

THE GREAT GATSBY

Background References –

Chapter I:

1. “Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her. . . . Thomas Parke D’Invilliers:” the lines of poetry that form the novel’s epigraph were actually written by Fitzgerald. D’Invilliers is a character in Fitzgerald’s novel THIS SIDE OF PARADISE (1920). This character was based on the writer John Peale Bishop, a Princeton classmate of Fitzgerald’s.
2. Dukes of Buccleuch: members of a Scottish dukedom with origins in the 17th Century.
3. Great War: World War I, so called until the Second World War (1939)
4. West Egg village: West Egg and East Egg are considered to be Fitzgerald’s versions of the communities of Little Neck and Great Neck on Long Island’s North Shore. Fitzgerald owned a house in Great Neck, the more affluent of the two. (Little neck and great neck are types of clams.)
5. Midas and Morgan and Maecenas: Midas was a mythical king whose touch turned items to gold. Morgan refers to a prominent American banking family. Maecenas was a wealthy Roman patron of literature.
6. like the egg in the Columbus story: Christopher Columbus answered a critic by challenging him to balance an egg on its tip. When the man failed, Columbus crushed the tip slightly, flattening it so that the egg could stand. He thus proved that a discovery seems obvious only after it has been made by someone with the vision to imagine it.
7. Hotel de Ville in Normandy: town hall in the French province of Normandy.
8. nightingale...on the Cunard or White Star Line: The nightingale, famous for its singing, is frequently identified with English poetry. The title of the novel Fitzgerald wrote after THE GREAT GATSBY is TENDER IS THE NIGHT, its title taken from Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale.” Cunard and White Star were two prominent passenger lines sailing between Europe and North America.
9. rotogravure: section of newspaper containing only photographs. *published the banners*

Chapter II:

1. borough of Queens: largest of the five boroughs, or divisions, of New York City; close to Little Neck and Great Neck.
2. torpedoes: small fireworks that explode under great pressure.
3. Versailles: location of a spectacular seventeenth century palace built outside of Paris by King Louis XIV.
4. ectoplasm: ghostly spirit emanating from a medium during a trance.
5. Kaiser Wilhelm: German emperor (1859-1941) and king of Prussia from 1888 to the end of World War I.

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Chapter V

1. like Kant at his church steeple: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the German philosopher, said that he developed his theories regarding reality and morality while gazing at a church steeple outside his window.
2. Marie Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons: elegantly furnished rooms in period style, respectively, of just before the French Revolution (1789) and of the brief restoration of the monarchy (1815).
3. Adam study: the Adams were an 18th century family of British architects. The Adam style is extremely delicate in form and color.
4. Chartreuse: green or yellow liqueur.
5. pompadour: style of hairdressing in which the hair is combed back to create the illusion of a puffy mass in the front.

Chapter VI

1. Platonic conception of himself: reference to the Greek philosopher Plato's notion that physical items are inferior copies of transcendent ideas. Gatsby's "Platonic conception of himself" is his fantasy image of his life, as opposed to his actual background.
2. Madame de Maintenon: French marquise (1635-1719) who gained commanding influence at the court of Louis XIV and who later married him.

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Background References –

Chapter VII

1. grail: tended guest; from the seeking of the Holy Grail associated with Christ at the Last Supper.
2. Argonne: French forest, where Allied forces fought at the end of World War I.
3. pneumatic MATRESS: air-inflated mattress; raft.

Chapter IX

1. pasquinade: a satire, posted publicly
2. ulster: long, heavy overcoat, with a cape; often belted.
3. James J. Hill: railroad magnate (1838-1916)
4. Swastika Holding Company: The swastika is most famous as an emblem of the German Nazi party, which was founded shortly after World War I; however, the swastika is an ancient symbol that at various times has had positive as well as negative associations. Fitzgerald, living in Europe after the war, was probably aware of the Nazis and other German anti-Semitic groups; in THE GREAT GATSBY he uses the swastika's anti-Semitic associations ironically in connection with Meyer Wolfsheim, who is probably Jewish.
5. American Legion: veterans' organization, founded 1919.
6. Hopalong Cassidy: a cowboy hero in popular fiction, films, and, much later, television.
7. El Greco: Greek painter (1541-1614) who worked in Italy and Spain. He is known for painting landscapes with harsh or somber colors and elongated and twisted figures. Fitzgerald may have had in mind El Greco's: "View of Toledo", and especially tormented scene.

