

Looking Back at the Jazz Age

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*New Essays on the Literature
and Legacy of an Iconic Decade*

Edited by

Nancy Von Rosk

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Looking Back at the Jazz Age grew out of a panel I organized for the Northeast Modern Language Association Conference in 2013. The overwhelming response to the Call for Papers for this session assured me that there was not only continued interest in the Jazz Age, but that the decade was still a fertile scholarly field with much exciting and important work being done. I would like to thank the original panelists of that session, in particular Elizabeth Decker, who went on to develop her essay and contribute to this volume. I want to thank all of the contributors for their insightful and provocative work as well as their patience through the revision and editing process. I would also like to thank all the students I taught in my Jazz Age course at Mount Saint Mary College, especially James FitzGerald, Alyssa Watkins, Alexandra Lerikos, Tess Allen, Kyle Giovanniello, Danah Edwards, Miles Hurley and Courtney Fahy. It was a pleasure to look back at the Jazz Age with all of you. I am also grateful to Mount Saint Mary College for the course release which helped me to see this project through to its completion, and to the support of Mount Saint Mary College's excellent library staff for all my scholarly projects over the years. The Mount Saint Mary College's S.U.R.E. program (Summer Undergraduate Research Experience) also lent its support. My outstanding student researcher, Amanda Wright was invaluable in tracking down sources, images and assisting with copyediting. Finally, I thank my family, especially Pete and Cameron who kept me moving forward as I took this long look back.

INTRODUCTION

I have an old photograph of my grandmother dated from about 1926, soon after she arrived in New York from Ireland. She is about eighteen. It is a picture that fascinates me. My grandmother is standing next to her sister, my Aunt Winnie, the two of them with carefree, almost flirty smiles, wearing jewelry and shiny stockings, their hair crimped and waved in very short bobs. This was definitely *not* my grandmother of the sensible shoes and matronly wardrobe. Here was a woman I recognized and yet did not recognize. A photograph of an older person when they were young has a kind of mystery, a sense of unreality. There is something familiar in this image of my grandmother—the shape of the nose, the expression of the eyes—and yet it is utterly strange since the young woman in the photograph has not been transformed by time, so she is not really my grandmother at all. Part of my fascination with the Jazz Age is its connection to this photograph, to my grandmother, to my wondering about what she was like before she was my grandmother or before she was my mother's mother, and wondering what it was like to come of age during a time when women had just started to vote, and hemlines went up as inhibitions were let down. This photograph made the Jazz Age familiar, more personal, and, in some ways, I would argue that this describes our contemporary culture's relationship with the Jazz Age.

In her magisterial *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, Ann Douglas helps us understand this relationship:

The modern world as we know it today, all the phenomena that to our minds spell the contemporary, from athletic bodies and sexual freedom for women to airplanes, radios, skyscrapers, chain stores, and the culture of credit, arrived on the scene then, and although these phenomena have been extended and vastly empowered in the decades since, they have not fundamentally altered. Only the computer, developed in the 1940s from the electronic calculator can claim a revolutionary effect comparable to those brought about in the first decades of the twentieth century. (192-93)

If the Jazz Age, as Douglas observes, marks the moment when the contemporary world was born, our fascination with it can be traced to a desire to return to one's origins, to better understand ourselves as well as the magic and mishaps that modernity has wrought upon the world. Indeed, the Jazz Age is so familiar to us—almost too familiar—and this volume seeks to examine that familiarity and our fascination with looking back to this iconic decade. It is about complicating our understanding of

the familiar images we have of this period—of the flapper as well as the writers who were shaping and shaped by Jazz Age culture. This volume then offers an opportunity to reflect on how our present moment is defined by our understanding of the past, and how our understanding of the past is defined by our present moment, how each inhabits the other. It is about our own age as much as it is about the Jazz Age.

