

Background references for *The Great Gatsby*

Chapter 1:

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her...Thomas Parke D'Invilliers: The lines of poetry that form the novel's epigraph were actually written by Fitzgerald. D'Invilliers is a character in Fitzgerald's novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920). This character was based on the writer John Peale Bishop, a Princeton classmate of Fitzgerald's.

Dukes of Buccleuch: members of a Scottish dukedom with origins in the seventeenth century.

Great War: World War I, so called until the Second World War in 1939

West Egg village: West Egg and East Egg are considered to be Fitzgerald's versions of the communities of Little Neck and Great Neck on Long Island's north Shore. Fitzgerald owned a house in Great Neck, the more affluent of the two. (Little neck and great neck are also types of clams.)

Midas and Morgan and Maecenas: Midas was a mythical king whose touch turned items to gold. Morgan refers to a prominent American banking family. Maecenas was a wealthy Roman patron of literature.

Like the egg in the Columbus story: Christopher Columbus answered a critic by challenging him to balance an egg on its tip. When the man failed, Columbus crushed the tip slightly, flattening it so that the egg could stand. He thus proved that a discovery seems obvious only after it has been made by someone with the vision to imagine it.

Hotel de Ville in Normandy: town hall in the French province of Normandy.

Chapter 2:

Borough of Queens: largest of the five boroughs, or divisions, of New York City; Little Neck is in Queens; Great Neck is in Nassau County, just over the border from New York City.

Torpedoes: small fireworks that explode under great pressure.

Versailles: location of a spectacular seventeenth-century palace built outside of Paris by King Louis XIV.

Ectoplasm: ghostly spirit emanating from a medium during a trance.

Kaiser Wilhelm: German emperor (1859-1918) and king of Prussia from 1888 to the end of World War I.

Chapter 3:

Castile: region of north central Spain. Spain is known for its beautiful shawls.

Belasco: David Belasco (1853-1931), American theatrical producer, famous for realistic sets.

Didn't cut the pages: The books in Gatsby's library are rare first editions, in which the sheets are folded into pages but not yet cut apart.

Tostoff's *Jazz History of the World*: Fitzgerald may have been punning on the expression "tossed off."

Chapter 4:

Bootlegger: seller of illegal merchandise – in this case, of liquor outlawed by Prohibition. The term *bootleg* refers to concealing objects in the leg of a high boot.

Von Hindenburg: Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934), the commander of the German forces during World War I.

Knickerbockers: short, loose-fitting pants gathered at the knee; fashionable menswear during the 1920s.

Bois de Boulogne: large park just west of Paris.

Montenegro: small, fiercely independent kingdom, now part of Yugoslavia.

Non-olfactory money: untainted capital; that is, not associated with crime.

Queensboro Bridge: bridge over the East River connecting the boroughs of Manhattan and Queens in the New York City.

Katspaugh: pun on "cat's paw"; colloquially, a person used by another as a tool.

Rosy Rosenthal: Herman "Rosy" Rosenthal was shot by four men outside New York's Metropole Hotel on July 16, 1912. His murderers were later executed.

Fixed the World Series: reference to the "black Sox" scandal in the 1919 World Series, when the Cincinnati Reds defeated the Chicago White Sox. Later eight Chicago players admitted accepting bribes to lose the series; they had been paid \$100,000 by a New York gambling syndicate.

Plaza hotel: celebrated luxury hotel overlooking New York City's Central Park.

Roadster: small open car with one seat for two or three people; an earlier version of the sports car.

Debut: formal introduction of a young woman into society.

Armistice: November 11, 1918, when fighting in WWI between Germany and the Allied forces ended.

Cannes [kan]...Deauville [dō vel]: resort cities on the French Riviera and English Channel, respectively.

victoria: horse-drawn open carriage for two, named for Queen Victoria, who ruled England from 1837 to 1901.

Chapter 5:

Like Kant at his church steeple: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the German philosopher, said that he developed his theories regarding reality and morality while gazing at a church steeple outside his window.

Marie Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons: elegantly furnished rooms in period style, respectively, of just before the French Revolution (1789) and of the brief restoration of the monarchy (1815).

Adam study: The Adams were an eighteenth-century family of British architects. The Adam style is extremely delicate in form and color.

Chartreuse: green or yellow liquor.

Pompadour: style of hairdressing in which the hair is combed back to create the illusion of a puffy mass in the front.

Chapter 6:

Platonic conception of himself: reference to the Greek philosopher Plato's notion that physical items are inferior copies of transcendent ideas. Gatsby's "Platonic conception of himself" is his fantasy image of his life, as opposed to his actual background.

Madame de Maintenon: French marquise (1635 – 1719) who gained commanding influence at the court of Louis XIV and who later married him.

Chapter 7:

Trimalchio: character of rich, vulgar upstart, taken from the satires of Petronius, the first-century Roman writer. Fitzgerald had considered using the name Trimalchio in the title of this novel.

Caravansary: Oriental inn, for caravans; hence, a gaudy enterprise.

Clog: to knock in a rhythmic fashion, from the dance in which the rhythm is beaten out by shoes with wooden soles.

Blessed isles: beautiful islands in classical mythology.

Coupe: closed, two-door automobile

Chapter 8:

Grail: extended guest; from the seeking of the Holy Grail associated with Christ at the Last Supper.

Argonne: French forest, where Allied forces fought at the end of WWI.

Pneumatic mattress: air-inflated mattress or raft

Chapter 9:

Pasquinade: a satire, posted publicly.

Ulster: long, heavy overcoat, with a cape; often belted

James J. Hill: railroad magnate (1838-1916)

Swastika Holding Company: The swastika is an equal-armed, bent-cross symbol, most famous as an emblem of the German Nazi party, which was founded shortly after World War I. The swastika is an ancient symbol that at various times has had positive as well as negative associations. Fitzgerald, living in Europe after the war, was probably aware of the Nazis and other German anti-Semitic groups; in *The Great Gatsby*, he uses the swastika's anti-Semitic associations ironically in connection with Meyer Wolfsheim, who is probably Jewish.

American Legion: veterans' organization, founded 1919.

Hopalong Cassidy: a cowboy hero in popular fiction, films, and, much later, television.

El Greco: Greek painter (1541-1614) who worked in Italy and Spain. He is known for painting landscapes with harsh or somber colors and elongated and twisted figures. Fitzgerald may have had in mind El Greco's *View of Toledo*, an especially tormented scene.