Like Dreiser's novel, Fitzgerald's is based to some degree on the fated life of a real person, Arnold Rothstein, and filled out with other characters drawn from life. But there are differences. In Dreiser's novel, Clyde Griffiths represents Chester Gillette, and Roberta Alden is based on Grace Brown, Brown being the real-life drowning victim of Gillette. Gillette's wealthy girlfriend is represented in the novel by Griffiths's wealthy girlfriend Sondra Finchley. Fitzgerald based Dan Cody in part on Buffalo Bill (William Cody) and partly on the fictional Hopalong Cassidy, "one of Gatsby's earlier heroes . . . [a] modern and American version of the White Knight, Sir Galahad. The epitome of the upright, refined cowboy with his white hat, Hopalong was always excessively polite to the 'ladies' and was their 'savior' whenever the opportunity presented" (Thornton 43). Both Cody and Cassidy expressed fictional images of the American West and the free masculine life of legend. Daisy Fay Buchanan is patterned after Ginerva King, Fitzgerald's first love in 1915, whom he never forgot, and also Zelda Sayre, whom he married. Nick Carraway and his family derive from Fitzgerald's own social milieu in Saint Paul, Minnesota, the relative West to which Nick returns after his sojourn in New York. Clyde Griffiths's family is patterned after Dreiser's zealously religious background, also in the Mid-West.

In comparing the leading male characters of the two 1925 novels, Clyde Griffiths and Jay Gatsby, we can only reiterate what untold numbers have already said: early on in their lives, Clyde and Jay decide that they will leave the world of

their childhood behind them for a fervent accumulation of wealth. Both young men have descended from humble poor families, but eventually they both forego ethical and moral principles as their desire focuses on the appropriation of an ideal female—Clyde impregnating one girlfriend while misrepresenting himself to another and Gatsby becoming a criminal and later misrepresenting himself as an honest man of means in order to regain the affection of a now-married woman. As symbols of commodity and wealth, both objects of desire are characterized by their possessions. Clyde's and Gatsby's quests result in their deaths at the hands of others—Clyde by execution and Gatsby by murder. Clyde begins by earning his living legitimately in a drug store, hotels, and his uncle's shirt factory, and Gatsby at first serves as Cody's sidekick and later as a bootlegger. Clyde appears ill-at-ease no matter where he is and with whom he is, whereas Gatsby appears self-assured though stereotypically parroting upper class locutions, for example, "old sport." Clyde never achieves the wealth he desperately seeks, but Gatsby becomes ostentatiously wealthy. Clyde never becomes a truly polished man of the world like Gatsby. To Clyde, Sondra Finchley never steps down from the pedestal upon which he has placed her. On the other hand, Daisy Buchanan becomes somewhat less than ideal to Gatsby during the course of the confrontation among the ménage a trois:

She looked at Gatsby. "There, Jay," she said—but her hand as she tried to light a cigarette was trembling. Suddenly she threw the cigarette and the burning match on the carpet.

“Oh, you want too much!” she cried to Gatsby. “I love you now—isn’t that enough? I can’t help what’s past.” She began to sob helplessly. “I did love him once—but I loved you too.”

Gatsby’s eyes opened and closed.

“You loved me too?” he repeated. (88)

Clyde’s family plays a background role throughout Dreiser’s novel, and Mrs. Griffiths comes to comfort Clyde before his execution, but Gatsby’s family is not mentioned until the end of Fitzgerald’s novel when Mr. Gatz, Gatsby’s father, arrives for the funeral, essentially unaware of, and stunned by, his son’s financial success.

The ironic similarities in the situations (idolatry of a female), characters (star-crossed lovers), settings (bodies of water), issues (poor versus rich) in *The Great Gatsby* and *An American Tragedy* literally illuminate the theme of the death of the American Dream as each hero’s life ends simultaneously at the close of each novel. In at least seven published letters, Fitzgerald mentions Dreiser’s works and speaks about his philosophy. One such letter states: “My view of life . . . is the view of Theodore Driesers [sic] and Joseph Conrads [sic]—that life is too strong and remorseless for the sons of men” (Brucoli *Letters* 40).

There is no mention of Fitzgerald in Robert H. Elias’s biography of Dreiser, so obviously they were not personal friends, and there is no way to tell whether Dreiser ever read *The Great Gatsby*, but Fitzgerald did read *An American Tragedy*. In a 1935 letter, Fitzgerald wrote: “If Dreiser, in The American Tragedy; [sic] plans to linger over the drowning in upper New York well and good, but I could tell you

plenty books in which the main episode, around which swings the entire drama, is over and accomplished in four or five sentences” (Brucoli *Letters* 276).

In a May 1924 letter Fitzgerald wrote: “We missed Edith Wharton by one day—she left yesterday for Paris + won’t return until next season. Not that I care, except that I met her in New York + she’s a very distinguished grande dame who fought the good fight with bronze age weapons when there were very few people in the line at all” (Brucoli *A Life* 68). What Fitzgerald means is explained in Carol J. Singley’s biography of Wharton:

Ahead of her time in exploring the limitations that women faced, she nevertheless hesitated to venture too far from familiar conventions when charting their alternatives. It is ironic that a quality lauded in an acclaimed modernist such as Eliot—concern for tradition—should have led to Wharton being considered old-fashioned or shrill, for Wharton no less than Eliot searches for stable structures of meaning amid unsettling cultural change. (9)

Like Fitzgerald, Wharton wrote social novels, and in *The Mother’s Recompense*, published in 1925 when she was sixty-three years old, as in her other work, she satirized and strongly indicted the values of well-to-do American socialites. Louis Auchincloss comments in his introduction to the 1986 printing of *The Mother’s Recompense* that “never were her descriptive powers more brilliantly used than in establishing the small, petty, socially strained, expatriate community of gamblers, alcoholics and women with a past, in which Kate Clephane, outlawed by respectable New York for her desertion of her husband and infant daughter, has sought a

precarious refuge” (vii). Of course escaping from the confines of her sheltered life and from an incompatible husband would be no problem for Wharton to put into words since she had accomplished just such an escape, though she had no children of her own. More certainly, her series of riveting novels portraying tragic or resigned women prove that Wharton’s powers of creativity could also fashion such a woman deserter as Kate Clephane from her imagination.

So many of Wharton’s women are independent characters, certainly not clinging vines of the sort that Fitzgerald’s Daisy Buchanan reverts to, but the fate of Daisy, who does not escape her narrow-minded, unfaithful, high-society husband, is not so different from the fate of some of Wharton’s protagonists. Singley writes:

Like Ernest Hemingway, [Wharton] describes the trauma of battle; like F. Scott Fitzgerald, the social hilarity and rootlessness of the post-World War I era. A sense of discontinuity and lost purpose, hallmarks of modernism, characterize Wharton’s late fiction. Novels such as *The Glimpses of the Moon*, *Twilight Sleep*, and *The Mother’s Recompense* chart a precipitous cultural fall into moral relativism which, lacking an ethical safety net, puts individuals and institutions at risk. Wharton’s modernism, however, unlike Ezra Pound’s or T. S. Eliot’s [the new work of those she would call “*les jeunes*”] is neither anti-romantic nor impersonal. (9)

What does *recompense* mean? In effect, Wharton’s title suggests that Kate pays for deserting her daughter Anne by not revealing that Chris Fenno, the dilettante and social opportunist with whom she becomes involved and but for whom she might

have returned to New York, is her lover. If we view this in terms of *The Great Gatsby*, perhaps poor Daisy is more tragic than ever, for she has a child with the brutal Tom Buchanan and nearly runs off with Gatsby, who, for all his charm, is an opportunist dilettante himself, a maker of spectacle in his grand but pretentious house, built with wealth won through illegal business schemes. The fate of Daisy's daughter is moot, but we are not left with much hope for her, given her parents.

Wharton's heroines in general rebel in one way or another against the norms of society, whether rich or poor. Most of their rebellion emanates from their boredom, boredom with confinement in stultifying environments and even their intellectual or emotional superiority to the men with whom their lives are burdened. This disillusionment underlies the themes in many works that arrived in bookstores in 1925: *Dark Laughter*, *The Professor's House*, *An American Tragedy*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and "A Summary for Alastor," but especially *The Great Gatsby*, where Daisy says she hopes her new daughter is "a beautiful little fool" because "that's the best thing a girl can be in this world" (Fitzgerald 12). In Wharton's novel, even when Kate accepts her abandoned daughter Anne's invitation to resume her role as mother, Kate drops again into boredom: "For Kate, expecting difficulty," as Louis Auchincloss writes, "is at first enraptured, then simply relieved and at last disillusioned by the bland atmosphere of forgiveness, or rather oblivion, in which her old fault seems to have been lost" (viii). In a manner of speaking, Kate almost resents the lack of conflict in society's acceptance or ignorance of her checkered past. Would the invigoration of conflict have proved more satisfying? Did she expect the indignation of society to convict her of sinfulness, as she surely had

convicted herself? This lack of agreement about her drop from grace bothers Kate. She inwardly invites condemnation. Like a penitent pleading forgiveness from the priest, she expects exact atonement for her sins, much as does the speaker of Riding's "A Summary for Alastor," who "must weep awhile," but "The dreaming child can smile / And keep on safely sleeping" (ll. 23-24). The atonement, however, extracts an extreme price from Kate, not an unusual fate for one of Wharton's heroines. "The central problem for the reader of today—and it may well also have been the same for a reader in 1925—is that Kate is making too much of the circumstance," Auchincloss argues (ix). "Her horror approaches the horror of Oedipus when he learns that he has married his mother. Kate, like Hamlet in T. S. Eliot's essay, 'is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible because it is in excess of the facts as they appear'" (Auchincloss ix). One answer to such feelings is Daisy's, "'Sophisticated—God, I'm sophisticated!'" (Fitzgerald 12). These moderns live in a world where the old values have changed, but perhaps not the human soul. Dreiser's graphic portrayal of this circumstance is Clyde's crawling away like an animal at the climax of each of two prominent events in his life. Today's reader might consider Kate's situation one of cowardice, not martyrdom. For a woman in 1925, however, to abandon her child, she might expect banishment forever. Although Auchincloss claims that Kate over-dramatizes her circumstance, the reader of 1925 might disagree. That is to say, by 1925 standards, Kate should keep quiet about her secret involvement with Chris Fenno and allow her daughter to marry him.

The real problem is that Kate shuns the idea of seeing Anne and Chris together: “Kate is suddenly faced with her daughter’s proposal that they continue to live together even after the marriage” (Auchincloss x). This love for Chris overwhelms Kate’s love for Anne. After all, Kate did not return to Anne because of Chris years ago. Kate’s turmoil is hardly justified, for she blames the confinements of society for her abandoning the husband and daughter in the first place. Wharton leaves the reader wondering why Kate really flees New York. Unlike Tom and Daisy Buchanan, she may not leave a mess for others to clean up, but she may be leaving her daughter to learn only too late what Kate herself has learned about marriage. All part of the upper class, Tom, Daisy, and Kate are typical of those in society who cause proletarians their problems, according to Upton Sinclair, whose 1925 *Mammonart* both confirms and, in effect, condemns novels like *The Great Gatsby*.

Upton Sinclair will always be remembered for his novel *The Jungle* (1906), which dealt with the horrible conditions in the United States’ meat packing industry and led ultimately not to a socialist government in America but to the passage of the Meat Inspection Act in 1906. Perhaps characteristically for this literary reformer, his 1925 book *Mammonart: An Essay in Economic Interpretation* is a series of essays about the social and economic forces that underlie many of the modern works of fiction published the same year, especially *The Great Gatsby*.

Sinclair argues that the distinction between “art” and “propaganda” is “purely a class distinction and a class weapon, itself a piece of ruling-class propaganda, a means of duping the minds of men, and keeping them enslaved to

false standards both of art and of life” (10b). How do Sinclair’s opinions about propaganda compare to those of F. Scott Fitzgerald with respect to class distinction? Fitzgerald would begin his long-labored-over 1934 novel, *Tender is the Night*, “On the pleasant shores of the French Riviera,” but *The Great Gatsby* confines itself mostly to East and West Egg, the old and new parts of an American Riviera, and these, rendered ironically, are the names of the people who came to Gatsby’s parties:

From East Egg, then, came the Chester Beckers and the Leeches, and a man named Bunsen, whom I [Nick] knew at Yale, and Doctor Webster Civet, who was drowned last summer up in Maine. And the Hornbeams and the Willie Voltaires, and a whole clan named Blackbuck, who always gathered in a corner and flipped up their noses like goats at whosoever came near. And the Ismays and the Chrysties (or rather Hubert Auerbach and Mr. Chrystie’s wife), and Edgar Beaver, whose hair, they say, turned cotton-white one winter afternoon for no good reason at all. (Fitzgerald 40)

This could be a vision of the social set by Edith Wharton or e. e. cummings or even Gertrude Stein. While the themes of class distinction and propaganda permeate much of Fitzgerald’s work, a neat summary appears in Theodore Dreiser’s

Newspaper Days:

I marveled slightly at [the] appearance [of a group of industrial workers] and their number, and assumed . . . that . . . they had heard of the wonderful American Constitution. . . . All I knew was that

there had been a very great steel strike in Pittsburgh recently; that one Andrew Carnegie as well as other steel manufacturers—the Olivers, for one, and Frick—had built fences and strung them with electrified barbed wire in order to protect themselves against the “lawless” attacks of “lawless” workingmen; that large numbers of state or county or city-paid deputy sheriffs and mounted police and city policemen had been “sworn in” and set to guarding the company’s very honorable property; and that one H. C. Frick, a leading steel manager for Mr. Carnegie, had been slightly wounded by a desperado named Alexander Berkman, who was about the ignoble task of inflaming these same workingmen—all foreigners of course, and lawless and unappreciative of the great and prosperous steel company, which was paying them reasonable wages and against which they had no honest complaint, or so I had frequently read.

(488-89)

Both Dreiser and Sinclair are on the side of the proletariat in their bitter distinction between the ruling class and the poor, but in his own way, so is Fitzgerald. Tom Buchanan is an example. John McCormick says, “Tom Buchanan, with his ‘shining arrogant eyes,’ his wealth, and his ‘body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body,’ is precisely right, precisely stupid and clever enough to bear fully Fitzgerald’s vision of a certain kind of power and brutality in American life” (37). And, like Dreiser and Fitzgerald, Upton Sinclair will preach about the disparities between rich and not rich in the remainder of his essays in *Mammonart*. Whether

Fitzgerald read Upton Sinclair is questionable, but we know that Fitzgerald was familiar with Sinclair's publication problems. Leon Harris writes in his biography of Sinclair:

In 1921, in *The Beautiful and the Damned*, F. Scott Fitzgerald defined the summum bonum [highest good] as "the final polish of the shoe, the ultimate dab of the clothes brush," and, in 1925, he published the definitive novel of the twenties, *The Great Gatsby*. In 1922 Sinclair's novel attacking the same superficialities of the period as *Gatsby* was published. Entitled *They Call Me Carpenter: A Tale of the Second Coming*, it could hardly have been more heavy-handed or more deservedly forgotten, with such chief characters as Abey Tschniczklefritsch, a movie producer with a burlesque hall Jewish accent, and Mary Magna, a great movie star who is redeemed from her wicked ways and brought to salvation by The Carpenter before He is lynched by the American Legionnaires of Mobland. (196)

In a note to the biography, Harris states that *The New York Times* "refused even to accept" Upton Sinclair's "paid advertisement for TBC" [*The Brass Check*] (382). Fitzgerald, in a January letter that same year, 1922, to Edmund Wilson, who had written an article for the March 1922 issue of *The Bookman*, asked Wilson to take out an unidentified incident that occurred during Fitzgerald's army service:

I am afraid of it. . . . Ever since *Three Soldiers*, the *New York Times* has been itching for a chance to get at the critics of the war. If they got hold of this I would be assailed with the most violent vituperation

in the press of the entire country (and you know what the press can do, how they can present an incident to make a man upholding an unpopular cause into the likeness of a monster—vide [sp] Upton Sinclair. (Brucoli *Letters* 51)

Upton Sinclair does not mention Fitzgerald at all in *Mammonart*, but he does mention Sherwood Anderson and Theodore Dreiser in denigrating William Lyon Phelps's membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters, "a most august body of literary nonentities" (270). "If Dostievski [sic] himself were alive," says Upton Sinclair, "and writing in the United States today, the masters of this august body would be just as apt to invite him to their membership as they are to invite Theodore Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson" (270). The only other 1925 contemporary whom Upton Sinclair includes in *Mammonart* is Sinclair Lewis. He speaks at length about "a lanky, red-headed youth from Minnesota" and recalls "the story of "Main Street"" [sic] and "mixes" Flaubert "up with Main Street, Gopher Prairie, Minn. . . to bring out the contention" that in *Madame Bovary* "the sexual impulse dominates the lives of men and women. . . . We have once more the old Greek tragedy with its lurking Nemesis; only this time the lurking-place is in the genital glands" (207). In a October 25, 1924, letter to his agent Harold Ober, Fitzgerald, in sending him the typed manuscript of *The Great Gatsby*, says "Whether it will serialize you will be a better judge than I. There is some pretty frank stuff in it and I wouldn't want it to be chopped as Hovey chopped the Beautiful + Damned" (Brucoli *Letters* 83). In a November 18, 1924, letter, Maxwell Perkins (Fitzgerald's editor), writes that the story has "a great deal of underlying thought of unusual

quality. It has a kind of mystic atmosphere” (Brucoli *Letters* 86). One assumes, then, that Fitzgerald’s novel would have displeased Sinclair as much as did the writers he derides.

