F. Scott Fitzgerald

Flappers and Philosophers

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

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FLAPPERS AND PHILOSOPHERS

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY FITZGERALD (1896–1940), who was born in St Paul, Minnesota, was named after his second cousin three times removed, Francis Scott Key, the author of 'The Star-Spangled Banner', which was officially adopted as the US national anthem in 1931. Fitzgerald attended Princeton University, but did not graduate: having enlisted in the US Army in 1917 during World War I, though never required to serve, Fitzgerald's life took an alternative course, in part explained by his meeting Zelda Sayre from Montgomery, Alabama, in the summer of 1918 while he was stationed at a training camp nearby. The couple married in the spring of 1920 shortly after his first book, *This Side of Paradise*, was published and became Fitzgerald's bestselling novel during his lifetime, simultaneously confirming his status as a celebrity author. His next novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), was less enthusiastically received, as was his brief, disastrous foray into drama with *The Vegetable* (1923) the following year. Fitzgerald, along with Zelda and their daughter Scottie (born October 1921), spent most of the 1920s interchanging time periods between the US east coast and Paris and the French Riviera, Fitzgerald writing commercially successful short stories to maintain their nomadic lifestyle. With the publication of *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Fitzgerald's literary legacy would be secured, though the novel was not a commercial success while Fitzgerald was alive. The late 1920s and the 1930s were times of protracted difficulties: Fitzgerald's financial problems were added to by Zelda's recurrent episodes of psychiatric breakdown that required hospitalization in a series of European and then American clinics. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Fitzgerald's next novel, *Tender Is the Night* (1934), relates the breakdown of a psychiatrist–patient relationship; however, its reviews and its sales were disappointing. Hoping to revive his career and also earn money, Fitzgerald went to Hollywood in 1937 to work on film scripts: although he was involved with a number of movie projects, he received just the one screen credit, for *Three Comrades* (1938). While working on a draft novel about the film industry, *The Love of The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald died of a heart attack on 21 December 1940. In his notes for this unfinished novel, and reflecting on the country with which he would become so indelibly linked after his death, Fitzgerald summarized the lasting connection between his ground-breaking writing and the United States that persists today, a century and counting after his first works were published: 'I look out at it—and I think it is the most beautiful history in the world. It is the history of me and of my people. . . . It is the history of all aspiration—not just the American dream but the human dream and if I came at the end of it that too is a place in the line of the pioneers.'

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F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Flappers and Philosophers

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

KIRK CURNUTT

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INTRODUCTION

F. Scott Fitzgerald published his first short-story collection, *Flappers and Philosophers*, on 10 September 1920, six months after his literary debut, *This Side of Paradise*, ignited the first great *succès de scandale* of the decade that the author almost instantaneously symbolized. A coming-of-age novel about a self-involved, *Sorrows of Young Werther*-esque dreamer who grows disaffected when the rewards of maturation prove elusive, *Paradise* sold upwards of fifty-thousand copies and remained far more famous throughout the writer's lifetime than even his eventual masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). The book's popularity was due in part to its then-salacious depiction of teenage petting parties: thanks to its taunting revelation that young people may enjoy kissing before marriage, the Princeton University dropout became the media's go-to spokesman for an impudent generation snottily flaunting its youth. *Flappers and Philosophers* hit bookstores amid the supernova of fascination that *Paradise* helped ignite with the twentieth-century's first wave of adolescents and twentysomethings whose mores, thanks to a little cataclysm known as the Great War, seemed wholly cleaved from their Victorian-bred parents. Like the novel it followed, the collection sold impressively well, especially for a book of stories—about fifteen thousand copies. Yet the title alone cemented the impression that Fitzgerald was a glib chronicler of contemporary fads and fashions. Reviewers treated the slang term 'flapper' as if it were a veritable 'F-word', accusing the twenty-four-year-old of indulging in cloying superficiality. The criticism helped cement the image of him as an *enfant terrible* that he would spend the rest of his days regretting. Thanks in no small part to Fitzgerald himself, biographers and critics have long dramatized his twenty-year career as a Manichean battle between his conflicting desire for popular recognition and money on the one hand and critical legitimacy on the other. In doing so, they have exhibited an unfortunate bias against commercial short fiction like the eight tales gathered here, privileging instead 'serious' efforts such as 'Babylon Revisited' (1931), his most anthologized story. If *The Great Gatsby* is the book that proved F. Scott Fitzgerald a great writer, commentators are apt to say, *Flappers and Philosophers* is the silly kids' stuff he had to outgrow to get there.

Which is unfortunate, because the pleasures of *Flappers and Philosophers* are many. Most of the stories possess a decidedly non-literary quality: they are fun! They exude a joyousness that a reader probably has to be twenty-one or twenty-two to believe is a sustainable outlook or credo in life—but, to steal a line from a famous contemporary of Fitzgerald's, isn't it pretty to think so? Enjoying *Flappers and Philosophers* does not mean that revelling in its vibrancy and passion is somehow fey or callow, to use judgements often lobbed at Fitzgerald during his heyday. Full of snazzy repartee and observational quips, these tales crackle and pop with wit.

