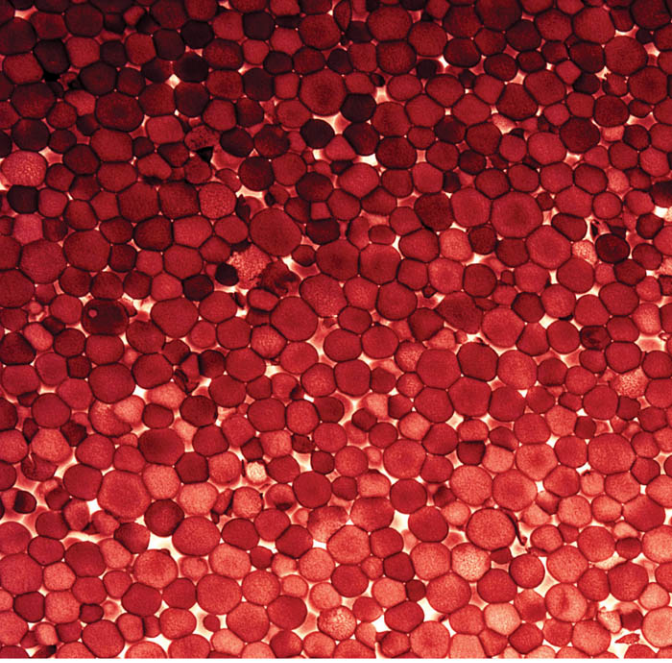
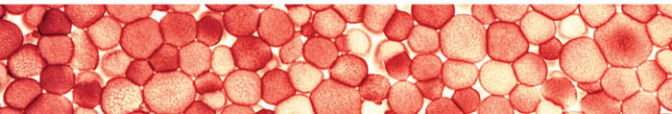


F. Scott Fitzgerald

Tales of the Jazz Age

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

TALES OF THE JAZZ AGE

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY FITZGERALD (1896–1940) was born in St Paul, Minnesota, and named after his second cousin three times removed, the author of 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. He went to Princeton University, but dropped out, eventually joining the Army in 1917. While in the service he began writing a novel, and also met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, of Montgomery, Alabama, whom he married in the spring of 1920, the year in which he published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. The novel, a thinly disguised fictional account of Fitzgerald's Princeton years, made its author an instant literary success, and a celebrity as well. Dividing his time between the East Coast of the United States and France during the 1920s, Fitzgerald wrote short stories in order to earn enough money to sustain himself and his family between novels. His second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), was not nearly as critically successful as his first. It was followed by a brief but disastrous excursion into drama, *The Vegetable* (1923), and by his acknowledged masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which marked a departure for Fitzgerald in its poetic style, its narrative complexity, and its highly controlled concise structure. Beset during the late 1920s and early 1930s by his wife's psychiatric difficulties, which required periodic hospitalization, and by his own financial problems, he did not produce another novel until 1934, when *Tender Is the Night* appeared—to mixed reviews and disappointing sales. In 1937 Fitzgerald went to Hollywood to write film scripts; despite working on numerous movies, he received screen credit for only one, but he paid off most of his debts and began a novel about the movie industry. *The Last Tycoon* was nearly half-completed in first draft form when, on 21 December 1940, Fitzgerald died of a heart attack.

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F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Tales of the Jazz Age

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by
JACKSON R. BRYER

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INTRODUCTION

In mid-January 1920, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins of Charles Scribner's Sons, and asked, 'There's nothing in collections of short stories is there?' At about the same time, he addressed an almost identical query to his agent, Harold Ober: 'Is there any money in collections of short stories?'[1] That the potential financial reward of a short story collection was on Fitzgerald's mind at that time is not surprising. While during the first six months of 1919 he had—according to his own probably somewhat exaggerated account—accumulated 'one hundred and twenty-two rejection slips' trying to get his stories published,[2] his fortunes had changed dramatically after Scribner's accepted his novel *This Side of Paradise* in September 1919. Between September 1919 and June 1920, thirteen Fitzgerald stories and two playlets appeared in such prestigious publications as the *Smart Set*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Although the *Smart Set* paid only $35–$40 per contribution, *Scribner's* fee was $150 and the *Saturday Evening Post* paid $400–$500. As a result, Fitzgerald's earnings from his writing increased from $879 in 1919 to $18,850 in 1920.[3]

But Fitzgerald's scepticism regarding publishing his stories in a book is also symptomatic of his career-long ambivalence about his short fiction. Despite the fact that he relied heavily on the money he earned from publishing his stories, he continually deprecated them as 'trash' and potboilers written only to sustain him during the financially fallow years between novels. Typically, he wrote to John Peale Bishop in 1925, 'No news except now I get $2000 a story and they grow worse and worse and my ambition is get to where I need write no more but novels'. Similarly, he wrote to Perkins that same year, 'Isn't

[1] John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald–Perkins Correspondence* (New York, 1971), 25; Matthew J. Bruccoli (ed.), with the assistance of Jennifer McCabe Atkinson, *As Ever, Scott Fitz——: Letters Between F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Literary Agent, Harold Ober, 1919–1940* (Philadelphia, 1972), 9.

[2] 'Who's Who and Why', *Saturday Evening Post*, 18 Sept. 1920; repr. in *Afternoon of an Author: A Selection of Uncollected Stories and Essays by F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1958), 85.

[3] Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 2nd rev. edn. (Columbia, SC, 2002), 101–2, 133; *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Ledger: A Facsimile* (Washington, DC, 1972), 51–2.

that a disgrace, when I get $2500. for a story as my regular price. But trash doesn't come as easily as it used to and I've grown to hate the poor old debauched form itself.'[4] And most famously of all, there is his oft-quoted remark, in a 1929 letter to Ernest Hemingway: 'Here's a last flicker of the old cheap pride: the *Post* now pays the old whore $4000 a screw. But now it's because she's mastered the 40 positions—in her youth one was enough.'[5]

There was, however, another side to Fitzgerald's view of his short fiction. Aside from somewhat overvaluing it for the income it provided, he occasionally also saw its artistic merits, as when he wrote to Ober in 1935 that 'all my stories are concieved [*sic*] like novels, require a special emotion, a special experience—so that my readers . . . know that each time it'll be something new, not in form but in substance'.[6] From the very beginning of Fitzgerald's career, Perkins took this more positive position regarding his client's short stories. Replying to Fitzgerald's January 1920 question, he admitted that while story collections 'do not constitute selling books', 'it has seemed to me your stories were likely to constitute an exception . . . they have the popular note which would be likely to make them sell in book form'. He concluded with the sort of tactful and perceptive statement that would characterize and probably help sustain his two-decade relationship with Fitzgerald: 'I wish you did care more about writing them because of this, and also because they have great value in making you a reputation and because they are quite worthwhile in themselves. Still we should not like to interfere with your novels.'[7] Unfortunately, in the nine decades since Perkins wrote these words, critics and scholars have, for the most part, taken their cue from Fitzgerald's own negative remarks about his stories rather than from Perkins's opinion that they have 'great value' and are 'quite worthwhile in themselves'. Beyond a core group of eight or nine which have been frequently anthologized and are the subjects of a few scholarly essays, the vast majority of the 178 stories he wrote have been almost totally ignored by teachers, students, critics, and scholars.

