The F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers

BY ARTHUR MIZENER '30

The F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers, presented to Princeton University by Fitzgerald's daughter, Mrs. Samuel J. Lanahan, can only be described as magnificent.¹ The more one works with the collection—and the present writer worked with it over a period of five years—the more remarkable it appears in the range of subjects it covers and the value of the evidence it provides. It is undoubtedly one of the finest collections of its sort that will come out of its period.

The collection's remarkable range is due to Fitzgerald's special position in his age. That age was not all "Jazz Age," and in spite of Fitzgerald's having, half-jokingly, invented this name for the twenties, he was himself far from representing merely this element in the period. "He was," as Glenway Wescott put it for his generation, "our darling, our genius, our fool." As such he was, for twenty years, near the heart of the significant life of his times, close to the center of its maximum awareness, living the life that awareness suggested and watching others live it; for at least ten years he was almost the master of what his generation thought to be the great, good place.

The richness of the collection is, however, due to a special quality in Fitzgerald himself. The immediate subject of nearly everything he wrote is some experience of Scott Fitzgerald. This intense interest in Scott Fitzgerald was not, at least in the ordinary sense of the word, narcissistic. About that young man's experience Fitzgerald thought with the cool objectivity of an anthropologist studying the representative life of some young Samoan who was just coming of age. He therefore treated the history of Scott Fitzgerald and the documentary evidences for that history with a scholar's passionate enthusiasm for detail.

Like all antiquarians, he had his storage problems; he was not an orderly man and could have benefited from the advice of an experienced filing clerk. If you file a protested check somewhere in the five or six hundred manuscript pages of a novel, it may take

¹ Scrapbooks, photographs, and certain miscellaneous items have been retained by Mrs. Lanahan. In addition to the nearly complete papers of her father, Mrs. Lanahan has given to Princeton some six hundred volumes from his library, as well as his own copies of his published writings.—Ed.
you a minute or two to lay your hands on it later. The Fitzgerald Papers, as they came to Princeton, resembled that collection of documents on which W. C. Fields was such an expert in one of his early pictures. This confusion was partly at least the result of Fitzgerald’s desire to lose nothing which documented his past. He would not sacrifice material to an orderly system, and the problem of how to file a Newman diploma printed on heavy cardboard and measuring 11 x 14 inches might well have baffled more experienced folders than Fitzgerald. Similar problems existed for locks of Zelda’s hair, Triangle charms, manuscripts torn up (apparently) in moments of frustrated anger, and letters written, like many of Hemingway’s, on yellow scratch paper which, after a year or two, will tear every time you look at it. But if such things were hard to file, they were nonetheless important to preserve, and preserved they were. They were the materials on which Fitzgerald’s sensibility worked; they are now, happily for us, the materials on which our understandings may work for a knowledge, not only of Scott Fitzgerald, but of an age.

Fitzgerald probably wrote more during the twenty years of his literary career than any other writer of equal stature in his time; about how he wrote it we can now know a great deal. The collection includes the autograph manuscripts of his four finished novels and the unfinished Last Tycoon. It also includes the typescripts of all his novels except The Great Gatsby. There are even parts of the typescripts of The Kingdom in the Dark, Fitzgerald’s ill-fated novel about the Middle Ages, which was also to be “the story of Ernest” (it was never completed), and of The Romantic Egotist, which was written partly in college and partly in the army and ultimately revised into This Side of Paradise. Beyond the manuscript stage, the collection contains the elaborately corrected galley proofs of The Great Gatsby (Fitzgerald never saw the page proofs because he was on the Riviera; Ring Lardner corrected them for him) and Tender Is the Night. For these two novels the collection also contains copies of the first editions corrected by Fitzgerald and, in the case of Tender Is the Night, drastically revised. There are also notes and outlines and that odd kind of letter authors seem to write themselves about their own work for Tender Is the Night, The Kingdom in the Dark, and The Last Tycoon—these last run to scores of pages and are full of the marvelous insights with which Fitzgerald filled his notebooks.

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Gustave B. Schurmeier  
PRESENTS  
LAURANCE BOARDMAN  
in  
Scott Fitzgerald's Comedy  
"THE COWARD"  
AT THE  
Y.W.C.A.—August 29, 1913  
Tickets 25c  
ON SALE AT  
Y. W. C. A. and Y. M. C. A.  
Given for the Benefit of the Baby Welfare

The poster for Fitzgerald's Civil War melodrama  
Original in the F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers
The manuscript material for *Tender Is the Night* is particularly wonderful. Fitzgerald began what was eventually to be published as *Tender Is the Night* immediately after the completion of *Gatsby* in 1924; he did not publish it until 1934. Much of the time between he spent on other projects, some of it even on nothing. But he also worked a great deal on the novel, which was in some places rewritten half a dozen times. It began as something called *The Melarky Case* and *The Boy Who Killed His Mother*, changed to *Our Type* and *The World's Fair*, then to *Doctor Diver's Holiday*, and finally to the two published versions of *Tender Is the Night* (the serial and book versions, which differ in some important respects). For all these stages there are autograph manuscript, typescript, revised typescript, more autograph manuscript—it will take a long time and a great deal of knowledge to disentangle it all and to follow the development of Fitzgerald's idea.

