Francis Scott Fitzgerald

Letter related to *Tender Is the Night*

To Gilbert Seldes, 31 May 1934, 1307 Park Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland

3 pages (280x215 mm), double-spaced on three sheets of beige paper, a one-word penciled revision and two typographical corrections by Fitzgerald, some slight marginal creasing. A fine and longish letter in which Fitzgerald discusses Seldes's edition of Ring Lardner, a possible evening of one-act plays, and reviews of Tender Is the Night. The novel received mixed reviews and Fitzgerald was disappointed by this critical response and by what he saw as lackluster sales, although the novel made the best-seller lists for that April and May. (Letters, ed. A. Turnbull, 532-33.*)*

Just read the Lardner collection *[First and Last]*. At first I was disappointed because I had expected there would be enough stuff for an omnibus and I still feel that it could have stood more weight. However, looking over those syndicate articles I realize what you were up against – even many of those which you were compelled to use are rather definitely dated and I think you did the best you could with the material at hand. Anyhow, I've had a further hunch on the matter which is this: the short-one-act plays at the end do stand up but they would not play in any conventional sense because so much of the nonsense is embodied in the stage directions, <u>but</u> if they were done, as I believe one was, for the Authors' League Fete or the Dutch Treat Club with *[Robert]* Benchley and *[Donald Ogden]* Stewart clowning the whole business I believe they would play very well.

Now doping along on the subject, it seems to me an evening of five nonsense plays would be monotonous no matter how funny they were, but just suppose taking over the technique of the Grand Guignol, two of those plays were alternated with something macabre. When the Grand Guignol failed in N.Y. it seems to me that I remember that all the plays were plays of horror and the minute the novelty wore off it closed up shop…mightn't some enterprising producer be interested in a thoroughly balanced program if we could get the material together? I don't know whether there are any good horror one-acters in America but we might pick up a couple of the Grand Guignol hits very cheaply or get somebody to dredge something out of Edgar Allen *[sic]* Poe. What do you think of this idea?… I am terribly tied up in work and also not being on the spot could not efficiently go into it. I hand you the suggestion for what it is worth and I wish you would let me know what you think of it …

My novel *[Tender Is the Night, published on 12 April]* seems to go pretty well. I haven't been able to make up my mind entirely how good it is because most of the reviewers have been so entirely cuckoo in their effect of saying in one line that the thing comes off entirely because it is technically so well done and others say it comes off in spite of all its technical faults. No two reviewers – and I am speaking only of the big shots – agree who was the leading character. Malcolm Cowley in the *New Republic* seems to be chiefly impressed by a man who only appears once in the whole picture – in any case my total impression is that a whole lot of people just skimmed through the book for the story and it simply cannot be read that way. In any case, your review [in the *New York Evening Journal*] and Mabel Dodge Luhan's enthusiasm [in a letter to the editor of the *New York Herald-Tribune* of 6 May praising the novel] made it all worthwhile to me.

1307 Park Avenue,
Baltimore, Maryland,
May 31, 1934.

Mr. Gilbert Seldes,
17 Henderson Place,
New York, New York.

Dear Gilbert:

Just read the Lardner collection. At first I was disappointed because I had expected there would be enough stuff for an omnibus and I still feel that it could have stood more weight. However, looking over those syndicate articles I realize what you were up against-- even many of those which you were compelled to use are rather definitely dated and I think you did the best you could with the material at hand.

Anyhow, I've had a further hunch on the matter which is this: the short one-act plays at the end do stand up but they would not play in any conventional sense because so much of the nonsense is embodied in the stage directions, but if they were done, as I believe one was, for the Authors' League Fete or the Dutch Treat Club with

-2-

Benchley and Stewart clowning the whole business I believe they would play very well. Now doping along on the subject, it seems to me an evening of five nonsense plays would be monotonous no matter how funny they were, but just suppose taking over the technique of the Grand Gingnol, two of those plays were alternated with something macabre. When the Grand Gingnol failed here in N. Y. it seems to me that I remember that all the plays were plays of horror and the minute the novelty wore off it closed up shop. If the fault of too much of a good thing were repeated this whole hunch might flop, but mightn't some enterprising producer be interested in a thoroughly balanced program if we could get the material together? I don't know whether there are any good horror one-acters in America but we might pick up a couple of the Grand Gingnol hits very cheaply or get somebody to dredge something out of Edgar Allen Poe. What do you think of this idea? Do you think there's any money in it? If we do it we ought to get started immediately. I am terribly tied up in work and also not being on the spot could not efficiently go into it. I hand you the suggestion for what it is worth and I wish you would let me know what you think of it. In any case I would be glad to aid in any advisory

capacity.

My novel seems to go pretty well. I haven't been able to make up my mind entirely how good it is because most of the reviewers have been so entirely cuckoo in their effect of saying in one line that the thing comes off entirely because it is technically so well done and others say it comes off in spite of all its technical faults. No two reviewers--and I am speaking only of the big shots--agree who was the leading character. Malcolm Cowley in the New Republic seems to be chiefly impressed by a man who only appears once in the whole picture--in any case my total impression is that a whole lot of people just skimmed through the book for the story and it simply cannot be read that way. In any case, your review and Mabel Dodge Luhan's enthusiasm made it all worthwhile to me.

Love to Amanda and the children.

Ever yours,

Scott

Notebooks entries related to *Tender Is the Night*

The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli.

923 Nicole's attitude toward sickness was either a sympathy toward a tired or convalescent relation who didn't need it, and which therefore was mere sentimentality, or else a fear when they were absolutely threatened with death, toward real sickness—dirty, boring, unsympathetic she could control no attitude—she had brought up selfish in that regard. Often this was a source of anger and contempt in her to Dick.

924 Idea about Nicole can do everything, extroverts toward everything save people so earth, flowers, pictures, voices, comparisons seem to writhe—no rest wherever she turns, like a tom-tom beat. Escapes over the line where in fantasy alone she finds rest.

925 No first old man in an amateur production of a Victorian comedy was ever more pricked and prodded by the daily phonomens of life than was

1397 "Did you ever read the books of Phillips Oppenheim?"

"I think I've read one."

"He's one of my favorite American writers," Tommy said simply. "He writes about the Riviera, you know. I don't know whether the things he writes about are true but this place is like that."

Standing before the gate they were suddenly bathed in a small floodlight, quick as a flashlight, that left them blinded for a moment. Then a voice from behind the gate.

"Who's this, please?"

"Tell Monsieur Irv that it's Monsieur Tommy. Tell him we can't come in the house, but can he come out in the garden a minute."

A section of the gate rumbled open like a safe and they were in a park, following a young Italo-American dandy toward a lighted house. They waited just out of range of the porch light, and presently the door opened and a dark thin man of forty came out and gazed blindly.

"Where you, Tommy?"

"Down here. Don't come. I have a lady with me who wants to remain anonymous."

"How?"