Ellen Glasgow’s *Barren Ground*, published in 1925 when she was fifty-two years old, might seem in its very title to take on the issues raised by F. Scott Fitzgerald whose *The Great Gatsby* centers on an ash heap wasteland where delusion and death lurk. Like Wharton, however, Glasgow’s concerns are with female, not male, characters. “What isolation! What barrenness!” says Dorinda Oakley when she fully encounters the task of her life. Describing the protagonist as a universal character, Glasgow proclaims that Dorinda Oakley “exists wherever a human being has learned to live without joy, wherever the spirit of fortitude has triumphed over the sense of futility” (viii), a discovery tragically unavailable for Jay Gatsby, whose manicured gardens become the barren ground where his body is found by the gardener.

As a matter of comparison, Dorinda’s character in Ellen Glasgow’s *Barren Ground* mirrors the research scientist Martin Arrowsmith in another realist work, Sinclair Lewis’s *Arrowsmith*, more than, say, the reformed Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, though more similarities may exist than immediately meet the eye. That is to say, Dorinda and Martin share a “spirit of fortitude” that facilitates their triumph over a “sense of futility.” Whether Gatsby suffers this feeling or not, there is an immense sense of futility dominating the novel especially in the lives of Daisy, Myrtle, and George Wilson.

Glasgow structures *Barren Ground* as a *bildungsroman* about Dorinda Oakley—the daughter of Joshua Oakley, a poor white Virginia farmer—and Lewis structures *Arrowsmith* as a *bildungsroman* about Martin Arrowsmith—the “son of J. J. Arrowsmith, who conducted the New York Clothing Bazaar” (1), but Fitzgerald appears to make *Gatsby*’s story a vicarious *bildungsroman* for the young and impressionable Nick Carraway. Their extremely different backgrounds explain why Dorinda involves herself in things bucolic and Martin engages himself in things urban. By different means both acquire livelihoods that benefit the necessities of humanity, albeit Dorinda’s occupation generates goods that nourish the body and Martin’s vocation creates cures that heal. *Gatsby* touches both worlds; however, the self-created former farmboy who becomes a soldier and an urban criminal sees no irony in the fact that his latest mentor, Wolfsheim, toyed “with the faith of fifty million people—with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe,” fixing the World Series in 1919 (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 48).

At the beginning of *Barren Ground*, Dorinda stands alone “in an orange-coloured shawl at the window of Pedlar’s store and looks, through the falling snow, at the deserted road” (3), like *Gatsby* staring at “a green light that burns all night at the end of [Daisy’s] dock” (Fitzgerald 61). At the end of *Gatsby*, the reader may experience a strange feeling of nostalgia as Nick reflects upon his and *Gatsby*’s relationship, while at the end of *Barren Ground*, the reader may experience a feeling of hope as Dorinda decides that Pedlar’s son, John Abner, will inherit her land, a land that has been her savior (350). What Nick inherits from *Gatsby* is abstract; though Nick does return to his roots in the mid-west, for what future we do not

know. But what John Abner will inherit from Dorinda is something palpable, something that another generation will hopefully cultivate.

Allen Tate faults Glasgow for not abiding by his “prescription for acceptable Southern literature . . .,” a system requiring “that the writer must ‘ignore the historical background of his subject; and second, he must judge the subject strictly in terms of the material welfare of his characters and of the ‘injustice’ which keeps them from getting enough of it. . . . Somewhat reluctantly Tate includes *Barren Ground* among the literary works written to this formula:

The novel that came nearest to real distinction was probably Miss Glasgow’s *Barren Ground*; but even this excellent novel is written outside the subject, with the result that the frustration of her Virginia farmers is not examined as an instance of the decay of rural culture everywhere, but rather as a simple object-lesson in the lack of standard American ‘advantages.’ (Santas 140)

Joan Foster Santas argues that Dorinda’s affection lies with the “shared place of her ancestors and not with the soil or even what has always been referred to so vaguely as nature or natural scenes” (148). Maybe so, but many natural scenes describe weather conditions that provide background relevant to the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the story, just as environmental scenery in *The Great Gatsby* coincides with the fatal development of the plot—the garden parties, the ash heap, an overheated New York City. In another example from *Barren Ground*, weather conditions foreshadow the sense of alienation Dorinda faces in her pregnancy: “Straight, tranquil, thin and fugitive as mist, the snow was falling” (10),

a scene that oddly connects to the “unreal city” of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Fitzgerald’s scene in which Nick remembers the hot city on the 4th of July through a drunken haze.

One more natural, reappearing symbol focuses on the pine tree that can be seen from the Oakley’s farmhouse, not to mention that the prefix of Dorinda’s surname is the word “oak”: “Usually, unless she overslept herself and her mother got breakfast without waking her, the men were in the fields and the two women were attending to the chickens or cleaning the house before the branches of the big pine were gilded with light” (51). The tree also provides solace for Joshua as he lies stricken on his bed:

Every now and then he made an effort to follow [Dorinda], while a bewildered expression crept into his face; but it was only for a minute at a time that he could fix his mind on what she was saying, and when the strain became too great for him, his gaze wandered to the open window and the harp-shaped pine, which towered, dark as night, against the morning blue of the sky. (267)

In comparing Glasgow’s *Barren Ground* with Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby*, one experiences the sense of alienation that pervades both works. In *Barren Ground*, Dorinda allows a youthful mistake to affect her pessimistically forever. *Gatsby* likewise ends his life alone, practically unaccompanied at his funeral. Nick says, “About five o’clock our procession of three cars reached the cemetery and stopped in a thick drizzle beside the gate—first a motor hearse, horribly black and wet, then Mr. Gatz and the minister and I in the limousine, and a little later four or five

servants and the postman from West Egg, in Gatsby's station wagon, all wet to the skin" (116-17). The authors of *The Great Gatsby* and *Barren Ground* project the lives of their characters "against a background of unlimited space and time, where the flatness creates an illusion of immensity and over the immutable landscape human lives drift and vanish like shadows" (Santas 146).

Glasgow's Dorinda Oakley, like Fitzgerald's Gatsby and Wharton's Kate Clephane, reaches for someone who wrecks her life, but, like the Alastor speaker in Riding's poem, Dorinda moves on, as Gatsby might have but for the deluded mechanic, George Wilson.

Glasgow is not mentioned in Fitzgerald's published letters, nor does Santas mention any personal contact between the two in her biography of Glasgow. Santas does talk about *The Great Gatsby*. The following is one of her excerpts:

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy* often seem unwitting confessions of his own as well as his protagonists' bewilderment over the means and manners necessary to achieve the "happiness" of the elect. Furthermore, a Nicholas of the next generation proclaimed in *The Great Gatsby* the truth, terrible in its very simplicity, that there were deficiencies in the Horatio Alger myth as well as in the delusions of the wealthy. (45)

Santas mentions "Nick's observation of Daisy Buchanan's basic insincerity"; "a bluestocking Nick Carraway"; Nick's "long way from the Midwest" (76). Then she calls Jay Gatsby "an innocent" (153). In one instance Santas compares Dorinda with Sinclair Lewis's Carol Milford of *Main Street* in that "both girls reached

toward life with the expectant arms of the eternally young who feel only emptiness around them” (152). Another protagonist who, like Gatsby and Dorinda, moves on with his life through despair is Lewis’s Martin Arrowsmith.

Harry Sinclair Lewis was a recognized literary presence at the printing of *Arrowsmith* in 1925 when he was forty years old. Like *Main Street* (1920), Lewis’s first major commercial success, *Arrowsmith* questions and satirizes the conventions of American middle-class life, particularly the relationship between husband and wife. In 1926, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith*, but refused it. Somewhat ironically, the Pulitzer committee wanted to give him the prize for *Main Street* in 1920, but the trustees vetoed the decision, and the 1920 award for fiction went to Edith Wharton in 1921 for *The Age of Innocence* (Wolff 4). He received and accepted the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930, the first American to be so honored.

Like Lewis’s father, the male protagonists of both *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith* possess medical degrees. Lewis’s biographer Mark Schorer proposes that Lewis, in creating Martin, was thinking of R. G. Hussey, professor of pathology at Yale (418). Nonetheless, McCormick says that Lewis’s medical doctors are also “variations upon George Babbitt” (81), that is, they have the bourgeois traits and limitations of Lewis’s dissatisfied small city character in his famous 1922 novel. Although Martin graduates seventh in his class and emerges as Martin L. Arrowsmith, M.D., house physician in the Zenith General Hospital (Lewis 115), he feels unhappy: “With this sadness there was envy that he should be left out of things, that others should go ahead of him, ever surer in technique, more widely aware of the phenomena of biological chemistry, more deeply daring to explain laws

at which the pioneers had but fumbled and hinted” (Lewis 118). He has known all along that he belongs in research, but with his medical degree in hand, the practical course to follow is that of physician, much as Gatsby, with all his experience and credentials, chooses the path of least resistance after World War I and becomes not social or intellectual iconoclast but a small-time criminal.

Though considered a realist, Lewis, like Fitzgerald, dabbled in modernist styles. John McCormick describes Lewis’s narrative technique as consisting mainly of a mosaic of vignettes, rarely more than a printed page in length, which he numbered within a chapter to construct a loose formal pattern. The result is not a smoothly flowing narrative, but rather the expansion of moments of consciousness, of specific segments of time. It is most successful in *Babbitt*, where the technique is appropriate to Lewis’ fascination with objects and processes; in *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith*, the fragmentary time-conscious technique works against sustained narrative, and, as a result, against our awareness of the passing of months and years. (83)

One may keep up with Martin’s progress, however, by tracing his association with various mentors, much as Gatsby’s arrival in West Egg is made possible through the backing of Cody and then Wolfsheim and observed from less and less distance by the young broker Nick Carraway. At the age of fourteen Martin becomes an “unpaid assistant” to Doc Vickerson (a character Lewis created from no known prototype) (Schorer 418), but “it is not certain that, in attaching himself to Doc Vickerson, Martin was entirely and edifyingly controlled by a desire to become

a Great Healer” (Lewis 2). When Martin first views the laboratory of Doc Vickerson, however, he feels exhilarated. Doc Vickerson advises Martin, “Training, that’ what you got t’ get. Fundamentals. Know chemistry. Biology. I nev’ did” (Lewis 4).

Enter the mysterious genius Dr. Max Gottlieb, who teaches at the University of Winnemac. Gottlieb’s great book, “Immunology,” “has been read by seven-ninths of all the men in the world who could possibly understand it—the number of these being nine” (Lewis 9). Martin hopes that Professor Gottlieb will “recognize him as a genius, make him an assistant, predict for him” (Lewis 10). Finally, Gottlieb notices Martin: “I do not t’ink you will be a good doctor. Good doctors are fine—often they are artists—but their trade, it is not for us lonely ones that work in labs” (Lewis 38). The distinction between the physician and the researcher exists throughout the novel. The problem of the researcher, as portrayed by Lewis, deals with the powers-that-be. Both Gottlieb and Martin face this problem, and it exerts a bitter influence on both their careers.

The University of Winnemac fires Gottlieb after he has “drudged on for a dozen years” as professor of bacteriology (Lewis 122). Gottlieb, however, was never interested in teaching but in research. Eventually hired by Dawson Hunziker, Gottlieb enjoys “such laboratories as he had never planned” (Lewis 136-37). Unfortunately, Gottlieb loses that job also: “He began, that hour, a sordid strategy which his old proud self would have called inconceivable; he began to equivocate, to put off announcement and production till he should have ‘cleared up a few points,’ while week on week Hunziker became more threatening” (Lewis 138).

Martin Arrowsmith and Gottlieb enjoy a successful reunion in the year 1916, and, upon his return home, Martin suddenly feels inspired to pray the prayer of the scientist:

“God give me unclouded eyes and freedom from haste. God give me a quiet and relentless anger against all pretense and all pretentious work and all work left slack and unfinished. God give me a restlessness whereby I may neither sleep nor accept praise till my observed results equal my calculated results or in pious glee I discover and assault my error. God give me strength not to trust to God!”

(Lewis 280)

Gatsby, on the other hand is *his* own creator. But Martin’s life lacks fruition, too, at this time of Western crisis: Martin “puttered his insignificant way through the early years of the Great European War” (Lewis 292). Although Lewis and Fitzgerald were both from Minnesota, they were never personal acquaintances, but each was keenly familiar with the other’s works. There is at least one written documentation that Fitzgerald corresponded directly with Lewis when he sent *The Great Gatsby* to Lewis in April 1925 with the inscription “The Great Gatsby. University of Tulsa [sic], Capri, Italy. Dear Sinclair Lewis, I’ve just sent for *Arrowsmith*. My hope is that this *The Great Gatsby* will be the second best American book of the Spring. F. Scott Fitzgerald” (Brucoli *Letters* 103). And Fitzgerald mentions Lewis in several letters, 1921-1933, but the two were from different generation s and never traveled in the same circles. Mark Schorer writes:

Fitzgerald moving with such apparent ease into the life of Princeton, enjoying so immediately his fantastic success, blithe heir to all that glamour that Lewis was never to know, let alone embody, moving so easily into “that real Parisian bunch” that always shut Lewis out, writing two great books of subtle charm and beauty and pathos, and one of them a perfect work of art and socially important as well—how different! (275)

Even though both Fitzgerald and Lewis portray the spirit of the times, many of the qualities in the novels of Lewis mark “him as having been formed before 1914 and sets him off . . . sharply from the only slightly younger writers who matured during the First World War and were publishing their exciting early books—*The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Manhattan Transfer*, *Soldiers’ Pay*—simultaneously with Lewis’s big ones” (Schorer 214). Nevertheless, when “Martin conducts a gauche winter flirtation with one Orchid Pickerbaugh under the eyes of his wife” (Schorer 250), the reader’s mind automatically reverts once again to Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* and Tom Buchanan’s affair with Myrtle Wilson under the eyes of Daisy Buchanan.

Mentioning James Boyd only once in his letters, Scott Fitzgerald, March 11, 1935, wrote to Maxwell Perkins from Baltimore, Maryland: “By the way we had sort of a Scribner congeries here last night. Jim Boyd and Elizabeth [Lemmon—Perkins’s cousin who lived at ‘Welbourne’ in northern Virginia] came to supper and George Calverton [wrote and edited books on political and sociological subjects] dropped in afterwards” (Brucoli *Letters* 277). At the age of thirty-seven, North Carolinian James Boyd released a novel about the Revolutionary War,

Drums, March 27, 1925, to great popular and critical acclaim. Ernest E. Leisy writes that *Drums* was “an excellent novel to connect the warfare on the sea with the events of the Revolution in the Southern Colonies” (102). Unlike Eliot’s “view of history as a spiral rather than as a straight line, history as recurrence rather than as linear causation” (McCormick 128), Boyd’s view is linear and remains true to the main facts of history.

Instead of Hopalong Cassidy, Boyd’s young Johnny Fraser reads about the exploits of Lucius Cornelius Balbus, Caesar’s chief builder. Boyd figuratively connects the study of ancient militaristic Romans to the forthcoming war between the American colonies and the British monarchy, perhaps intuiting critic John McCormick’s observation that “unless our European antecedents and contemporary leanings are duly noted, any resulting history is predestined to provincialism and distortion” (223). The story of Balbus and his wall, although fascinating to read in English, must have proved challenging to young Johnny in a Latin text. After his studies by the firelight, he will go to bed and awaken to hear “Sophonsiba, the cook, pounding hominy in the mortar” (10). Sophonsiba speaks with the African American vernacular inflection widely employed by white authors in this time period: “‘Now, Mist’ Johnneh, you paw say come to de pasture an’ he’p fix de fence. De yearlins bust out last night’” (11). Boyd’s use of the Punic name of Sophonsiba (intriguing because Faulkner uses it as the “man-hunting” single sister of Hubert Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses* many years later) may reflect that Boyd intends the reader to envision the Punic Wars, a series of three wars fought between Rome and the Phoenician city of Carthage, as parallel to the Scottish rebellion, the

American Revolution, and the Civil War that is to come later, all seen through the eyes of Celtic, not Roman, peoples. Although Boyd does not get around to the actual pre-war skirmishes at sea and the land battles of the Revolutionary War until three-fourths of the way through the book, the image of other historical military actions in some manner of speaking is ever present.

A military inference exists in the scene of Mrs. Fraser returning home astride a horse, chaperoned by the Frasers' African American slave, Scipio (14), another Punic name, probably taken from the name of the historically famous Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major, a general in the Second Punic War and statesman of the Roman Republic; he defeated Hannibal of Carthage, a feat that earned him the surname *Africanus*. In using the Punic names of "Scipio" and "Sophonsiba," Boyd has "found a technique for using history" (McCormick 127), a technique that focuses his transitional scenes on military implications.

Not until chapter XLVI, however, does Johnny actually become engaged in the land battle of the Revolutionary War. He and the North Carolina Brigade engage the British on American soil. By chapter XLVII, the war is over.