The delights the book offers are most plentiful in its four core selections, each of which runs between 8,000 and 10,000 words. Two of the four are love stories ('The Offshore Pirate', 'Head and Shoulders'), although only the first concludes with what we would consider the mandatory happy ending. The other pair are sharp, wryly observed comedies of manners ('The Ice Palace', 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair'). Rounding out the collection are four additional pieces that demonstrate Fitzgerald's facility with various genres and forms prevalent in the era's popular fiction. There is a supernatural, Gothic-tinged O. Henry tale about the undue influence a household possession exerts on its characters' fates ('The Cut-Glass Bowl'); a satire of civic virtue and business ethics that pulses with postwar cynicism towards hand-me-down values like integrity and the Protestant work ethic ('Dalyrimple Goes Wrong'); a moralistic tale of character formation that insists, with a straight face, that a punch to the face is key to learning the difference between right and wrong ('The Four Fists'); and—in what most Fitzgerald scholars argue is the collection's best and yet for some reason most overlooked entry—a nuanced portrait of a young woman's uncertainty over whether to seize the day and live for the moment, morality be damned, or to take shelter in the cloistering restraint of religious dictum and miss out on experience ('Benediction'). It is a testament to Fitzgerald's proficiency with this array of plot forms that no two reviewers could agree in 1920 on which type his talents best suited. 'It is curious', wrote his editor at Charles Scribner's Sons, Maxwell Perkins, forwarding a newspaper notice, 'how much diversity of opinion there is as to which stories are the best.'[1]

[1] John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer (eds), *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald/Perkins Correspondence* (New York, 1971), 31.

The range of story types also dramatizes how deliberately Fitzgerald set out to become a professional writer, making his living by pen by cracking markets geared towards different tastes and expectations. *Flappers and Philosophers*'s contents were written between May 1919 and February 1920, a period of intense self-doubt that then suddenly and improbably delivered their author to the doorstep of fame. From autumn 1917 to spring 1918 while serving as an army lieutenant training for the Great War the aspiring writer dashed off a preliminary version of *This Side of Paradise* called *The Romantic Egotist*. Through an acquaintance, the Irish writer Shane Leslie, he submitted the book to Scribner's, the only publisher whose imprimatur he wanted stamped on his work. In August 1918, while stationed at Camp Sheridan outside Montgomery, Alabama, he received an encouraging rejection letter from Perkins, the firm's lone editor to recognize the manuscript's potential appeal with younger audiences. Perhaps too hastily, Fitzgerald accepted an invitation to revise and resubmit, only to have the book declined again two months later. 'The end of a dream,' he scrawled on the telegram informing him of this second rejection.[2]

When the Armistice arrived the following month before the 67th Infantry Regiment to which he was assigned could embark for the Western Front, Fitzgerald had to cope with dashed fantasies of military as well as literary achievement. Discharged from the US Army in February 1919, he took the first New York City job that would have him, a lowly copywriter's position at the Barron Collier Agency, for $90 a month. That salary was nowhere near enough to secure the hand of the Southern belle he had begun dating the previous summer while stationed at Camp Sheridan, 18-year-old Zelda Sayre. Living in a grubby apartment at 200 Claremont Avenue—an address he would depict as the nadir of the long fall from wealth and privilege suffered by the protagonist of his second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922)—Fitzgerald spent his evenings (at least when not dispatching Zelda furious pleas not to abandon him) cranking out short stories he hoped would earn him quick cash from the day's remunerative commercial magazine market. As he recalled just a year later, after his fortunes turned:

[2] Matthew J. Bruccoli, Scottie Fitzgerald Smith, and Joan P. Kerr (eds), *The Romantic Egoists: A Pictorial Autobiography from the Scrapbooks of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (New York, 1974), 35.

There were nineteen [stories] altogether; the quickest written in an hour and a half, the slowest in three days. No one bought them, no one sent personal letters. I had one hundred and twenty-two rejection slips pinned in a frieze about my room. I wrote movies. I wrote song lyrics. I wrote complicated advertising schemes. I wrote poems. I wrote sketches. I wrote jokes. Near the end of June I sold one story for thirty dollars.[3]

That particular effort, 'Babes in the Woods', had already appeared two years earlier in *The Nassau Literary Magazine*, Princeton's undergraduate literary journal. The acceptance came from an influential outlet, *The Smart Set*, edited by the arch metropolitan tastemakers H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, but two decades later in a more sombre reminiscence Fitzgerald would admit mixed feelings towards this modest breakthrough, depicting himself as wondering whether the negligible pay cheque was evidence that he wasted his time:

Even having a first story accepted had not proved very exciting. Dutch Mount and I sat across from each other in a car-card slogan advertising office, and the same mail brought each of us an acceptance from the same magazine—the old *Smart Set*.

'My cheque was thirty—how much was yours?'

'Thirty-five.'

The real blight, however, was that my story had been written in college two years before, and a dozen new ones hadn't even drawn a personal letter. The implication was that I was on the down-grade at twenty-two. I spent the thirty dollars on a magenta feather fan for a girl in Alabama.[4]

Shortly after that fan was delivered to Montgomery, Zelda broke off the couple's tentative engagement. With nothing left to lose, Fitzgerald quit his job and returned to his parents' home in St Paul, Minnesota, for one final attempt at revising the novel he still believed would make his name. 'I was in love with a whirlwind,' he would say in one of his most beautiful passages, 'and I must spin a net big enough to catch it out of my head, a head full of trickling nickels and sliding dimes, the incessant music box of the poor.'[5]

[3] 'Who's Who and Why', *Saturday Evening Post* (18 Sept. 1920), rpt. in James L. W. West III (ed.), *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940* (New York, 2005), 5.