This collection also had its beginnings in 2013, the first year I taught a course on the Jazz Age at Mount Saint Mary College. This was also the year that Baz Luhrmann's highly anticipated adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* came to movie theaters along with much hype and fanfare. At this time, the young adult book industry was expanding and books about the Jazz Age seemed to be proliferating alongside all the popular vampire-themed books. *The Flapper Series* by Jillian Larkin, published by Penguin Random House came out with titles such as *Vixen*, *Ingénue* and *Diva* and promotional blurbs like "Jazz. . . Booze . . . Boys . . . It's a dangerous combination" and "Every girl wants what she can't have. Seventeen-year-old Gloria Carmody wants the flapper lifestyle—and the bobbed hair, cigarettes, and music-filled nights that go with it" (*Vixen*). Another series by Anna Godberson called *Bright Young Things*, published by Harper Collins, also promised thrills and romance for its teen audience. Publisher's Weekly proclaimed that Godberson's series prove that "some things—namely the allure of cities, fame, and a good time—never change" (Bright). If one's taste turned more towards mystery, there was also Ellen Mansoor Collier's *Jazz Age Mystery Series*. *Flappers, Flasks and Foul Play: A Jazz Age Mystery* was, according to Goodreads, "one of the Best Beach Reads of 2013," and the latest in the series, *Vamps, Villains and Vaudeville* was published in July, 2015 (Flappers). One did not have to look far to find references to or images of the Jazz Age. From *Downton Abbey* and HBO's *Boardwalk Empire* to Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, the Jazz Age's presence in recent popular culture has been remarkable. Even as I write this introduction, plans are in motion for a new film version of *The Beautiful and the Damned* starring Scarlett Johansson as Zelda Fitzgerald.

This persistent presence of the Jazz Age can be seen not only in recent films, young adult books, and television programs, but also in the many cultural events and experiences that package the Jazz Age for a wide range of twenty-first century customers and consumers. The company *Take Me Out*, founded in 2012, for example, offers patrons an adventure in the form of a Manhattan "Prohibition Tour":

If the glowing nighttime streets of Manhattan inspire thoughts of bygone eras more glamorous and exclusive, then *Take Me Out's* Prohibition Tour

is made for you. On this tour, guests are transported back to the 1920s for one magical night. . . The last decade has seen a revival in the speakeasy scene in Manhattan, and though these clubs no longer operate illegally, they strive to embody the glamour of the Prohibition era, with dim lighting, hidden entrances, velvety interiors and bartenders who know their way around a cocktail shaker. And while nowadays the city's speakeasies might not be in danger of a police raid, they can still be pretty hard to find. Luckily, *Take Me Out* knows exactly which doorbells to press, passwords to whisper, and bookcases to lean on to gain entrance to the most hidden speakeasies in Manhattan! (New York)

If *Take Me Out*'s starting price of \$130.00 is too steep, one might pay *New York Nightlife* \$59.00 for an experience that, while also emphasizing secrecy and adventure, hints at the thrill of danger:

The Big Apple has always had its seamy underbelly and the 1920s were no exception. Prohibition was in full swing and alcohol was for those willing to risk the danger of finding it. Experience some of those secret places with us as we visit the well-preserved bars from the Prohibition era. Your three drinks and a snack are on us but you might want to come ready for trouble. (NY Night)

For those who prefer a less seedy Jazz Age experience, there is the Governors Island *Jazz Age Lawn Party* where you can picnic outside and dance the Charleston all dressed up in your finest vintage clothing. *The Wall Street Journal* describes this event as “the biggest (not to mention the cleanest and most family-oriented) regular event in the ‘Retro Nouveau’ movement” (Jazz). At the Lawn party, its website claims, “guests are invited to discover and experience one of the most colorful and formative epochs in American history” (Jazz).

