



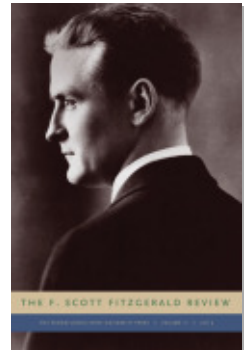
PROJECT MUSE®

Further Adventures of Unreliable Narrators

Don Noble

The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review, Volume 11, 2013, pp. 177-182 (Review)

Published by Penn State University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/524446>

to place Chanler in a similar position in New York. Both a patron and an artist, a musician and a muse, Margaret Terry Chanler's life certainly deserves a story of its own, and Olmstead's easy prose seems to bring her to life again. The writing in this book is lively, and Olmstead paints her historical subjects as complex characters, giving each a personality, even the members of the hopelessly complex Astor clan. Old feuds animate the stories, as well as the romance of Fitzgerald telling Chanler his greatest ambition was "[t]o stay married and in love with Zelda and write the greatest novel in the world" (qtd. in Turnbull 172).

While most readers of Fitzgerald are conversant with the Paris expatriate literary scene of the 1920s, it is easy to forget that similar scenes were active in Rome and New York as well. Olmstead's book reminds us of just how interconnected the leading artists of the time were, and she makes masterful use of history to paint a picture that evokes the same sense as Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011)—that the great literary minds of the late 1800s and early 1900s existed together for a moment in one joyous, glittering party that seemed as if it would last forever and could never happen again.

Works cited

- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli, with the assistance of Judith S. Baughman. New York: Scribner's, 1994. Print.
- . "The Rich Boy." 1926. *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A New Collection*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli. New York: Scribner's, 1989. 317–49. Print.
- . *This Side of Paradise*. 1920. New York: Washington Square Press, 1995. Print.
- Mizener, Arthur. *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951. Print.
- Turnbull, Andrew. *Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Scribner's, 1962. Print.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF UNRELIABLE NARRATORS

Nick and Jake: An Epistolary Novel

by Jonathan Richards and Tad Richards

New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012. 287 pages

Reviewed by Don Noble

There is no doubt that Hemingway and Fitzgerald have made their way back into the world of popular culture. Perhaps the rash of 1920s-related movies and

stage presentations, one-woman shows, etc., can be attributed to the popularity of the Woody Allen film *Midnight in Paris* (2011), which was indeed charming and put Stein, Dali, and, especially, Hemingway and both Fitzgeralds back in the spotlight. The newest version of *The Great Gatsby* starring Leonardo DiCaprio has only increased the public's interest in the Jazz Age.

But that is all about cinema. In fiction, *Nick and Jake* may represent the culmination, indeed the apotheosis, of a recent trend that one might call repurposing or recycling the 1920s, both the historical figures themselves and their fictional creations. There has been, from the start, a subgenre of writing, not just the usual biographies and critical studies (as provocative as some are, such as the psychosexual examinations of Ernest's gender issues), that is concerned with the nature of the porous boundaries between fiction and fact. These commentators have focused on the "real life" identities of the characters in fiction and even the accuracy of the portrayal of those people, forgetting that in works clearly labeled novels, they are, presumably, fictitious.

Many of the reviews of the time discussed *This Side of Paradise* more as a *roman à clef* than as fiction. Which character was based on Edmund Wilson? Which was John Peale Bishop? The discussion surrounding *The Beautiful and Damned* involved especially the extent to which Gloria was, simply, Zelda.

Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1925) generated not just reviews and articles but an entire volume dedicated to sorting out the differences between the real-life characters and the fictional, if there were any. This study, *Hemingway and the Sun Set* by Bertram Sarason (1972), is worth another look in view of the recent mix of fictional and actual people. Sarason identifies the characters in the novel, evaluates Hemingway's accuracy of portrayal, and includes interviews with witnesses and even the subjects themselves, especially Harold Loeb, the model for Robert Cohn, as to how they feel about the way they are depicted. On several occasions Hemingway is criticized for getting it wrong, while on others he is denigrated as just a journalist with little artistic imagination who merely recorded what actually happened.

The interest in genre-mixing, fiction and nonfiction, has taken a different form as of late, and there are several recent cousins to *Nick and Jake*. Perhaps because of the recent success of Paula McLain's novel *The Paris Wife* (2011), a fictionalization of the life of Hadley Richardson Hemingway, Ernest's first, there has been a stream of such novelizations. *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013) by Therese Anne Fowler is, I believe, less successful and here this reader's complaints are (ironically?) much like those of the interviewees in *The Sun Set*: Fowler does not get it right; Hemingway would never have assaulted Zelda

on the sidewalk outside the Dingo bar. But I cannot prove it did not happen. Fowler assumes the novelist's defense: plausibility—it might, within the laws of nature, have happened. Unfortunately, in *Z*, even more than in *The Sun Also Rises*, many readers, knowing little in advance, will believe that they are reading history/biography, not fiction.