[4] 'Early Success', *American Cavalcade* (October 1937), in *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940*, 185.

[5] Ibid., 186.

'What happened next', biographers are fond of saying, 'reads like a fairy tale.'[6] In two short months Fitzgerald retooled *The Romantic Egotist* into *This Side of Paradise* (stitching 'Babes in the Woods' and another *Smart Set* tale, 'The Debutante', into the plot). Two weeks after resubmitting the manuscript to Scribner's he received the long-dreamed-of acceptance letter from Perkins. The bolt of confidence sent him back to his heap of rejected stories with renewed determination to place his work in popular periodicals with circulations in the millions. 'The metamorphosis of amateur into professional was taking place,' he would recall, 'a sort of stitching together of your whole life into a pattern of work, so that the end of one job is automatically the beginning of another.'[7]

That October *The Smart Set* bought six stories at once for $215, including 'Benediction' and 'Dalyrimple Goes Wrong'. The following month Scribner's eponymous in-house magazine purchased the more didactic genre tales 'The Cut-Glass Bowl' and 'The Four Fists' for $150 each. In November, thanks to a recommendation from the bestselling St Paul author Grace Flandrau, Fitzgerald became a client of the Paul Reynolds Literary Agency in New York. Reynolds's senior partner, Harold Ober, easily placed 'Head and Shoulders' (originally titled 'Nest Feathers') with *The Saturday Evening Post* for $400. Over the next three months, Ober would inform the author several more times that this leading 'slick'—so called because its pages were printed on glossy paper—had accepted his latest submission, from 'The Ice Palace' and 'Myra Meets His Family' (which Fitzgerald chose not to reprint in his lifetime) to 'The Camel's Back' (collected in his second collection, 1922's *Tales of the Jazz Age*), 'The Offshore Pirate', and 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair'. As a much older Fitzgerald marvelled in 1937, 'The dream had been early realized and the realization carried with it a certain bonus and a certain burden. Premature success gives one an almost mystical conception of destiny as opposed to will-power—at its worst the Napoleonic delusion.'[8] For the moment at least, he could enjoy the feeling that his good fortune was written in the stars: 'Then my novel came out,' he marvelled

[6] Andre LeVot, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography*, trans. William Byron (New York, 1983), 72.

[7] 'Early Success', in *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940*, 187.

[8] Ibid., 190.

in a publicity piece for the *Post*, recalling how rapidly the magazine snapped up his work. 'Then I got married. Now I spend my time wondering how it all happened.'[9]

How *Flappers and Philosophers* itself happened is a story less about providence than conventional publishing practice. As James L. W. West III notes, Scribner's, as was customary with many of its competitors, 'liked to have its authors issue short-story collections soon after they had published novels. In this way author and firm would capitalize on the visibility that the novels had generated.'[10] Story collections were loss leaders that bought writers time to work on subsequent novels by keeping them in the public eye between 'major' efforts—something Fitzgerald needed as he struggled over what would coalesce only after great effort into the uneven *The Beautiful and Damned*. *Paradise* was barely in bookstores a month before Perkins received a letter suggesting eleven potential efforts for the table of contents. As possible titles, Fitzgerald offered *We are Seven*, *Table D'hote*, *A La Carte, Journeys and Journey's End*, *Bittersweet*, and *Short Cake*. Because none of these was very promising, it was fortunate that he had at hand an alliterative phrase supposedly coined by Perkins's fellow editor Edwin L. Burlingame for the publicity campaign Scribner's developed for *This Side of Paradise*: 'A Novel about Flappers for Philosophers'. Perkins seized upon the fricatives, despite the disapproval of the firm's chairman, Charles Scribner II, who reportedly 'thought the choice was "horrid" '. Given how much interest *Paradise* was generating, however, the sixty-five-year-old publisher 'was inclined to let Perkins parlay his first success into another'.[11] Scribner had already proved his aversion to flappers wrong-headed by initially opposing his editor's acquisition of the novel.

As West also notes, no subsequent correspondence between Perkins and Fitzgerald about the collection exists, so exactly who selected the stories and how their running order was compiled remains a mystery. Most biographers presume Perkins made the final decisions, though the duo met frequently in New York throughout spring and summer 1920 as Fitzgerald commuted to the city from Westport, Connecticut, where he and Zelda resided for roughly five months. (Also unknown

[9] 'Who's Who and Why', in *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940*, 5.
[10] James L. W. West III, 'Introduction' to *Flappers and Philosophers* (New York, 2000), xi.
[11] A. Scott Berg, *Maxwell Perkins, Editor of Genius* (New York, 1978), 21.

is whether the author or his editor nixed the former's initial suggestion to include poetry in the collection, an idea that received little serious deliberation.) For a book jacket, Perkins called upon illustrator William Ely Hill, whose cover art for *Paradise* had pleased Fitzgerald. Hill zeroed in on the humorous scene in 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair' in which the titular heroine is dared into cutting her tresses in this divisive style. It was a clever choice considering editorialists galore since 1916 had been debating whether the coiffure was a mere craze or an affront to propriety that augured the end of femininity. ('If girls want their hair cut,' groused one adult, 'why not do it up right and cut it like a man's and then wear knickers? That's what they are trying to get at anyway.'[12]) With white lettering on an orange backdrop, Hill's cover also maintained an effective continuity with the artist's design for *Paradise*, creating something of a visual brand for Fitzgerald.