In addition to the Jazz Age's pervasive presence in recent popular culture, there has been a surge of scholarship and literary work on this “colorful and formative epoch.” The Lost Generation writers, in particular, have been the focus of much of the recent inquiry. Several works on F. Scott Fitzgerald have been published including *American Icon: Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby in Critical and Cultural Context* by Robert Beuka (2011), *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Context* by Bryant Mangum (2013) and John Irwin's biography, *An Almost Theatrical Innocence* (2014). Zelda Fitzgerald also continues to be a source of fascination. In addition to Sally Cline's biography, *Zelda Fitzgerald: Her Voice in Paradise* (2004), several fictional biographies were all published in 2013: Therese Anne Fowler's *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, Clifton Spargo's *Beautiful Fools: The Last Affair of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald*, and Erika Robuck's *Call Me Zelda*. Another biography of Hemingway was published in 2014:

Influencing Hemingway: The People and Places That Shaped His Life and Work by Nancy W. Sindelar. The subject of Hemingway and race has been a fertile field as well: *Hemingway, Race, and Art: Bloodlines and the Color Line* by Marc Dudley and *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance* edited by Gary Edward Holcomb and Charles Scruggs, both published in 2012. Craig Monk's *Writing the Lost Generation: Expatriate Autobiography and American Modernism* (2008), meanwhile, places canonical writers in new contexts by pairing readings of the autobiographical writing of figures like Hemingway and Stein with writing by lesser-known figures such as Sylvia Beach and Harold Stearns. Indeed, many scholars like Monk, have turned their attention to Jazz Age writers who are not as familiar as Hemingway and Fitzgerald. John Dos Passos and Dorothy Parker, for example, have both been the focus of recent critical attention. *John Dos Passos: Biography and Critical Essays* was published in 2010, and Donald Pizer's *John Dos Passos: Toward a Modernist Style* was published in 2013. *The Critical Waltz: Essays on the Writing of Dorothy Parker*, was published in 2005. In addition to this scholarship focusing on Jazz Age authors, there have also been some notable works published on the cultural history of Jazz-Age Manhattan. Carla Kaplan's *Miss Ann in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance* (2013) —which explores a little-known dimension of the Harlem Renaissance—and Donald Miller's *Supreme City: How Jazz Age Manhattan Gave Birth to Modern America* (2014) are recent acclaimed examples.

While this overview confirms that the Jazz Age is a subject of continued interest for contemporary culture—both academic and popular audiences—it also perhaps raises the following question: Do we really need another book on the Jazz Age? Although much has certainly been published over the last fifteen years, it has tended to examine well-known individual authors such as Fitzgerald and Hemingway or taken a broad sweeping view of Harlem or Manhattan. Besides Kaplan's book and Monk's book, there has been little in between a focused attention on a single writer or a historical overview of the decade, nor has there been much critical reflection on the phenomenon of the early twenty first century's preoccupation with the Jazz Age. This volume then hopes to begin filling in these gaps.

The volume is organized into three sections to highlight the conversation between the various chapters. The first three chapters are grouped under *The Origins and Evolution of the Flapper*, and offer some provocative new readings of the flapper and her most famous incarnation, Zelda Fitzgerald. The next four chapters are grouped around the theme of

Urban Geography, Artistic Experimentation and Literary Art; these readings of Fannie Hurst, John Dos Passos and Langston Hughes explore the intersections between city spaces (both real and imagined) and literary, visual and musical art forms. The final section entitled *The Jazz Age in Our Time* focuses on the cinematic images of the Jazz Age, and in particular, the cultural meanings and cultural work of the Jazz Age in our own 21st century, a time when the Jazz Age was “in vogue,” to borrow a phrase from Langston Hughes. This volume then aims to not only deepen our understanding of this iconic period, but to also better understand its persistent presence “in our time.”