Johnny distinguishes himself during the Revolutionary War, much as Gatsby does during World War I. Wolfsheim tells Nick, "My memory goes back to when first I met him. . . . A young major just out of the army and covered over with medals he got in the war" (114). Both Johnny and Gatsby are romantics. John Kuehl writes about the qualities that make Gatsby a hero, but the same may be said of Johnny, although both books engage the reader in the "study of a nation's values" (16) as well:

Jay Gatsby is a hero because he is a romantic who has ideals, dreams, and illusions, who answers a call to something beyond life, who has the capacity to respond to the infinite possibilities of existence, who sees the world not as it is but as it might be. He has a “heightened sensitivity to the promises of life . . . an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness.” His reveries give him “a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy’s wing.” He is convinced that one can repeat the past, can “fix everything just the way it was before.” As a romantic he pursues the ideal, the illusion of something beautiful and wonderful, something akin to the eternal in transcending the drab facts of life. Because he is a romantic, he realizes that illusion itself, not its materialization, is important. . . . But *The Great Gatsby* is not only romance. It is also a realistic study of a nation’s values and their effect on an individual. (16)

The “nation’s values and their effect on an individual” are quite different in the two novels. *Drums* focuses heavily on the life of Fraser leading up to the Revolutionary War. He is surrounded first by subjects loyal to England and then patriotic individuals who risk their lives for America’s freedom. In *The Great Gatsby*, World War I has ended and the nation’s values have changed drastically, a situation epitomized in Kuehl’s discussion of the “Great Party”:

But there are other truths to tell besides the literal one, and so we try taking the Great Party as symbol. This means taking it in relation to

Gatsby's famous Dream, toward which Nick Carraway's disposition is so disastrously ambivalent. There would have been no parties if James Gatz had not wandered away from Minnesota, into a war, and eventually into Louisville. There he met Daisy, and trouble came. Imagine yourself Gatsby. You find yourself in another place from those you know. You have been given special attractive clothes (i.e., the uniform of an officer) such as you have never had, and you are different yourself; and a girl who somewhere else might never have looked at you turns out to love you, at least for the shining moment. Then somebody—in Washington—waves a wand and you ship out. Poetry has very abruptly changed to prose. (19)

Both Fraser and Gatsby's mortality are influenced by the pursuit of females. Gatsby pursues and loses Daisy, overcome by meaninglessness and death; Fraser pursues and wins Stewart, representing life and freedom. As Whisnant comments, "Stewart Prevost functions as an ideal for Fraser much as Daisy Buchanan does for Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*" (79). The two novels, however, bear scant comparison because the Fraser in *Drums* is raised by a loving family who support him in all his decisions and welcome him home to North Carolina after his sojourn abroad, whereas Gatsby's perspective is told to us by Carraway, and Gatsby's family is of little importance. The sense of patriotic pride that permeates *Drums* and that is also lacking in our other 1925 works, makes one wonder if Boyd's unadulterated positive portrait of a young man entering an unambiguous war helped determine his book's success, whereas the highly

ambiguous *Gatsby's* story did less well. Ironically, Fitzgerald's "achievement received critical praise, but sales of *Gatsby* were disappointing" (Brucoli "A Brief Life" xxi)

Literary competition is in one sense accidental, since books may be labored over for years in obscurity and with no more intent than the author's wish to write. Bold writers are, in fact, often competing only with the society they see around them. Fitzgerald probably felt very little concern about the writers older than he was and already discussed in this chapter. From some he learned, but there was one writer truly of his own time whose roughly parallel work illuminates another aspect of Fitzgerald's creative life and his desire for fame. In Paris in the early Twenties, when Ernest Hemingway was himself in his early twenties, he wrote the poem "The Age Demanded": "The age demanded that we sing / And cut away our tongue. / The age demanded that we flow / And hammered in the bung / The age demanded that we dance / And jammed us into iron pants. / And in the end the age was handed / The sort of shit that it demanded" (Gerogiannis). Hemingway's credo might be said to predict the challenge to such an age by Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (March 1925) or to Hemingway's own collection of interrelated stories and sketches *In Our Time* (October 5, 1925), published by Boni & Liveright when he was twenty-six and praised by such writers as John Dos Passos, Ford Madox Ford, and F. Scott Fitzgerald himself.

Before Fitzgerald and Hemingway actually met, Hemingway had decided upon the title *In Our Time* from a line in the Anglican Church's *Book of Common Prayer*, "Give us peace in our time, O Lord," for a 1924 limited-edition version of

the short sketches that became interchapters of the full publication of *In Our Time* in 1925. Hemingway immediately earned his place among the most promising American writers, writers including his mentors Sherwood Anderson, who published *Dark Laughter*, and Gertrude Stein, who published *The Making of Americans*, both in the same year, 1925. One of the most interesting features of Hemingway's book is that preceding each short story—and many of them have become Hemingway classics—are the vignettes in even sparer prose, the kind of writing Hemingway practiced in Europe to explore and develop his now famous style and point of view. These sixteen sketches are not titled and concern a variety of subjects from the Great War to bullfights to rough life in a gritty lower class America. Like the strangely disparate elements of his friend John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, his friend Fitzgerald's dreamy impressions of Gatsby's life, or the tales of loosely connected grotesques in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, the vignettes serve as a record of the spirit characterizing the mood of the post-World War I era, aptly reflected in his title, *In Our Time*.

The post-World War I mood is exemplified in the exploits of these expatriates who moved on to Spain from Paris and who congregated at the same parties while enjoying food and drink. For example, in early June 1926, at a champagne-and-caviar party, including Archie and Ada MacLeish and Ernest and Hadley Hemingway, Fitzgerald arrived already tipsy and "intent on social sabotage. 'To begin with,' said Gerald [Murphy], 'he made all sorts of derogatory remarks about the caviar-and-champagne notion . . . evidently because he thought it the height of affectation.'" Then he stared so long and rudely at a pretty girl at a nearby

table that she complained to the head waiter. Next he began tossing ashtrays at another of the tables, laughing with sophomoric glee, until the head waiter had to be called again” (Baker 220).

Fitzgerald mentions Hemingway’s *In Our Time* several times in his published letters. For example, in an encouraging letter to a would-be writer, November 9, 1938, he wrote, “Ernest Hemingway’s first stories ‘In Our Time’ went right down to the bottom of all that he had ever felt and known” (Brucoli 368).

The setting of *In Our Time*’s interchapters is chiefly World War I (1914-1918). For example, Chapter I is in France and the viewpoint of a kitchen corporal is introduced: “We were fifty kilometers from the front but the adjutant worried about the fire in my kitchen. It was funny going along that road. That was when I was a kitchen corporal” (13). This scene precedes the first story about Hemingway’s Nick Adams (“Indian Camp”), a narrow look at a child who views “a Cæsarian” birth performed “with a jack-knife and” sewed up “with nine-foot, tapered gut leader,” only to turn around and see the Indian father “lay with his face toward the wall. His throat . . . cut from ear to ear” (18). Nick Adams is too young to comprehend death, and next day “sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die” (19). Dean Rehberger points out that Nick Adams is essentially a passive man to whom unpleasant things happen, not initiating action, nor behaving particularly well under pressure. Rather he is a vulnerable young man growing up without strong male role models, “neither sexually confident nor physically sure of himself” (30). On the other hand, Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway has strong role models in his father and in Gatsby

himself. Harold Bloom writes that Gatsby saves Nick from the “abyss of nihilism” and gives Nick “an image of the male side of heterosexual love that can be placed against the sadistic masculinity of Tom Buchanan” (2). Yes, Fitzgerald saves Nick Carraway from the abyss of nihilism, but does Hemingway save Nick Adams? Perhaps, because at the end of *In Our Time*, he is world weary and looks longingly toward America and home in a scene from Greece.

Like Fitzgerald, Hemingway includes a figure from the underworld in his book. In Chapter XV, “They hanged Sam Cardinella at six o’clock in the morning in the corridor of the county jail” (143). Cardinella (1868-1921) was a Chicago mobster, extortionist, and leader of the Cardinelli Gang during the 1910s. He terrorized Chicago’s Little Italy between 1915-1918, killing at least twenty and wounding hundreds more. Cardinella was hanged for the 1919 murder of saloon-owner Andrew P. Bowman on July 15, 1921.

Continuing his theme of nihilism, Hemingway, in the final interchapter, “L-Envoi” [explanatory concluding remarks to a poem, essay, or book], discusses other violent thugs under the guise of an American envoy visiting the Greek king and queen after World War I. Speaking about the coup d’état of Colonel Plastiras in 1922 that dethroned Constantine, Hemingway writes, “Like all Greeks he [the king] wanted to go to America” (157). Hemingway goes on to mention Alexander Kerensky, the Russian revolutionary leader who helped topple the Russian monarchy in 1917. These topical political references to Plastiras and Kerensky reflect the same concerns that inspired Fitzgerald to use “George” and “Wilson” as names for his deranged auto mechanic.

Fitzgerald conceived the idea of using the semi-autobiographical Nick Carraway as narrator of *The Great Gatsby* after reading Joseph Conrad, whose recurring character Marlow is a kind of unengaged narrator of certain contemporary horrors. As previously discussed, Fitzgerald employed dozens of real sources. Some others include the fashionable Long Island bootlegger Max Von Guerlach as his model for Gatsby, and the idea for the sightless eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg on a billboard overlooking the Valley of Ashes from Scribner's design for a dust-jacket that featured two enormous eyes overlooking New York, representing Daisy Buchanan, a dust-jacket that was eventually used. The sightless eyes of Eckleburg are remnants of an advertising billboard for an oculist, mocking the notion of clear-sightedness, writes Linda C. Pelzer, and staring inscrutably down on the comings and goings that constitute life in the Valley of Ashes. These eyes also represent the absent God of Gatsby's world, indicated when George accuses Myrtle of adultery and forces her to look out the window at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, insisting they know and see everything (95).

While *The Great Gatsby* stars a mysterious sophisticate in a novel full of brilliant imagery and intriguing adult social situations, *In Our Time* focuses on a type "one meets in the more wild and woolly regions of the United States" (Lawrence 19). Hemingway was fascinated, writes Michael Reynolds, by tales of the old west, particularly Owen Wister's *Virginian*, but Hemingway's Nick Adams, among other Hemingway male characters, is not self-reliant, does not take responsibility for his life, demonstrates stoicism in pain, but "with little of the inner fortitude associated with the Western hero" (30). Nick Adams, then, may be

compared with Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths. However, Nick Adams is a survivor whereas we know that Clyde, as well as Gatsby, is not. James Gatz and Nick Adams are both wanderers. Gatz wandered away from Indiana, into a war, and eventually into Louisville, where he met trouble—Daisy (Frohock 19). But *Gatsby's* main focus lies on the reformed wanderer and an urbane world of wealth overwrought with the meaninglessness of life as seen through the not so impartial eyes of Nick Carraway. The wanderings of a Nick Adams, closely based on Hemingway himself, also encompass the international scene, but in a much wider perspective, and *In Our Time* focuses on various aspects of nihilism throughout the world, an idea associated with Nietzsche, but an attitude not at all original because the idea can be found in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, near the end when he speaks not of universal collapse or expansion but the brute and more immediate fact of human death, expressed via tour de force in both *The Great Gatsby* and *In Our Time*. In reflecting on "realism" and its ambiguities, we must consider that *The Great Gatsby* belongs not only among the impressionists but also among the experimentalists, the realists, and, yes, the independents, specifically because it has kinship in theme, character, course of life, language, and narrator, with parts of so many other works during the mid-1920s. Significant, however, are the elements of *In Our Time* and *The Great Gatsby* that share a definite kinship. For example, both narrators are "Nick" who share subjective perspectives on the modern age. Both novels feature involvement of their protagonists in World War I. And last but not least, are Luz and Daisy. Nick ("A Very Short Story") falls in love with Luz in Padua after he is wounded in the war, but she writes him a "Dear John letter" when he returns to America. Daisy does not

bother to write *Gatsby* anything; she just disappears with her husband. Of course both Hemingway and Fitzgerald used Cubist techniques, following the technique of collage employed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Fitzgerald's technique is notable especially in his treatment of Myrtle Wilson's distortion. Hemingway, "through his placement of the stories and chapters, allows each part of *In Our Time* to comment upon the next. The sensibility of Dr. Adams, for example, who treats the Indian woman as insensitively as if she were an animal and resorts to pumping a shotgun when he is angry with his wife, is akin to the sensibility that caused the carnage of World War I" (Tyler 35)

CHAPTER 5 – THE INDEPENDENTS

Archibald MacLeish published his six-hundred-line poem, *The Pot of Earth*, in May 1925 when he was thirty-three years old (Donaldson 145-50). He “was the most influential of American poets who had espoused the social and political ideals of extreme liberalism against the encroachments of world fascism” (Honig 527-28). He joined “the Communists in advocating American economic and military aid to all nations threatened by fascist aggression,” and he “denounced congress and the Roosevelt administration for embargoing trade with the Spanish Republican government, fighting for its life against national and international fascism” (Alexander 173).

Robert Penn Warren began his career as young Southern agrarian, evolving from radical conservatism to a type of traditionalist conservatism, writes Paul V. Murphy. Unlike Allen Tate and Donald Davidson, Warren’s fellow agrarians, who assumed a “defensive particularism,” Warren argued that “simple loyalty to the past is insufficient if one aspires to morally responsible action in the modern world” (Murphy 272), the modern world that is reflected by an ominous quality in Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby*. *Gatsby*, as Dalton and MaryJean Gross argue, speaks of “corruption spread far beyond the world of the gangsters themselves, into sports, politics, and law enforcement” (37), and the lives of the corrupt rich and ruthless like Tom and Daisy. “The most blatant examples occurred in Chicago and nearby Cicero, Illinois, rather than in New York” (Gross 37), but, Fitzgerald seems to argue, by using the mid-westerners Gatsby and Carraway, the corrupting effect of the time was felt everywhere.

A mid-westerner himself, Archibald MacLeish was the son of a dry-goods merchant and a college professor and grew up on an estate bordering Lake Michigan in Glencoe, Illinois. He majored in English at Yale University, and, after serving as an ambulance driver and as a captain of artillery in World War I, he graduated from Harvard Law School in 1919 and later became one of the post-war expatriates.

The Pot of Earth was MacLeish's third book, but, as John McCormick points out, it "does not sound its own unmistakable note" (160), mainly because it reads much like one of MacLeish's fellow poets, T. S. Eliot. Nevertheless, Scott Donaldson cites several favorable reviews of *The Pot of Earth*, including those by Harriet Monroe (*Poetry*), Allen Tate (*New Republic*), the *Dial*, Stephen Vincent Benét (*Saturday Review of Literature*), Katherine Lee Bates (*New York Evening Post*), and the *New York Times* (150).

In the November 1925 issue of *The Double Dealer*, the New Orleans little magazine, editor John McClure wrote, "The question in modern criticism too often is not 'Is it good?' but 'who did it first?' Now it makes a devil of a lot of difference whether 'The Wanderer' was plagiarized from a lost original or whether the author of 'Weep you no more, sad fountains' stole it. Do we care whether a beautiful vase was plagiarized? There may be a question under the common law or under the golden rule whether one man should make use of another's devices, but there is no such question in aesthetics. Art stands on its own merit" (272)—(a marvelous license for young William Faulkner, then one of McClure's contributors, to steal). MacLeish would write in the September 11, 1943, issue of *The New Yorker*, "Have

Gentlemen perhaps forgotten this?— / We write the histories” (“A Poet Speaks from the Visitors’ Gallery” 1-2).

MacLeish begins *The Pot of Earth* with a quote from Sir James G. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, an account Frazer borrows from Greek mythology, Spenser, or Socrates:

These (the gardens of Adonis) were baskets or pots filled with earth in which wheat, barley, lettuces, fennel, and various kinds of flowers were sown and tended for eight days, chiefly or exclusively by women. Fostered by the sun’s heat, the plants shot up rapidly, but having no root they withered as rapidly away, and at the end of eight days were carried out with the images of the dead Adonis and flung with them into the sea or into springs. (qtd. from MacLeish’s *Collected Poems, 1917-1982, Part Two: 59*)

MacLeish’s reference here “may be traced to pre-Christian vegetation and nature cults, especially those of Attis, Mithra, and Adonis” (Umland 15). Christine M. Bird and Thomas L. McHaney thoroughly discuss Fitzgerald’s use of mythological figures to depict Gatsby’s life and death. *The Literary Digest International Book Review* [“E.K.”] sees in Gatsby “a modern Solomon erecting a bizarre temple to the wayward god Popularity. Fitzgerald has painted with swift, sure strokes the pictures of his bewildering parties, where crowds of people, many of them unknown to the host, come and go, drinking his champagne, flitting through his gorgeous rooms, velvet lawns, and bright gardens like greedy moths around a cool flame, warranted not to singe their wings” (426-27).

For purposes similar to Fitzgerald's, MacLeish makes the female protagonist of *The Pot of Earth* represent a metaphysical figure whose body turns fertile in spring, becomes impregnated in summer, gives birth in March, and immediately dies. After burial, she says, "I will show you the body of the dead god bringing forth / The corn. I will show you the reaped ear / Sprouting" (ll. 532-34). Divided into three parts, the poem speaks of the female's experiences from one spring to the next. In Part One a daughter comes of age ("The Sowing of the Dead Corn"); in Part Two she marries and conceives ("The Shallow Grass"); and in Part Three she bears a son and dies ("The Carrion Spring").

Based essentially on the same Greek myth, *The Great Gatsby* tells of a figure also "bound to the responsibilities of" a "historical role" (Bloom 84), a role that places that figure, Gatsby, within a beautiful mansion situated in the middle of magnificent gardens—to love deeply, die young, and be reborn, though re-birth is not Gatsby's fate. His love for Daisy "has no meaning apart from this physical context" (Bloom 85); "love is sweet, and throws gentle fits; merriment is unconstrained, unenvied, freely admitted, and fruitful" (Bloom 90). In his pursuit of Daisy, Gatsby no longer tolerates society within his resplendent gardens, for "The Gardens of Adonis are accessible only to the Fairy race" (Bloom 91), and only Gatsby and Daisy are of the "Fairy race." Though from a questionable background, Gatsby, in the Gardens of Adonis, appears pure, "[t]here is no question of evil or falsehood . . . and the natural principles which they represent. What is at stake is the question of the adequacy of those principles to prepare an individual for the perils of human society" (Bloom 92). Gatsby possesses plenty of

natural principles; unfortunately they do not include Commandment Nine of the Ten Commandments (in the order given by Augustine of Hippo)—“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife,” (Exodus [20:1-17] and Deuteronomy [5:6-21]). His natural principles fail him in his attempt to deal with a society in which moral relativity can play out in various ways. He arrives on stage briefly, experiences moments of anxiety, hope, disillusionment, and quickly disappears. In the mood established by Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Gatsby will neither have nor inspire a rebirth.