Collectively, the *Post*, *Scribner's*, and *The Smart Set* paid Fitzgerald $2,180 for the eight stories included in *Flappers and Philosophers*—about $27,000 in today's dollars. The only lump sum he saw from Scribner's for the book, by contrast, was a $500 advance. The $2,730 in royalties it earned in 1921, along with $350 in 1922 and $98 in 1923, went instead to pay off the ever-accumulating debt he mounted with Scribner's by borrowing against future earnings, a habit that would extend across the arc of his career. (Fitzgerald also perpetually borrowed from Ober, who left Reynolds to open his own agency shortly before the Depression.) After 1924, *Flappers and Philosophers* only earned an average of $25 a year in royalties; after 1928 the title disappears completely from the meticulous ledger in which he tracked his earnings.[13] All told, the collection earned Fitzgerald $3,428, less than the $4,750 the movie rights to 'Head and Shoulders' and 'The Offshore Pirate' paid in 1920. (He earned an additional $1,000 for the rights to 'Myra Meets His Family'.) Even so, as previously noted, the near-fifteen thousand copies sold made the book an unqualified success—at least in financial terms.

Over the autumn of 1920 and into 1921, Scribner's promoted *Flappers and Philosophers* more widely than most story collections of

[12] Naomi Little, 'They'll Bob It Anyway, So What's the Use for Us to Criticise', *Jeffrey Service* 8.11 (July 1922), 10.

[13] *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Ledger, 1919–1938*, https://delphi.tcl.sc.edu/library/digital/collections/fitzledger.html.

the day. In addition to ads in major metropolitan newspapers, the firm bought space in campus magazines. The November 1920 *Vassar Quarterly* features a half-page mail-order notice for the book, oddly sandwiched among local promotions for secretarial schools, clothing stores, and household linen services—proof that Scribner's understood Fitzgerald's target market was preppy undergraduates.[14] Equally intriguing, libraries and bookstores throughout the country highlighted the collection in lists of recent arrivals, often alongside bestsellers such as Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. Testaments to the book's popularity also appeared in columns like the *Los Angeles Times*'s 'Book Notes':

> F. Scott Fitzgerald has taken possession of Chicago. Last week Mr. Fitzgerald's popular novel, *This Side of Paradise*, was officially recorded as the book of fiction most in demand in the Windy City, and second among most sought-for books at the Public Libraries. This week it is announced that Mr. Fitzgerald's new book of short stories, *Flappers and Philosophers* has outstripped *This Side of Paradise*. *Flappers and Philosophers* tops the current list of books in demand in Chicago.[15]

Much as *The Side of Paradise* inspired endless puns and jokes, the title *Flappers and Philosophers* quickly entered popular parlance, providing a convenient code phrase for ribbing the younger generation's outré attitudes and faux sophistication. One syndicated columnist, Franklin Pierce Adams (F.P.A.) of *The New York Tribune*, whose 'The Conning Tower' took great delight in making fun of Fitzgerald, slapped the title on all manner of anecdotes readers mailed in from across the country:

> FLAPPERS AND PHILOSOPHERS
> Sir: There is a sign in a music store on Fifth Avenue, New York, which announces a Jenny Lind Centennial Concert. Chancing to pass this sign abreast of two flappers, each of whom represented an outlay of several hundred dollars in clothing (quality), I overheard this remark:
> 'Just to think, dearie, a hundred years old and still singing.'
> M. W. C.[16]

[14] 'The Novelist of the Rising Generation', *Vassar Quarterly* 5.1 (November 1920), 76.
[15] Thomas F. and Lillian C. Ford, 'Books and Their Makers: Book Notes', *Los Angeles Times* (31 October 1920), 59.
[16] F.P.A. (Franklin Pierce Adams), 'The Conning Tower', *New York Tribune* (6 October 1920), 10.

Another squib intones darker, more troubling humour:

FLAPPERS AND PHILOSOPHERS

Sir: I beg to report that George and I simultaneously lamped an exaggerated example of edited eyebrows, short skirts, low high-heeled shoes and V-neck in the snow yesterday morning and George, who'd be a poet if he had a mind to be, said right off, without hesitation:

'Oh see the silly little flapper,
I think her Mommer ought to slapper.'

COCKLES[17]

Such newspaper filler is indicative of the irritation the flapper incited among the general public, a hostility that would be largely forgotten in subsequent decades as the popular culture looked back with fond nostalgia at her impish exuberance. Unfortunately for the writer, that annoyance seeped into reviews of the collection, tainting perceptions of the stories' value in ways that still linger one hundred years later.

