



15.3 Francis Scott Fitzgerald: the writer of the Jazz Age

'Want to go with me, old sport'⁴⁵? Just near the shore along the Sound.'
 'What time?'
 85 'Any time that suits you best'⁴⁶.
 It was on the tip of my tongue⁴⁷ to ask his name when Jordan looked around and smiled.
 'Having a gay time now?' she inquired.
 'Much better.' I turned again to my new acquaintance. 'This is an unusual party for me. I
 haven't even seen the host. I live over there –' I waved my hand at the invisible hedge in the
 90 distance, 'and this man Gatsby sent over his chauffeur⁴⁸ with an invitation.' For a moment he
 looked at me as if he failed to understand.
 'I'm Gatsby,' he said suddenly.
 'What!' I exclaimed. 'Oh, I beg your pardon.'
 'I thought you knew, old sport. I'm afraid I'm not a very good host.'
 95 He smiled understandingly – much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare
 smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across⁴⁹ four or five times in
 life. It faced – or seemed to face – the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated
 on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted
 to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that
 100 it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey⁵⁰. Precisely at that
 point it vanished – and I was looking at an elegant young rough-neck⁵¹, a year or two over thirty,
 whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd⁵². Some time before he introduced
 himself I'd got a strong impression that he was picking⁵³ his words with care.
 Almost at the moment when Mr Gatsby identified himself, a butler⁵⁴ hurried toward him
 105 with the information that Chicago was calling him on the wire⁵⁵. He excused himself with a
 small bow⁵⁶ that included each of us in turn.
 'If you want anything just ask for it, old sport,' he urged me. 'Excuse me. I will rejoin you later.'

- 45 **old sport.** Vecchio mio.
 46 **that suits you best.** Che preferisci.
 47 **tip of my tongue.** Punta della lingua.
 48 **chauffeur.** Autista.
 49 **come across.** Incontrare.
 50 **to convey.** Di trasmettere.
 51 **rough-neck.** Lett.: teppista; *qui*: tipo manierato.
 52 **formality ... absurd.** Ricerchezza nel parlare rasentava l'assurdo.
 53 **he was picking.** Scegliesse.
 54 **butler.** Maggiordomo.
 55 **wire.** Telefono.
 56 **bow.** Inchino.

COMPREHENSION



- 2 READ** the text and point out: the setting in time and place, the people involved, the main situation.



YOUR TURN

- 8 DISCUSS** in what sense *The Great Gatsby* can be regarded as the quintessential novel of the 'Jazz Age'.



ANALYSIS



- 3 FOCUS** on Nick's character and make notes about his appearance and his feelings. How does he compare to the other people at the party?



- 4 GATHER** information about Jordan Baker and say what impression you get of her character.



- 5 EXPLAIN** how Gatsby is introduced throughout the text. What sort of man is he? What does Nick think of him?



- 6 FIND** references to the moon and say what it symbolises.



- 7 DESCRIBE** the topics of conversation and the type of behaviour at Gatsby's party that convey the mood of the society of the 1920s in America (⊕15.1).



1 J.C. Leyendecker, *Couple descending a staircase* (advertisement for Arrow Shirt Company), ca 1930. Private Collection. Courtesy of Illustration House, New York.