In 1920, however, Perkins apparently convinced Fitzgerald and

[4] Andrew Turnbull (ed.), *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1963), 355; Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 134.

[5] Turnbull (ed.), *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 307.

[6] Bruccoli (ed.), *As Ever, Scott Fitz——*, 221.

[7] Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 26.

his publisher, because in September 1920, hoping to capitalize on the success of *This Side of Paradise*, which sold more than 36,000 copies in nine months and went through nine printings before the end of 1920,[8] Scribner's published *Flappers and Philosophers*, its author's selection of the best of his stories published to that point in his career. This inaugurated a practice that was to continue throughout Fitzgerald's lifetime: within six months or a year of the publication of one of his novels, Scribner's would issue a volume that reprinted his selection of what he considered to be the best of his stories that had appeared since his last collection. *Tales of the Jazz Age* was the second such collection; it was published in September 1922, six months after *The Beautiful and Damned*, his second novel. *Flappers and Philosophers* sold well: it went through six printings, and by 1922, more than 15,000 copies were in print. *Tales of the Jazz Age* was only slightly less successful, going through three printings and about 14,000 copies by the end of 1922.[9]

When Fitzgerald began to select the stories for his second collection in February 1922, he faced a situation that was markedly different from that in 1920, when he had made his selections for *Flappers and Philosophers*. While for the earlier collection he was able to choose from among the dozen or so stories and short plays that he had published to that point, most written before he did final work on *This Side of Paradise*, for his second collection his choices were much more limited. For the previous two years, Fitzgerald had been devoting most of his time to his second novel, and had published a mere half-dozen stories between July 1920 and January 1922, two of which were only slightly revised versions of pieces he had originally published as an undergraduate at Princeton University. As a result, he debated what to include and what to call the new book. Originally, he proposed '*Sideshow* or *A Sideshow*' to Perkins, but when the latter replied that it suggested 'something of secondary importance', he came up with 'In One Reel', a title that evoked the single-reel short films then popular, before finally putting forward 'Tales of the Jazz Age'. Perkins's initial reaction to this last title was negative; he explained that the Scribner's sales force had voiced 'loud and precipitous criticisms' of it because

[8] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 133.

[9] Matthew J. Bruccoli, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Descriptive Bibliography*, rev. edn. (Pittsburgh, 1987), 29, 31, 53.

they felt that 'there is an intense reaction against all jazz and that the word whatever implication it actually has, will injure the book'. But he added quickly—and typically—that 'Your own instinct has proved so good that you ought not to be overruled by numbers, but give the point consideration'. In his reply, Fitzgerald disagreed, predicting, probably accurately as it turned out, that 'It will be bought by *my own personal public*, that is by the countless flappers and college kids who think I am a sort of oracle'; and he concluded wryly, 'It is better to have a title & a title-connection that is a has-been than one that is a never-will-be'.[10] There were also disagreements regarding the contents of the collection. These centred primarily on whether it should include 'Tarquin of Cheapside', which Perkins thought artistically unconvincing and likely to shock many readers. It was one of the stories that had originally been published while its author was at Princeton. In defence, Fitzgerald cited the praise the story had elicited when it appeared in the *Nassau Literary Magazine* and after its republication in the *Smart Set*, and again Perkins ultimately yielded to Fitzgerald's judgement.[11]

It is probably an indication of Fitzgerald's own doubts as to the overall strength of *Tales of the Jazz Age* that he decided to preface it with a Table of Contents, a feature unique to this collection, in which he humorously and self-mockingly described the circumstances in which each story had been composed. 'The Camel's Back', he asserted, was written '*during one day . . . with the express purpose of buying a platinum and diamond wrist watch which cost six hundred dollars*' (p. 5); while of 'Jemina' he observed, '*It seems to me worth preserving a few years—at least until the ennui of changing fashions suppresses me, my books, and it together*' (p. 8). This tone was also reflected in the book's dedication 'Quite Inappropriately—To My Mother' (p. 3).

Responses to *Tales of the Jazz Age* in 1922 were generally very favourable. Reviewers used phrases like 'unerring insight', 'engaging freshness and frankness', 'original, styleful, expert', 'highly entertaining', 'astonishingly sincere and unselfconscious', 'pungent, witty and fascinating in style', and 'facility, ease, and brilliancy'.[12] As he

[10] Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max,* 51, 271, 54, 58, 271–2, 59.

[11] Ibid. 61, 62, 63.

[12] Jackson R. Bryer (ed.), *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception* (New York, 1978), 146, 141, 148, 150, 154, 158.

had undoubtedly hoped, Fitzgerald's Table of Contents attracted considerable positive attention from reviewers: Hildegarde Hawthorne called it 'an excellent idea . . . done as well as Fitzgerald does anything that has to do with writing, which is very well indeed'; Woodward Boyd challenged readers to '[r]ead the table of contents and see if you can refrain from reading the book afterward'; and another critic praised Fitzgerald's 'ingenuous and disarming comment' that 'quite forestalls any criticism by the gracious candour of his remarks'.[13]

While there were a few negative reviews—John Gunther called the volume 'a poorly assembled mixture of bad, fair and good but not best' and H. L. Mencken noted that '[t]he spread between Fitzgerald's best work and his worst is extraordinarily wide'[14]—what is most prescient in the notices is the number of reviewers that saw in the author's second short story collection a significant shift, both with respect to subject matter and treatment. Some simply mentioned the variety—'no two of the stories are at all alike', observed one, and another commented, '[h]e does many things, and does most of them well'—but others delved more deeply and analytically into the possible implications of this diversity of material. The anonymous critic for the *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger* hinted at this by suggesting that 'Mr. Fitzgerald has post-graduated from the naive and charming sophomorism of the younger set'; but Hildegarde Hawthorne was more perceptively precise in pointing out that the stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age* that Fitzgerald described as written in his 'second manner' showed 'a development in his art, a new tone . . . the outcropping of a rich vein that may hold much wealth', noting that the collection was 'filled with all sorts of hints, promise and portents that make it exciting beyond its actual content'.[15]

Now, nearly a century after the publication of *Tales of the Jazz Age*, we have the benefit of knowing just how accurate were Hawthorne and those reviewers who saw it as a major departure from Fitzgerald's earlier work. Less than two years after its publication, Fitzgerald began—and completed rather quickly—*The Great Gatsby*, his third novel, which seemed, upon its appearance in 1925 and still today is generally regarded, in its conciseness, poetic style, and

[13] Ibid. 150, 160, 163.
[14] Ibid. 155, 163.
[15] Ibid. 141, 157, 151.

intricate patterning, as a radical and somewhat unexpected departure from its author's previous fiction. But, in fact, *Tales of the Jazz Age*, in many respects, marks a pivotal shift in Fitzgerald's writing, both with respect to subject matter and style, and can be seen as an important indicator of the direction his writing was to take as he moved towards *Gatsby*.