Like *The Great Gatsby*, *The Pot of Earth* incorporates the tale of “Adonis who had once more died / Down a slow water the last / Withdrawing of a fallen tide” (ll. 11-13) into its story of youth, fertilization, pregnancy, and death. A chief difference is that MacLeish has a female protagonist. In *Pot of Earth*, after the female fulfills her obligation to give birth, she hears, “A slow crying in the sea, Come home, / Come to your house— / Go secretly and put me in the ground— / Go before the moon uncovers, / Go where now no night wind hovers, / Say no word above me, make no sound. / Heap only on my buried bones / Cold sand and naked stones / And come away and leave unmarked the mound. / Let not those silent hunters hear you pass: / Let not the trees know, nor the thirsty grass, / Nor secret rain / To breed from me some living thing again, / But only earth—” (ll. 497-510). The female completes her mission on earth and dies, and so does Gatsby.

Like the life of the female in *The Pot of Earth*, “[a]t every landing point in his incredible history [Gatsby’s] life juts upon water. Even his house belongs to the sea, in the persistent rumor that he lives not in a house but in a boat, ‘a boat that

looked like a house and was moved secretly up and down the Long Island shore.’
 ‘Blessed are the dead that the rain falls on’—*blessed* because the mess and refuse of their lives is washed away,” writes R. W. Stallman (60). Unlike the symbol of the life-producing figure of the female in *The Pot of Earth*, “[i]n the “strangely sterile and childless world of Fitzgerald’s ‘valley of ashes,’” says Emily Miller Budick,

Tom and Daisy’s doll-like daughter is the only child, and Tom and Myrtle adopt a puppy. The antitypological drama of the *akedah* [Hebrew word for the binding of Isaac], therefore, has come to be enacted within the isolated self in whom destruction and self-destruction, homicide and suicide, sacrifice and blasphemy are one and the same. In this post-Freudian era, they are also aspects of a powerful psychological repression. The result is the loss of the life in history on which future generations, that is, the continuation of history, depend. For Gatsby what is ‘lost’ (as it will be for Hemingway’s similarly ‘lost generation’) is not only an Eden that never was but also the compensation for that lost paradise, the possibility of history. (161)

The time sequence of *The Pot of Earth* follows the changing seasons and the changing seasons coincide with the age of the female protagonist. MacLeish establishes a sense of surrealism in the depiction of the sea and various other scenes of nature, but he also creates a practical sense of place through everyday scenes consistent with the comings and goings of a young female. At the beginning, therefore, the time is early “in March and at the full moon” (15), and the daughter

spends time with her father at the beach “watching for the spring” (25). The father has brought his daughter to the sea to “sow the spring now” (28), indicating that the daughter will soon be ready to mate. As a matter of fact, she is eager —“She kept calling, Hurry! Hurry!” to her father (33). Soon “winter melted and she felt the flow / Of the smooth river, and she saw / The moon wavering over her through the water— / And after the rain the brook in the north ravine / Ran blood red” (41-45). The daughter begins her menstrual cycle, indicating her fertility and the time for her to mate and reproduce—“This occurred / When she was thirteen years— / Oh, she felt / Ill. It was horrible” (56-59). Her mother must be dead: “She thought of one / Dead, and the weeping . . .” (59-60).

The “moon wavering” over MacLeish’s female calls to mind “A wafer of a moon [that] was shining over Gatsby’s house, making the night fine as before, and surviving the laughter and the sound of his still glowing garden. A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell” (37). Nick Carraway speaks of the aftermath of Gatsby’s July party when “Owl Eyes has a wreck, and after a ghostly pause an apparition of a man (‘a pale, dangling individual’) steps out of the wrecked coupe to stare at the ‘amputated wheel—he stared at it for a moment, and then looked upward as though he suspected that it had dropped from the sky’” (36-37). Arnold Weinstein takes note of Nick’s thoughts the next day before Nick lists Fitzgerald’s well-known array of names of the rich and famous who come to Gatsby’s parties:

and he [Nick] metaphorically sizes up the damage done the night before. Things always look smaller, less glamorous, on July 5th, because the magic, the Rausch, is over, the grand and ecstatic moments of the party are now, in the harsh light of day, embarrassments. (138)

The young female in MacLeish's *The Pot of Earth* is a daughter who seems close to her father and misses her dead mother, quite a difference from the portrait of Daisy Buchanan observed in *Gatsby*. Daisy appears throughout the novel without the benefit of family background. David H. Lynn points out that "Daisy Buchanan exists at two well-defined levels in the novel. She is what she is—but she exists at the level of *Gatsby*'s vision of her" (179). John McCormick writes,

Daisy Buchanan is a vindication of Fitzgerald's earlier partial failures to portray the beautiful, selfish, willful girl-woman flapper of the period. Her dizziness is charming, and her final corruption is convincing. It is convincing because she is the agent of *Gatsby*'s downfall, just as she had been the agent of his rise. Through Daisy's association with *Gatsby*, she moves far beyond flapperdom to that great, good, mysterious place of fictional heroines and heroes who achieve immortality not through psychological or sociological fidelity or mechanical relationship to plot, but through their embodiment of fictional truth. (31-32)

In other words, as Linda C. Pelzer says, Daisy is "a projection of *Gatsby*'s consciousness, of his desire to make real a dream of success, [rather] than a living

being fraught with human imperfections” (21). She is also, in the “mythical method” Eliot observed in Joyce’s *Ulysses* and practiced in *The Waste Land*, a symbolic figure akin to the female in MacLeish’s poem.

“The Sowing of the Dead Corn” in *The Pot of Earth* casts Nature in various anthropomorphic roles. For example, the female and the surrounding trees listen to “The sound of the sea breaking beyond the wall . . . And she saw the blind moon climb through the colorless air / Through the willow branches. She could feel the moon / Lifting the numb water, and the sea fill” (ll. 70-76). The foggy night prevents the female from seeing the moon, a sign that since it is springtime the moon either wanes or waxes in its gibbous phase. The auditory senses of the female are constrained by the sound of “sea breaking” (l. 70), which in effect deafens her because of its incessant roar. Furthermore, since she can neither see nor hear, Nature heedlessly ignores her physical impairment, rendering her as tortured as the breaking sea.

In lines eighty-one to one hundred ten of *Pot of Earth*, the voice of the poem changes to “we,” indicating that the daughter speaks for the people who live in her neighborhood. Moreover, up to this point she has been looking forward to spring, but now her hopes diminish, “We are having a late spring, we are having / The snow in April, the grass heaving / Under the wet snow” (ll. 81-83). In *The Waste Land* Eliot calls April “the cruelest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain” (*Poems* 83). Not yet mated to the Adonis figure, the female in *The Pot of Earth* indicates that “nothing blossoms, grows / In the fields nothing and the garden fallow” (ll. 84-85). In “The

Hollow Men,” Eliot writes: “**This is the dead land / This is cactus land / Here the stone images / Are raised, here they receive / The supplication of a dead man’s hand / Under the twinkle of a fading star**” (*Poems* 125). The female in *The Pot of Earth*, unlike the narrators or protagonist of Eliot’s *Waste Land* poems, does not give up hope. The refrain “tomorrow” appears twice in line eighty-nine and again in line one hundred two. She says, “Well, there is time still, there is time. / Tomorrow there will be tomorrow / Tomorrow there will be a host / Of crocuses and small hairy / Snowdrops” (ll. 88-89, 102-103). She keeps repeating, “Wait! Let us wait!” (l. 92), “Wait! / Oh, wait, I will gather / Grains of wheat and corn together” (ll. 96-98). When she was thirteen, she looked forward eagerly to spring. Now seventeen, she says, “And why, then, must I hurry? / There are things I have to do / More than just to live and die / More than just to die of living” (104-07). She goes on to say, “I have seen the moonlight leaving” (l. 108), implying that she need not be in a hurry to reproduce.

The female of the poem is the only voice in *The Pot of Earth*, a voice that indicates a wide range of emotional experiences but one that ends in ultimate desolation. In *The Great Gatsby*, many characters speak, but their statements actually are mere recollections of young Nick Carraway, whose experiences, John S. Whitley argues, “offer little hope of a middle ground in human solidarity because his human world is a thinner, more corrupt place” (149). Gary Scimgeour concurs that “Carraway’s moral vision is flawed, so that he is unable to face reality and uncover truth” (147). Robert Secor sees him as one “of the curious observers of other people’s affairs” (xxx). Joan M. Allen writes, “Fitzgerald modeled Nick

Carraway on Conrad's observer-chronicler, Marlow, but Nick, unlike Marlow, becomes 'an interesting and rounded character in his own right'" (105). John F. Callahan, in "reviewing the similarities between Nick Carraway and the Marlow of *Heart of Darkness*, compares Conrad and Fitzgerald as 'moral historians' who are horrified by history and turn instead to myth" (143). "The journeys taken by characters in post-World War I literature more likely lead to the discovery of nothingness," writes Edwin M. Moseley, "but writers like Fitzgerald learned from Eliot to mock the quest for values by employing the imagery of naturalistic monism and determinism, Christian or otherwise, in ironic contexts" (146).

Robert Ian Scott points out that Fitzgerald calls "the valley of ashes 'the waste land' once" in placing George Wilson's garage: "The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it, and contiguous to absolutely nothing" (Fitzgerald 16). (Thus the reader also ponders whether Fitzgerald refers to Sinclair Lewis's 1920 novel.) Scott continues,

Eliot uses his waste land as a metaphor describing an emotional or spiritual condition, but does not mention ashes or offer a glimpse of a greener world; his desert's red rocks, solitude, and lack of water resemble those of natural deserts, which can seem beautiful. But men made Fitzgerald's ugly grey ashheaps by wasting energy, ruining a once-lovely natural world. The ashes crowd together "a small foul river," a commuter railroad, a road, and Wilson's desolate garage. The novel seems depressingly overpopulated by people we could do

without: the Buchanans, Jordan, and Gatsby's guests, whose names Nick records on an outdated, disintegrating timetable. (84-85)

In *The Pot of Earth*, the daughter addresses the reader: "One of those mild evenings when you think / Spring is tomorrow and you can smell the earth . . . / And you stand listening—" (ll. 142-46). This is the end of her present meditative period and the end of her holiday by the seashore, for the next stanza places her in London: "So she closed the gate / And walked up Gloucester Street" (ll. 147-48). And now the reader learns that the daughter—or perhaps by now she may be any female symbolizing infertility—has a lover in her past: "Her throat pounded . . . / What do you want? What do you want me to do? / What can I do? Can I put roots in the earth?" (ll. 152-58). This is blatantly like Eliot's "What shall we do, What shall we ever do," but also like the talk of Daisy and Jordan, especially when Daisy speaks about missing the summer equinox:

Slenderly, languidly, their [Daisy and Jordan] hands set lightly on their hips, the two young women preceded us [Nick and Tom] out onto a rosy-colored porch, open toward the sunset, where four candles flickered on the table in the diminished wind.

"Why *candles*?" objected Daisy, frowning. She snapped them out with her fingers. "In two weeks it'll be the longest day in the year." She looked at us all radiantly. "Do you always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it? I always watch for the longest day in the year and then miss it." (8)

Jerome Klinkowitz notices that Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* addresses the reader “through two and one-half chapters—48 pages of a 182 page novel.” The following quote is Nick’s recollection of finally coming face to face with Gatsby (44):

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best you hoped to convey. (Fitzgerald 32)

Fitzgerald brings the supernatural into focus here, much as MacLeish does in many scenes in *The Pot of Earth*. For example, a focus on trees as an analogy of the female’s state of mind: “They seemed to be waiting, / The willow-trees by the wall, / Fidgeting with the sea wind in their branches, / Unquiet in the warm air” (ll. 159-62). In Line 73, the “trees listened,” as though in a meditative, calm state. Now the “willow-trees” noisily fidget, reflecting the unsettled state of mind of the female:

She said,
 You who have set your candles toward the sea
 Two nights already and no sound
 Only the water,

Tell me, do the dead come out of the sea?

Does the spring come from the sea?

Does the dead god

Come again from the water? (ll. 163-70)

In this chiaroscuro picture, involving now again the light of candles on a dark night by the sea, several matters account for the female's lighting of the candles: the Christian ritual of lighting candles as an accompaniment to prayer or as a representation of the light of Jesus, the Jewish tradition of lighting candles in remembering a deceased loved one, and the pre-Christian custom of lighted bonfires at all the turnings of the seasons. All these suggestions seem appropriate, for her past comments suggest that she prays and meditates often by the seaside, where perhaps her childhood home is located.

Another piece of the puzzle with respect to the lover is delivered up in this stanza also when she asks about the dead coming out of the sea, harking back to the mythological Adonis at the beginning of the poem, which suggests the lover may return like Adonis does every spring. MacLeish's seashore scene calls forth "Nick Carraway's first glimpse of Gatsby [as he stands] on the shore of the bay stretching his arms in near mystic contemplation towards the dark waters separating him from Daisy" (Seshachari 98). Edwin S. Fussell sees Gatsby's attitude as one of

supplication, a gesture that pathetically travesties the gestures of worship; Nick finally observes that the object of his trembling piety is [the] green light which, until his disillusion, is one of Gatsby's "enchanted objects." In the novel's concluding passage, toward which

all action and symbol is relentlessly tending, one is given finally the full implications of the green light as symbol (“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future”) (15),

the green light representing, says Brian Way, “the triviality of Daisy herself” (26). But to Gatsby, Daisy is hardly trivial. His outstretched arms, writes Kermit W. Moyer, is Gatsby’s way of regaining “that time five years before when he had kissed Daisy and she had ‘blossomed for him like a flower’” (35). Furthermore, R. W. Stallman points out that “green . . . symbolizes the future (as in the green light that flickers on the Buchanan dock across the bay from Gatsby); but green is also the symbol of excitements, desires unfulfilled, expectations or hopes” (61). Patricia Bizzell points out that “Carraway likes Gatsby better when he learns that Gatsby’s ‘splendor’ was for the purpose of obtaining a living woman, not a dead ideal. Gatsby’s love seems to make him more human and alive—but in the implicit irony of Daisy’s replacing the mere stars, Carraway retains a sense that Gatsby’s real business is to search for an heroic model, and by centering the search on Daisy, he must be disillusioned” (117).

In moving from the seashore in *The Great Gatsby* back to *The Pot of Earth*, the reader observes that the willow trees “stirred” and then “stilled” as the female considers the thought that “may be he has come and gone, and I not knowing” (ll. 174-75). Again, she leaves the seashore and reenters her social life, and it is springtime, so the reader begins to contemplate the idea that the female is not literally leaving the seashore and that the whole poem is composed of various retrospective scenes from her life, no doubt scenes which involve her lover:

Easter Sunday they went to Hooker's Grove,

Seven of them in one automobile

Laughing and singing. (ll. 176-78)

The observance of Easter in this stanza and the lighting of the candles in line one hundred sixty-four inform the reader that the female is probably Christian even though the poem is based on the mythological story of "the gardens of Adonis." Therefore, MacLeish combines two mythologies, both of which were written by the Greeks—stories about the Christian God and stories about the secular Greek gods. Nevertheless, the mention of Easter signifies the appearance and disappearance of Jesus, just as the poet writes of the appearance and disappearance of Adonis.

In her reverie, the female remembers "the full moon," and the "the salt stone / Drowns in the sea" (ll. 180-82), indicating that the party of seven stayed at Hooker's Grove a long time, for the moon has appeared. "Seven" being an odd number, also a lucky or magic number, one wonders about the makeup of the party. Were there three couples and one single person? If so, was the seventh person a male, and did the female and he become aware of each other? And why does she say that the salt stone drowns? In line one hundred twenty-eight, she notices the salt stone; now she says it has drowned. Is she merely observing the waves crashing against the seashore?

In lines one hundred eighty-three and eighty-four, the female changes the time of day again when she remembers one of the members of the party of seven saying, "Look! Look! / The flowers, the red flowers," so it must be daytime since they are able to see that the flowers are red. As they discuss their next sightseeing

tour of the seashore, the literal presence of real people at a seashore reverts to the metaphorical presence of someone arising from the sea: “Who is this that comes / Crowned with red flowers from the sea? Who comes / Into the hills with flowers? (189-91). So the red flowers seen in line one hundred eighty-four are flowers on the head of Adonis arising from the sea because it is springtime. The color red in *Gatsby* symbolizes death, not rebirth, though the image is still suggestive of the legend of Adonis. In Kermit W. Moyer’s discussion of the “circularity” of the “novel’s perspective,” he suggests that “it is perhaps inevitable that in death Gatsby describe [sic] with his own life’s blood ‘a thin red circle’ in the water of his swimming pool” (33), the thin red circle recounted in *Gatsby* right out of Frazer’s Adonis myth:

After his murder, Gatsby’s body is found by Nick and some of the servants, including, appropriately, the gardener. It is, as noted, September, the fall. Gatsby lies on the rubber raft in his pool:

There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of [a] transit, a thin red circle in the water. (*GG*, pp. 194-95)

The gods of mythology are linked in Frazer's study with primitive rituals performed to influence the renewal of seasonal process and agricultural fertility. In Europe, these rituals were performed on important solar days, like the equinox and the solstice. Midsummer Day, the summer solstice, marks "the incipient though still almost imperceptible decay of summer" and often celebrated the death of the "spirit of vegetation" (*GB*, p. 319). (Bird)

Time does not race in *The Pot of Earth*. Both the setting and the pace are entirely different. We return to the poem to find a pastoral scene, hear "a girl calling her lost cows" (l. 193), and watch her bite "her mouth / To keep from crying" (ll. 196-97). Is the girl unhappy over the lost cows or because she feels forsaken? She reminds us of Dorinda Oakley in *Barren Ground* when she realizes that the man she loves does not love her: "She had placed her life in his hands, and he had ruined it. With the fury of a strong nature toward a weak one that has triumphed over it, she longed to destroy him and she knew that she was helpless" (Glasgow 169). In lines one hundred ninety-eight through two hundred two of *The Pot of Earth*, the poet again combines secular knowledge and religious faith in speaking of the bridegroom of the Christian faith together with the symbolism of the garden of Adonis: "On the third day / The cone of the pine is broken, the eared corn / Broken into the earth, the seed scattered. / The bridegroom comes again at the third day. / The sowers have come into the fields sowing." Jesus rose from his tomb on the third day, the seeds are scattered on the third day, and the bridegroom, symbolizing the garden of Adonis or Jesus representing the Church of God, comes on the third day.