The Origins and Evolution of the Flapper

Perhaps no other figure epitomizes the Jazz Age as much as the flapper. Linda Simon complicates our understanding of this all too familiar icon by charting the flapper’s history and evolution in her chapter “Flappers before Fitzgerald.” Arguing that much historical scholarship mistakenly depicts the flapper as an invention of the 1920s, Simon posits that, “the flapper was not a result of post-war euphoria, nor the advent of jazz, nor Fitzgerald’s seductive creation; instead, she was a female type reflecting deep cultural anxieties about adolescent girls prevalent around the turn of the 20th century.” In particular, Simon focuses on G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence*, published in 1904 and the influence and popularity of the stage productions of *Peter Pan* in London and New York in 1904 and 1905. Her analysis of Hall’s influential work reveals his paradoxical ideas about women’s sexuality as well as the cultural anxiety surrounding this newly identified transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. This anxiety she suggests is also given form through the “quintessential adolescent” of the time: Peter Pan, “the boy who refused to grow up, and who was always played by an adult woman who could pass for a male adolescent.” Simon teases out this intense interest and anxiety towards adolescence and female sexuality in not only Hall’s psychological theories and the theatrical productions of *Peter Pan*, but also in other cultural artifacts: newspapers, magazine articles and fiction for girls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ultimately, Simon’s chapter helps us see this familiar Jazz Age icon in a new way by emphasizing her connection to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as opposed to her distinctive break from this earlier time.

While the flapper may be the Jazz Age’s most famous icon, Zelda Fitzgerald is arguably the Jazz Age’s most famous flapper. Situating her essay within the recent renewed interest in Zelda Fitzgerald’s life and

work, Heather Salter Dromm believes that one of the reasons readers find the subject of Zelda Fitzgerald so fascinating is “their wish to rescue her from being misunderstood.” There is also, she writes, “the desire to understand Zelda’s place within the Jazz Age, a complex time period for women, coming after the suffragettes and the winning of the vote yet well before the second wave of feminists.” She suggests that we are still not sure whether we should admire Zelda for being a feminist role model or condemn her for not being one. Dromm places the question, “Who is the authentic Zelda Fitzgerald?” at the forefront of her chapter, and explores whether Zelda is an authentic flapper, since “her husband placed her in this role, and the Jazz Age public expected her to be brazen, adventurous, and extravagant.” Using Sartrean existentialism, Dromm examines the role of authenticity and freedom in Zelda Fitzgerald’s novel, *Save Me the Waltz* “in order to explore what—if anything—Zelda and her fictional self, Alabama Knight, accomplish regarding authenticity.” Reading the novel within the biographical contexts of the Fitzgeralds’ marriage, Zelda’s medical treatment and her relationships with women, Dromm looks at the similarities between Zelda and her fictional heroine, Alabama Knight through a philosophical as well as a queer theory lens to show how Zelda reclaims herself, arguing that *Save Me the Waltz* is “an authentic existential quest.”

Siobhan Lyons also explores the Jazz Age “as a point of existential enquiry,” and contemporary culture’s wish to rescue Zelda from being misunderstood. She argues that contemporary culture has been “unable to relinquish the ghosts of the Jazz Age.” Lyons looks at the continued fascination with the Fitzgeralds’ marriage and, in particular, Zelda’s flapper image in two recent films: *Midnight in Paris* and *The Great Gatsby*. Using Arjun Appadurai’s concept of “nostalgia without memory” to structure her analysis, Lyons explains how “we witness the idealization of the past without an actual lived experience,” a past that is linked to the media and the technologies of the twenty first century, and “facilitates a romanticisation of past times.” Illustrating Appadurai’s observations that society now relies on a system of “nostalgia without memory,” she shows how contemporary artists and readers use both F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald as the Jazz Age’s tragic spokespersons. Focusing in particular on the conflicted view of Zelda’s “flapper image,” and how this correlates to the Jazz Age’s conflicted attitudes towards women, she demonstrates how contemporary depictions seem to be forgiving of Scott and harsher towards Zelda. The intrigue that still surrounds the couple she believes provides a space in which to elaborate and exaggerate details for the

purposes of romanticising history, highlighting contemporary culture's reliance on "nostalgia without memory."