At a basic level, thanks to the attention *Paradise* received, knives were out for F. Scott Fitzgerald by September 1920. Critics resented the notoriety he achieved by politicking on behalf of 'flaming youth' and began chiding him for suffering from a bad case of 'mooncalfing', or maundering caused by a swirling tempest of immature emotion. (So identified were both of these terms with high-schoolers and college-age students that they became titles of *Paradise*-like novels: *Moon Calf* by Floyd Dell (1920) and *Flaming Youth* by Warner Fabian (1928).) Other detractors resented his Ivy League image and intellectual pretension. Perhaps because 'Head and Shoulders' makes a reference to Edward FitzGerald's *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859), some reviewers planted their flags on the far side of the generation gap by comparing him unfavourably to his Victorian namesake: 'The difference between Edward FitzGerald and F. Scott Fitzgerald is this,' declared the *Chicago Tribune*. 'Edward wrote Omar Khayyam, and F. Scott wrote Omark-howsmart-hayyam.'[18]

Thanks to this public image, many reviewers decided that praise for *This Side of Paradise* had been too much too soon. 'Fitzgerald's New Book is Disappointing,' declared the *Baltimore Evening Sun*: 'Scott

[17] F.P.A. (Franklin Pierce Adams), 'The Conning Tower', *Wisconsin State Journal* (6 February 1921), 3.

[18] 'A Line O' Type or Two', *Chicago Tribune* (11 December 1920), 8.

Fitzgerald's first book . . . was undoubtedly one of the best works of fiction published in the past year. . . . "Flappers and Philosophers" must have been written specially to please those people whose hobby it is to harp on the harmfulness of praise and early success to an artist, emphasizing the theory that only in penury and neglect can a man do good work.'[19] The *Detroit News* insisted that while the 'enchanting boisterousness' of *Paradise* felt natural and spontaneous, the stories strained for effect: 'His previous book . . . was one of the most striking productions in the realm of imaginative literature for the year. "Flappers and Philosophers" is not so good. What is the matter? . . . Too bizarre. Too Smart Alecky.'[20] *The Nation*'s reaction, meanwhile, demonstrates how fervently commentators employed rhetorical questions to dramatize their belief that the book offered a textbook case of the dreaded sophomore slump: 'What has happened to Mr. Fitzgerald? His first book has had a well-merited success. Did he retire, after a very proper interval of gaiety, to his story in order to write a deeper, rich, riper book?' Of course not. The conclusion was he had veered the exact opposite direction: the stories 'have a rather ghastly rattle of movement that apes energy and a hectic straining after emotion that apes intensity. . . . [The whole collection] is merely harsh and flippant.'[21]

In addition to the feeling that Fitzgerald was overhyped, many reviewers rolled their eyes at his theme of postwar insouciance, doubting aloud whether his generation's self-consciously modern mindset was a sufficiently weighty topic to merit serious consideration. Heywood Broun of the *New York Tribune*, a virulent critic of *Paradise*, took issue with baby vamps like Ardita Farnam of 'The Offshore Pirate': 'We are told that in spite of the silliness of the plot the story is among the material which shows Fitzgerald's amazing knowledge of the talk and thought of flappers. . . . Fitzgerald's observations may be entirely correct. We only doubt whether they are important.'[22] *Publishers Weekly* not only doubted whether the diagnosis of youth was all that significant but whether it was all that accurate: 'If you've never been young, yourself, and you are like those members of the youngest generation who talk in epigrams, cut off each other's hair for spite, and refer airily to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche you will like *Flappers and*

[19] Jackson R. Bryer (ed.), *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception* (Philadelphia, 1978), 42.

[20] Ibid., 42. [21] Ibid., 36. [22] Ibid., 45.

Philosophers. . . . But if you know anything about either philosophy or youth, you will not be so impressed.'[23] Fitzgerald's hometown newspaper, the *St. Paul Daily News*, mocked the city's 'infant prodigy' for perpetuating 'brightly colored flub-dub' in which 'surpassingly beautiful 19-year-old debutantes' boast of their 'boredom and their capacity for kissing'. The 'osculatory habits of the flapper', the reviewer concluded, amounted to little more than whimsical 'effrontery'.[24]

To be sure, several reviewers praised Fitzgerald and the stories. Fanny Butcher, the influential columnist of the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, predicted that 'The Ice Palace' and 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair' would one day be recognized as classics. Until then, Butcher credited Fitzgerald with producing character types and plots that, 'perhaps more than any published [stories] lately, are weather vanes of the popular magazine fiction of the next few years'.[25] But her celebration of the collection's 'snappy' vitality points to the core criticism that would negatively colour perceptions of both *Flappers and Philosophers* and the author's future short fiction: in writing 'popular magazine fiction', commentators complained, Fitzgerald dabbled in a form that cheapened his natural gift for eloquence. The *Louisville Courier-Journal* declared the stories 'almost dapper in their conscious adeptness' but then held their sartorial gloss against them: they 'furnish entertainment as per contract but are lacking in substance. The reader who has been waiting for a successor to Mr. Fitzgerald's first success will find himself still waiting.'[26]

The *New York Evening Post Literary Review* took a similarly condescending stand, acknowledging that the stories were 'respectable jobs, ready made to the cleverly calculated measure of the magazines', yet 'with two of three partial exceptions his heart was not in the business'.[27] William Huse, Hurst's competition at the rival *Chicago Evening Post,* voiced the complaint most bluntly: 'He is capable of something better than the ordinary popular magazine type of entertainment.'[28]

These excerpts suggest that no sin is greater to a reviewer than producing 'entertainment as per contract', the 1920s' equivalent, apparently, of 'cashing in'. Fitzgerald made little effort to defend the craft and skill required to refashion existing pop-culture formulae

[23] Ibid., 35. [24] Ibid., 49. [25] Ibid., 38.
[26] 'Books and Their Writers', *Louisville Courier-Journal* (19 September 1920), 66.
[27] Bryer, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception*, 138.
[28] Ibid., 36.