What can be learned from studying such a series of manuscripts can be re-enforced by all the knowledge of Fitzgerald's habits of thought and composition available in other forms. All his life, for instance, he kept revealing notebooks, of which Edmund Wilson gave a skillful sampling in *The Crack-up*. These notes are frequently closely related to his short stories, published and unpublished; Fitzgerald wrote 160 short stories, and for nearly every one of them there is some sort of manuscript material available and for a great many of them there are the minute revisions he was accustomed to rush off by airmail to editors, usually after the story had been printed. In many cases there are the autograph manuscripts of the stories as well as typescripts; sometimes there are the preliminary notes and outlines, as in the cases of the Basil Duke Lee and the Josephine series; occasionally there are tantalizing notes for stories that were never written. In addition to all this material, there are tear sheets for most of the stories; Fitzgerald kept them systematically and frequently annotated them, often heavily. When he discovered other writers had not this habit he was scandalized; “My God!” he wrote of Ring Lardner, “he hadn't even saved them—the material of 'How to Write Short Stories' was obtained by photographing old issues of magazines in the public library!”

The collection also contains the typescript and proof sheets of Zelda's novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, and a good many manuscripts of other work of hers. These manuscripts often represent collab-
orations between her and Fitzgerald and so contribute to our knowledge of him as well as of Zelda herself, a deeply fascinating woman without whom, as someone once remarked, there would have been no Jazz Age.

But Fitzgerald was not only a novelist and short-story writer; he was also a movie writer, and the material he saved from his career in Hollywood provides, even by itself, a neat little study in how to become a script writer. There is a fascinating typescript of the unproduced comedy he wrote for Constance Talmadge in 1927 called Lipstick and there are typescripts, often annotated and sometimes providing as many as three or four versions of a single picture, for a whole group of pictures Fitzgerald worked on during his final period in Hollywood from 1937 to 1940: Infidelity, Madame Curie, Raffles, Three Comrades, and others. There is some kind of evidence of the fascination the movies had for him from the beginning of his career, when he tried his hand on This Side of Paradise, to the end, when he did a fine script called Cosmopolitan based on "Babylon Revisited" (there are four versions of Cosmopolitan). The collection also contains a careful story analysis, made in February, 1938, for a picture called Winter Carnival, which has a special interest for anyone who has read Mr. Schulberg's The Disenchanted.

But the most interesting material in the collection is Fitzgerald's correspondence. Although it is evident that he did not manage to keep every single letter he ever received, he made an heroic stab at it, and, as if to compensate us for what letters he lost, he carefully preserved carbons or drafts of most of his own letters from about 1935. The Library has done a good deal to add Fitzgerald letters from other sources for the period before 1935. Among the letters he received are a good many of a random kind. Some of these are amusing enough; there is, for example, the lively correspondence with and about a company which sued Fitzgerald after he had ordered an ambulance to meet him at an airport, not used it, and refused to pay for it; there are the sometimes fascinating and never entirely routine correspondences with magazine editors, agents, headmistresses, landlords (Fitzgerald was uncommonly lucky in finding landlords like Bayard Turnbull in Baltimore and Edward Everett Horton in Los Angeles), and the income tax collectors who, almost to a man, failed to understand that Fitzgerald was an exceptional case. There are Fitzgerald's often
astonishingly painstaking replies to the kind of unknown people who write every author for priestly advice (the spoiled priest in Fitzgerald was frequently touched by these people).

But apart from such random correspondence, the collection contains between seventy-five and a hundred sustained correspondences with important people of Fitzgerald's time (the number depends on how many letters you think it takes to make a sustained correspondence). It contains more than thirty of Mencken's wonderfully amusing little notes—"Dear Fitz:—The colored George Jean Nathan? Then there are two of them. Certainly you have eyes. Can't you detect an octoroon?" It contains twenty-nine Hemingway letters—and Fitzgerald's replies to a number of them—dating from 1925 to 1935. There are similar correspondences with Edmund Wilson '16, John Peale Bishop '17, and a good many others. Few of the letters in these correspondences are mere notes; Fitzgerald seldom treated others as casual acquaintances or let others treat him so. Some of these correspondences may well provide more revealing knowledge of the writers than will be available anywhere else.

The number of specially informative documents in these correspondences can only be suggested here. There is, for instance, a letter Fitzgerald wrote John O'Hara which discusses the problem of how to end a novel. Fitzgerald illustrates his point with a discussion he remembers having had with Hemingway. Edmund Wilson contemplated including this letter in The Crack-up and therefore sent it to Hemingway for comment. Hemingway wrote a marginal note of his recollection of the discussion on the letter and Wilson has then added a note of his own. Or there is the long letter Maxwell Perkins wrote Fitzgerald to describe the meeting between Hemingway and Eastman in Perkins' office just after Eastman had written his famous article for The New Republic in which he advised Hemingway to take the false hair off his chest. Perkins' account is circumstantial and authoritative.

The lines of force among the men who constituted this group of friends and correspondents are various and complex. Perkins edited Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Bishop; Wilson stood in a very special relationship to Fitzgerald, was Hemingway's friend and Bishop's; Bishop sat for the portrait of Tom D'Invilliers in This Side of Paradise, wrote a book with Wilson, knew Hemingway in Paris—one could go on. They were all, moreover, complex people,
so that, as you read through their letters, you get a sharp sense of the almost endless ramifications of feelings that exist among intimate and aware people.

The Fitzgerald Papers, in short, provide us with a wealth of material for a variety of subjects. Here is material for the study of a fine writer who belonged to a crucial period in the history of American culture. Here too is material for a concomitant study of the position of the craftsman and professional writer in the special conditions of the twentieth century: Fitzgerald was, for better and for worse, a professional, a writer by trade, perhaps the only writer of his age who tried to live fully as both a commercial writer and a serious one. The history of his relations with agents, magazines, and their editors has, as they say in the trade, everything. Here too is the evidence for the interlocking friendships of a group of writers who constituted one of the creative centers of American culture in their time. Here, as Doctor Johnson notoriously remarked on a somewhat different kind of occasion, is wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.