

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Language

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Fitzgerald, like Hemingway, was an American writer in a time of angst and disappointment with America and life in general after World War I. Many writers of the early 1920's had expatriated to France and cynically sat and stewed about their art and how awful a place the world was.

Hemingway was lauded for his phenomenal writing and the fact that his style was incredibly simple – some say written at the 4th grade level. But he is appreciated for the powerful messages and feelings behind his simple words. I have only read his *The Sun Also Rises* and believe I made a poor choice. The book was dreadfully boring and virtually without a plot. It was mostly about the social life of expatriated artists living in Paris who did not practice their art. They mainly loafed and slept, gathered together for food, drink and gossip all the while licking their wounds and whining about life as they saw it.

Fitzgerald also wrote about these themes but with an emphasis on poor little rich boys in the age of bootlegging and the Roaring 20's. His level of language was to me higher and more profound than Hemingway's. There is an elegance with a visual component as a way to convey deep melancholy so very well. His *The Great Gatsby* was my choice and it affected me as both a writer and a conscious, feeling human being.

Here is an excerpt from the end of the book, where the narrator of the story speaks about Jay Gatsby's Long Island eastern tip, that I thoroughly enjoyed-

“Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, has once pandered in whispers to the last greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity to wonder.

And as I sat there, brooding on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch our arms out farther ... And one fine morning –

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

Arthur Herman’s masterwork, *How The Scots Invented the Modern World*, is filled with stories and countless names throughout Scottish history and particularly those who arose during the Scottish Enlightenment in the 18th century after the Scottish wars of 1715 and 1745. These men were prominent in all fields of intellectual endeavor and invented an education system which was at the time the best in the world. For a time, an extended time actually spanning much of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Scots leap-frogged over all others in England, France, Germany and the western world in establishing modernity.

A portion of his book is allocated to the men of letters who set the standard for literature for the world to follow. He highlights Sir Walter Scott above these as the last minstrel, a romantic during the Highland revival. He would lead all those to follow with the invention of the historic novel- Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Trollope, Balzac, Hugo, Flaubert and Tolstoy.

Without all the detailed explanations and examples, Scott was complex and multi-dimensional and saw the opposing tensions of the modern world and the divisions in himself as a reflection of the Scottish culture itself. He wrote a friend, “The Scottish mind was made up of poetry and strong common sense, and the very strength of the latter gave perpetuity and luxuriance to the former.”

Herman wrote that the credit for defining the artist as a person who can hold two inconsistent ideas at once goes to F. Scott Fitzgerald. The credit for realizing that that is precisely what all modern men can do – indeed, must be able to do – belongs to Sir Walter Scott.