"I've got a lady with me who doesn't want to be seen— like you."

"Oh, I unestand, I unestand."

"We want to swim. Anybody on the beach?"

"Nobody, nobody. Go ahead, Tommy. You want suits, towels?"

"All right, some towels. Nodoby's going to come down, are they?"

"No, no, nobody. Say, did you see Du Pont de Nemours went up—"

"No stock market in the presence of ladies."

"All right, excuse me, lady. You wait now—Salve will take you down—don't want you to get in trouble."

As Irv re-entered the house Tommy said, "Probably he's phoning the machine gunner to pass us. He was a fellow townsman of yours in Chicago—now he has the best beach on the Riviera."

Curiously Nicole followed down an intricate path, then through a sliding steel door that operated like a guillotine, out into a roofless cavern of white moonlight, formed by pale boulders about a cup of phosphorescent waters. It faced Monaco and the blur of Mentone beyond. She likes his taste in bringing her here—from the highhanded storming of Mr. Irv's fortress.

Then, starting back the lane by which they had come Tommy tripped over a wire and a faint buzzer sounded far away.

"My God!" he excalimed, "that a man should have to live like this!"

"Is he afraid of burglars?"

"He's afraid of your lovely city and came here with a bodyguard of a dozen monkeys—is that the right slang? Maybe Al Capone is after him. Anyhow he has one period between being drunk and being sober when he is very nice."

He broke off as again they were momentarily bathed in the ubiquitous spotlight. Then amber lamps glowed on the porch of the castellated villa and Mr. Irv, this time supported by the very neat young man, came out unsteadily.

"I kept them off the beach, Tommy," he announced.

"Thank you, very much."

"Won't you both change your minds and come in? In *greatest* confidence. I have some other ladies here." He raised his voice as if to address Nicole. "As you are a lady of background you will like 'em."

"It's four o'clock," said Tommy. "We have to get to our background. Good night."
Irv's voice followed them.

"You never make a mistake having to do with a lady."

1486 During the ride the young man held his attention cooly away from his mother, unwilling to follow her eyes in any direction or even to notice his surroundings except when at a revealing turn the sky and sea dropped before them, he said, "It's hot as hell," in a decided voice.

1488 “I did say that, but I explained to you that waiting is just part of the picture business. Everybody’s so much overpaid that when something finally happens you realize that you were making money all the time. The reason it’s slow is because one man’s keeping it all in his head, and fighting the weather and the actors and accidents—”

Francis looked at her, without anger now, but also without pity. She had long lost all power of moving him, yet he responded automatically to old stimuli and now he put his arm around her shoulders.

1496 “Let’s not talk about such things now. I’ll tell you something funny instead.” Her look was not one of eager anticipation but he continued, “By merely looking around you can review the largest battalion of the Boys I’ve seen collected in one place. This hotel seems to be a clearing house for them—” He returned the nod of a pale and shaky Georgian who sat down at a table across the room, “That young man looks somewhat retired from life. The little devil I came down to see is hopeless. You’d like him—if he comes in I’ll introduce him.”

As he was speaking the flow into the bar began. Nicole’s fatigue accepted Dick’s ill-advised words and mingled with the fantastic Koran that presently appeared. She saw the males gathered down at the bar, the tall gangling ones, the little pert ones with round thin shoulders, the broad ones with the faces of Nero and Oscar Wilde, or of senators—faces that dissolved suddenly into girlish fatuity, or twisted into leers—the nervous ones who hitched and twitched, jerking open their eyes very wide, and laughed hysterically, the handsome, passive and dumb men who turned their profiles this way and that, the pimply stodgy men with delicate gestures; or the raw ones with very red lips and frail curly bodies, their shrill voluble tones piping their favorite word “treacherous” above the hot volume of talk; the ones over-self-conscious who glared with eager politeness toward every noise; among them were English types with great racial self-control. Balkan types, one small cooing Siamese. “I think now,” Nicole said, “I think I’m going to bed.”

“I think so too.”

—Goodby, you unfortunates. Goodby, Hotel of Three Worlds.

1571 “Been looking all over the ship for you for two days.”

The speaker was an ageless Jew, wrapped in a polo coat, and tied with a belt—his nose was a finger pressing down his compressed lips which shuffled under it as he mulled and valued, his eyes were beautiful and mean. The two men each recapitulated to himself the many dealings they had had in the past or were likely to have in the future.

“Where did you keep yourself, Lew?” asked the Jew, Bowman, “I thought I’d see you at the Captain’s table.”

“We heard you were on board so we stayed in our cabin,” Lew answered gravely.

Bowman's face fell, not at the harshness of pleasantry' but because he usually looked forward to a few minutes of formal cordiality before people commenced the abuse which he subconsciously demanded.

"That was a wise thing for you to marry a lady. There's nothing like a lady. I've always been glad I married a lady myself."

"Do you call that broad of yours a lady?" asked Lew.

"Bowman looked at him.

"You don't feel in a good humor today."

"Yes, I do," said Lew. He had resented the implication that he and Bowman were upstarts and with sadistic cruelty he prolonged the moment; then he laughed, "Hell, George, I'm kidding you. If you had any self-respect you'd have socked me. Of course Edith's a lady, one of the finest ladies I know." Anyhow half the word was true, so he'd heard.

"You're all right, Lew," said Bowman meditatively, "All you need is every-once-in-a-while a good swift kick in the—"

"Sure, that's right, and to make up for that I'll come to your lowsy party."

"You don't need to come to my party. You, a Yale man, talking like that. No one would ever know it." He went Jewish suddenly, "But come to the party."

"Sure I will." He put his hand in a friendly way on Bowman's arm.

He was thinking of her—he knew now that his abstraction had hurt her, for it was always after he had hurt her that she seemed most beautiful, unattainable and serene.

He found her in the cabin, just standing, thinking. He was afraid of her when she thought, knowing that in the part of her most removed from him, there was taking place a tireless ratiocination, the synthesis of which was always a calm sense of the injustice and unsatisfactions of life. He knew with which her mind worked, but he was always surprised that it brought forth in the end protests that were purely abstract, and in which he figured only as an element as driven and succourless as herself. This made him more afraid than if she said, "It was your fault," as she frequently did—for by it she seemed to lift the situation and its interpretation out of his grasp. In that region his mind was more feminine than hers—he felt light, and off his balance—and a little like the Dickens' character who accused his wife of praying against him.

General Plan for *Tender is the Night*[1]

Sketch

The novel should do this. Show a man who is a natural idealist, a spoiled priest, giving in for various causes to the ideas of the haute Bourgeoisie, and in his rise to the top of the social world losing his idealism, his talent and turning to drink and dissipation. Background: one in which the leisure class is at their truly most brilliant & glamorous such as Murphys.