into fresh, crowd-pleasing stories. Indeed, in many ways, he helped perpetuate the distortion that *Flappers and Philosophers* is merely 'ordinary' and 'respectable' and that his heart is to be found in his novels, not his short fiction. When he sent H. L. Mencken a gratis copy of the collection, he broke its contents down into categories, claiming that four of the stories were 'worth reading', one was 'amusing', and that three were outright 'trash'. Those dismissed were 'Head and Shoulders', 'The Four Fists', and 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair'.[29]

It's a dangerous tactic for a life-long fan of a writer to assert absolutes, but I feel confident in saying there is simply no world in which labelling 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair' 'trash' is legitimate. If the story is junk, then so is 'The Rape of the Lock', a poem with which it shares many similarities—not the least of which is a pair of scissors. Like Alexander Pope, Fitzgerald pours his formidable comedic skills into a mock epic that lampoons what on the surface should be civilized codes of social interaction as all-out games of war, replete with malicious strategizing, the deceptive planting of false flags, and impetuous acts of revenge. That the Hobbesian world he depicts belongs to teenagers competing for popularity and to appear fashionable makes the story no less 'substantial' than the world of British lords and ladies where the unchivalrous theft of a lock of hair can set sylphs and gnomes astir trying to protect a woman's honour. Nor does it demean 'Bernice' to call it proto-*Mean Girls*. Like that much beloved 2004 cult teen film (recently adapted into a Broadway musical), the story parodies adolescent cliques as microcosms of sternly enforced rules, indicative of adult society in general, where even the slightest unconscious violation of etiquette may unleash venomous hostility. To put it another way, Fitzgerald never made the case, as his most recent biographer, David S. Brown, has, that the story is 'serious-beneath-the-surface'.[30] Other biographers suppose that in dismissing 'Bernice' he curried Mencken's favour by implying that his best work had appeared in the critic's own magazine. But the damage was done. When Mencken reviewed *Flappers and Philosophers* he called the book 'a sandwich made up of two thick and tasteless chunks of

[29] Matthew J. Bruccoli and Margaret M. Duggan (eds), *Correspondence of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1980), 68.

[30] David S. Brown, *Paradise Lost: A Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Cambridge, MA, 2017), 102.

Kriegsbrod'—flavourless potato bread the Germans were reduced to eating during the war—'with a couple of excellent sardines in between'. The sardines he found tastiest, no shocker, were the two he had accepted for *The Smart Set*. The rest, including 'Bernice', was 'thin and obvious stuff—in brief, atrociously bad stuff'. As if that judgement wasn't cutting enough, Mencken concluded by questioning 'the sagacity of a publisher who lets a young author print *Flappers and Philosophers* after *This Side of Paradise*. If it were not two years too late I'd almost expect a German plot.'[31]

Unfortunately, Fitzgerald was just as deferential to other influential colleagues and friends who publicly trounced his commercial fiction. When fellow Princetonian Edmund Wilson, a critic the author later called his 'artistic conscience', made fleeting references to *Flappers and Philosophers* in a pan of *The Beautiful and Damned* in the literary journal *The Bookman*, Fitzgerald was almost apologetic that his friend had deigned to crack open the book: 'I note from the quotation from "Head and Shoulders" and from reference to "Bernice" that you have plowed through Flappers for which conscientious labor I thank you. When the strain has abated I will send you two exquisite stories in what Professor Lemuel Ozuk in his definitive biography will call my "second" or "neo-flapper" manner.'[32] As the sarcasm here suggests, Fitzgerald believed that no matter how 'exquisite', his flappers were too flighty and flimsy to win him the literary immortality he craved.

And yet elsewhere he *did* express certifiable pride in his popular fiction—or at least in the attention it received. 'Everyone in college,' he boasted to Perkins, 'I mean *literally everyone* in college seems to have read "Head and Shoulders".'[33] To a Hollywood correspondent requesting 'human interest points' for publicizing the movie version of the story (released as *The Chorus Girl's Romance*) he claimed to have received 'four dozen letters from readers when it first appeared'.[34] One wishes Fitzgerald would have celebrated his stories like this more often, both in rebuttals to dismissive peers and in public statements about his career. Yet his instinct was to disparage his own output,

[31] Bryer, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception*, 48.

[32] Matthew J. Bruccoli (ed.), *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters* (New York, 1994), 52. For the 'artistic conscience' reference, see 'Pasting It Together', in West (ed.), *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940*, 149.

[33] Kuehl and Bryer (eds), *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, 29.

[34] Bruccoli and Duggan (eds), *Correspondence of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 60.

almost as if doing so were a defence mechanism that insulated him from the literary establishment's negative judgement. Nowhere is this self-demeaning habit more painful than in a metaphor dramatizing his reliance on commercial fiction that appears in a well-known 1929 letter to Ernest Hemingway written after the *Post* upped his per-contribution rate to a peak $4,000, or nearly $60,000 today: 'Here's the last flicker of the old cheap pride—the *Post* now pay the old whore $4,000 a screw. But now its [*sic*] because she's mastered the 40 positions—in her youth one was enough.'[35]