Switching back to remembrance of past events, the female thinks again of the good times she had at the Grove. This is perhaps Frazer's Grove of Diana at Nemi, with which the 1922 one-volume *Golden Bough* begins. MacLeish writes, "Well, at the Grove there was a regular crowd / And a band at the Casino, so they ate / Up in the woods where you could hear the music" (ll. 204-05). Evidently the time period is still Easter Sunday, for in line one hundred seventy-six the seven people in her party were going to Hooker's Grove.

MacLeish follows Eliot with modern-day imagery and allusion to ancient ritual, placing the twentieth-century female in a poem with the Greek Adonis and then rendering her life meaningless. *The Great Gatsby*, however, seems the more effective, less obviously imitative work.

In Scott Donaldson's biography of Archibald MacLeish, he quotes from *The Great Gatsby* in discussing how MacLeish felt when he moved to New York in 1929:

For Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, riding across the Queensboro Bridge in Jay Gatsby's circus wagon of a car, the view of New York City ahead offered a "promise of all the mystery and beauty in the world." New York remained a city of wondrous possibilities, a place where, as Nick puts it, "anything can happen . . . anything at all." (197)

Years later in 1940, "the year he died, Fitzgerald wrote his daughter that he 'once thought that Lake Forest was the most glamorous place in the world. Maybe it was'" (Donaldson 37). Fitzgerald and MacLeish were more than mere acquaintances. Ada and Archie MacLeish partied upon several occasions with

Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald, often at the Antibes chalet of Gerald and Sara Murphy, who “hosted the Picassos and close to everybody else who counted in adventurous art and literature” (Schjeldahl 74).

Robert Penn Warren’s 1925 poem “To a Face in a Crowd,” published when he was twenty years old, presents a “westward-moving race in a . . . tragic Exodus to the Promised Land, which they can never quite reach or claim” (Pratt xxvi-xxxv), a form of expression closely in accord with Gatsby’s exodus to the East and, as well, with many of the important writers of the mid-twenties, including perhaps MacLeish’s embodiment of myth in a humble trip to Hooker’s Grove. Warren observes, as does Fitzgerald, “We are the children of an ancient band / Broken between the mountains and the sea” (ll. 10-11). That is, human existence is still shadowed, and influenced, by the deep past recorded in ancient myth and ritual. He perhaps is fashioning his poetic speaker after Odysseus, “who serves as the prototype of the traveler-observer figure, like Solon, which becomes so important to Greek thought” (Dougherty 4). In “children of an ancient band” Warren speaks in general of the Southerner’s trek, but a search that parallels Gatsby’s. The poems of Warren and his Nashville brethren define their “fugitive” nature:

Besides the esoteric sense of the term “Fugitive” [which the Nashville poets gave as a title to their literary magazine] there was also what might be called the emergent sense: that defined by the poems themselves. . . . In its emergent sense, the term “Fugitive” becomes one of the prime equivalents for “modern man.” For, contrary to their desire to recover an older, communal experience of men living

together on the land they loved—call it the “Old South,” the “Golden Age,” the “Garden of Eden,” what you will—the pull of modern experience forced them to express recurrent images of isolation and alienation. (Pratt xxxviii)

Such images appear in the following lines of Warren’s “To a Face in a Crowd”: “we must meet / As weary nomads in this desert at last, / Borne in the lost procession of these feet” (Pratt 105).

Such world weariness of course was a feature of the age in which the young T. S. Eliot could see himself as the “aged eagle” and Pound became old Odysseus. Fitzgerald’s Nick sets the mood in *Gatsby*. Dalton and MaryJean Gross point out that Nick

has become the perfect person to tell *Gatsby*’s story and to produce the mood, tone, and dimensions Fitzgerald wishes it to have. For the story is much more than a disillusionment with the pursuit of a rich girl or with the admiration of a monied class. The disillusionment is with contemporary American culture and in a sense with modern Western civilization. Perhaps the disillusionment is even cosmic. (6)

Seshachari writes that “*Gatsby* curiously appears to vindicate his position. The clue to this final impression that the novel leaves may lie in the fact that ‘whenever the mythological mood pervades, tragedy is impossible.’ The death of a mythic hero is a tragedy only for the people; it is always a triumph or ultimate victory for the hero himself. For the hero, who in his life presented a dual perspective (as *Gatsby* did), in his death is a synthesizing image. So in *Gatsby*’s death are reconciled all the

conflicts and tensions of national and human vision, as well as Gatsby's own tensions" (101). "*The Great Gatsby* is, in one sense, a period piece," write the Grosses. Like Warren's poem, "[i]t captures the mood, the feeling, of a time in United States history. Yet it is much more than that. It survives as a compelling story in spite of the fact that conditions of American life have changed drastically since it was written. Like all great books, it rises above its historical context" (167).

While the poet in "To a Face in a Crowd" looks forward to the time when he will meet others of like mind, those who are looking past the inheritance of their forefathers, who have searched already to the point of despair, he comprehends that they are walking in the footsteps of their forefathers, despite their nomadic attempt to escape. William Pratt goes on to compare the Warrenesque style with that of the existentialist Albert Camus, suggesting "that when human identity becomes lost, man becomes prey to man" (xxxix).

In *The Great Gatsby*, it is Nick's Middle Western background that "is one of the major legends of the novel," and it is that background "which blends into and complements the legend of America as a whole" (Raleigh 59). Curiously, then, "the moral center of the universe lies somewhere west of Chicago but east of what could be called the Far West. But it is not rural; it is urban, although not metropolitan and, more importantly, it is traditional, conservative, and house-centered" (Raleigh 62). Nick says,

That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of

holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life. (Fitzgerald 118)

Raleigh maintains that Fitzgerald has added “the idea of class to the idea of place,” though he [Raleigh] goes on to say that the “kind of class that he attributes to Nick Carraway's family suggests that of the one great American cultural component that had its origin in the major region that he never expressly mentions in the novel—namely New England, with its ideal of a comfortable, cultivated, stable existence, drawing sustenance, generation after generation, from a family business and living out its generations in the same spacious but unostentatious house” (62-63). This would seem condescending toward the well-to-do Minnesota urban culture from which Fitzgerald came, something the “East,” indeed, might regard from its false sense of superiority, one supposes, or a “waste land,” though Fitzgerald's waste land turns up on the Eastern shore.

In an excerpt from Joseph Blotner's *Robert Penn Warren*, Jeffrey Hart points out that among the Nashville Fugitives, “Warren was the more expansive and tumultuous, extending himself into all areas of literature: short story, novel, poetry, criticism, biography, drama. His subjects centrally were history, power, and the

depths of the heart” (Blotner 69). Young Warren’s poem “To a Face in a Crowd” demonstrates marvelous power and depth. The first stanza of “To a Face in a Crowd” reads as follows:

Brother, my brother, whither do you pass?
 Unto what hill at dawn, unto what glen,
 Where among the rocks[,] the faint lascivious grass
 Fingers in lust the arrogant bones of men? (ll. 1-4)

In our contemporary culture it is not unusual to hear the term “brother” being secularly applied in print and film among the various media outlets as well as by members of the general population. Warren, however, most likely adopted the term from the Bible. One should also consider the possibility that Warren is speaking to himself with the realization that he is part of the human race. The student-poet may have arisen early to walk, to meditate, to study. Vanderbilt is located in Nashville, Tennessee, and one of its off-campus facilities includes the Arthur J. Dyer Observatory, situated on a one-thousand-one-hundred-thirty-one-foot hill six miles south of campus, indicating that there are hills around the campus that Warren probably climbed in the early morning hours before class.

In speaking of lascivious grass Warren turns from the spiritual to the flesh. And how can grass be lascivious? It can only be lascivious if made so by the human body, for the human body is the only entity on earth that can be lascivious. Is Warren hinting at the idea that students have used the grassy glens as places to rendezvous, for he uses the word “faint” as if to relay the thought that the grass has

been trod down to the point of mere dirt. The few blades remaining, however, are still able to finger the bodies who arrogantly impede their growth.

The speaker has now climbed to the top of the hill, and he meditates about all the others who have preceded him. In the second stanza, he thinks of the future:

Beside what bitter waters will you go

Where the lean gulls of your heart along the shore

Rehearse to the cliffs the rhetoric of their woe?

In dream, perhaps, I have seen your face before. (ll. 5-8)

He is rather pessimistic in determining that he will experience bitterness. But from his mountaintop he senses a faint longing beckoning him toward the sea. The “lean gulls” foreshadow his desire to move to California from the hills of Tennessee, and he identifies the mountains presently surrounding him with the cliffs overlooking the sea and he hears the “lean gulls” rehearsing the rhetoric of their woe. Both the gulls and his heart are hungry for something more, and the desire is ever-present. Their rhetoric is the cackle one hears at seaside. The next line speaks of “dream,” so perhaps he has only read of the seashore, and then later dreamed about it, a vision of travelling west, as Warren would soon do.

Nick Carraway’s gravitational pull is toward a different seashore. A direction that metamorphoses into a circular rotation mentioned by Moyer (105), who writes: “*Gatsby* is really an extended flashback: events are narrated by Nick Carraway some two years after they have occurred. This technique gives the novel a formal circularity (starting at the end, we move to the beginning and proceed back to the end) which reflects structurally a series of circular movements within the

story itself (circles of movement traced from West Egg to East Egg and back, from Long Island to Manhattan and back, from East to West and back)” (Moyer 33). On the other hand, Nick is placed in a polarized position between the two extremely opposing lifestyles of the East and the West. Arthur Mizener notices that Nick is

carefully placed so far as his attitude is concerned. He has come East to be an Easterner and rich, but his moral roots remain in the West. In the most delicate way Fitzgerald builds up these grounds for his final judgment of the story and its people. In the book’s first scene, Nick’s humorous awareness of the greater sophistication of these people is marked: “You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy,” I confessed. . . . “Can’t you talk about crops or something?” But only a moment later, when Daisy has confessed her unhappiness with Tom, he has an uneasy sense of what is really involved: The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. . . . I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face, as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged. (Fitzgerald 35)

Does this predicament place Nick as one of the people whose face appears in Warren’s crowd? Nick’s thoughts when he returns to New York after Gatsby’s death bear some similarity to the observations of Warren’s speaker in the poem:

Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond

the Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old—even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg, especially, still figures in my more fantastic dreams. I see it as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a house—the wrong house. But no one knows the woman’s name, and no one cares. (Fitzgerald 118)

Warren, in stanza three, writes,

A certain night has borne both you and me;
 We are the children of an ancient band
 Broken between the mountains and the sea.

A cromlech marks for you that utmost strand (ll. 9-12)

The first line is again pessimistic, so let us consider whether Warren was indeed attuned, like so many authors of 1925, to modernity. There is a sense of meaninglessness in the outer world portrayed by “the children of an ancient band,” indicating that he may also have been a student of anthropology, philosophy, and geography because the words “between the mountains and the sea” pretty much cover everybody in the United States. On the other hand, he may still be considering only those people between the mountains of Tennessee and the sea.

Nevertheless, when he uses the word “broken,” he implies that there is no hope. The word “cromlech” summons the idea that he may not be discussing only Americans, for “cromlech” harkens back to ancient communities who built megalithic tombs, the Celtic peoples whose descendants, Irish and Scots and Welsh, settled large parts of the upland South. This bit of information takes us back to the first stanza and “arrogant bones of men,” for in ancient times cromlechs marked the graves of the dead. In speaking of the “utmost strand,” he links the “broken” band of people, including you and me, between the mountain and the sea with a cromlech, indicating that though our ancestors lie in decay, society’s ties to the past, though fragile, remain connected through monumental form. The green light in *Gatsby* in a similar way symbolizes another classical form. John Guare writes that “Gatsby’s green light . . . seen across a bay had contained both mystery and purity. . . . But when Gatsby sought to invest that mystery in a living being and embrace his own vision, he discovered its fallibility” (30), and Fitzgerald unravels his image a different way at the novel’s end when Nick Carraway reflects about Gatsby:

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. (Fitzgerald 121)

The next stanza of “To a Face in a Crowd” confirms the fact that Warren is speaking of an ancient people and a place somewhere other than the United States—
 “And you must find the dolorous place they stood. / Of old I know that shore, that dim terrain, / And know how black and turbulent the blood / Will beat through iron chambers of the brain” (ll. 13-16).

The next stanza, number five, of “To a Face in the Crowd,” corroborates the theory that the place is Ireland, for Warren again speaks of a “stone” and a “monument”:

When at your back the taciturn tall stone,
 Which is your fathers’ monument and mark,
 Repeats the waves’ implacable monotone,
 Ascends the night and propagates the dark. (ll. 17-20)

Remembering that Warren speaks of “my brother” (l. 1) in stanza one, the reader must notice that he addresses him in nearly every stanza—Stanza one: “whither do you pass” (l. 1); Stanza two: “Beside what bitter waters will you go” (l. 5); Stanza three: “A certain night has born both you and me” (l. 9) and “A cromlech marks for you that utmost strand” (l. 12); Stanza four: “And you must find the dolorous place” (l. 13). Warren also uses the word “your” throughout the poem—Stanza two: “your heart” (l. 6) and “your face” (l. 8); Stanza five: “your back” (l. 17) and “your fathers’ monument” (l. 18); Stanza six: “your decision” (l. 23); Stanza seven: “Your face” (l. 25).

So the brother has his back to the silent stone. Has the brother forgotten that there is a grave there? Or is the brother simply looking to the future and forgetting

that he is doomed to repeat the same mistakes as his father if he does not consult the past? And we cannot help thinking of Nick Carraway's father who gives Nick the oft-cited advice that "all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had" (Fitzgerald 1). And "although [Nick's] amplification somewhat distorts his father's intention," writes Janet Giltrow, "his speech habits can often exactly preserve the voice of the father. Despite his relative youth and his taste for partying, Nick makes a number of similar generalizations about life" (476).

Warren harkens back to the cromlech of stanza three in mentioning the monument over the father's grave, hinting again that the place whereof the poet writes is Ireland. Fertility cults and fires at equinox and solstice characterize these old times, too, touching the "fertility" and waste land themes in *Gatsby* (i.e., the garden parties with their lights and the bit about "missing" the summer solstice, displaced into America's day of Independence). In reading of the waves in this stanza, the reader must compare it with the "bitter waters" and the "lean gulls" and "the cliffs" of stanza two. In stanza two the brother is seen on the shore, like a gull, rehearsing his woes, and in stanza five his woes are still present, and his woes are as implacable as the monotone of the incessant waves, a scene that reminds us of *Gatsby* looking across the water.

The waves' sound fills the darkness, a sound that drowns out everything except the realization that nothing but death awaits his brother. In Fitzgerald's novel, *Gatsby* too appears as "a face in a crowd," a double of sorts to the narrator, his alter ego. "The imaginative identity of the narrator and the novel's protagonist (an alter ego relationship)," writes David Stouck,

is apparent in the novel's style wherein Nick's ironic perception constantly yields to the lush romanticism of Gatsby's vision. In the novel's rich, evocative descriptions we are made continuously aware of Gatsby's world and we thereby assume that the book is exclusively his story. We forget that it is Nick who is speaking, that both the romantic and ironic response are his, and that both responses are an integral part of the narration from the beginning. (66)

Similarly, in stanza six of "To a Face in a Crowd," the poet synthesizes the universe and himself and his brother in wrestling not with the sea as in stanza three but the ocean, an image harkening back to Odysseus, and thus Joyce, and to the kind of fear one of Eliot's personas finds in a handful of dust. Warren, from the land-locked upper South, has his speaker observe,

Men there have lived who wrestled with the ocean;
 I was afraid—the polyp was their shroud.
 I was afraid. That shore of your decision
 Awaits beyond this street (ll. 21-24)

The "men" he speaks of could be any number of voyagers, especially the early seafarers, whose most important challenge after simply staying afloat was knowing where they were, for example, the Phoenicians, Vikings, Norsemen, Polynesians. No doubt many of those sailors became shrouded by the sea. Warren may have used the word "shroud" here as a double entendre, for it represents a set of ropes or wire cables stretched from the masthead to the sides of a vessel to support the mast, and it also represents a cloth used to wrap a body for burial. Not

only the shroud but also the word “polyp” produces connotations of the sea, for in zoology, the polyp may be roughly compared in structure to a sac, a sac that could in a manner of speaking enshroud the body of a dead seafarer. So is the poet afraid of being literally drowned? He again repeats that he is afraid, but this time he speaks to his “brother” in looking to “that shore of your decision.” Is he afraid not only of his own demise, but that his double, a face in a crowd, will also concur that, indeed, death awaits both of them? The shore to the lost seafarer usually means safety, but not in a storm or where rocks loom. Of course the poet speaks metaphorically in suggesting that the shore in the ultimate sense may not mean life but death. He has mentioned “shore” twice before, in stanza two (“lean gulls of your heart along the shore”) and in stanza four (“Of old I know that shore”). In stanza two, he appears to be in Ireland; in stanza four he appears to be in Hell, and the shore is perhaps the border of one of Hell’s legendary rivers. In all three instances of Warren’s use of the word “shore,” he aligns it with death.