The hero born in 1891, is a man like myself brought up in a family sunk from haute bourgeoisie to petite bourgeoisie, yet expensively educated. He has all the gifts and goes through Yale almost succeeding but not quite but getting a Rhodes scholarship which he caps with a degree from Hopkins, & with a legacy goes abroad to study psychology in Zurich. At the age of 26 all seems bright. Then he falls in love with one of his patients who has a curious homicidal mania toward men caused by an event of her youth. Aside from this she is the legendary promiscuous woman. He "transfers" to himself & she falls in love with him, a love he returns.

After a year of non-active service in the war he returns and marries her & is madly in love with her & entirely consecrated to completing the cure. She is an aristocrat of half American, half European parentage, young, mysterious & lovely, a new character. He has cured her by pretending to a stability & belief in the current order he does not have, being in fact a communist-liberal-idealist, a moralist in revolt. But the years of living under patronage etc. & among the bourgeoisie have seriously spoiled him and he takes up the marriage as a man divided in himself. During the war he has taken to drinking a little & it continues as secret drinking after his marriage. The difficulty of taking care of her is more than he has imagined and he goes more and more to pieces, always keeping up a wonderful face.

At the point when he is socially the most charming and inwardly corrupt he meets a young actress on the Riviera who falls in love with him. With considerable difficulty he contains himself out of fear of all it would entail since his formal goodness is all that is holding his disintegration together. He knows too that he does not love her as he has loved his wife. Nevertheless the effect of the repression is to throw him toward all women during his secret drinking when he has another life of his own which his wife does not suspect, or at least he thinks she doesn't. On one of his absences during which he is in Rome with the actress having a disappointing love affair too late he is beaten up by the police. He returns to find that instead of taking a rest cure she has committed a murder and in a revulsion of spirit he tries to conceal it and succeeds. It shows him however that the game is up and he will have to perform some violent & Byronic act to save her for he is losing his hold on her & himself.

He has known slightly for some time a very strong & magnetic man and now he deliberately brings them together. When he finds under circumstances of jealous agony that it has succeeded he departs knowing that he has cured her. He sends his neglected

[1] Typos have been corrected.

son into Soviet Russia to educate him and comes back to America to be a quack thus having accomplished both his bourgeois sentimental idea in the case of his wife and his ideals in the case of his son, & now being himself only a shell to which nothing matters but survival as long as possible with the old order.

Characters

We have

a. the hero, treated 1st entirely from without and then entirely from within.

Technique

One part retrospective to ten-fifteen parts narrative.

Approach

The Drunkard's Holiday will be a novel of our time showing the break-up of a fine personality. Unlike The Beautiful and Damned the break-up will be caused not by flabbiness but really tragic forces such as the inner conflicts of the idealist and the compromises forced upon him by circumstances.

The novel will be a little over a hundred thousand words long, composed of fourteen chapters, each 7,500 words long, five chapters each in the first and second part, four in the third—one chapter or its equivalent to be composed of retrospect.

Characters & Names

DICK

The hero was born in 1891. He is a well-formed rather athletic and fine looking fellow. Also he is very intelligent, widely read—in fact he has all the talents, including especially great personal charm. This is all planted in the beginning. He is a superman in possibilities, that is, he appears to be at first sight from a bourgeois point of view. However he lacks that tensile strength—none of the ruggedness of Brancusi, Léger, Picasso. For his external qualities use anything of Gerald, Ernest, Ben Finny, Archie Mcliesh, Charley McArthur or myself. He looks, though, like me.

The faults—the weakness such as the social-climbing, the drinking, the desperate clinging to one woman, finally the neurosis, only come out gradually.

We follow him from age 34 to age 39.

Actual age of Dick

September	1891	Born
September	1908	Entered Yale
June	1912	Graduated Yale, aged 20[2]
June	1916	Graduated Hopkins. Left for Vienna (8 mo. there)
June	1917	Was in Zurich after 1 year and other work. Age 26
June	1918	Degree at Zurich. Aged 26
June	1919	Back in Zurich. Aged 27
September	1919	Married—aged 28
		after his refusing fellowship at University in neurology and pathologist to the clinic. Or does he accept?
July	1925	After 5 years and 10 months of marriage is aged almost 34
		Story starts
July	1929	After 9 years and 10 months of marriage is aged almost 38.

[2] 21 in Fabre & Fabre

Nicole's age

Always one year younger than century.

Born July 1901

courtship for two and one half years before that, since she was 13.

Catastrophe	June 1917	Age almost 16
Clinic.	Feb. 1918	Age 17
		To middle October bad period
		After armistice good period
		He returns in April or May 1919
		She discharged June 1, 1919. Almost 18
		Married September 1919. Aged 18

Child born August 1920

Child born June 1922

2nd Pousse almost immediately to October 1922 and thereafter

Frenchman (or what have you in summer of 1923 after almost 4 years of marriage.

In July 1925 when the story opens she is just 24

(One child almost 5 (Scotty in Juan les Pins)

One child 3 (Scotty in Pincio)

In July 1929 when the story ends she is just 28

The heroine was born in 1901. She is beautiful on the order of Marlene Dietrich or better still the Norah Gregor-Kiki Allen girl with those peculiar eyes. She is American with a streak of some foreign blood. At fifteen she was raped by her own father under peculiar circumstances—work out. She collapses, goes to the clinic and there at sixteen meets the young doctor hero who is ten years older. Only her transference to him saves her—when it is not working she reverts to homicidal mania and tries to kill men. She is an innocent, widely read but with no experience and no orientation except what he supplies her. Portrait of Zelda—that is, a part of Zelda.

We follow her from age 24 to age 29

Method of Dealing with Sickness Material

(1) Read books and decide the general type of case

(2) Prepare a clinical report covering the years 1916-1920

(3) Now examine the different classes of material selecting not too many things for copying.

(1) From the sort of letter under E

(2) " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " F

(In this case using no factual stuff)

(3) From the other headings for atmosphere, accuracy and material being careful not to reveal basic ignorance of psychiatric and medical training yet not being glib. Only suggest from the most remote facts. Not like doctor's stories.

Must avoid Faulkner attitude and not end with a novelized Kraft-Ebing—better Ophelia and her flowers.

Classification of the Material on Sickness

A. Accounts
B. Baltimore
C. Clinics and clipping
D. Dancing and 1st Diagnoses
E. Early Prangins—to February 1931
F. From Forel (include Bleuler Consultation)
H. Hollywood
L. Late Prangins
M. My own letters and comments
R. Rosalind and Sayre family
S. Squires and Schedule
V. Varia

The actress was born in 1908. Her career is like Lois or Mary Hay—that is, she differs from most actresses by being a lady, simply reeking of vitality, health, sensuality. Rather gross as compared to the heroine, or rather *will be* gross for at present her youth covers it. Mimi-Lupe Velez.

We see her first at the very beginning of her career. She's already made one big picture.

We follow her from age 17 to age 22.