One way of beginning to see this shift is to compare the magazines which originally published the stories in *Flappers and Philosophers* with the venues where those in *Tales of the Jazz Age* first appeared. Four of the eight stories in *Flappers and Philosophers* were originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which required its fiction to be 'never cynical, . . . never naturalistic, . . . never openly critical of the near-Puritan virtues which made the *Post* the mouthpiece of middle America; and seldom . . . less than serious about romantic love'.[16] Once royalties from *This Side of Paradise* and income from his short stories and from the sale of film rights to his fiction made Fitzgerald's financial situation considerably more secure, he no longer had to write stories specifically for the *Post*; they could be more experimental in form and more serious and more nuanced in their subject matter. Only one of the eleven pieces in *Tales of the Jazz Age*, 'The Camel's Back', first appeared in the *Post*; and it is arguably one of the two or three selections in the volume that appear to look back to his earlier stories rather than forward towards *Gatsby*. One of the cardinal rules of a *Saturday Evening Post* story was that it had to have a happy ending; so it is another measure of how far Fitzgerald deviated from his previous short fiction in *Tales of the Jazz Age* to note that, of the eleven selections, three ('May Day', 'Benjamin Button', and 'The Lees of Happiness') end in the death of a major character and two ('The Camel's Back' and 'The Jelly-Bean') culminate in accidental and unexpected marriages that certainly do not bode well for the participants.

That Fitzgerald himself saw *Tales of the Jazz Age* as a departure from his previous fiction can be seen in the names he gave to the first two sections of the book and in the order in which he arranged them. By placing 'My Last Flappers' (with 'Last' implying final not most recent; as he wrote to Perkins in January 1922, 'God knows I am indebted to [the flapper idea] but I agree with you that its [*sic*] time to

[16] Bryant Mangum, *A Fortune Yet: Money in the Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Short Stories* (New York and London, 1991), 28.

let it go'[17]) at the beginning of the volume and then following it with 'Fantasies', as Alice Hall Petry explains, 'Fitzgerald could convey semiotically [a] shift in orientation from frivolous flappers to serious fantasies'.[18] Far more than *Flappers and Philosophers*, this collection also, as several reviewers mentioned, demonstrated its author's talents in several different fictional genres and styles, including 'fantasies' ('Diamond', 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button', and '"O Russet Witch!"'), a 'farce' ('The Camel's Back'), a 'domestic melodrama' ('The Lees of Happiness'), a 'technically innovative novella' ('May Day'), a 'sexually suggestive playlet' ('Porcelain and Pink'), a 'burlesque of popular fiction' ('Jemina'), and 'Mr. Icky', 'a play . . . which anticipates the theater of the absurd, . . .'.[19]

While *Tales of the Jazz Age* presents ample indications of its author's movement towards more serious and complex fiction, familiar and persistent Fitzgerald motifs are also abundantly evident. Chief among these are the related themes of a poor boy hopelessly in love with an unattainable rich and beautiful girl who often ends up marrying someone of her own class and that of a couple whose marriage is fraught with obstacles, either due to circumstances beyond their control or to inherent personal defects. The former of these, announced as early as an August 1916 entry in his *Ledger* that 'Poor boys shouldn't think of marrying rich girls' (the remark is sometimes attributed to the father of Ginevra King, the wealthy Chicago-area teenager with whom Fitzgerald had a brief but intense—mostly epistolary—romance between January 1915 and July 1917),[20] pervades Fitzgerald's fiction from Amory Blaine's relationship with Rosalind Connage in *This Side of Paradise* through Jay Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* to Dick Diver's doomed marriage to Nicole Warren in *Tender Is the Night* and many of his short stories. In *Tales of the Jazz Age*, in 'The Jelly-Bean', the title character, plebeian Jim Powell, 'who spends his life conjugating the verb to idle in the first person singular' (p. 11), is hopelessly smitten with Nancy Lamar, who 'had left a trail of broken hearts from Atlanta to New Orleans'

[17] Kuehl and Bryer (eds.), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 51.

[18] Petry, *Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction: The Collected Stories 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., and London, 1991), 57.

[19] Ibid. 55–6.

[20] *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Ledger*, 170.

(p. 14), but loses her to Ogden Merritt, 'an individual in white trousers' whose 'father had made a better razor than his neighbor' (p. 17). In 'May Day', Gordon Sterrett, who admits to his friend Philip Dean that 'I'm on my own now . . . and I can't stand being poor' (p. 58), unsuccessfully tries to rekindle his college romance with Edith Bradin, 'a complete, infinitely delicate, quite perfect thing of beauty, flowing in an even line from a complex coiffure to two small slim feet' (p. 73); while in 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz', John T. Unger from Hades, 'a small town on the Mississippi River' (p. 117), falls in love with Kismine Washington, the daughter of the world's richest man, who, she tells John, would 'have you poisoned if he thought we were in love' (p. 143).

Even 'Caroline', who hapless bookstore clerk Merlin Grainger of '"O Russet Witch!"' realizes represents his 'romantic yearning for a beautiful and perverse woman' (p. 214), is, at the end of the story, married to Thomas Allerdyce and 'secure for life' (p. 216), while Merlin becomes 'too old now even for memories' (p. 216). In the playlet 'Mr. Icky', Ulsa, the '*very worldly*' and '*loudly dressed*' (p. 241) daughter of the title character, is pursued by Rodney Divine, '*handsomely attired in a dress-suit and a patent-leather silk hat*' (p. 240), to whom she observes, 'they wouldn't let me in through the servants' entrance of your house' (p. 241); and 'Jemina, the Mountain Girl', at the beginning of that story, encounters a 'man from the settlements' and muses that '[n]o one like him had ever come into her life before' (p. 247). In 'Porcelain and Pink', Mr Calkins, the 'Young Man' who, mistakenly thinking she is her sister Lois, carries on a flirtatious conversation with Julie while, unbeknownst to him, she is in her bathtub, is a 'literary' man whom the obviously upper-crust girls' mother 'detests . . . because he's just got a divorce' (p. 107). And Betty Medill's unwanted marriage to Percy Parkhurst in 'The Camel's Back', despite the fact that they are of the same social class, leaves her furious with him, exclaiming that her father will 'take his gun and put some cold steel in you' (p. 52). Significantly, it is only when Percy threatens to leave her to the luckless cabdriver who was the back half of the camel whom she was tricked into 'marrying' that she proclaims her love and agrees to marry Percy officially.