Nevertheless the poet goes on to say that his brother’s decision has not been reached; it “Awaits beyond this street.” What street? The poet has not mentioned a street. The word “street” does not fit with the illusions he has portrayed throughout. He has placed the setting in the ancient past where no mention of “street” has been made. By inserting the word “street,” he brings the reader back to the present, to a city street where there is a crowd, and thus we may think of Eliot, especially the “unreal city” that Nick also perceives in Tom Buchanan’s New York. The word “crowd” implies that the face of this stranger/brother is lost amid the anonymous, pitiless throngs of the big city. The reader has come to the

realization by now that the poet's 'brother' really means in 1925 "mankind." This means that the individual is just part of a crowd, and a crowd represents anonymity. It is a face that was lost in antiquity, a face that was drowned in the sea, a face that wound up in hell, and thus a face separated from tradition, community, and life itself. Again, one thinks of Gatsby, an isolato among the crowd at his own parties.

The last stanza takes us away from the present: "Your face is blown, an apparition, past. / Renounce the night as I, and we must meet / As weary nomads in this desert at last, / Borne in the lost procession of these feet" (ll. 25-28). The brother's face, or a face in a crowd, has been merely a face with an expression of lostness glimpsed fleetingly but which blends with ghosts of the past that the poet has been envisioning, reminding us of lines from Pound's "Personæ" and of the tragic affair between Daisy Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. Warren, therefore, in 1925 had a vision cognate with the Mid-Westerner Fitzgerald and the other moderns. John J. Clayton writes: "I see that modernist writers have a surprisingly similar way of being-in-the world, a surprisingly similar condition of anxiety. As I look at their lives, I am again surprised by similarities; surprised, because we're speaking of people as different as D. H. Lawrence, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner" (3). To this list we can now add Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, William Carlos Williams, Elinor Wylie, John Dos Passos, Gertrude Stein, E. E. Cummings, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Laura Riding, John Erskine, Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton, Upton Sinclair, Ellen Glasgow, Sinclair Lewis, James

Boyd, Archibald MacLeish, and Robert Penn Warren, especially by virtue of works each published in 1925.

Fitzgerald does not mention Warren in his published letters. Nor does Mizener (1987) mention Warren in Fitzgerald's biography. Fitzgerald is mentioned once by William Bedford Clark, *Selected Letters of Robert Penn Warren*, in a footnote following a letter Warren wrote from Memphis, Tennessee, in 1931 to Maxwell Perkins, "Scribner's legendary editor-in-chief . . . whose stable of authors included Hemingway, Fitzgerald. . ." (198). Fitzgerald's name is never brought up in Victor H. Strandberg's biography of Warren. Although Pratt does not discuss Fitzgerald in his introduction to *The Fugitive Poets*, Pratt does speak about Gertrude Stein's talent for "drawing around her a group of unusually intelligent young men and inspiring them to creative activity" (xix); "the commanding position in world letters occupied by Eliot's *Criterion*" (xxiii), "the sense of intellectual alienation" in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" that is "shared with the leading poets of the age" (xxv); of course Laura Riding, along with Warren, "[a]mong the first to win the prizes that began to be offered in 1923" by the *Fugitive* publication (xxvi); "the new school of Symbolists, particularly as represented by Eliot. . ." (xxvii); "new experiments in poetic technique by T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings: 'The strangest thing in contemporary poetry . . . is that innovation and conservatism exist side by side'" (xxvii); and Faulkner's ability to "raise a wild bear into an image of God, as in *The Bear*" (xxxvi). Faulkner scholar Joseph Blotner records Warren's one encounter with Fitzgerald in December 1928:

I had dinner with Mr. and Mrs. John Peale Bishop . . . the Tates, and Scott Fitzgerald (Mrs. Fitzgerald had canceled out for some mysterious reason, half nuts anyway). After dinner we began to go café-crawling. I had been having a very fine time talking with Fitzgerald. Finally, he asked me to walk to his apartment and see how Zelda was. I went, but as we approached he became glummer and glummer. He asked me to go upstairs with him to the apartment. No more conversation. We got nearly to his floor, a winding stair, when he turned and ordered me to stand right there. He knocked on the door, and Zelda came out. Then began a ghastly cat-dog fight. I had to witness it, having been ordered to stay there. Finally she slammed the door, and he came down and said, "Let's go." No conversation all the way back. But once seated he began to take on a load and became talkative. I got around to saying something that I admired about *Gatsby*. It touched off an explosion, "Don't even mention that book" (or that's the substance) "to me again, you bastard"—or son-of-a-bitch—or something of that sort. I got up and opined that I didn't have to take that off him or anybody, seized my coat, and stalked out. Next day I got a pneumatique from him full of apologies, begging me to "understand" the strain he was under, or something like that. Anyway, all friendship. I learned later about his domestic troubles, and that he couldn't write, and the mention of the old success drove him nuts. I never saw him again. (90)

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

Willa Cather wrote *The Professor's House* during “a period of stress and turmoil” (Woodress 291), a frame of mind reflected in the story of professor Godfrey St. Peter. Sherwood Anderson lays *Dark Laughter* “upon the shores of the Ohio and of the Mississippi,” but “for him the orchestration is more important than the theme” (Michaud 197). Its “main charm . . . is its poetry and its music, the curious and clever blending of thought, dream, color and song. It is a sort of *sotto voce* monologue with musical interludes” (Michaud 197), reminding us of the mid-nineteenth century French painters. William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain*, “depends on an undoing of the traditional memory of American history and employs quotation extensively,” a technique he attributes to Poe, who borrowed “‘the tags of other cultures’ as a sign not of a need to pay obeisance to those cultures, but of his strong sense of his own culture” (Gregory *Quotation* 84). Elinor Wylie’s *The Venetian Glass Nephew* “concerns a vision of sexual conflict rendered in the language of fantasy and allegory” (Champion 374). John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* “is a synecdoche . . . representing a ‘sanitary civilization of a scientized New World Order,’ a world that had enslaved itself to a debilitating ‘industrial system’ offering little succor, except in the hectic pleasures of suffocating life in cities” (Harding 30). William Faulkner’s *New Orleans Sketches* includes “various people one might meet on the streets of the city” (Hamblin 269), but they are seen through the haze of sexuality, violence, and the bizarre that meets the modernist’s eye.

How similar, again, mood or intent in these authors resembles strongly that which spurred or allowed F. Scott Fitzgerald to write his own American classic, *The Great Gatsby*, a novel full of “complex emotions and attitudes . . . conveyed to the reader through Nick’s consciousness” (Gross *Understanding* 2). Gertrude Stein wrote about “the radical and final difference in people, defined in *The Making of Americans* as the attacking and the resisting kinds or types” (Sutherland 46). E. E. Cummings developed three styles—(1) “a lyric and mythic style,” (2) “his Satyric style” that “reflects a dark view of human behavior and a hostile attitude toward society,” and (3) “Hephaestian . . . , bending, breaking, twisting, mending, reshaping—manipulations which describe[s] well what the ‘modern’ artist was doing to his materials” (Kennedy 115-26). The poems in his volume & reflect a combination of these styles. Ezra Pound’s “intention from the very outset of work on the *Cantos* was to create a poem that could deal quite literally with everything” (Carpenter 288), but in 1925 “it became clear that the poem was to be a great Odyssean voyage through time and space, with, apparently, no limits as to what might eventually be encountered (no limits, that is, except the poet’s tact and sense of relevance)” (Dekker *Cantos* 167). T. S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men”

dragged us more deeply into that desperate landscape [of *The Waste Land*]: the surface distractions gone, only the innermost twilight kingdom, the twittering world of ghosts, was left, and a profound sense of catastrophe, heightened and deepened by a new element, fragments of the liturgy and imagery of the Christian Church, which

seemed to struggle against great odds and to be defeated: this, too, one recognized as truth. (Braybrooke 32)

Laura Riding “delights in the play of abstraction, and the more she races over the switchback of her paradoxes the more engrossing her poetry becomes” (Hamilton 454), as we appreciate in “Summary for Alastor.” *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* by John Erskine is a “jest at ancient ideals,” a “phase” in American literature of “cynicism and disillusionment” (Slosson 420). Erskine was merely a spectator, however, not a practicing participant as most of our other authors were in this age of modernism, though a multi-faceted one inspired also to revise and parody Homeric material.

In *An American Tragedy*, Theodore Dreiser “shows himself an expert . . . in abnormal psychology by the way he marshals what may be called instinctive logics, the logics of our blood and flesh, against rational logic, and by the way he detects the obscure sophistications of the inhibited and repressed, to find motives which come to their selfish ends” (Michaud 118). In *The Mother’s Recompense*, Edith Wharton charts “a precipitous cultural fall into moral relativism which, lacking an ethical safety net, puts individuals and institutions at risk” (Singley 9). In *Mammonart*, Upton Sinclair strives to make “people get rid of their shibboleths about the art” of their times (Sinclair 10). In *Barren Ground*, Ellen Glasgow exposes “the gender assumptions of an American culture whose understanding of farming is rooted in an agrarian myth that defines farmers exclusively as men” (Conlogue 23). In *Arrowsmith*, Sinclair Lewis presents “the young person who has his glimpse of values beyond the reach of the environment, his struggle to achieve it, his success

after sacrifice” (McLaughlin 24). In *Drums*, James Boyd draws “rigid class lines” between the planters “on the rich Cape Fear plantations” and “the precarious existence of farmers in the adjacent swamp and forest lands. James Fraser and his mother and father were not crackers; their descent from substantial status in Revolutionary times was the result, simply, of a ‘spell of bad luck’” (Lively 182). In *In Our Time*, Ernest Hemingway writes “a series of successive sketches from a man’s life. . . . It is a short book: and it does not pretend to be about one man. But it is. It is as much as we need know of the man’s life. . . . Nick is a type one meets in the more wild and woolly regions of the United States. He is the remains of the lone trapper and cowboy” (Lawrence 19). Among these realists Hemingway’s life represents more of a degree of a meaninglessness attitude than any of the others. Like Fitzgerald, he spent much of his time in pursuit of something he never found.

The Pot of Earth, by Archibald MacLeish, though it seems to stand independently among our modern American writers for several reasons, “appears,” as Tim Dayton points out,

to offer no possible or potential redemption, however remote or unrealizable, for the blight it figures, and the fate of the young woman is literally *her* fate: she is presented as having forebodings about fertility even as a young girl, and she is the only character with any substantial existence in the poem. Yet while she is granted by far the fullest development of any figure in the poem, she is utterly subordinate to her function: to be the bearer and victim of fertility.

Geoffrey Miles notes that MacLeish's poem "is more equivocal about the 'natural' values embodied in the Adonis story" than is Ezra Pound in his *Cantos* or T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* (208), but that "MacLeish jarringly juxtaposes the ancient and the modern" in his "continuity rather than contrast" (319). Sona Raiziss writes: "Whether mythical or scientific, the explanation of the cyclic behavior in nature and man does not suffice the poet: he is distraught in the presence of inexplicable destiny. In *The Pot of Earth* woman is the symbol of death breeding life only to die again" (217).

Thus, we see that MacLeish, like Erskine, Riding and Glasgow, has set the modernist dilemma in a woman's life, a dilemma cognate with that of Warren's. "To a Face in a Crowd" by Robert Penn Warren "is the perennial survivor in *Warren's Selected Poems* (1943, 1966, 1975, and 2005), always placed at the end, since those four collections (or at least the last three) are arranged in reverse chronological order of composition. It has thus acquired an existence, indeed a place, of its own in his oeuvre" (Runyon 39). In Warren's early poems, he "portrays the modern individual cut off from the past and living a naturalistic existence as a 'nomad' or 'Wanderer,'" but "rarely, if ever, seems to suggest any sort of solution to this problem . . . and 'disorder' becomes his primary subject matter" (Szczesniul 47). "To a Face in a Crowd" has survived because it still addresses a contemporary audience, as does *The Great Gatsby*.

What, then, can we learn about *The Great Gatsby* from these other 1925 works in several genres and written by authors of different ages, genders, and literary dispositions? How can they help us see the conscious and unconscious

achievement of F. Scott Fitzgerald in his own iconic 1925 novel about Nick Carraway and James Gatz?

In 1925, it would seem, Fitzgerald and many of his writing peers—some even considered his betters—channeled a major spirit of the times, and Fitzgerald did it more successfully than almost anyone. What then were the crucial elements, themes, obsessions, issues, sense of places, voices, familial backgrounds, marriages, wars, ideologies, religions, day jobs, economic positions, sources, travels, and hobbies common to the author of *The Great Gatsby* and the writers of its contemporary publications?

For one, there was the American individualist telling his story or having it told—Nick as sojourner, backtrailer, and perhaps isolato telling of Gatsby's failed assault upon privilege, tradition, romance, the dream of success. In an odd way, Nick is Huck, Gatsby is the romantic Tom, with no sidekick from the "primitive" realm—no Jim (no Queequeg)—to guide the journey of discovery through the realm with which the "boys" have no experience, the dark chaotic realm of bad dreams, the descent and return. A major issue of course is the war, a special field of initiation for young Americans, including those who never saw a battlefield, or never held a gun, or never even left the United States; and the war became related in various ways to the license of the times, the materialism and its attractive dangers, whether sought or fled from. The issue for young men always connects back to the war of 1914-1919, but also in a strange way to the war's opposite, materialism's opposite: the agrarian or small-town roots of so many Americans of the era, still. In turn, in the modernist imagination, which connected these elements

through the “machine” and the machine society, these concerns were connected also to the ancient past, to both the primitive fertility rituals corrupted by the loss of direct experience of belief and certain compelling ancient myths seen by Freud to reflect the history of the human psyche and seen by Eliot as myth, thus, was memory lost, although the old stories might be retold in modern dress, as Fitzgerald’s story is indeed retold.

Even though these twenty-two authors approached their famous works of 1925 from a wide range of ages and literary reputations, all seemed to hear the call of what “the age demanded.” Fitzgerald (29), Dos Passos (29), Faulkner (28), Hemingway (26), Riding (24), and Warren (20) are among the youngest of these modern writers who published in 1925. They are followed by writers in their thirties, forties, and beyond: James Boyd (37), E. E. Cummings (31), T. S. Eliot (37), and Archibald MacLeish (33); Sherwood Anderson (49), John Erskine (46), Sinclair Lewis (40), Ezra Pound (40), Upton Sinclair (47), William Carlos Williams (42), and Elinor Wylie (40); Willa Cather (52), Theodore Dreiser (54), Ellen Glasgow (52), and Gertrude Stein (51); and finally Edith Wharton (63). Furthermore, their ages seem to have nothing to do with whether they are impressionists, experimentalists, realists, or independents because the writers in their twenties are in the same field as those in their forties and fifties. Ironically, most of these authors lived relatively long lives except for Fitzgerald (44) and Wylie (43); Boyd (56), Anderson (65), Cummings (68), Faulkner (65), Hemingway (62), and Lewis (66) lived roughly twenty years longer than Fitzgerald and Wylie, and Cather (74), Dos Passos (74), Dreiser (74), Eliot (77), Erskine (72), Glasgow (72), Stein (72), Wharton (75),

followed by Pound (87) and Williams (80), MacLeish (90), Riding (90), and Sinclair (90) enjoyed even greater longevity.

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Cather's *The Professor's House*, Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, Williams's *In the American Grain*, Wylie's *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, and Faulkner's *New Orleans Sketches* are classified herein as impressionistic works of art because of our fascination with their indirect expression. There is a strain of the mysterious that pervades each selection, a mystery that entices and persuades the reader to peer behind the words appearing on the page and perhaps to imagine another place and time. The fictional characters of Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, Cather's *St. Peter*, Anderson's *Dudley*, Wylie's *Peter Innocent*, Dos Passos's *Jimmy Herf*, Faulkner's *street people*, and the historical characters of Williams's profiles appeal to readers still because they each possess secrets or experience disturbing episodes that the rest of us have seen, dreamed of, or may be able to imagine. *Gatsby*, *St. Peter*, *Dudley*, *Herf*, *Innocent*, and the truly historical characters may in many cases be classified as dreamers. And while Faulkner's sketches and Williams's stories are based on real characters, the interpretations of the two writers are skewed toward an off-the-wall viewpoint. Now it is for sure that none of these characters is alike, but most do share other similarities besides being dreamers. They also remember special events from their past. *Gatsby* remembers falling in love with *Daisy*. *St. Peter* remembers his young family. *Dudley* remembers small-town life. *Jimmy Herf* "cant seem to remember anything, there is no future but the foggy river and the ferry looming big with its lights in a row like a darky's smile" (Dos Passos 403), and that of course is a

powerful memory itself. Daniel Boone observes early settlers unwilling to change: “For the problem of the New World was, as every new comer soon found out, an awkward one, on all sides the same: how to replace from the wild land that which, at home, they had scarcely known the Old World meant to them; through difficulty and even brutal hardship to find a ground to take the place of England. They could not do it. They clung one way or another, to the old, striving the while to pull off pieces to themselves from the fat of the new bounty” (Williams 136). Peter Innocent remembers his youth and “the Christmas season of 1716, when he had seen Venice no longer blue and gold, but muffled and masked in whiteness. . . . All this was memorable to Peter Innocent after many years, and he could picture the wine shop, even, where his father had taken him for a glass of malvasia from Epirus” (Wylie 174). A bootlegger remembers “‘the fall of ’20 or ’21, when the liquor business was so good, when you could stick ‘em one-fifty and two hundred a case’” (Faulkner 111).