There is unlikely to be such confusion with *Daisy Buchanan's Daughter* (2011) by Tom Carson. The protagonist here is Pansy (Pamela), the fictional child of fictional Daisy Buchanan. In this novel, Pamela's father, Tom, was killed in a polo accident and her mother, Daisy, became a suicide. Pamela is a kind of Zelig (again with roots leading to Woody Allen) or a Forrest Gump. Her adventurous life includes time as a war reporter—she landed at Omaha Beach on D-Day and helped liberate Dachau, spent a spell in Hollywood among the stars, was the wife of a U.S. Ambassador for JFK in West Africa, and acted as confidant to LBJ. Pansy is now a woman of 86, waiting on her birthday, June 6, 2006, for a phone call from George W. Bush in the White House, so she can berate him.

Nick and Jake contains all the devices of the above-mentioned works—and more. Fitzgerald and Hemingway and their biological families do not themselves appear as characters; but in this epistolary novel, several of their fictional children do, as do the fictional children of fictional children and characters from other novels, all in a salmagundi with “real” people.

When *Nick and Jake* begins, Nick Carraway from *The Great Gatsby* is a kind of secret agent for the U.S. State Department. He has previously written a novel, *Trimalchio in West Egg* (aficionados will recognize this is as a title Fitzgerald considered for *Gatsby* and discarded), about a gangster named Gatsby he had known on Long Island in the 1920s. Nick explains: “Trimalchio was a character in Petronius's *The Satyricon*, a coarse parvenu who is respected by no one and whose only entree into polite society is his money” (178).

Then Nick co-founded an advertising agency, Taylor & Carraway, in Chicago. He has married, not very happily, a woman named Margery, who may be named for the rejected girlfriend Marjorie in Hemingway's Nick Adams story “The End of Something” (1924) but who makes the kind of disparaging remarks about Nick's manhood one might expect to hear, according to Hemingway in *A Moveable Feast* (1964), from Zelda, about Scott. Jake Barnes writes of Nick: “He's got this idea his wee-wee is too small. Told me the other night when we were tight” (91).

Barnes, the narrator of *The Sun Also Rises*, after his tempestuous summer at the fiesta in Pamplona, has written a memoir about Paris in the 1920s, *A Lost Generation*. Jake is still in Paris, still a journalist, an editor and columnist for the Paris *Herald Tribune*. He writes of sitting in a café “watching some Bryn

Mawr girls get drunk on white wine . . . imagining themselves in the fairy tales their fairy college professors told them” (5). Jake is as hardboiled as ever. The year is 1953 and Senator Joseph McCarthy is riding high in D.C. searching for Communists in government and the army. He dispatches his top aide, Roy Cohn, and David Schine to purge Communist literature from U.S.-sponsored libraries in Europe, where Communists are easy to find, especially in France.

Robert Cohn, the badly behaved oaf of *Sun* (based as we know all too well on Harold Loeb) who was madly in love with Lady Brett Ashley, is here portrayed as the red-baiting uncle of the real Communist-hunter Roy Cohn. Lady Brett herself, much beloved of Jake Barnes, is in India with Alden Carraway, Nick’s son. Lady Brett Ashley, the fictional character from *Sun* based on Lady Duff Dwysden, writes to Jake from New Delhi that she is having an affair with Alden, the fictional son of a fictional father: “I’m afraid he’s quite smitten with me” (128). Alden writes to Brett that he knows she is “pure in her [heart]” (144). But we know she will do the decent thing, catch and release.

Nick himself moves to Paris, partly to avoid dealing with his vicious wife, who is represented in her divorce suit by the law firm of Quayle and Quayle. (Jake recognizes that Nick is launching himself on a “second act.”) Casting about for a subject for another novel, Nick contemplates writing something like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) about his experience in the ad game but decides “I don’t want to turn a microscope on the flea circus of advertising. They can make you itch, but magnified to the hundredth degree, they’re still just performing fleas” (158). Carraway has a young female admirer, Ronnie Gilchrist, an aspiring jazz singer. For a while Ronnie lives in the Martha Washington Hotel in New York, where she is befriended by a young writer, Jackie Susann, who regularly gives her pills to calm her nerves. Jacqueline Susann will go on to fame as the author of *Valley of the Dolls* (1966).