The second iteration of Fitzgerald's marriage motif, that of the unhappy or doomed couple, prominently apparent in the relationship of Anthony and Gloria Patch in his second novel, *The Beautiful*

and Damned, which he was working on at the same time he was writing several of the pieces in *Tales of the Jazz Age*, is present in 'The Lees of Happiness', probably the collection's most pessimistic selection. The idyllic union of Roxanne and Jeffrey Curtain—'It was a marriage of love. He was sufficiently spoiled to be charming; she was ingenuous enough to be irresistible' (p. 220)—is shattered when a 'blood clot the size of a marble' (p. 226) bursts in his brain and leaves him in a vegetative state for eleven years before he dies. Roxanne cares for him devotedly and unceasingly; while the marriage of their friends Harry and Kitty Cromwell abruptly ends when she, 'nervous without being sensitive, temperamental without temperament, a woman who seemed to flit and never light' (p. 223), abandons him and later marries 'a man named Horton, a sort of lumber king' (p. 237). Roxanne is only 35 when Jeffrey dies and Harry, who is 'devoted to her' and is her 'best friend' (p. 236), has faithfully visited them throughout Jeffrey's illness; but the story ends with them denying the possibility of future happiness together, because, in Fitzgerald's words, 'To these two life had come quickly and gone, leaving not bitterness, but pity; not disillusion, but only pain' (p. 238).

Another characteristic of Fitzgerald's fiction evident in *Tales of the Jazz Age* is the care with which he selected the names of his characters and the titles of his stories. Petry has suggested that Merlin Grainger's name, in '"O Russet Witch!"', reflects the story's theme that 'each of us contains the capacity for both the magical' (Merlin) and 'the mundane (hence "Grainger," literally "farmer")' and 'that it is our individual responsibility to nurture the former rather than to submit to the latter'.[21] In the same story, Caroline's real name, Alicia Dare, combines her pretentious phoniness with her audaciousness. In 'May Day', the 'over-rouged' (p. 84) Jewel Hudson's first name is typical of many of Fitzgerald's names and narrative passages in that it is both perfectly descriptively appropriate for someone of her class and also an ironic commentary in that she is anything but a 'jewel'. Likewise, Ogden Merritt of 'The Jelly-Bean' has a name that is suitable for a vapid well-born young man but as well ironically suggests that he in no way 'merits' any rewards he receives. Most transparently, the Braddock Tarleton Washington's genealogy in 'The

[21] Petry, *Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction*, 76.

Diamond as Big as the Ritz' carries a great deal of symbolic meaning, combining references to 'the Norman conquerors who brought with them a system of steep class differences', Lord Baltimore, 'a charter-holding proprietor of a large tract of early America who held absolute . . . power', Tarleton and Braddock, both 'noted for their presumptuousness', and Washington, 'a Southern, slave-owning plantation owner'.[22]

And, most obviously, by giving the rapacious, corrupt, and unscrupulous owner of the diamond as big as the Ritz Carlton Hotel the name of the man commonly known as the Father of His Country, Fitzgerald is satirizing the essential principles underlying the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave. A similar intention probably lies behind Fitzgerald's choice of the name Carrol Key for one of the two returning servicemen in 'May Day', who are described as 'ugly, ill-nourished, [and] devoid of all except the very lowest form of intelligence' (p. 64); his surname is suggestive of Francis Scott Key, author of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' (and, not incidentally, a distant relative of Fitzgerald, after whom the latter was named); this connection is made overt when we are told that Key's name hints that 'in his veins, however thinly diluted by generations of degeneration, ran blood of some potentiality' (p. 65)—an observation that may well also indicate some subtle authorial self-deprecation. With respect to titles, many have noted the possible multiple meanings of 'May Day' and their applicability to the story. On a literal level, it refers to the actual date on which the story takes place, 1 May 1919; but it may 'also ironically refer to the spring festival of crowning the May Queen and dancing around the Maypole, or even to the French expression, *m'aidez* ("help me")',[23] the latter being the origin of the term 'Mayday' for a distress call issued by a vessel at sea.

These layers of meaning in the names of Fitzgerald's characters and in the title of 'May Day' in turn suggest the principal reason that the three best stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age*—'May Day', 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz', and 'The Jelly-Bean'—represent significant turning points in Fitzgerald's writing and major transition points between his earlier fiction and *The Great Gatsby*. To varying degrees, in them, he was able to do what he had not done

[22] Robert Emmet Long, *The Achieving of* The Great Gatsby*: F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1920–1925* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1979), 63.

[23] John Kuehl, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston, 1991), 39.

previously: compose a narrative that existed on more than one level. In each case, albeit to differing extents, the story has some basis in Fitzgerald's own experience; and thus has a literal narrative. In fact, Fitzgerald locates many of the stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age* in a specific place and sometimes at a specific time: 'The Jelly-Bean' in Tarleton, Georgia, just after the end of the First World War; 'The Camel's Back' in Toledo, Ohio, 'during the Christmas holidays of 1919' (p. 29); 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button' 'in ante-bellum Baltimore' (p. 156) in 1860; and 'The Lees of Happiness' 'near the town of Marlowe, half an hour from Chicago' (p. 221) in 'the first years of the present century' (p. 219). But, unlike his previous stories and novels, there is also a very clear intent in 'May Day', 'Diamond', and 'The Jelly-Bean' to convey a larger, more universal, often ambivalent, and sometimes mythic dimension that clearly presents Fitzgerald's complex and often critical views on America and its culture. As Henry Dan Piper puts it, in these stories Fitzgerald begins 'to explore and expose the values that he had so naïvely glamorized in his early *Saturday Evening Post* stories'.[24]

This multi-layering is most apparent in 'May Day'. It is based on a number of actual events that took place in New York on 1 May 1919, when a rowdy group of returning servicemen tried to disrupt labour and socialist meetings throughout the city and were dispersed in sometimes violent confrontations with the police. Fitzgerald was living in New York at the time, writing advertising copy by day and unsuccessfully trying to pursue a writing career at night in order to establish a financial basis on which he might reinstate his engagement to Zelda Sayre. His situation is clearly parallel to that of Gordon Sterrett and Edith Bradin. But we can begin to see the other, less literal dimension of 'May Day' by looking at Fitzgerald's 1931 essay 'Echoes of the Jazz Age' where he dated the beginning of the Jazz Age as 'about the time of the May Day riots in 1919' when 'the wildest of all generations, the generation which had been adolescent during the confusion of the War, brusquely shouldered my contemporaries out of the way and danced into the limelight'; it was '[a] whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure'.[25] Viewed against this background, the chaos and self-indulgent pleasure-seeking that Fitzgerald saw as descriptive of that pivotal moment become the template not only for

[24] Piper, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait* (New York, 1965), 76.
[25] Edmund Wilson (ed.), *The Crack-Up* (New York, 1945), 13, 15.

the events of the story but also for its structure. The longest story he ever wrote, it is sometimes criticized for its diffuseness and for the coincidences used to bring its narrative strands together. Its tripartite plot construction is also unique in Fitzgerald's short fiction; but that structure is deliberately chosen as a reflection of the confusion, hysteria, and lack of focus that typified its time.