The Friend was born in 1896. He is a wild man. He looks like Tunte and like that dark communist at the meeting. He is half Italian or French & half American. He is a

type who hates all sham & pretense. (See the Lung type who was like Foss Wilson) He is one who would lead tribesmen or communists—utterly aristocratic, unbourgeois king or nothing. He fought three years in the French foreign legion in the war and then painted a little and then fought the Riff. He's just back from there on his first appearance in the novel and seeking a new outlet. He has money & this French training—otherwise he would be a revolutionist. He is a fine type, useful or destructive but his mind is not quite as good as the hero's. Touch of Percy Pyne, Denny Holden also.

We see him from age 28 to age 33.

Summary of Part III (1st half)[3]

The Divers, as a marriage are at the end of their rescourses. Medically Nicole is nearly cured but Dick has given out & is sinking toward alcoholism and discouragement. It seems as if the completion of his ruination will be the fact that cures her—almost mystically. However this is merely hinted at. Dick is still in control of the situation and thinks of the matter practically. They must separate for both their sakes. In wild bitterness he thinks of one tragic idea but controls himself and manages a saner one instead.

His hold is broken, the transference is broken. He goes away. He has been used by the rich family and cast aside.

Part III is as much as possible seen through Nicole's eyes. All Dick's stories such as are absolutely necessary: Edwardo, father, auto catastrophe (child's eyes perhaps), Struppen quarrel?, girls on Riviera, must be told without putting in his reactions or feelings. From now on he is mystery man, at least to Nicole with her guessing at the mystery.

Note by A. Mizener

These notes connected with the planning of Tender Is the Night *were together among Fitzgerald's papers. The evidence seems to suggest that all of them except the "Summary of Part III" were written at the same time and that this summary was made when Fitzgerald got to the writing of the last section of the book. None of this material is dated, so that it is only a guess, based on internal evidence, that the main outline of the story and the character sketches were made at La Paix in 1932, when, for the last time, he started over again to write the book. The differences between this outline and the novel as Fitzgerald actually wrote it—particularly the book's failure to follow the outline's suggestions about Dick's sympathy with the Soviet Union—fit the changes in Fitzgerald's attitude during this period. The "Summary of Part III," on the other hand, fits the book fairly closely.*

General plan featured partly in *The Far Side of Paradise* (Appendix Two) by A. Mizener (337-41), in M. J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (330-36), and in Fabre & Fabre (345-50).

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[3] Mizener notes that "*Both the content and the handwriting show that the . . . outline of Part Three was written later than the main sketch and at least some of the character sketches which are printed above*" (341).

"Echoes of the Jazz Age"

The Crack-Up, ed. E. Wilson, 1993.

November, 1931

It is too soon to write about the Jazz Age with perspective, and without being suspected of premature arteriosclerosis. Many people still succumb to violent retching when they happen upon any of its characteristic words—words which have since yielded in vividness to the coinages of the underworld. It is as dead as were the Yellow Nineties in 1902. Yet the present writer already looks back to it with nostalgia. It bore him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did, that something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War.

The ten-year period that, as if reluctant to die outmoded in its bed, leaped to a spectacular death in October, 1929, began about the time of the May Day riots in 1919. When the police rode down the demobilized country boys gaping at the orators in Madison Square, it was the sort of measure bound to alienate the more intelligent young men from the prevailing order. We didn't remember anything about the Bill of Rights until Mencken began plugging it, but we did know that such tyranny belonged in the jittery little countries of South Europe. If goose-livered business men had this effect on the government, then maybe we had gone to war for J. P. Morgan's loans after all. But, because we were tired of Great Causes, there was no more than a short outbreak of moral indignation, typified by Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*. Presently we began to have slices of the national cake and our idealism only flared up when the newspapers made melodrama out of such stories as Harding and the Ohio Gang or Sacco and Vanzetti. The events of 1919 left us cynical rather than revolutionary, in spite of the fact that now we are all rummaging around in our trunks wondering where in hell we left the liberty cap—"I know I had it"—and the moujik blouse. It was characteristic of the Jazz Age that it had no interest in politics at all.

It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire. A Stuffed Shirt, squirming to blackmail in a lifelike way, sat upon the throne of the United States; a stylish young man hurried over to represent to us the throne of England. A world of girls yearned for the young Englishman; the old American groaned in his sleep as he waited to be poisoned by his wife, upon the advice of the female Rasputin who then made the ultimate decision in our national affairs. But such matters apart, we had things our way at last. With Americans ordering suits by the gross in London, the Bond Street tailors perforce agreed to moderate their cut to the American long-waisted figure and loose-fitting taste, something subtle passed to America, the style of man. During the Renaissance, Francis the First looked to Florence to trim his leg. Seventeenth-century England aped the court of France, and fifty years ago the German Guards officer bought his civilian clothes in London. Gentlemen's clothes—symbol of "the power that man must hold and that passes from race to race."

We were the most powerful nation. Who could tell us any longer what was fashionable and what was fun? Isolated during the European War, we had begun combing the unknown South and West for folkways and pastimes, and there were more ready to hand.

The first social revelation created a sensation out of all proportion to its novelty. As far back as 1915 the unchaperoned young people of the smaller cities had discovered the mobile privacy of that automobile given to young Bill at sixteen to make him "self-reliant." At first petting was a desperate adventure even under such favorable conditions, but presently confidences were exchanged and the old commandment broke down. As early as 1917 there were references to such sweet and casual dalliance in any number of the *Yale Record* or the *Princeton Tiger*.

But petting in its more audacious manifestations was confined to the wealthier classes—among other young people the old standard prevailed until after the War, and a kiss meant that a proposal was expected, as young officers in strange cities sometimes discovered to their dismay. Only in 1920 did the veil finally fall—the Jazz Age was in flower.

Scarcely had the staider citizens of the republic caught their breaths 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. This was the generation whose girls dramatized themselves as flappers, the generation that corrupted its elders and eventually overreached itself less through lack of morals than through lack of taste. May one offer in exhibit the year 1922! That was the peak of the younger generation, for though the Jazz Age continued, it became less and less an affair of youth.

The sequel was like a children's party taken over by the elders, leaving the children puzzled and rather neglected and rather taken aback. By 1923 their elders, tired of watching the carnival with ill-concealed envy, had discovered that young liquor will take the place of young blood, and with a whoop the orgy began. The younger generation was starred no longer.

A whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure. The precocious intimacies of the younger generation would have come about with or without prohibition—they were implicit in the attempt to adapt English customs to American conditions. (Our South, for example, is tropical and early maturing—it has never been part of the wisdom of France and Spain to let young girls go unchaperoned at sixteen and seventeen.) But the general decision to be amused that began with the cocktail parties of 1921 had more complicated origins.