While Fitzgerald’s literary disposition lies strongly within the impressionistic field, certain qualities of *The Great Gatsby* display strong techniques of tone and style found in the experimentalist works of Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, Cummings’s &, Pound’s *A Draft of XVI Cantos*, Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” Riding’s “Summary for Alastor,” and Erskine’s *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*. One of Stein’s recurring concentrations is on “feeling”:

Many women and men have a completely sure feeling in them. Many men and women have certain feeling with something inside them.

Many have a very certain feeling about something inside them. Many

need company for it, this is very common, many need a measure for it, this will need explaining, some need drama to support it, some need lying to help it, some are not letting their right hand know what their left hand is doing with it, some love it, some hate it, some never are very certain they really have it, some only think they love it, some like the feeling of loving it they would have if they could have it. Some have a feeling they would have it if they had their life to live over again and they sigh about it. Certain feeling in men and women is very interesting. (486-87)

Fitzgerald of course does not need nine hundred pages to talk about feeling, but lying beneath the hundred or so pages in *Gatsby* is a “certain feeling” instilled in the reader by the voice of Nick Carraway. In Cummings’s forty-eight poems of &, there is also an unmistakable sense of a “certain feeling,” but the feeling is one of the flesh and not of the spirit:

I had cement for her, (48)

Merrily

not so

hard dear

you’re killing me

fabulous against ,a,fathoming jelly (62)

of vital futile huge light as she

does not stand-ing.unsits

nearer: breath of my breath: take not thy tingling (70)

similar traits in that both males are dominated by the women with whom they are infatuated. Helen eventually wins every argument with Menelaos. When Menelaos threatens to throw Helen's servant Adraste out of the house because she is pregnant, Helen has no intention of allowing Menelaos to do so—"I am sure you will change your mind," said Helen, "I have complete confidence in you" (190). In this manner, Helen persuades Menelaos, sooner or later, to see her way of thinking, and not just on this occasion. Gatsby almost persuades Daisy to leave Tom, but, unlike Helen, Daisy loses her nerve and remains with her husband.

Gatsby also shares similarities with the realists of that time period. There are myriad ways that Fitzgerald's Gatsby and Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths fit the realist category. Both protagonists are bent on achieving a measure of success, and both are willing to work, albeit both engage in less than honorable methods to attain greatness. Gatsby becomes a bootlegger and Clyde gets one of his uncle's employees pregnant. So too does Wharton's Kate Clephane engage in dishonorable conduct in her involvement with the opposite sex. She is enamored with Chris Fenno to the point that she gives up husband and daughter to chase after him. And we are herewith reminded of Upton Sinclair's appraisal of Becky Sharp in *Mammonart*:

The instinctive rebel in Thackeray shows himself still more plainly in "Vanity Fair." This time the villain is Becky Sharp, an utterly heartless intriguer, selling her sex for money and power.

Nevertheless, she is a woman "on her own," a little tiger-cat backed into a corner, with all the world poking sticks at her; she fights back,

and gets the best of her enemies, and Thackeray cannot help making her the most interesting figure in the book. (234)

The only female in *Gatsby* comparable to Becky Sharp is Myrtle Wilson. We are reminded of this particular scene between Myrtle and Tom:

Tom Buchanan and Mrs. Wilson stood face to face, discussing in impassioned voices whether Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name.

“Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!” shouted Mrs. Wilson. “I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai—”

Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. (24-25)

The female in Glasgow's *Barren Ground*, Dorinda Oakley, although quite different from Myrtle Wilson, shares some characteristics with Myrtle, Kate, and Becky in that she has lots of gumption. But Dorinda lives out her days in quiet discomfort on a farm: “Gradually, as the years passed, her human associations narrowed down to Fluvanna's (her maid) companionship and the Sunday afternoon visits of Nathan Pedlar and his children” (348). Glasgow portrays Dorinda as a martyr, much as Sinclair Lewis portrays Leora in *Arrowsmith*.

The young James Gatz may be likened to James Boyd's young Johnny Fraser in that they both go to war, albeit Johnny's is the Revolutionary War and James Gatz's is World War I. We know that Gatsby actually won lots of medals, not from Gatsby himself but from Meyer Wolfsheim:

“My memory goes back to when first I met him,” he said. “A young major just out of the army and covered over with medals he got in the war. He was so hard up he had to keep on wearing his uniform because he couldn’t buy some regular clothes. First time I saw him was when he come into Winebrenner’s poolroom at Forty-third Street and asked for a job. He hadn’t eat anything for a couple of days. ‘Come on have some lunch with me,’ I said. He ate more than four dollars’ worth of food in half an hour.” (114)

Johnny Fraser did not win a bunch of medals, but he fought honorably and was wounded:

Still he should be well content, he told himself; he had helped to beat the British once on sea and once on land and had come off with his life. A few years ago he would have been happy to lie back and enjoy the admiration due a wounded patriot. But now his restless, straining thoughts were with the Hunting Shirts who, having struck their blow, retreated northward over frozen roads before the main army of Cornwallis. (402)

Johnny Fraser reminds us in many ways of Hemingway’s Nick Adams, especially in the stories “Indian Camp” and “Big Two-Hearted River,” because Johnny and Nick are both products of farming country, although Johnny would never refer to his father as “My Old Man,” another of the stories in *In Our Time*. Gatsby too came from a farming family, but his life is so removed from his roots that Fitzgerald does not concentrate upon Gatsby’s agrarian heritage.

Gatsby of course can be compared with MacLeish's *The Pot of Earth* because MacLeish and Fitzgerald both use the mythological Adonis figure, who springs to life, flowers in the summer, and dies in the fall. Interestingly, both MacLeish and Fitzgerald wrote their works while in France, although MacLeish did not consider himself one of the lost generation as he beheld Fitzgerald to belong to such. While they were associated as partygoers in France, MacLeish looked with haughty disfavor upon Fitzgerald's drinking problem. MacLeish believed in having a good time, but he was extremely conservative when compared to the boisterous Fitzgerald.

The poem by Robert Penn Warren, "To a Face in a Crowd," though written at the early age of twenty, could very well have been addressed to Fitzgerald or to his character Gatsby:

Brother, my brother, whither do you pass?
 Unto what hill at dawn, unto what glen,
 Where among the rocks the faint lascivious grass
 Fingers in lust the arrogant bones of men?
 Beside what bitter waters will you go
 Where the lean gulls of your heart along the shore
 Rehearse to the cliffs the rhetoric of their woe?
 In dream, perhaps, I have seen your face before. (104)

One can see Gatsby all through these lines. And we see him floating dead in his swimming pool, after all his careful planning to be somebody and get somewhere. After Gatsby was shot and killed, Carraway opened the "ragged old copy of a book

called *Hopalong Cassidy* that Gatsby's father, Mr. Gatz, had brought with him to attend Gatsby's funeral, and on the back cover, dated September 12, 1906,

Carraway read:

Rise from bed.....	6.00	A.M.
Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling.....	6.15-6.30	“
Study electricity, etc.....	7.15-8.15	“
Work.....	8.30-4.30	P.M.
Baseball and sports.....	4.30-5.00	“
Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it.....	5.00-6.00	“
Study needed inventions.....	7.00-9.00	“

GENERAL RESOLVES

No wasting time at Shafers or [a name, indecipherable]

No more smokeing or chewing

Bath every other day

Read one improving book or magazine per week

Save \$5.00 [crossed out] \$3.00 per week

Be better to parents (116)

These rules and exercises are another reason that Gatsby gains the sympathy of the reader. That is to say, he worked diligently to pull himself up, and we are saddened that he did not succeed, much as we can consider our disappointment for Gatsby when we read these words by the poet Robert Penn Warren: “We are the children of an ancient band / Broken between the mountains and the sea” (104).

So what, then, are the crucial elements in these twenty-two works of 1925? Each of these works is a component of the modern era in the United States, loosely considered the period between the end of World War I (1918) and the beginning of World War II (1939). Each author, in one manner or another, expressed his or her disillusionment with the world at large. Furthermore, while Fitzgerald, Anderson, Wylie, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Stein, Cummings, Riding, Erskine, Dreiser, Wharton, Sinclair, Glasgow, Lewis, Boyd, Hemingway, Glasgow, and MacLeish (seventeen out of the twenty-two authors) concentrate upon conflict between the sexes (some more than others), Cather, Williams, Pound, and Eliot focus more upon secular circumstances. Fitzgerald's main narrative purpose is to arrange the merger of Gatsby and Daisy, the wife of Tom Buchanan. Anderson looks at the failed marriage of Bruce Dudley and his impromptu affair with Aline Grey, the wife of Fred. Wylie treats the unlikely relationship of Virginio and Rosalbo. Dos Passos reveals a whole slew of affairs, mainly involving Ellen Thatcher Oglethorpe Herf. And let us not forget Faulkner's treatment of the infamous Frankie and Johnny in New Orleans. Stein's volume gratuitously mentions husbands and wives and boys and girls, but her main focus persistently rests with insidious internal arguments with herself. She merely uses the men and women as springboards to her philosophical discussions. Although Cummings is quite able to write poetry that does not concentrate upon sex, the poems in & are predominantly concerned with affairs of the body. Riding is much more discreet in her treatment of male and female encounters, preferring to cloak hers in a mythological drama with a Greek god. Erskine takes the seldom developed character of Helen and transforms her

into an adulteress that regains her husband's home and becomes almost his superior. Dreiser's Clyde Griffith stupidly tries to please two females concurrently. At least *Gatsby's* downfall concerns only one female. Wharton's novel only infers a sexual encounter between Kate and Chris. She leaves it up to the reader to understand that sex was involved because they travelled and lived together.

Upton Sinclair, unlike Fitzgerald, writes more explicitly about sex in his various essays:

In our time the great Phedre was Sarah Bernhardt, the "divine Sarah," as she was known to the leisure-class critics of my boyhood. Upon the stage she exhibited the unbridled desires of an ancient Greek queen, and in real life she exhibited the unbridled desires of a modern stage queen; a woman who never felt a social emotion, but squandered the treasure of various royal and plutocratic and literary lovers, who likewise had never felt a social emotion. (123)

One can readily see that even though Sinclair smirks at Bernhardt's unbridled affairs, his main focus, as usual, is on the haves and have-nots. Fitzgerald successfully draws such a picture as well, but it is a Cubist picture that shows distortion between the haves and have-nots.

The themes of all these twenty-two novels cannot be easily thrown into one classification, but in one manner or another we can see strong connections between *Gatsby* and the other twenty-one works. The main theme, for example, of *Dark Laughter* (Anderson) could be "cloying emotionalism" (Hartwick 151). No one is likely to evaluate one of the themes in *Gatsby* as that of "cloying emotionalism," but

Bruce Dudley (*Dark Laughter*) and Jay Gatsby set out on an Odyssean venture with the idea that a happier world has eluded them. Horace Gregory, in commenting about *In the American Grain* (Williams), says:

It is the “happier world” that seems so often to elude us and that Dr. Williams frequently discovers on earth and not in heaven. To make these discoveries seem alive and new also implies the cheerful will to outface the dangers of a theme that grows too large for habitation, and too many writers have already lost themselves in that blue vault in which the images of rebirth and the sensations of becoming are reiterated with alarming regularity. One might almost say that our long-continued faith in the American renaissance is an habitual response to living on this continent, as though we waked each morning to find a new world still-born at our door. (xvii)

This sense of looking for a better world that we see as one of the themes in *Gatsby*, *Dark Laughter*, and *In the American Grain* may be extended to include a struggle with a sense of disorder, a sense we feel upon reading Robert Penn Warren’s “To a Face in a Crowd.” Anthony E. Szczesiul writes that Warren “sees a ‘necessity for order’ in the modern world and, consequently, ‘disorder’ becomes his primary subject matter” (47). Disorder also permeates Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” with its focus on “death’s kingdom,” “lost kingdoms,” “death’s other kingdom,” “death’s twilight kingdom,” “death’s dream kingdom,” and “For Thine is the Kingdom” (Apivor 89). “Death” is certainly one of the themes of *Gatsby*, as two people are killed, notably Myrtle Wilson, ironically struck down by Daisy Buchanan, whose

husband was having an open affair with her, and of course Gatsby himself, who is murdered by George Wilson, Myrtle's husband. Only a handful of people seem to care that Gatsby dies, much as Nature looks upon the tragedy with indifference, an indifferent nature one may notice in MacLeish's "The Pot of Earth." Geoffrey Miles writes that MacLeish's poem,

takes its title and epigraph from Frazer's discussion of the 'Gardens of Adonis' and repeatedly invokes images of the rituals of the dying god, falls into three sections describing a young woman's childhood and puberty ('The Sowing of the Dead Corn'), marriage and pregnancy ('The Shallow Grass'), childbirth and death ('The Carrion Corn'). The poem creates a sense of an individual human being caught up in the ancient, inescapable cycle of 'birth, copulation, and death', but also of her frightened, helpless rebellion against that cycle: 'why, then, must I hurry? / There are things I have to do / More than just to live and die / More than just to die of living.' As Shelley lamented in "Adonais," nature, in its cycle of endless selfperpetuation, seems indifferent to the human mind and its aspirations. (208)

Here we see the isolated human being, a female representative of the birth/death fate awaiting us all. The meditative, reflexive characteristics portrayed in MacLeish's poem are also strong themes in Hemingway's *In Our Time*, which "focuses mostly on the isolated, meditative, reflexive character of Nick Adams" (Dooley 111), much as Gatsby focuses mostly on the isolated, meditative, reflexive thoughts of Nick Carraway. In Hemingway's novel, there are several brief World

War I scenarios, a theme which takes us to Gatsby's participation in World War I, and there is another novel that has its theme in war—the American Revolution—Boyd's *Drums*. All three protagonists—Nick Adams, Jay Gatsby, and Johnny Fraser—survive their wartime efforts. Another survivor is Martin Arrowsmith who wages a different kind of war. He fights against the “prostitution of standards in medical science” (Dooley 111). Unlike Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Boyd, Sinclair Lewis was not involved in World War I, although he did register for the draft and was classified 4A—married, with dependents (Schorer 252). While Martin Arrowsmith dedicates himself to the field of scientific research, Glasgow's Dorinda Oakley “chooses the techniques of industrial agriculture to free herself from male dominance” (Conlogue 23). Kate Clephane (Wharton's *Mother's Recompense*), like Dorinda Oakley, represents the “conflicted woman” (Wolff 96), and may also serve to represent one of the themes in Stein's *The Making of Americans*, despite Janice L. Doane's assignation of the “theme of matriarchy” (xxi). None of the females in Gatsby fit the category of a matriarch, but the women are all conflicted, including Daisy, Myrtle, and Jordan.

The theme of economics is showcased in Upton Sinclair's *Mammonart*. He states that “artists, down through the ages, have always been ready to trade their souls for thirty pieces of silver” (Hartwick 241). The economic theme in Ezra Pound's *A Draft XVI Cantos*, is discussed by Forrest Read, who also thoroughly investigates the “overall theme” of “metamorphic tradition.” Read points to the “brief first phase of the Ovidian narration,” which “tells how a ship's crew offered passage to ‘a young boy loggy with vine-must’ but then, ‘mad for a little slave

money' (the economic theme), mutinied against the captain and took the ship off its course" (Read 127). Economics is of course one of *Gatsby's* major themes. Need we be reminded that just before he meets up with Daisy, he reads "a copy of Clay's *Economics*" (Godden 125).

We do not dwell on the fact that although Gatsby is a sympathetic figure, he is also criminally minded, a theme investigated by Raegis Michaud in his discussion of *An American Tragedy*. He sees the novel as "a most original attempt to detect the instillation of a criminal thought into a man's brain. Did anybody ever give a more exact, penetrating and dramatic account of how the idea of crime can invade a mind and gradually anesthetize the whole moral system of the criminal?" (117). Even though Clyde Griffiths is in some ways a sympathetic figure, his thoughts about getting rid of Roberta Alden make one's stomach turn queasy. As for Gatsby, 'technically no doubt a criminal, he remains to the end an obsessed, impenitent romantic, driven and sustained by his love for Daisy, by what Fitzgerald calls "the colossal vitality of his illusion"' (Tynan 39).

It is the Greek theme that Gatsby shares with several of the other 1925 novels under consideration herein. Although Erskine's *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* focuses on a female, it is of course based on a Greek theme, albeit a "humorous" rendition (Van Doren 324). Greek in theme also is Riding's "Summary for Alastor," but considered "intense" (Hamilton 386), not humorous. Gatsby, on the other hand, represents a Greek god, and he also represents the hero figure. Therefore, *Gatsby* shares the hero theme with *The Venetian Glass Nephew* by Wylie, who "had a hero made, and a heroine made over, to order" (Van Doren 324). The

affair between Virginio and Rosalba in a manner of speaking may be linked to the theme of courtly love in accordance with the more spiritual tradition, not the sensual tradition of E. E. Cummings. Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska write: "The girls and young women in Cummings' second book of poems, & (1925), are drawn from the same models who sat for Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and John Dos Passos' *1919*," and they quote poems number sixty-six and thirty-eight before saying, "But if Cummings' verse could show discourtesy to more than several young women of its day, its recurrent theme remained that of courtly love" (126). One can find a full treatment of courtly love in Andreas Capellanus's *The Art of Courtly Love*, where, in the introduction, John Jay Parry writes:

We find among the Arabs two different attitudes toward the subject of love: they have a sensual tradition, perhaps native although colored by the work of Ovid, and another more spiritual tradition, which appears to be based upon the work of Plato as it had come down through the commentaries of Arabic scholars. (8)

Gatsby's love for Daisy of course would fall into the spiritual type of courtly love, as put forth by Fitzgerald, since there is no evidence that Daisy and Gatsby ever consummated their relationship.