The characters are also deliberately selected to represent a cross-section of the constituencies of the day: Gus Rose and Carrol Key, soldiers newly returned from the war not knowing how they will fit into the new order, taking out their frustration in violence against what they see as society's radical element; Henry Bradin, the social activist editor, and the nameless Jew, eager to take advantage of the uncertainty of the times to promote their socialist ideology; Edith Bradin, Philip Dean, and Peter Himmel, upper-class hedonists out for a raucous and unfettered good time, aware that their social status insulates them from punishment or censure; and George Rose, the waiter at Delmonico's, and Jewel Hudson, representatives of the proletariat. As Brian Way notes, nothing is more characteristic of the arbitrariness of this moment than 'the distribution of happiness and misery'—the 'rich and fortunate' Dean and Himmel are at the beginning of a 'memorable party', while the fate of 'the weak' like Philip and Carrol Key is death—one self-imposed, the other utterly random.[26] One thinks of Myrtle Wilson and Jay Gatsby, similarly victimized by the rich and impregnable Buchanans.

Two specific passages serve further to exemplify the story's resonances and complexity. Couched in biblical or mythical language which deliberately withholds any mention of a specific time or place, its opening paragraphs imply perfectly the 'universality' of Fitzgerald's 'theme—the general hysteria and confusion of values which follow war'.[27] They read in part:

> Never had there been such splendor in the great city, for the victorious war had brought plenty in its train, and the merchants had flocked thither from the South and West with their households to taste of all the luscious feasts and witness the lavish entertainments prepared—and to buy for their women furs against the next winter and bags of golden mesh and varicolored slippers of silk and silver and rose satin and cloth of gold. (p. 55)

[26] Way, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction* (London, 1980), 78.

[27] James E. Miller, Jr., *F. Scott Fitzgerald: His Art and His Technique* (New York, 1964), 56.

The tone here, suitable for a heroic epic, echoes ironically with the debauchery, senseless violence, and philistine indifference evident in the narrative that follows; and its lack of specificity plays against the actual events of 1 May 1919. One thinks here of the last page of *Gatsby* where Gatsby's dream is placed against 'the fresh, green breast of the new world' that 'flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes'.[28]

In a similar way, towards the end of the story, as Philip Dean and Peter Himmel drunkenly throw their breakfast hash around Child's Restaurant, their mindless revelry is interrupted by a sight that momentarily silences them and the rest of the early-morning crowd:

> The great plate-glass front had turned to a deep creamy blue, the color of a Maxfield Parrish moonlight—a blue that seemed to press close upon the pane as if to crowd its way into the restaurant. Dawn had come up in Columbus Circle, magical, breathless dawn, silhouetting the great statue of the immortal Christopher, and mingling in a curious and uncanny manner with the fading yellow electric light inside. (p. 97)

Aside from the literal facts that, in 1919, Child's was indeed a popular spot for all-night partygoers to go for breakfast and was located on Columbus Circle, which in its centre did—and does still—feature a statue of its namesake, the invoking of the 'immortal' discoverer of the New World serves as an abrupt and ironic counterpoint to the scene of extravagant and reckless excess which has been unfolding in 'the fading yellow electric light inside' Child's, signifying 'that an earlier version of the new world has been emptied of its force'.[29]

'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz' is certainly far less tied to a realistic mode than 'May Day'; it is, in fact, unique in Fitzgerald's fiction as the one story in which he makes no pretence of grounding his narrative in a believable storyline. It is pure fantasy, rivalled in that genre among his short stories only by 'Benjamin Button' and 'A Short Trip Home', a 1927 story that features a ghoul who preys upon young women he meets on trains. The tie of 'Diamond' to its author's personal experience is extremely tenuous. To some extent, it is based on his stay in the summer of 1915 at his Newman School and Princeton friend Sap Donahoe's family's ranch in Montana;[30] but by allowing his imagination and creativity totally free rein, he was able to express

[28] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Cambridge and New York, 1991), 140.
[29] Long, *The Achieving of* The Great Gatsby, 37.
[30] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 56.

a devastating criticism of the American Dream. In terms of its subject matter, the story strongly and directly asserts, through its broadly comic satiric style, ideas that Fitzgerald had certainly hinted at in his earlier fiction: to be poor is miserable and degrading; the absence of money is worse than abundant wealth; both rich and poor are equally susceptible to evil; the rich can succeed in life more easily than the poor; and youth has intrinsic value but it is considerably enhanced by the fact or illusion of wealth and beauty. Previously he had expressed these ideas through essentially realistic characters in basically prosaic, if often romantic, situations; in 'Diamond', Piper explains, he 'was able to make use of the exaggerations and other comic devices of fantasy to express his convictions about the fantastic power of money in our society'.[31] And where previously his wealthy central characters were invariably the flappers and undergraduates of his generation, in 'Diamond', through his portrait of the older members of the Washington family he was able to portray 'the historical evolution of a class'.[32]

His method was one that he introduced in this story (although he had also used it as early as 'Tarquin of Cheapside') and would develop very profitably in his later fiction, that of presenting his narrative through the eyes of an impressionable outsider. Like Nick Carraway observing Gatsby and the Buchanans, like Rosemary Hoyt watching the Divers and their friends on the Riviera, and like Cecelia Brady, who is '<u>of</u> the movies but not <u>in</u> them',[33] telling producer Monroe Stahr's story in *The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald's uncompleted last novel, John T. Unger is alternately dazzled, bewildered, and appalled by what he sees and hears. This technique relieves the author from explaining 'the *how* and *why* of so much wealth'[34] and enables him to portray what, in 'Echoes of the Jazz Age', he called 'the age of excess' and 'the age of satire'[35] in passages of great wit and poetic language, such as John's first sighting of the Washington mansion:

Full in the light of the stars, an exquisite château rose from the borders of the lake, climbed in marble radiance half the height of an adjoining

[31] Piper, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 78.
[32] Way, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction*, 68.
[33] Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 458.
[34] Sergio Perosa, *The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, tr. Charles Matz and Sergio Perosa (Ann Arbor, 1965), 57.
[35] Wilson (ed.), *The Crack-Up*, 14.

mountain, then melted in grace, in perfect symmetry, in translucent feminine languor, into the massed darkness of a forest of pine. The many towers, the slender tracery of the sloping parapets, the chiselled wonder of a thousand yellow windows with their oblongs and hectagons and triangles of golden light, the shattered softness of the intersecting planes of star-shine and blue shade, all trembled on John's spirit like a chord of music. On one of the towers, the tallest, the blackest at its base, an arrangement of exterior lights at the top made a sort of floating fairyland—and as John gazed up in warm enchantment the faint acciaccatura sound of violins drifted down in a rococo harmony that was like nothing he had ever heard before. (p. 124)

Brian Way contends that passages like this in 'Diamond' show that Fitzgerald was 'discovering that social fiction could be a mode of poetry';[36] and, indeed, so it is in that most poetic of modern American social novels, *The Great Gatsby*—in Nick's descriptions of Gatsby's house ('a colossal affair by any standard—it was a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden') and of the Buchanans' ('a cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial mansion overlooking the bay. The lawn started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens—finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run').[37]

Many critics feel that H. L. Mencken's harsh critiques of American society (Lawrence Buell describes them as 'his brand of rhapsodic invective'[38]) influenced Fitzgerald's frequently bitter satire in 'Diamond'; and, of course, Mencken accepted the story for the *Smart Set* after other magazines had rejected it. But focusing on its harsh criticism is to overlook two features that considerably leaven its critique. The first, already noted, is the use of the observer/narrator, which Kuehl, among others, sees as providing the author with his 'chief means of maintaining both "intimacy" and "detachment"'.[39] The second is humour, a feature of Fitzgerald's fiction too often

[36] Way, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction*, 69.