The word jazz in its progress toward respectability has meant first sex, then dancing, then music. It is associated with a state of nervous stimulation, not unlike that of big cities behind the lines of a war. To many English the War still goes on because all the forces that menace them are still active—Wherefore eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. But different causes had now brought about a corresponding state in America—though there were entire classes (people over fifty, for example) who spent a whole decade denying its existence even when its puckish face peered into the family circle. Never did they dream that they had contributed to it. The honest citizens of every

class, who believed in a strict public morality and were powerful enough to enforce the necessary legislation, did not know that they would necessarily be served by criminals and quacks, and do not really believe it today. Rich righteousness had always been able to buy honest and intelligent servants to free the slaves or the Cubans, so when this attempt collapsed our elders stood firm with all the stubbornness of people involved in a weak case, preserving their righteousness and losing their children. Silver-haired women and men with fine old faces, people who never did a consciously dishonest thing in their lives, still assure each other in the apartment hotels of New York and Boston and Washington that "there's a whole generation growing up that will never know the taste of liquor." Meanwhile their grand daughters pass the well-thumbed copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* around the boarding-school and, if they get about at all, know the taste of gin or corn at sixteen. But the generation who reached maturity between 1875 and 1895 continue to believe what they want to believe.

Even the intervening generations were incredulous. In 1920 Heywood Broun announced that all this hubbub was nonsense, that young men didn't kiss but told anyhow. But very shortly people over twenty-five came in for an intensive education. Let me trace some of the revelations vouchsafed them by reference to a dozen works written for various types of mentality during the decade. We begin with the suggestion that Don Juan leads an interesting life (*Jurgen*, 1919); then we learn that there's a lot of sex around if we only knew it (*Winesburg, Ohio*, 1920), that adolescents lead very amorous lives (*This Side of Paradise*, 1920), that there are a lot of neglected Anglo-Saxon words (*Ulysses*, 1921), that older people don't always resist sudden temptations (*Cytherea*, 1922), that girls are sometimes seduced without being ruined (*Flaming Youth*, 1922), that even rape often turns out well (*The Sheik*, 1922), that glamorous English ladies are often promiscuous (*The Green Hat*, 1924), that in fact they devote most of their time to it (*The Vortex*, 1926), that it's a damn good thing too (*Lady Chatterley's Lover,* 1928), and finally that there are abnormal variations (*The Well of Loneliness*, 1928, and *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 1929).

In my opinion the erotic clement in these works, even *The Sheik* written for children in the key of *Peter Rabbit*, did not one particle of harm. Everything they described, and much more, was familiar in our contemporary life. The majority of the theses were honest and elucidating—their effect was to restore some dignity to the male as opposed to the he-man in American life. ("And what is a 'He-man'?" demanded Gertrude Stein one day. "Isn't it a large enough order to fill out to the dimensions of all that 'a man' has meant in the past? A '*He*-man'!") The married woman can now discover whether she is being cheated, or whether sex is just something to be endured, and her compensation should be to establish a tyranny of the spirit, as her mother may have hinted. Perhaps many women found that love was meant to be fun. Anyhow the objectors lost their tawdry little case, which is one reason why our literature is now the most living in the world.

Contrary to popular opinion, the movies of the Jazz Age had no effect upon ils morals. The social attitude of the producers was timid, behind the times and banal—for example, no picture mirrored even faintly the younger generation until 1923, when magazines had already been started to celebrate it and it had long ceased to be news. There were a few feeble splutters and then Clara Bow in *Flaming Youth*; promptly the Hollywood hacks ran the theme into its cinematographic grave. Throughout the Jazz Age the movies got no farther than Mrs. Jiggs, keeping up with its most blatant superficialities. This was no doubt due to the censorship as well as to innate conditions

in the industry. In any case, the Jazz Age now raced along under its own power, served by great filling stations full of money.

The people over thirty, the people all the way up to fifty, had joined the dance. We graybeards (to tread down F.P.A.) remember the uproar when in 1912 grandmothers of forty tossed away their crutches and took lessons in the Tango and the Castle-Walk. A dozen years later a woman might pack the Green Hat with her other affairs as she set off for Europe or New York, but Savonarola was too busy flogging dead horses in Augean stables of his own creation to notice. Society, even in small cities, now dined in separate chambers, and the sober table learned about the gay table only from hearsay. There were very few people left at the sober table. One of its former glories, the less sought-after girls who had become resigned to sublimating a probable celibacy, came across Freud and Jung in seeking their intellectual recompense and came tearing back into the fray.

By 1926 the universal preoccupation with sex had become a nuisance. (I remember a perfectly mated, contented young mother asking my wife's advice about "having an affair right away," though she had no one especially in mind, "because don't you think it's sort of undignified when you get much over thirty?"). For a while bootleg Negro records with their phallic euphemisms made everything suggestive, and simultaneously came a wave of erotic plays—young girls from finishing-schools packed the galleries to hear about the romance of being a Lesbian and George Jean Nathan protested. Then one young producer lost his head entirely, drank a beauty's alcoholic bath-water and went to the penitentiary. Somehow his pathetic attempt at romance belongs to the Jazz Age, while his contemporary in prison, Ruth Snyder, had to be hoisted into it by the tabloids—she was, as *The Daily News* hinted deliciously to gourmets, about "to cook, *and sizzle*, AND FRY!" in the electric chair.

The gay elements of society had divided into two main streams, one flowing towards Palm Beach and Deauville, and the other, much smaller, towards the summer Riviera. One could get away with more on the summer Riviera, and whatever happened seemed to have something to do with art. From 1926 to 1929, the great years of the Cap d'Antibes, this corner of France was dominated by a group quite distinct from that American society which is dominated by Europeans. Pretty much of anything went at Antibes—by 1929, at the most gorgeous paradise for swimmers on the Mediterranean no one swam any more, save for a short hang-over dip at noon. There was a picturesque graduation of steep rocks over the sea and somebody's valet and an occasional English girl used to dive from them, but the Americans were content to discuss each other in the bar. This was indicative of something that was taking place in the homeland—Americans were getting soft. There were signs everywhere: we still won the Olympic games but with champions whose names had few vowels in them—teams composed, like the fighting Irish combination of Notre Dame, of fresh overseas blood. Once the French became really interested, the Davis Cup gravitated automatically to their intensity in competition. The vacant lots of the Middle-Western cities were built up now—except for a short period in school, we were not turning out to be an athletic people like the British, after all. The hare and the tortoise. Of course if we wanted to we could be in a minute; we still had all those reserves of ancestral vitality, but one day in 1926 we looked down and found we had flabby arms and a fat pot and couldn't say boop-boop-a-doop to a Sicilian. Shades of Van Bibber!—no Utopian ideal, God knows. Even golf, once considered an effeminate game, had seemed very strenuous of late—an emasculated form appeared and proved just right.

By 1927 a widespread neurosis began to be evident, faintly signalled, like a nervous beating of the feet, by the popularity of crossword puzzles. I remember a fellow expatriate opening a letter from a mutual friend of ours, urging him to come home and be revitalized by the hardy, bracing qualities of the native soil. It was a strong letter and it affected us both deeply, until we noticed that it was headed from a nerve sanatorium in Pennsylvania.