In 1940, when Fitzgerald died at a premature 44, *Flappers and Philosophers* was as antiquated to the generation preparing to fight World War II as Louisa May Alcott and Annie Fellows Johnston had been twenty years earlier to his. ('Bernice Bobs Her Hair' nonchalantly dismisses both of these popular nineteenth-century writers as 'so out of style'.) When eulogists mentioned his short stories at all, it was usually with the same flippancy as this comment from Glenway Wescott: 'There were dozens of stories, some delicate and some slap-dash; one very odd, entitled "Head and Shoulders".'[36]

As the Fitzgerald Revival commenced a few years later, selections from the four short-story collections published in the writer's lifetime were included in various reissues and repackagings of his work, although always presented as secondary to the achievement of the novels. Some compilations featured one or two entries from *Flappers and Philosophers*, some glaringly excluded them in toto. Either way, editors in prefaces and footnotes demonstrated a marked preference for stories that could be defined as 'mature'. Works from his third collection, *All the Sad Young Men* (1926), such as 'Winter Dreams' (1922), 'Absolution' (1924), and 'The Rich Boy' (1926) written both immediately before and after *The Great Gatsby* were said to share that novel's critique of wealth and for dramatizing the thin line separating Romantic self-making from solipsism. Selections from *Taps at Reveille* (1935) such as 'Babylon Revisited' and 'The Last of the Belles' (1929), meanwhile, were commended for exploring loss, regret, and nostalgia, all central modernist preoccupations, and for employing devices of evocative restraint (symbolism, free indirect discourse) instead

[35] Bruccoli (ed.), *Life in Letters*, 169.

[36] Glenway Wescott, 'The Moral of F. Scott Fitzgerald', in Edmund Wilson (ed.), *The Crack-Up* (New York, 1945), 326.

of the showier, more garrulous storytelling of Fitzgerald's early manner.[37] In many of these compilations even *Tales of the Jazz Age* is better represented than *Flappers and Philosophers*, although it is generally considered the weakest of the four original collections, handicapped by filler like the unfortunately titled 'Mr. Icky' and pieces culled from the author's Princeton days. Yet *Tales* also includes two novella-length efforts, 'May Day' and 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz', that critics deemed far more ambitious than either 'The Ice Palace' or 'Head and Shoulders', mostly because they explore the politics and money madness of the Roaring Twenties instead of young love. (*Tales* also has the advantage of including 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button', and it must be noted, sadly, that because none of the early stories adapted into silent movies in 1920–1 starred a Jazz Age-equivalent of Brad Pitt, they were not especially successful.)

When Fitzgerald's first collection was mentioned at all then, it tended to be dismissed as immature and frivolous, even by commentators who should have known better. In 1963, Arthur Mizener, the author of the first full-length Fitzgerald biography, *The Far Side of Paradise* (1951), prefaced a collection of critical essays responsible for posthumously canonizing the writer with a quote purportedly disparaging the book: 'Part of the time he deliberately wrote what the high-priced magazines wanted, what he called, speaking of the stories in *Flappers and Philosophers*, "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".'[38] In fact, this line wasn't said in reference to *Flappers and Philosophers* at all—it comes from a story collected in *Tales of the Jazz Age* called 'The Lees of Happiness' about a *fictional* writer whose popularity peaks at the turn of the century.[39] It's one thing to suggest that an author like Fitzgerald metatextually poked fun at or perhaps vented anxieties toward his commercial

[37] Rare was the collection such as the Dorothy Parker-edited *The Portable Fitzgerald* (1945), which included 'The Cut-Glass Bowl' and 'The Offshore Pirate', both intriguing choices given that each was routinely discounted as 'genre fiction' (supernatural and romance fiction, specifically).

[38] Arthur Mizener, 'Introduction', in *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1963), 3.

[39] F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'The Lees of Happiness', in James L. W. West III (ed.), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (New York, 2002), 239.

fiction in his own work. It's far more dubious if not underhanded to state, inaccurately, that in its original context the line specifically disowned *Flappers* as a dentist-office diversion. Mizener's misuse of the quote is especially head-scratching considering that only four years earlier he had written an introduction to the second American edition of the collection, which returned the book to print after nearly forty years.

Remarkably, the presumption that Fitzgerald's early stories were only 'passably amusing' went unchallenged until the early 1980s. That was when the then-dean of Fitzgerald scholarship, Matthew J. Bruccoli (1931–2008), began a concerted effort to rehabilitate the commercial fiction. In his 1981 biography *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, Bruccoli seized upon word choices previously used to diminish the early love stories and turned them into badges of honour: suddenly, 'clever', 'written with facility', and 'heavily plotted' were emblems of skill instead of selling out.[40] In a 1989 collection designed to provide the broadest, most comprehensive survey of the 160-plus stories published across Fitzgerald's career, Bruccoli admonished critics to stop segregating popular writing and literary art, pointing out that 'everything that a professional writer gets paid for is commercial work'. As he insisted, 'Although [Fitzgerald] wrote about the subjects editors expected of him, his stories were rarely formulaic. . . . At the top of his form he was able to write popular stories that were honest Fitzgerald stories.'[41] To prove the point, Bruccoli unapologetically kicked off his anthology with *Flappers and Philosophers*'s four quintessential flapper tales: 'Head and Shoulders', 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair', 'The Ice Palace', and 'The Offshore Pirate'.

