



15.3 Francis Scott Fitzgerald: the writer of the Jazz Age

WARM-UP

- 1 **DISCUSS** in pairs. How do you feel/act at a party if you don't know most of the people there? What do you do if you've never met the host?

Nick meets Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Great Gatsby (1925)

Chapter III

Gatsby, Nick's neighbour, gives very big parties every weekend in his large house. Most of the people who attend them have not been invited. There is always plenty of good food to eat, alcohol to drink and an orchestra playing jazz. Nick actually receives an invitation to one weekend party, so he decides to go.



1 Two competitors in a Charleston dance contest, Los Angeles, 1926.



2.7 Dressed up in white flannels¹ I went over to his lawn² a little after seven, and wandered around rather ill at ease³ among swirls and eddies⁴ of people I didn't know – though here and there was a face I had noticed on the commuting train⁵. I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about⁶; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were at least agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key⁷.

As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host, but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts⁸ stared at me in such an amazed way, and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements, that I slunk off⁹ in the direction of the cocktail table – the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless¹⁰ and alone.

I was on my way to get roaring drunk from sheer embarrassment¹¹ when Jordan Baker came out of the house and stood at the head of the marble steps, leaning a little backward¹² and looking with contemptuous¹³ interest down into the garden.

Welcome or not, I found it necessary to attach myself to someone before I should begin to address cordial remarks to the passers-by.

'Hello!' I roared¹⁴, advancing toward her. My voice seemed unnaturally loud across the garden.

'I thought you might be here,' she responded absently as I came up. 'I remembered you lived next door to –'

She held my hand impersonally, as a promise that she'd take care of me in a minute, and gave ear to two girls in twin yellow dresses, who stopped at the foot of the steps.

'Hello!' they cried together. 'Sorry you didn't win.'

That was for the golf tournament¹⁵. She had lost in the finals the week before.

'You don't know who we are,' said one of the girls in yellow, 'but we met you here about a month ago.'

'You've dyed¹⁶ your hair since then,' remarked Jordan, and I started¹⁷, but the girls had moved casually on and her remark was addressed to the premature moon, produced like the supper, no doubt, out of a caterer's¹⁸ basket. With Jordan's slender golden arm resting in mine, we descended the steps and sauntered about¹⁹ the garden. A tray of cocktails floated at us through the twilight²⁰, and we sat down at a table with the two girls in yellow and three men, each one introduced to us as Mr Mumble.

'Do you come to these parties often?' inquired Jordan of the girl beside her.

- 1 flannels. Flanella.
- 2 lawn. Prato.
- 3 rather ill at ease. Piuttosto a disagio.
- 4 among ... eddies. Tra turbini.
- 5 commuting train. Treno dei pendolari.
- 6 dotted about. Sparsi in giro.
- 7 in the right key. Dette nel modo giusto.
- 8 his whereabouts. Dove fosse.
- 9 I slunk off. Sgattaiolai.
- 10 could ... purposeless. Potesse indugiare senza sembrare spaesato.
- 11 to get ... from sheer embarrassment. Di ubriacarmi a morte per sfuggire all'imbarazzo.
- 12 leaning a little backward. Pendendo un po' all'indietro.
- 13 contemptuous. Sprezzante.
- 14 roared. Gridai.
- 15 tournament. Torneo.
- 16 dyed. Tinto.
- 17 I started. Sussultai.
- 18 a caterer's. Di un fornitore.
- 19 sauntered about. Gironzolammo per.
- 20 A tray ... twilight. Un vassoio di cocktails fluttuò verso di noi nel crepuscolo.