By this time contemporaries of mine had begun to disappear into the dark maw of violence. A classmate killed his wife and himself on Long Island, another tumbled "accidently" from a skyscraper in Philadelphia, another purposely from a skyscraper in New York. One was killed in a speak-easy in Chicago; another was beaten to death in a speak-easy in New York and crawled home to the Princeton Club to die; still another had his skull crushed by a maniac's axe in an insane asylum where he was confined. These are not catastrophes that I went out of my way to look for—these were my friends; moreover, these things happened not during the depression but during the boom.

In the spring of '27, something bright and alien flashed across the sky. A young Minnesotan who seemed to have had nothing to do with his generation did a heroic thing, and for a moment people set down their glasses in country clubs and speak-easies and thought of their old best dreams. Maybe there was a way out by flying, maybe our restless blood could find frontiers in the illimitable air. But by that time we were all pretty well committed; and the Jazz Age continued; we would all have one more.

Nevertheless, Americans were wandering ever more widely—friends seemed eternally bound for Russia, Persia, Abyssinia, and Central Africa. And by 1928 Paris had grown suffocating. With each new shipment of Americans spewed up by the boom the quality fell off, until towards the end there was something sinister about the crazy boatloads. They were no longer the simple pa and ma and son and daughter, infinitely superior in their qualities of kindness and curiosity to the corresponding class in Europe, but fantastic neanderthals who believed something, something vague, that you remembered from a very cheap novel. I remember an Italian on a steamer who promenaded the deck in an American Reserve Officer's uniform picking quarrels in broken English with Americans who criticized their own institutions in the bar. I remember a fat Jewess, inlaid with diamonds, who sat behind us at the Russian ballet and said as the curtain rose, "Thad's luffly, dey ought to baint a bicture of it." This was low comedy, but it was evident that money and power were falling into the hands of people in comparison with whom the leader of a village Soviet would be a gold-mine of judgement and culture. There were citizens travelling in luxury in 1928 and 1929, who, in the distortion of their new condition, had the human value of Pekingese, bivalves, cretins, goats. I remember the Judge from some New York district who had taken his daughter to see the Bayeux Tapestries and made a scene in the papers advocating their segregation because one scene was immoral. But in those days life was like the race in *Alice in Wonderland*, there was a prize for every one.

The Jazz Age had had a wild youth and a heady middle age. There was the phase of the necking parties, the Leopold-Loeb murder (I remember the time my wife was arrested on Queensborough Bridge on the suspicion of being the "Bob-haired Bandit") and the John Held Clothes. In the second phase such phenomena as sex and murder became more mature, if much more conventional. Middle age must be served and pyjamas came to the beach to save fat thighs and flabby calves from competition with

the one-piece bathing-suit. Finally skirts came down and everything was concealed. Everybody was at scratch now. Let's go——

But it was not to be. Somebody had blundered and the most expensive orgy in history was over.

It ended two years ago [1929], because the utter confidence which was its essential prop received an enormous jolt, and it didn't take long for the flimsy structure to settle earthward. And after two years the Jazz Age seems as far away as the days before the War. It was borrowed time anyhow—the whole upper tenth of a nation living with the insouciance of grand dukes and the casualness of chorus girls. But moralizing is easy now and it was pleasant to be in one's twenties in such a certain and unworried time. Even when you were broke you didn't worry about money, because it was in such profusion around you. Towards the end one had a struggle to pay one's share; it was almost a favour to accept hospitality that required any travelling. Charm, notoriety, mere good manners weighed more than money as a social asset. This was rather splendid, but things were getting thinner and thinner as the eternal necessary human values tried to spread over all that expansion. Writers were geniuses on the strength of one respectable book or play; just as during the War officers of four months' experience commanded hundreds of men, so there were now many little fish lording it over great big bowls. In the theatrical world extravagant productions were carried by a few second-rate stars, and so on up the scale into politics, where it was difficult to interest good men in positions of the highest importance and responsibility, importance and responsibility far exceeding that of business executives but which paid only five or six thousand a year.

Now once more the belt is tight and we summon the proper expression of horror as we look back at our wasted youth. Sometimes, though, there is a ghostly rumble among the drums, an asthmatic whisper in the trombones that swings me back into the early twenties when we drank wood alcohol and every day in every way grew better and better, and there was a first abortive shortening of the skirts, and girls all looked alike in sweater dresses, and people you didn't want to know said "Yes, we have no bananas", and it seemed only a question of a few years before the older people would step aside and let the world be run by those who saw things as they were—and it all seems rosy and romantic to us who were young then, because we will never feel quite so intensely about our surroundings any more.

"One Hundred False Starts"

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"Crack!" goes the pistol and off starts this entry. Sometimes he has caught it just right; more often he has jumped the gun. On these occasions, if he is lucky, he runs only a dozen yards, looks around and jogs sheepishly back to the starting place. But too frequently he makes the entire circuit of the track under the impression that he is leading the field, and reaches the finish to find he has no following. The race must be run all over again.

A little more training, take a long walk, cut out that nightcap, no meat at dinner, and stop worrying about politics—

So runs an interview with one of the champion false starters of the writing profession—myself. Opening a leather-bound waiste-basket which I fatuously refer to as my "notebook," I pick out at random a small, triangular piece of wrapping paper with a canceled stamp on one side. On the other side is written:

> Boopsie Dee was cute.

Nothing more. No cue as to what was intended to follow that preposterous statement. Boopsie Dee, indeed, confronting me with this single dogmatic fact about herself. Never will I know what happened to her, where and when she picked up her revolting name, and whether her cuteness got her into much trouble.

I pick out another scrap:

> Article: Unattractive Things Girls Do, to pair with counter article by woman: Unattractive Things Men Do.
>
> No. 1. Remove glass eye at dinner table.

That's all there is on that scrap. Evidently, an idea that had dissolved into hilarity before it had fairly got under way. I try to revive it seriously. What unattractive things do girls do—I mean universally nowadays—or what unattractive things do a great majority of them do, or a strong minority? I have a few feeble ideas, but no, the notion is dead. I can only think of an article I read somewhere about a woman who divorced her husband because of the way he stalked a chop, and wondering at the time why she didn't try him out on a chop before she married him. No, that all belongs to a gilded age when people could afford to have nervous breakdowns because of the squeak in daddy's shoes.

Lines to an Old Favorite

There are hundreds of these hunches. Not all of them have to do with literature. Some are hunches about importing a troupe of Ouled Nail dancers from Africa, about

bringing the Grand-Guignol from Paris to New York, about resuscitating football at Princeton—I have two scoring plays that will make a coach's reputation in one season—and there is a faded note to "explain to D.W. Griffith why costume plays are sure to come back." Also my plan for a film version of H. G. Wells' History of the World.