And so it goes.

Nick and Jake is loaded with cameo appearances both by characters from novels like W. Somerset Maugham’s *The Razor’s Edge* (1944) and Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* (1955) and real people like Chuck Berry, Maurice Chevalier, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir—who tries to seduce Nick. In the course of the novel there is a secret U.S.-sponsored coup in Iran, putting the Shah in power, and an attempted coup in France. U.S. government agents are fiddling in Indochina where the French are losing their war. Especially absurd are the transcripts of McCarthy Senate hearings in which perfectly innocent young Ronnie is befuddled and reduced to tears. She knows nothing but gets Nick into trouble anyway.

Nick and Jake is written as a collection of dozens of letters, in the style of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady* (1748), with letterhead from various hotels, hospitals, *Encounter Magazine*, the desk of Allen Dulles, and even the ocean liner *Ile de France*—at sea. There are handwritten notes and a few State Department telegrams, encoded then decoded. (I guess now this would be done by e-mail, allowing for less delay and confusion, with the accompanying consequences.)

At the center of this epistolary maelstrom is Jake himself who, readers will remember, was wounded, “unmanned,” in the Great War. Jake is longtime friends with George, soon to be Christine, Jorgensen, famous as the recipient of the first publicly acknowledged sex-change operation. Jake writes: “What about yours? You won’t be using it” (7). George/Christine’s reply suggests the possibility of a kind of creative, organic “recycling.” Mlle. Jorgensen writes: “You’re more than welcome to mine. It may smell a little of formaldehyde, but . . . I wonder! I’ll put you in touch with Dr. Hamburger” (17).

Those who have not read the novels alluded to here and to whom the McCarthy era and the surrealistic activities of the House Un-American Activities Committee are ancient history will not be in the best position to enjoy the historical and literary references. But for older or knowledgeable readers, *Nick and Jake* is a treasure trove of cleverness, ribald jokes, and irreverent allusions. This is not serious business; it is a long elaborate joke, a kind of literary *Where’s Waldo?* The more you look, the more you find. And if you change only one letter in Nick and one letter in Jake you get a new title: Dick and Jane, a literary primer.

Works cited

- Carson, Tom. *Daisy Buchanan’s Daughter*. Arlington, VA: Paycock, 2011. Print.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Beautiful and Damned*. New York: Scribner’s, 1922. Print.
- . *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner’s, 1925. Print.
- . *This Side of Paradise*. New York: Scribner’s, 1920. Print.
- Fowler, Therese Anne. Z: *A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*. New York: St. Martin’s, 2013. Print.
- The Great Gatsby*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Perf. Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire, and Carey Mulligan. Warner, 2013. Film.
- Greene, Graham. *The Quiet American*. London: Heinemann, 1955. Print.
- Hemingway, Ernest. “The End of Something.” 1924. *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987. 77–82. Print.
- . *A Moveable Feast*. New York: Scribner’s, 1964. Print.
- . *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner’s, 1925. Print.
- McLain, Paula. *The Paris Wife*. New York: Random House, 2011.

Maugham, Somerset. *The Razor's Edge*. London: Heinemann, 1944. Print.
Midnight in Paris. Dir. Woody Allen. Perf. Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams, and Kathy Bates. Mediapro/Gravier, 2011. Film.
Sarason, Bertram, ed. *Hemingway and the Sun Set*. Washington, DC: NCR, 1972. Print.
Susann, Jacqueline. *Valley of the Dolls*. New York: Bernard Geis, 1966. Print.
Wilson, Sloan. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955. Print.

PROOF OF HARD STRIVING

Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald

by Scott Donaldson

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 262 pages

Fitzgerald's Mentors: Edmund Wilson, H. L. Mencken, and Gerald Murphy

by Ronald Berman

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012. 119 pages

Readings of Trauma, Madness, and the Body

by Sarah Wood Anderson

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 210 pages

"F. Scott Fitzgerald"

by Jackson R. Bryer

Oxford Bibliographies

New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Online

Reviewed by Kirk Curnutt

The University of Minnesota Press has reissued Scott Donaldson's *Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald* just in time for its thirtieth anniversary. This unconventional biography originally appeared in 1983 from Congdon & Weed, a boutique imprimatur whose co-founder, publishing fixture Thomas Congdon—attention trivia buffs—was the man responsible for ushering Peter Benchley's *Jaws* (1974) into print. Because Congdon & Weed folded a mere six years after its