[37] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 8, 9.

[38] Buell, 'The Significance of Fantasy in Fitzgerald's Short Fiction', in Jackson R. Bryer (ed.), *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism* (Madison, 1982), 34.

[39] Kuehl, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 45.

neglected and one that is present in and often should be pointed to as one of the chief virtues of a number of the selections in *Tales of the Jazz Age*. In 'Diamond', it often takes the form of irony—as in Kismine's remarks, 'Think of the millions and millions of people in the world, laborers and all, who get along with only two maids' (p. 141) and 'There go fifty thousand dollars' worth of slaves . . . at pre-war prices. So few Americans have any respect for property' (p. 147). Another comic technique employed is the unexpected blurring of the real and the absurd, as in John's admission that 'He was critical about women. A single defect—a thick ankle, a hoarse voice, a glass eye—was enough to make him utterly indifferent' (p. 132) and his observation that Kismine's sister Jasmine 'had never recovered from the shock and disappointment caused her by the termination of the World War, just as she was about to start for Europe as a canteen expert' (p. 139). There is even another possibly 'inside' joke like the reference to Francis Scott Key in 'May Day': John is told that the landscape gardener, architect, stage set designer, and poet Braddock Washington had kidnapped to redesign his property 'all went mad early one morning after spending the night in a single room trying to agree upon the location of a fountain, and were now confined comfortably in an insane asylum at Westport, Connecticut' (p. 140). Between May and September 1920, the Fitzgeralds rented an eighteenth-century farmhouse in Westport. The scene of many liquor-fuelled parties and not a great deal of serious work, the house was used as a setting for the Patches' contentious marriage in *The Beautiful and Damned*.

Unlike 'May Day' and 'Diamond', both of which have received some critical attention, 'The Jelly-Bean' has been virtually ignored; it deserves increased scrutiny. It is the second of three stories Fitzgerald set in the fictional town of Tarleton, Georgia; 'The Ice Palace' (1920) and 'The Last of the Belles' (1929) are the other two. Tarleton is obviously Montgomery, Alabama, where, in 1918, Fitzgerald, then a soldier stationed at Camp Sheridan, met Zelda Sayre, the prototypical Southern belle—beautiful, popular, rebellious, daring, and from a respected (albeit not very wealthy) local family. The central female characters of the three Tarleton stories are all modelled on Zelda; but there are significant differences between them—especially between Sally Carrol Happer of 'The Ice Palace' and Nancy Lamar of 'The Jelly-Bean'—and therein lies the major reason that the latter story is the better of the two.

Once again, as with 'May Day' and 'Diamond', its excellence rests in its greater complexity and layers of ambivalent meaning. While Sally Carrol is depicted as a quite conventional Southern girl, who, after a terrifying trip to the Winter Carnival in frigid St Paul, Minnesota, gratefully and happily returns to the warm, lazy indolence of her Southern hometown, Nancy Lamar resembles the heroine of Zelda's highly autobiographical 1932 novel *Save Me the Waltz*, who complains, 'it's very difficult to be two simple people at once, one who wants to have a law to itself and the other who wants to keep all the nice old things and be loved and safe and protected'.[40] Piper astutely calls 'The Jelly-Bean' 'Fitzgerald's first fully drawn portrait of the post-World War I flapper', whose loyalties, '[l]ike so many pretty Southern girls of her generation . . . were divided between the older, traditional way of life and the new freedom'.[41] Although Nancy has 'a mouth like a remembered kiss and shadowy eyes and blue-black hair', the fact that the latter is 'inherited from her mother who had been born in Budapest' (p. 14) hints that she may be a bit more unconventional than her peers. So we are not surprised to learn of her passions for shooting craps ('She will roll 'em with the boys and she loses more than her daddy can afford to give her', p. 15) and for drinking ('she do like her highballs', p. 17); and she is not above siphoning gasoline from a car to help her remove gum from her shoe.

In contrast to many of Fitzgerald's carefree rich young people, however, Nancy does not escape unscathed; at the end of the story, drunk on corn liquor, she has unhappily and unwittingly married a man she does not care 'a darn about' (p. 28). In this regard, she is notably different from Edith Bradin, Philip Dean, and Peter Himmel of 'May Day'; and Bryant Mangum sees Fitzgerald, in 'The Jelly-Bean', not focusing his 'narrative on the girl to entertain his audience'—as he had done in 'The Ice Palace' and others of his earlier stories—but rather making her 'a vehicle through which he expresses the unpleasantness that can result from irresponsibility'.[42] Because Fitzgerald does not glamorize or sentimentalize either Nancy or her jelly-bean swain Jim Powell, the reader can sympathize both with the poignancy of her dilemma as well as with his inability to escape from a dull, unproductive life.

[40] Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz* (Carbondale, Ill., 1967), 56.
[41] Piper, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 69.
[42] Mangum, *A Fortune Yet*, 42.

Although 'May Day', 'Diamond', and 'The Jelly-Bean' are the strongest stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age* because they demonstrate so clearly the developing seriousness and complexity of Fitzgerald's fiction, other selections in the volume warrant attention as well. 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button' and '"O Russet Witch!"', like 'Diamond', represent his attempts at what he called his 'second manner', presumably a movement away from realism towards more imaginative modes. While not as totally successful as 'Diamond', both can be looked at for their differing stylistic approaches to fantasy. '"O Russet Witch!"' is an example of how, in Fitzgerald's fantasies, 'two contrasting modes of presentation have been laid side by side' and the reader 'is made uncertain about the locus of reality, and we are made more conscious of the artist as manipulator of his characters and of ourselves'. Such stories depict 'rationally explicable events in ways that merely seem fantastic'.[43] Three scenes in '"O Russet Witch!"' fit this description perfectly; and, purposefully on Fitzgerald's part, they are the first three times Merlin Grainger meets his 'Caroline' face to face. In each instance, a quite straightforward narrative suddenly veers off almost imperceptibly into highly exaggerated and fanciful language. The first such encounter occurs in the Moonlight Quill Bookstore and culminates in Merlin and Caroline gleefully tossing books toward the ceiling:

> Merlin seized a large, specially bound French classic and whirled it upward. Applauding his own accuracy, he took a best-seller in one hand and a book on barnacles in the other, and waited breathlessly while she made her shot. Then the business waxed fast and furious—sometimes they alternated, and, watching, he found how supple she was in every movement; sometimes one of them made shot after shot, picking up the nearest book, sending it off, merely taking time to follow it with a glance before reaching for another. (p. 192)

The third time Merlin meets Caroline is Easter Sunday on New York's Fifth Avenue. Again, when she appears and a commotion erupts, Fitzgerald reflects the extent of the disruption both in his literal description and also in its gradually increasing hyperbole:

> The noise increased. The first fire-engine arrived, filling the Sunday air with smoke, clanging and crying a brazen, metallic message down the high, resounding walls. In the notion that some terrible calamity had overtaken

[43] Buell, 'The Significance of Fantasy in Fitzgerald's Short Fiction', 26, 27.

the city, two excited deacons ordered special services immediately and set tolling the great bells of St. Hilda's and St. Anthony's, presently joined by the jealous gongs of St. Simon's and the Church of the Epistles. Even far off in the Hudson and the East River the sounds of the commotion were heard, and the ferry-boats and tugs and ocean liners set up sirens and whistles that sailed in melancholy cadence, now varied, now reiterated, across the whole diagonal width of the city from Riverside Drive to the gray water-fronts of the lower East Side. . . . (p. 206)

These abrupt excursions into phantasmagoria occurring when they do in the story—their second meeting, at Pulpat's restaurant, is rendered similarly—are Fitzgerald's indications through the change in his style that Merlin's view of Caroline is highly unrealistic and romantic. Significantly, their fourth meeting at the end of the story is presented in a much more temperate mode, reflecting the fact that they are both older and Merlin's romanticized perspective has lessened; importantly, shortly after this, he learns her true identity and his disillusionment is complete. This type of juxtaposing of the real and surrealistic will recur frequently in *Gatsby*, perhaps most notably in the famous description at the beginning of chapter II of the Valley of Ashes, presided over by the eyes of Dr T. J. Eckleburg.[44]

In 'Benjamin Button', Fitzgerald's style in the fantasy mode operates quite differently from the way it is employed in '"O Russet Witch!"'. While the latter features the deliberate juxtaposition of two seemingly incongruous styles, 'Benjamin Button' utilizes what is, for the most part, an entirely realistic style to tell a completely unrealistic story, that of Benjamin—born a 70-year-old man who grows younger as his life progresses. Here the juxtaposition is between what Buell describes as 'the sense of a "real world" and the sense of an anti-world of the implausible or the outlandish'.[45] As mentioned earlier, Fitzgerald tells us precisely where Benjamin is born, Baltimore, and when, 1860; and, throughout the story, realistic details are supplied—such as the college in which he tries to enroll, Yale (pp. 165–7); the name of the Baltimore newspaper, the 'Blaze' (p. 170), a transparent reference to the *Baltimore Sun*; the street on which the Button family lives, Monroe Street (p. 180); where Benjamin lives, 'on Mt. Vernon Place' (p. 177); where he buys his military uniform, at a 'tailoring establishment on Charles Street' (p. 176); his enlistment in the army during the

[44] Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 21–2.

[45] Buell, 'The Significance of Fantasy in Fitzgerald's Short Fiction', 28.

Spanish-American War (p. 172); where he is stationed, 'Camp Mosby, in South Carolina' (p. 177); and his participation in the charge up San Juan Hill (p. 172). Much of the comedy in the story derives from the deadpan manner in which the most outlandish incidents are described, as when Benjamin's grandson is born:

> In 1920 Roscoe Button's first child was born. During the attendant festivities, however, no one thought it 'the thing' to mention that the little grubby boy, apparently about ten years of age who played around the house with lead soldiers and a miniature circus, was the new baby's own grandfather. (p. 178)

While 'Benjamin Button' is best regarded as a skilfully sustained comic tour de force, Milton Hindus observes that if it is characteristic of 'the average of what Fitzgerald was capable of achieving in his lightest moods, what a high average it turns out to be!'[46] The same might be said of 'The Camel's Back', a story more reminiscent of its author's early fiction than of the more mature pieces in *Tales of the Jazz Age*, and, to a lesser extent, of 'Tarquin of Cheapside' and 'Jemina' and of the two playlets in the volume, 'Porcelain and Pink' and 'Mr. Icky'. It is unfair to hold Fitzgerald's two undergraduate efforts to the same standards that we apply to the work he produced as he matured as a writer. It is best to regard 'Tarquin of Cheapside' and 'Jemina' as similar to the humorous poems and prose pieces Fitzgerald wrote for the *Princeton Tiger* humour magazine and to the lyrics he wrote for three Princeton Triangle Club musicals, *Fie! Fie! Fi-Fi!* (1914), *The Evil Eye* (1915), and *Safety First* (1916).

'Porcelain and Pink' and 'Mr. Icky' rely on two different, but equally dependable, comic techniques. In the former, the device, usually referred to as 'dramatic irony', is one where the audience knows more than a character or characters on the stage; in this case, the technique is enhanced because one of those characters also knows more than the other one. The result is a series of double entendres, the comedy arising from the difference between what the lines mean to us and to the more knowledgeable character and what they mean to the other character. In 'Porcelain and Pink', The Young Man, Mr Calkins, is doubly unaware: he thinks he is talking to Lois Marvis, whom he is romancing, when he is actually talking to her sister Julie;

[46] Hindus, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York, 1968), 107.

and, because he is speaking to her through a window, he cannot see her and does not know that she is in a bathtub and presumably naked—although we only see her head and neck over the rim of the tub. The result is amusing exchanges like this one:

THE YOUNG MAN. (*Sentimentally*) It's so nice talking to you like this—when you're merely a voice. I'm rather glad I can't see you.

JULIE. (*Gratefully*) So am I.

THE YOUNG MAN. What color are you wearing?

JULIE. (*After a critical survey of her shoulders*) Why, I guess it's a sort of pinkish white.

THE YOUNG MAN. Is it becoming to you?

JULIE. Very. It's—it's old. I've had it for a long while.

THE YOUNG MAN. I thought you hated old clothes.

JULIE. I do—but this was a birthday present and I sort of have to wear it. (p. 111)

In 'Mr. Icky', the dialogue and stage directions follow a different comedic pattern; here it is an absurdist play on words, as when Rodney Divine, trying to impress Ursula Icky, says, 'I have the best constitution in the world' and she responds, 'And the worst by-laws' (p. 242). Another instance occurs when Mr Icky asks Divine, his daughter's suitor, 'Is your mind in good shape?' and he replies, 'Fair. After all what is brilliance? Merely the tact to sow when no one is looking and reap when every one is'—to which Mr Icky retorts, 'Be careful. . . . I will not marry my daughter to an epigram' (p. 242). Petry finds that the stage directions in 'Mr. Icky' are 'reminiscent of Ionesco', pointing to examples such as '*Several hours pass. . . . Several songs can be introduced here or some card tricks . . . or a tumbling act, as desired*' (p. 240); '*Any other cue may be inserted here*' (p. 245); '*He picks up a handful of soil passionately and rubs it on his bald head. Hair sprouts* (p. 244); and '*The play can end at this point or can go on indefinitely*' (p. 245).[47]

'Jemina' was originally published in a special December 1916 'Chaopolitan' issue of Princeton's *Nassau Literary Magazine*, intended as a burlesque of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and containing parodies of popular writers of the day. Fitzgerald contributed two pieces, 'The Usual Thing by Robert W. Shameless' and 'Jemina: A Story of the Blue Ridge Mountains by John Phlox, Jr.'. The first was a parody of Robert W. Chambers and the second of John Fox, Jr.,

[47] Petry, *Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction*, 199–200.

author of the best-selling *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908).[48] Today, without an acquaintance with Fox's then highly popular novels about Southern mountain families, it is difficult fully to appreciate the cleverness and accuracy of Fitzgerald's satire.