These little flurries caused me no travail—they were opium eater's illusions, vanishing with the smoke of the pipe, or you know what I mean. The pleasure of thinking about them was the exact equivalent of having accomplished them. It is the six-page, ten-page, thirty-page globs of paper that grieve me professionally, like unsuccessful oil shafts; they represent my false starts.

There is, for example, one false start which I have made at least a dozen times. It is—or rather has tried to take shape as—a short story. At one time or another, I have written as many words on it as would make a presentable novel, yet the present version is only about twenty-five hundred words long and hasn't been touched for two years. Its present name—it has gone under various aliases—is The Barnaby Family.

From childhood I have had a daydream—what a word for one whose entire life is spent noting them down—about starting at scratch on a desert island and building a comparatively high state of civilization out of the materials at hand. I always felt that Robinson Crusoe cheated when he rescued the tools from the wreck, and this applies equally to the Swiss Family Robinson, the Two Little Savages, and the balloon castaways of The Mysterious Island. In my story, not only would no convenient grain of wheat, repeating rifle, 4000 H. P. Diesel engine or technocratic butler be washed ashore but even my characters would he helpless city dwellers with no more wood lore than a cuckoo out of a clock.

The creation of such characters was easy, and it was easy washing them ashore:

> For three long hours they were prostrated on the beach. Then Donald sat up.
>
> "Well, here we are," he said with sleepy vagueness.
>
> "Where?" his wife demanded eagerly.
>
> "It couldn't be America and it couldn't be the Philippines," he said, "because we started from one and haven't got to the other."
>
> "I'm thirsty," said the child.
>
> Donald's eyes went quickly to the shore.
>
> "Where's the raft?" He looked rather accusingly at Vivian. "Where's the raft?"
>
> "It was gone when I woke up."
>
> "It would be," he exclaimed bitterly. "Somebody might have thought of bringing the jug of water ashore. If I don't do it, nothing is done in this house—I mean this family."

All right, go on from there. Anybody—you back there in the tenth row—step up! Don't be afraid. Just go on with the story. If you get stuck, you can look up tropical fauna and flora in the encyclopedia or call up a neighbor who has been shipwrecked.

Anyhow, that's the exact point where my story—and I still think it's a great plot—begins to creak and groan with unreality. I turn around after a while with a sense of

uneasiness—how could anybody believe that rubbish about monkeys throwing coconuts?—trot back to the starting place, and I resume my crouch for days and days.

A Murder That Didn't Jell

During such days I sometimes examine a clot of pages which is headed Ideas for Possible Stories. Among others, I find the following:

> Bath water in Princeton or Florida.
>
> Plot—suicide, indulgence, hate, liver and circumstance.
>
> Snubbing or having somebody.
>
> Dancer who found she could fly.

Oddly enough, all these are intelligible, if not enlightening, suggestions to me. But they are all old—old. I am as apt to be stimulated by them as by my signature or the beat of my feet pacing the floor. There is one that for years has puzzled me, that is as great a mystery as Boopsie Dee.

> Story: **THE WINTER WAS COLD**
>
> CHARACTERS
>
> Victoria Cuomo
>
> Mark de Vinci
>
> Jason Tenweather
>
> Ambulance surgeon
>
> Stark, a watchman

What was this about? Who were these people? I have no doubt that one of them was to be murdered or else be a murderer. But all else about the plot I have forgotten long ago.

I turn over a little. Here is something over which I linger longer; a false start that wasn't bad, that might have been run out.

> **Words**
>
> When you consider the more expensive article and finally decide on the cheaper one, the salesman is usually thoughtful enough to make it alt right for you. "You'll probably get the most wear out of this," he says consolingly, or even, "That's the one I'd choose myself."
>
> The Trimbles were like that. They were specialists in the neat promotion of the next best into the best.
>
> "It'll do to wear around the house," they used to say; or, "We want to wait until we can get a really nice one."

It was at this point that I decided I couldn't write about the Trimbles. They were very nice and I would have enjoyed somebody else's story of how they made out, but I couldn't get under the surface of their lives—what kept them content to make the best of things instead of changing things. So I gave them up.

There is the question of dog stories. I like dogs and would like to write at least one dog story in the style of Mr. Terhune, but see what happens when I take pen in hand:

> **DOG**
> ***THE STORY OF A LITTLE DOG***
>
> Only a newsboy with a wizened face, selling his papers on the corner. A big dog fancier, standing on the curb, laughed contemptuously and twitched up the collar of his Airedale coat. Another rich dog man gave a little bark of scorn from a passing taxicab.
>
> But the newsboy was interested in the animal that had crept close to his feet. He was only a cur; his fuzzy coat was inherited from his mother, who had been a fashionable poodle, while in stature he resembled his father, a Great Dane. And somewhere there was a canary concerned, for a spray of yellow feathers projected from his backbone—

You see, I couldn't go on like that. Think of dog owners writing in to the editors from all over the country, protesting that I was no man for that job.

I am thirty-six years old. For eighteen years, save for a short space during the war, writing has been my chief interest in life, and I am in every sense a professional.

Yet even now when, at the recurrent cry of "Baby needs shoes," I sit down facing my sharpened pencils and block of legal-sized paper, I have a feeling of utter helplessness. I may write my story in three days or, as is more frequently the case, it may be six weeks before I have assembled anything worthy to be sent out. I can open a volume from a criminal-law library and find a thousand plots. I can go into highway and byway, parlor and kitchen, and listen to personal revelations that, at the hands of other writers, might endure forever. But all that is nothing—not even enough for a false start.

Twice-Told Tales

Mostly, we authors must repeat ourselves—that's the truth. We have two or three great and moving experiences in our lives—experiences so great and moving that it doesn't seem at the time that anyone else has been so caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and rewarded and humbled in just that way ever before.

Then we learn our trade, well or less well, and we tell our two or three stories—each time in a new disguise—maybe ten times, maybe a hundred, as long as people will listen.

If this were otherwise, one would have to confess to having no individuality at all. And each time I honestly believe that, because I have found a new background and a novel twist, I have really got away from the two or three fundamental tales I have to tell. But it is rather like Ed Wynn's famous anecdote about the painter of boats who was begged to paint some ancestors for a client. The bargain was arranged, but with the painter's final warning that the ancestors would all turn out to look like boats.

When I face the fact that all my stories are going to have a certain family resemblance, I am taking a step toward avoiding false starts. If a friend says he's got a story for me and launches into a tale of being robbed by Brazilian pirates in a swaying straw hut on the edge of a smoking volcano in the Andes, with his fiancee bound and gagged on the roof, I can well believe there were various human emotions involved; but having successfully avoided pirates, volcanoes and fiancees who get themselves

bound and gagged on roofs, I can't feel them. Whether it's something that happened twenty years ago or only yesterday, I must start out with an emotion—one that's close to me and that I can understand.