With that gesture, the doors opened to giving the popular fiction 'serious' consideration. Critics began exploring the conflict between art and commerce in the stories, at the ways that 'The Cut-Glass Bowl' satisfied the expectations of the supernatural genre it fits into, and at various historical elements, from the Confederate nostalgia that Sally Carrol Happer in 'The Ice Palace' invokes to the reverberations of minstrelsy and blackface in the depiction of African-American

[40] Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, rev. edn (New York, 1991), 129–30.

[41] Matthew J. Bruccoli, Preface to *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A New Collection* (New York, 1989), xv.

jazzmen in 'The Offshore Pirate'.[42] Many of the analyses have been biographical, showing how, for example, the role reversal between brainiac Horace Tarbox and chorus girl Marcia Meadow in 'Head and Shoulders' reflects Fitzgerald's fear that Zelda might capture more attention than he ever could as they prepared to marry in 1920.[43]

Yet if these approaches prove that the tales are worthy of close scrutiny, commentators have not yet adequately catalogued the simple pleasures that *Flappers and Philosophers* offers. If one quality can be said to be responsible for maintaining the freshness and spontaneity of the book after a century, it is the vitality that turbocharges Fitzgerald's conceits, characters, and prose. The vigour and zest are incarnated most obviously in the flapper heroines, the Arditas and Marcias and Sally Carrols and Marjorie Harveys that crabby, middle-aged columnists like Heywood Broun dismissed as petulant and childish. Yet these are young women who know exactly what level of passion and excitement they expect from life, and they aren't afraid to articulate their demands or make their suitors prove they can supply the requisite excitement. In dismissing Fitzgerald's attraction to commercial fiction, Mencken was particularly annoyed by *Flappers*' love stories and tried to besmirch them with a comparison to two older popular writers: 'Will he proceed via the first part of *This Side of Paradise* to the cold groves of beautiful letters, or will he proceed via "Head and Shoulders" into the sunshine that warms Robert W. Chambers and Harold MacGrath?'[44] The insult has been lost on readers since Chambers and MacGrath fell into obscurity *circa* 1940. As an experiment, though, a diligent fan should dig out collections of

[42] For a shortlist of examples, see Brian Way, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction* (New York, 1980); Bryant Mangum, *'A Fortune Yet': Money in the Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Stories* (New York, 1991); Stephen Potts, *The Price of Paradise: The Magazine Career of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (San Bernadino, CA, 1993); Jackson R. Bryer (ed.), *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism* (Madison, WI, 1982); Bryer, *New Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's Neglected Stories* (Athens, GA, 1996); David W. Ullrich, 'Memorials and Monuments: Historical Method and the (Re)construction of Memory in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Ice Palace" ', *Studies in Short Fiction* 36.4 (September 1999), 417–37; Michael Nowlin, 'The Racial Make-up of the Entertainer in Two Early *Post* Stories', in *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Racial Angles and the Business of Literary Greatness* (New York, 2007), 19–34; Jade Broughton Adams, *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Short Fiction: From Ragtime to Swing Time* (Edinburgh, 2019).

[43] Alice Hall Petry, *Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction: The Collected Works, 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1989), 11–20.

[44] Bryer (ed.), *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception*, 48.

theirs such as *The Tree of Heaven* (1907) or *The Adventures of Kathlyn* (1913) to appreciate what absolute snoozes their heroines are compared to Fitzgerald's flappers. Perhaps it's not exactly a breakthrough to be the first writer in *The Saturday Evening Post* to depict an ingénue telling her dowdy uncle to 'shut up!' while pelting him with a lemon, as Ardita does in 'The Offshore Pirate', a moment that particularly burred the saddle of detractors. Yet Miss Farnam and her cohorts' euphoric outgoingness underscores how aggressive their self-possession is: in their version of femininity girls have every right to make a scene, and they do.

The phrase 'make a scene' further suggests how performative love is in these stories. Ardita's suitor, Toby Moreland, concocts an elaborate spectacle to win her over, donning the guise of a jazz musician-turned-pirate named Curtis Carlyle and pretending to kidnap her to a remote island. 'I want you to lie to me just as sweetly as you know how for the rest of my life,' Ardita says when the ruse is revealed. The story reads like a take-off on popular seduction narratives of the time such as E. M. Hull's *The Sheik*, the no. 1 bestseller in America in both 1920 *and* 1921, in which male outlaws abduct virginal heroines to exotic settings to denude them (literally) of their inhibitions. The difference is in 'The Offshore Pirate'—besides the fact there is no actual sex—that Ardita actively collaborates in the fantasy, often encouraging Curtis/Toby with a nod and a wink to ham it up. ('Lie to me by moonlight,' she tells the marauder long before she knows his true identity or purpose. 'Do a fabulous story.') A daring imagination isn't just proof of a couple's romantic compatibility, though. A man's inventiveness is a young woman's escape hatch from the confining sex roles that marriage and motherhood will impose on her. A level of play is essential guaranteeing her the freedom to remain as outgoing in adulthood as she is in adolescence. Much of the charm of 'The Offshore Pirate' arises from the long odes to independence and individuality Fitzgerald allows Ardita to declare:

> Courage [she tells her 'abductor'] courage as a rule of life, and something to cling to always. I began to build up this enormous faith in myself. I began to see that in all my idols in the past some manifestation of courage had unconsciously been the thing that attracted me. I began separating courage from the other things of life. All sorts of courage—the beaten, bloody prize-fighter coming up for more—I used to make men take me to prize-fights; the déclassé woman sailing through a nest of cats and looking at