Way makes an intriguing case for 'Tarquin of Cheapside', which also was first published in the *Nassau Literary Magazine*, in April 1917, as Fitzgerald was beginning to try to find his identity as a writer. He contends that one of its themes is 'that the artist's work and his experience are so important that they raise him above the ordinary demands of morality'.[49] This may well have been a first step for Fitzgerald to acquire the confidence he needed to undergo the struggles he knew faced any aspiring writer; and there certainly were periods throughout his life when his behaviour seemed to indicate that he was adhering to this idealistic and adolescent concept of the creative artist. Buell, calling it a 'comic *tour de force*', claims that the story, in which Shakespeare commits an actual rape before sitting down to memorialize it in 'The Rape of Lucrece', unfolds 'in a circumstantial, pseudodocumentary manner that contrasts with the impossibility of the situation'[50]—and this links it stylistically with 'Benjamin Button'. Of course, one of the story's other features, equally the mark of a young writer, is its reliance on the hoary device of an O. Henry-like surprise ending.

Surprise endings can be found in two other stories in *Tales of the Jazz Age* that otherwise seem to be polar opposites of each other. 'The Lees of Happiness' may, in fact, have been written as Fitzgerald's response to those who felt he could write only stories like 'The Camel's Back'. Both stories are apparently based on events in their author's life, 'The Camel's Back' on 'a fancy-dress party in [his hometown of] St. Paul'[51] and 'The Lees of Happiness' more subtly and ambivalently on his recent marriage. As numerous critics have suggested, a number of details in the latter story match what Fitzgerald may have been feeling in July 1920 about his career and his very recent (April 1920) marriage to Zelda Sayre. Jeffrey Curtain's relatively short-lived literary career may echo how he felt at the time, when a life of partying was severely limiting his writing output; like

[48] Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 65–6.
[49] Way, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction*, 16.
[50] Buell, 'The Significance of Fantasy in Fitzgerald's Short Fiction', 26.
[51] Piper, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 67.

Fitzgerald, Jeffrey is the author of 'a novel or two'; and, like Jeffrey, Fitzgerald may well have feared that 'here were no masterpieces—here were passably amusing stories, a bit out of date now, but doubtless the sort that would then have whiled away a dreary half hour in a dental office. The man who did them was of good intelligence, talented, glib, probably young' (p. 219).

Like Zelda Fitzgerald, Roxanne Curtain in the early months of her marriage cannot cook; Roxanne's muffins are suitable only to be nailed to the wall. As Petry notes, also like Zelda, Roxanne 'is a fashionably attired media darling'; and the Fitzgeralds' early married life, like the Curtains', was 'lived in hotels' (p. 220). On the other hand, Roxanne does learn to cook after Jeffrey's stroke, and Kitty and Harry Cromwell are introduced into the story as what Petry calls 'a foil couple, . . . whose miserable existence . . . underscores how utterly peachy is the marriage of the Curtains'.[52] But how 'peachy' is their marriage? Jeffrey's stroke may symbolize Fitzgerald's fears that his promising career might be cut short and that his marriage might ultimately not be a happy one. Nevertheless, after the stroke and at the end of the story Roxanne would rather dwell on their one happy year of marriage, the lees of happiness, than move forward in her life. It is, in short, a much more complex and ambivalent tale than it appears to be; Petry describes it as a portrait of 'a fantasy marriage turned inside out', reflecting 'the bliss that [Fitzgerald] wanted to achieve in his own marriage, while simultaneously arguing its impossibility'.[53] Its seemingly deliberate downbeat ending must have come as a great shock to Fitzgerald's readers in 1920, who, based on his previous stories, surely expected Harry and Roxanne to walk off into the sunset together. By subverting those expectations, he was not only providing them with the requisite surprise ending, he was also proving to them that, unlike Jeffrey Curtain, he could, in his fiction, provide a 'sense of futility or hint of tragedy' (p. 219).

'The Camel's Back' seems, in many respects, to be the kind of story Jeffrey Curtain *could* write; but, like so much of Fitzgerald's short fiction—and several of the selections in *Tales of the Jazz Age*—a closer look reveals that it is quite a bit more than that. As already mentioned, the ending is not entirely happy—although it must have seemed sufficiently so to the editors of the *Saturday Evening Post* to

[52] Petry, *Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction*, 91.
[53] Ibid.

warrant publishing it. As Robert and Helen H. Roulston observe, Betty Medill and Perry Parkhurst are 'no more likely to live happily ever after than Scott and Zelda were—or than Daisy Fay would with Tom Buchanan or would have with Jay Gatsby'.[54] In many respects, the story is pure slapstick and silliness; but it is also yet another example of Fitzgerald's spinning a tale that on the surface seems a plausible narrative—because it is, for the most part, told very straightforwardly and with a maximum of specific detail—but upon further analysis reveals greater depth. It is one of Fitzgerald's greatest talents, one much in evidence in *Tales of the Jazz Age* and one that is underappreciated, that he can amuse, amaze, and entertain by stretching reality just enough to achieve maximum effectiveness without making us unduly aware that he is doing so. He seduces us into suspending disbelief, often by providing us, as he does in 'The Camel's Back', with an 'acutely accurate social observation of the holiday social scene among the Toledo rich'[55]—as in this paragraph:

> The Howard Tates are, as every one who lives in Toledo knows, the most formidable people in town. Mrs. Howard Tate was a Chicago Todd before she became a Toledo Tate, and the family generally affect that conscious simplicity which has begun to be the earmark of American aristocracy. The Tates have reached the stage where they talk about pigs and farms and look at you icy-eyed if you are not amused. They have begun to prefer retainers rather than friends as dinner guests, spend a lot of money in a quiet way, and, having lost all sense of competition, are in the process of growing quite dull. (p. 39)

This is a quintessential Fitzgerald passage—witty and astutely descriptive; but it leaves the reader in no doubt as to the judgement and satire levelled. We get an equally perceptive view of the circus ball:

> A great tent fly had been put up inside the ballroom and round the walls had been built rows of booths representing the various attractions of a circus side show, but these were now vacated and over the floor swarmed a shouting, laughing medley of youth and color—clowns, bearded ladies, acrobats, bareback riders, ringmasters, tattooed men, and charioteers. (p. 42)

[54] Roulston and Roulston, *The Winding Road to West Egg: The Artistic Development of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1995), 48.

[55] Alan Cheuse, 'Fitzgerald's Christmas Carol, or the Burden of "The Camel's Back"', in Jackson R. Bryer (ed.), *New Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's Neglected Stories* (Columbia, Mo., and London, 1996), 53.