It's an Ill Wind

Last summer I was hauled to the hospital with high fever and a tentative diagnosis of typhoid. My affairs were in no better shape than yours are, reader. There was a story I should have written to pay my current debts, and I was haunted by the fact that I hadn't made a will. If I had really had typhoid I wouldn't have worried about such things, nor made that scene at the hospital when the nurses tried to plump me into an ice bath. I didn't have either the typhoid or the bath, but I continued to rail against my luck that just at this crucial moment I should have to waste two weeks in bed, answering the baby talk of nurses and getting nothing done at all. But three days after I was discharged I had finished a story about a hospital.

The material was soaking in and I didn't know it. I was profoundly moved by fear, apprehension, worry, impatience; every sense was acute, and that is the best way of accumulating material for a story. Unfortunately, it does not always come so easily. I say to myself—looking at the awful blank block of paper—"Now, here's this man Swankins that I've known and liked for ten years. I am privy to all his private affairs, and some of them are wows. I've threatened to write about him, and he says to go ahead and do my worst."

But can I? I've been in as many jams as Swankins, but I didn't look at them the same way, nor would it ever have occurred to me to extricate myself from the Chinese police or from the clutches of that woman in the way Swankins chose. I could write some fine paragraphs about Swankins, but build a story around him that would have an ounce of feeling in it—impossible.

Or into my distraught imagination wanders a girl named Elsie about whom I was almost suicidal for a month, in 1916.

"How about me?" Elsie says. "Surely you swore to a lot of emotion back there in the past. Have you forgotten?"

"No, Elsie, I haven't forgotten."

"Well, then, write a story about me. You haven't seen me for twelve years, so you don't know how fat I am now and how boring I often seem to my husband."

"No, Elsie, I—"

"Oh, come on. Surely I must be worth a story. Why, you used to hang around saying good-bye with your face so miserable and comic that I thought I'd go crazy myself before I got rid of you. And now you're afraid even to start a story about me. Your feeling must have been pretty thin if you can't revive it for a few hours."

"No, Elsie; you don't understand. I have written about you a dozen times. That funny little rabbit curl to your lip, I used it in a story six years ago. The way your face all changed just when you were going to laugh—I gave that characteristic to one of the first girls I ever wrote about. The way I stayed around trying to say good night, knowing

that you'd rush to the phone as soon as the front door closed behind me—all that was in a book that I wrote once upon a time."

"I see. Just because I didn't respond to you, you broke me into bits and used me up piecemeal."

"I'm afraid so, Elsie. You see, you never so much as kissed me, except that once with a kind of a shove at the same time, so there really isn't any story."

Plots without emotions, emotions without plots. So it goes sometimes. Let me suppose, however, that I have got under way; two days' work, two thousand words are finished and being typed for a first revision. And suddenly doubts overtake me.

A Jury of One

What if I'm just horsing around? What's going on in this regatta anyhow ? Who could care what happens to the girl, when the sawdust is obviously leaking out of her moment by moment? How did I get the plot all tangled up ? I am alone in the privacy of my faded blue room with my sick cat, the bare February branches waving at the window, an ironic paper weight that says Business is Good, a New England conscience—developed in Minnesota—and my greatest problem:

"Shall I run it out? Or shall I turn back?"

Shall I say:

"I know I had something to prove, and it may develop farther along in the story?"

Or:

"This is just bullheadedness. Better throw it away and start over."

The latter is one of the most difficult decisions that an author must make. To make it philosophically, before he has exhausted himself in a hundred-hour effort to resuscitate a corpse or disentangle innumerable wet snarls, is a test of whether or not he is really a professional. There are often occasions when such a decision is doubly difficult. In the last stages of a novel, for instance, where there is no question of junking the whole, but when an entire favorite character has to be hauled out by the heels, screeching, and dragging half a dozen good scenes with him.

It is here that these confessions tie up with a general problem as well as with those peculiar to a writer. The decision as to when to quit, as to when one is merely floundering around and causing other people trouble, has to be made frequently in a lifetime. In youth we are taught the rather simple rule never to quit, because we are presumably following programs made by people wiser than ourselves. My own conclusion is that when one has embarked on a course that grows increasingly doubtful and feels the vital forces beginning to be used up, it is best to ask advice, if decent advice is within range. Columbus didn't and Lindbergh couldn't. So my statement at first seems heretical toward the idea that it is pleasantest to live with—the idea of heroism. But I make a sharp division between one's professional life, when, after the period of apprenticeship, not more than 10 per cent of advice is worth a hoot, and one's private and worldly life, when often almost anyone's judgment is better than one's own.

Once, not so long ago, when my work was hampered by so many—false starts that I thought the game was up at last, and when my personal life was even more thoroughly obfuscated, I asked an old Alabama Negro:

"Uncle Bob, when things get so bad that there isn't any way out, what do you do then?"

Homely Advice, But Sound

The heat from the kitchen stove stirred his white sideburns as he warmed himself. If I cynically expected a platitudinous answer, a reflection of something remembered from Uncle Remus, I was disappointed.

"Mr. Fitzgerald," he said, "when things get that—away I wuks."

It was good advice. Work is almost everything. But it would be nice to be able to distinguish useful work from mere labor expended. Perhaps that is part of work itself—to find the difference. Perhaps my frequent, solitary sprints around the track are profitable. Shall I tell you about another one? Very well. You see, I had this hunch—But in counting the pages, I find that my time is up and I must put my book of mistakes away. On the fire? No! I put it weakly back in the drawer. These old mistakes are now only toys—and expensive ones at that—give them a toy's cupboard and then hurry back into the serious business of my profession. Joseph Conrad defined it more clearly, more vividly than any man of our time:

"My task is by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see."

It's not very difficult to run back and start over again—especially in private. What you aim at is to get in a good race or two when the crowd is in the stand.

Editorial (by A. Mizener)

This essay was printed in *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 4, 1933. No doubt it makes Fitzgerald's life—or any author's—sound easier and pleasanter than it was, though the evidence of how hard it was is here, if you look in such things as "I am alone in the privacy of my faded blue room with my sick cat, the bare February branches waving at the window, an ironic paper weight that says Business is Good, a New England conscience—developed in Minnesota—and my greatest problem." That is a very exact description of Fitzgerald in his study at La Paix in the dark thirties, when he headed a letter to Edmund Wilson "La Paix (My God!)."

The writer of this essay is the Fitzgerald who no longer could feel that life might be a thing of sustained joy. He was beginning to tell himself, as he does here, that he must be a tough professional, an attitude toward his work which he never in fact succeeded in establishing completely, though he was going to insist on it more and more, until the insistence reached a climax in "Pasting It Together." But the very irony with which "Afternoon of an Author" reasserts this idea shows the extent to which, even at the end, he had failed to commit himself to it completely. Because he was a writer who had to "start with an emotion—one that's close to me and that I can understand," personal emotional involvement in the experience he wrote about was as important to his work as was his objectivity. The deceptive simplicity with which this essay involves us in his personal struggles as a writer is a modest illustration of what that involvement meant for his work.