In continuing our discussion of related themes among these twenty-two 1925 writers, we must question whether there is any connection in theme between Faulkner's *New Orleans Sketches* and Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*. There are, as a matter of fact, several related themes between these two works, but the theme suggested by Faulkner's portrait entitled "The Artist" is the sketch that we choose to discuss

because Faulkner's "The Artist" is "dominated by the traditional poetological images of 'dream' and fire,' suggesting the artist's visionary power and his divine 'afflatus' ('A dream and a fire which I cannot control')" (Hönnighausen 93).

Gatsby of course is a dreamer, a dreamer whom Harold Bloom in his introduction to *Gatsby* variously describes as "the American Dream," "Keatsian dream of love," "the Jamesian dream of innocence, "Gatsby's dream of an ideal," "a dream of freedom," and "dream of love and wealth" (1-4).

Gatsby's dream of love and wealth takes him to New York, which leads us to consider how the theme of Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* may be relevant.

Desmond Harding writes that

The theme [in *Manhattan Transfer*] of social and cultural hemiplegia [paralysis of one side] expressed as an entropic [spontaneous] vision of civilization is almost immediately apparent in the "Telemachus" episode of *Ulysses*, with Stephen's loud complaint that the Irish find themselves, "living in a bogswamp, eating cheap food and the streets paved with dust, horsedung and consumptives' spits." (129)

This scene is reminiscent of Nick Carraway's description of the valley of ashes:

About half way between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent

effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight. (15)

Previously in the story, Nick has described East and West Egg:

It was a matter of chance that I should have rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America. It was on that slender riotous island which extends itself due east of New York—and where there are, among other natural curiosities, two unusual formations of land. Twenty miles from the city a pair of enormous eggs, identical in contour and separated only by a courtesy bay, jut out into the most domesticated body of salt water in the Western hemisphere, the great wet barnyard of Long Island Sound. They are not perfect ovals—like the egg in the Columbus story, they are both crushed flat at the contact end—but their physical resemblance must be a source of perpetual confusion to the gulls that fly overhead. To the wingless a more arresting phenomenon is their dissimilarity in every particular except shape and size. (3)

This description introduces another *Gatsby* theme, the theme of East versus West, and a theme we also find in Cather's *The Professor's House*. Frederick Link uses as an example Cather's contrast of "the stultifying hamhandedness of the Washington

bureaucracy with the starry-eyed idealism of Tom Outland,” a contrast that suggests “the theme of East versus West, a familiar note in Cather’s writing” (315). East versus West is a theme that exists in *Gatsby* throughout. Nick says at the beginning of the novel,

I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two. . . .
 Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I’d known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago. (3-4)

At the end of the novel, Nick again reflects on the difference between East and West:

Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old—even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg, especially, still figures in my more fantastic dreams. I see it as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon. (118)

Gatsby, then, develops numerous themes—the odyssey, sense of disorder, death, isolated human beings, criminal-minded, Greek, hero, courtly love, dreamer, East

versus West, social and cultural hemiplegia, meditative, reflexive characters, wars, conflicted women, and economics—in a comparatively short novel.

Another theme is Gatsby's predilection toward obsessive behavior—his rigid daily routine and his pursuit of Daisy come to mind. Do we find this obsessive behavior in any of the other twenty-one protagonists? Cather's Professor St. Peter was obsessed with his "dismantled house where he had lived ever since his marriage, where he had worked out his career and brought up his two daughters" (11).

Anderson's Bruce Dudley keeps "thinking a lot about Mark Twain during the six months before he took the new name" (5). Père Sebastian Rasles's "passion held him a slave to the New World" in Williams's *In the American Grain* (121). Wylie's Peter Innocent yearns for a nephew. Dos Passos's Jimmy Herf yearns for Ellen Thatcher, but Ellen yearns for Stan Emery. The husband in Faulkner's "Jealously" is unjustly obsessed with the suspicion that his wife attracts other men. Stein's matriarch has plenty of obsessions: "Supposing there is one kind of them, that some one knows say ten of that kind of them among those that one has come to know in living. Now in these ten of that kind of them some have this kind of being that makes this kind of them as bottom being, some have other kinds of being mixed up in them with this bottom being in them" (36). Cummings is obsessed with the physical body:

i like my body when it is with your
 body. It is so quite new a thing.
 Muscles better and nerves more.
 i like your body. I like what it does,

**i like its hows. I like to feel the spine
of your body and its bones, and the trembling
-firm-smooth ness and which I will
again and again and again
kiss, I like kissing this and that of you,
i like, slowly stroking the, shocking fuzz
of your electric fur, and what-is-it comes
over parting flesh And eyes big love-crumbs,
and possibly i like the thrill
of under me you so quite new (Poem 96 np)**

Ezra Pound's *Cantos* are obsessed with "hellish states" in the here and now (Makin 146), and so is Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "We whisper together / Are quiet and meaningless / As wind in dry grass / Or rats' feet over broken glass / In our dry cellar (123). Riding's "Alastor" poem indicates obsessive boldness. John Erskine's Helen is obsessively argumentative. Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths is obsessively hungry for wealth. Wharton's Kate Clephane is obsessively jealous of her daughter's relationship with Chris Fenno. Upton Sinclair's Ogi is obsessively concerned that the "haves" dominate the "have-nots." Glasgow's Dorinda obsesses about her independence from men. Sinclair Lewis's Arrowsmith obsesses about research. James Boyd's Johnny Fraser obsesses about the need to stay out of the American Revolutionary War. Hemingway's Nick Adams obsesses about fishing. MacLeish's female obsesses about death. And Warren's poem obsesses about the wanderer. All

this obsession indicates that this characteristic probably exists not only among these twenty-two works but also within us all.

And what are some of the issues these protagonists face? One of the main dilemmas reflecting the 1925 era is a sense of meaninglessness—Warren’s “weary nomads,” MacLeish’s “Dead, and the weeping,” Hemingway’s “Elliot had taken to drinking white wine and lived apart in his own room” (88); James Boyd’s “fire-lit face” that “held neither its accustomed iron resolution nor cool salty humor” (202); Sinclair Lewis’s “I don’t want anybody’s friendship” (394); Glasgow’s “‘It doesn’t seem just right that we have to be born’” (342); Upton Sinclair’s “and so we come to the second stage of the Greek spirit—the sense of fate, of cruelty hidden at the heart of life, the terror and despair of loveliness that knows it is doomed” (187); Wharton’s “She had got back into her old habit of lingering on every little daily act, making the most of it, spreading it out over as many minutes as possible, in the effort to cram her hours so full that there should be no time for introspection or remembrance” (264); Dreiser’s “How pray, resignedly, unreservedly, faithfully?” (798); Erskine’s “‘I married your father,’” said Helen; ‘I never said I loved him’” (53); Riding’s “proud, impetuous fool” (l. 14); Eliot’s “Headpiece filled with straw” (l. 4); Pound’s figures “melting like dirty wax, / decayed candles” (Makin 148); Cummings’s “of the ingenious gods. (I am punished.” (Poem 85); Stein’s “I mean, I mean and that is not what I mean, I mean that not any one is saying what they are meaning, I mean that I am feeling something, I mean that I mean something and I mean that not any one is thinking, is feeling, is saying, is certain of that thing, I mean that not any one can be saying, thinking, feeling, not any one can be certain of

that thing, I mean I am not certain of that thing, I am not ever saying, thinking, feeling, being certain of this thing” (782); Faulkner’s “he turned his face bitterly to the wall, knowing that his veracity as a liar was gone forever” (103), Dos Passos’s “When the door of the room closed behind him, Ed Thatcher felt very lonely, full of prickly restlessness” (12); Wylie’s “This was the recurrent thorn in the clean flesh of Peter Innocent; this was his cross: he had no nephew” (20); Williams’s “he emerges as the ghoulish, the driven back” (223); Anderson’s “He sat for a long time, crying as a child might have cried” (195); Cather’s “But now he thought of eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort” (272); and finally Fitzgerald’s

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. (120)

Tom and Daisy’s lives, then, represent the pervasive meaninglessness that seeps through the cracks of all these modernist works, a meaninglessness that is not lost on the citizens of the twenty-first century. In the twenty-first century, *Gatsby* continues to be rediscovered by the young all over the world in high schools and colleges. The young can still identify with its themes and can understand Fitzgerald’s conventional story-telling. Louise Rosenblatt’s conceives the reading process in this way:

Through the medium of words, the text brings into the reader’s consciousness certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain

images of things, people, actions, and scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text. (924)

The readers of *Gatsby* and these other twenty-one works will find different ways to interpret what they see on the page, but *Gatsby's* readers seem to bond with the protagonist, even though we know that we are getting only the perspective of Nick Carraway. In the back of our minds, however, we cannot help but compare Jay Gatsby to Scott Fitzgerald himself. The recently published book of his letters brings nostalgic memories of bygone days, days when one used to rush to the mailbox to find a letter from a dear relative or friend. In his December 15, 1940, letter to Scottie, his daughter, he wrote:

For the rest I am still in bed—this time the result of twenty five years of cigarettes. You have got two beautiful bad examples of parents. Just do everything we didn't do and you will be perfectly safe. But be sweet to your mother at Xmas despite her early Chaldean rune-worship which she will undoubtedly inflict on you at Xmas. Her letters are tragically brilliant in all matters except those of central

importance. How strange to have failed as a social creature—even criminals do not fail that way—they are the law’s “Loyal Opposition”, so to speak. But the insane are always mere guests on earth, eternal strangers carrying around broken decalogues that they cannot read.
(Brucoli “A Brief Life” 475)

In “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” written in November 1931 and published in *The Crack Up*, Fitzgerald wrote:

It is too soon to write about the Jazz Age with perspective, and without being suspected of premature arteriosclerosis. Many people still succumb to violent retching when they happen upon any of its characteristic words—words which have since yielded in vividness to the coinages of the underworld. It is as dead as were the Yellow Nineties in 1902. Yet the present writer already looks back to it with nostalgia. It 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. . . . Presently we began to have slices of the national cake and our idealism only flared up when the newspapers made melodrama out of such stories as Harding and the Ohio Gang or Sacco and Vanzetti. The events of 1919 left us cynical rather than revolutionary, in spite of the fact that now we are all rummaging around in our trunks wondering where in hell we left the liberty cap—“I know I *had* it”—and the moujik blouse. It was

characteristic of the Jazz Age that it had no interest in politics at all.

(13-14)

Like most of the authors discussed herein, Fitzgerald's only true focus was on writing. That is what these people lived for. Some of them, like Fitzgerald, lived very chaotic lives, but they were all highly educated, talented people who published volumes of literature that will be read and appreciated many, many generations hereafter. Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Stein, Cummings, Wharton, MacLeish, and Pound were either friends or acquaintances. Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Sinclair Lewis drank excessively. Cather, Wylie, Faulkner, Eliot, Riding, Erskine, Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Glasgow, Boyd, and Warren were not part of Fitzgerald's coterie of friends, and Riding, Glasgow, Warren, Williams, and Erskine are never mentioned in his letters. In "A Brief Life of Fitzgerald," Brucoli writes:

The Fitzgeralds went to France in the spring of 1924 seeking tranquillity for his work. He wrote *The Great Gatsby* during the summer and fall in Valescure near St. Raphael, but the marriage was damaged by Zelda's involvement with a French naval aviator. The extent of the affair—if it was in fact consummated—is not known. On the Riviera the Fitzgeralds formed a close friendship with Gerald and Sara Murphy.

The Fitzgeralds spent the winter of 1924-1925 in Rome, where he revised *The Great Gatsby*; they were en route to Paris when the novel was published in April. *The Great Gatsby* marked a striking

advance in Fitzgerald's technique, utilizing a complex structure and a controlled narrative point of view. Fitzgerald's achievement received critical praise, but sales of *Gatsby* were disappointing, though the stage and movie rights brought additional income. (xxi)

The Fitzgeralds always lived beyond their means as they traveled among an affluent group of writers and artists. If he were alive today, he would see his name mentioned several times in the August 6, 2007, *New Yorker* article "Modern Love: Gerald and Sara Murphy at work and at play," an article about the figures who are sources for Dick and Nicole Diver in *Tender is the Night*.

What is perhaps most common to all these works, of course, is America, a word behind which lurks a host of mysteries and motives and hopes. And so, on we search:

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor

desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow 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. (121)

Fitzgerald's 1925 literary companions could not have put the issue any better.

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APPENDICES

- A** **LIST OF AUTHORS**
- B** **DATES OF PUBLICATION**

A – AUTHORS, CHRONOLOGICAL BY 1925 PUBLICATION

Author	Title	Published 1925	Composed
1. Upton Sinclair	<i>Mammonart</i>	February	1923-1925
2. James Boyd	<i>Drums</i>	March 27	1921-1924
3. T. S. Eliot	<i>The Hollow Men [Poems 1909-1925]</i>	November 24	1924-1925
4. F. Scott Fitzgerald	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	March	1924
5. Laura Riding	“Summary for Alastor”	March	c1923-1925
6. Ellen Glasgow	<i>Barren Ground</i>	March	1922-1925
7. Sinclair Lewis	<i>Arrowsmith</i>	March	1922-1925
8. Archibald MacLeish	<i>The Pot of Earth</i>	May	1924
9. William Faulkner	<i>New Orleans Sketches</i>	Jan-Sep	January-September
10. Gertrude Stein	<i>The Making of Americans</i>	April	1906-1911
11. E. E. Cummings	<i>XLI Poems</i>	May	1922-1925
12. Willa Cather	<i>The Professor’s House</i>	Jun-Sep	Fall 1923-Winter 1924-1925
13. Ezra Pound	“A Draft of XVI Cantos”	June	1918-1924
14. Robert Penn Warren	“To A Face In The Crowd”	June	c1923-1925
15. Edith Wharton	<i>The Mother’s Recompense</i>	September	1923-1925
16. Sherwood Anderson	<i>Dark Laughter</i>	September	1924
17. John Dos Passos	<i>Manhattan Transfer</i>	November 12th	1922-1925
18. Theodore Dreiser	<i>An American Tragedy</i>	September	c1920-1925
19. Ernest Hemingway	<i>In Our Time</i>	September	1921-1925
20. William Carlos Williams	<i>In The American Grain</i>	September	1923-1925
21. Elinor Wylie	<i>The Venetian Glass Nephew</i>	September	1923-1925
22. John Erskine	<i>The Private Life of Helen of Troy</i>	October	c1923-1925

B – DATES OF PUBLICATION, ALPHABETICAL BY AUTHOR

	Author	Birth/Death	Title	Publisher	Publication	Composition
1	Anderson, Sherwood	1876/1941	<i>Dark Laughter</i>	Liveright	September	1924
2	Boyd, James	1888/1944	<i>Drums</i>	Scribner	27-Mar	1921-1924
3	Cather, Willa	1873/1947	<i>The Professor's House</i>	Collier's	Jun-Aug	Fall 1923- Winter 1924-25
4	Cummings, E. E.	1894/1962	"&" [Poems 48-96]	Alfred A. Knopf Privately Printed	September May	1922-1925
5	Dos Passos, John	1896/1970	<i>Manhattan Transfer</i>	Harper & Brothers	12-Nov	1922-1925
6	Dreiser, Theodore	1871/1945	<i>An American Tragedy</i>	Boni & Liveright	September	c1920-1925
7	Eliot, T. S.	1888/1965	<i>The Hollow Men [Poems 1909-1925]</i>		24-Nov	1924-1925
8	Erskine, John	1879/1951	<i>The Private Life of Helen of Troy</i>	Bobbs-Merrill	October	1923-1925
9	Faulkner, William	1897/1962	<i>New Orleans Sketches</i>			
			"New Orleans"	<i>The Double Dealer</i>	Jan-Feb	Jan-Feb
			"Mirrors of Chartres Street"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	8-Feb	8-Feb
			"Damon and Pythias Unlimited"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	15-Feb	15-Feb
			"Home"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	22-Feb	22-Feb
			"Jealousy"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	1-Mar	1-Mar
			"Cheest"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	5-Apr	5-Apr
			"Out of Nazareth"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	12-Apr	12-Apr
			"The Kingdom of God"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	26-Apr	26-Apr
			"The Rosary"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	3-May	3-May
			"The Cobbler"	<i>Times-Picayune</i>	10-May	10-May

#	Author	Birth/Death	Title	Publisher	Publication	Composition
10	Fitzgerald, F. Scott	1896/1940	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Charles Scribner's Sons	11-Apr	1924-1925
11	Glasgow, Ellen	1873/1945	<i>Barren Ground</i>	Doubleday	March	1922-1925
12	Hemingway, Ernest	1899-1961	<i>In Our Time</i>	Boni & Liveright	October	1921-1925
13	Lewis, Sinclair	1885/1951	<i>Arrowsmith</i>	Harcourt, Brace	March	1922-1925
14	MacLeish, Archibald	1892/1982	"The Pot of Earth"	Houghton Mifflin	March	1924
15	Pound, Ezra	1885/1972	<i>A Draft of XVI Cantos</i>	Paris: Three Mountains Press	June	c1912-1924
16	Riding, Laura	1901/1991	"Summary for Alastor"	The Fugitive	March	c1923-1925
17	Sinclair, Upton	1878/1968	<i>Mammonart</i>	Pasadena: Self	February	1923-1925
18	Stein, Gertrude	1874/1946	<i>The Making of Americans</i>	Dijon, Paris: Contact Editions	April	1906-1911
19	Warren, Robert Penn	1905/1989	"To A Face In The Crowd"	The Fugitive	June	c1923-1925
20	Wharton, Edith	1862/1937	<i>The Mother's Recompense</i>	Appleton	September	1923-1925
21	Williams, William Carlos	1883/1963	<i>In The American Grain</i>	A. & C. Boni	September	1923-1925
22	Wylie, Elinor	1885/1928	<i>The Venetian Glass Nephew</i>	Doran	September	1923-1925