Urban Geography, Literary Form and Artistic Experimentation

In addition to the changing role of women, perhaps the most iconic cultural transformation that took place during the Jazz Age was the shift from a rural or small town culture to an urban industrial one. While 1920 is the year women won the right to vote in the United States, it is also the year that "the census marked the first time in which over 50 percent of the U.S. population was defined as urban" (Urban). Modernity is tied to an urban lifestyle as well as to women's freedom, and as the sleek machine-inspired designs of Art Deco emphasize, the Jazz Age was an urban age. The next group of essays examine how urban experience and urban living shape literary art and encourage a kind of cross-disciplinary discussion among artists of various fields and mediums. How, for example, might the musician and the poet or the painter and the novelist shape and influence each other's work? Not only do various arts come together and mingle in urban spaces, but the city itself— visual experiences of the city as well as the sounds of the city— shapes literary form and content. Each of these chapters demonstrates how the city is a space where not only diverse populations converge, creating a dynamic urban culture, but varied artistic styles and aesthetic forms are also brought together, expanding boundaries and creating new possibilities for art.

Elizabeth Decker, in her chapter "Fannie Hurst's Jazz Age Experimentation in *Lummox*," argues that popular writer Fannie Hurst, who has been overlooked by critics and is little-known today deserves to be recognized for her narrative experimentation in her novel *Lummox* (1923). Decker uncovers a "distinct crossover between Hurst's experiences living in New York's Lower East Side and her artistic vision for *Lummox*." Drawing on Rachel Farebrother's *The Collage Aesthetic in The Harlem Renaissance*, Decker examines how Hurst appropriates collage style by using such experimental techniques as repetition and genre switching. Collage with its capacity to shock and defamiliarize, Decker emphasizes, is an important political tool for Hurst, and Hurst's artistic experiment actually *strengthens* the political activism of her work by forcing her readers to continually recontextualize and re-evaluate their understanding of the Lower East Side immigrant experience. In her intricate close reading, Decker illuminates the many ways Hurst's novel defies genre and the traditional categories of "realism" and "modernism,"

and she shows how Hurst's writing moves well beyond the "sentimental sob sister novel" for which she is too often remembered. To truly rediscover Hurst, Decker insists that we must attend to her aesthetics and experimentation, and acknowledge that *Lummo*x is a modernist work that puts Hurst in the company of other modernist writers like Jean Toomer and John Dos Passos.

Though certainly praised by critics and more well-known than Fannie Hurst, John Dos Passos, one could argue, has not had his critical due either. He certainly has had nowhere near the recognition of his fellow Lost Generation writers Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and for many years, little was published on him.¹ There is now, however, renewed critical interest in his work, and Zach Tavlin's and Navid Ebrahimzadeh's essay "Howells, Dos Passos and the Evolution of Urban Mapping" contributes to this growing body of scholarship.² Similar to Decker's investigation of Hurst, Tavlin and Ebrahimzadeh elucidate the transition from realism to modernism and the impact of urban space on artistic experimentation. Their essay pairs Dos Passos, a quintessential modernist with Howells, the consummate realist to trace the development of New York urban fiction in the midst of rapid urbanization. They highlight the common goals of

¹ Andrew Root, one of the earlier scholars to address this neglect, writes in 1974: "While time has dealt favorably with Faulkner, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, its verdict on Dos Passos has been harsher." Root notes that even though in the late 1920s and 1930s, Dos Passos's "status was unquestioned," he "is a Modern American author about whom for a considerable period of time, no one—or almost no one—was prepared to write." Root observes this may be because "Dos Passos's fiction may have seemed to lie outside of the major concerns of American novel criticism of the nineteen forties, fifties and sixties," and Dos Passos's leftist leanings probably played a role as well. As Root puts it, "In the period of the Cold War, literary radicalism was as unpopular as radicalism of every other kind. What had seemed so exciting in Does Passos in the twenties and thirties must now have seemed more than a trifle suspect." See *Dos Passos: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Linda Wagner-Martin's *Dos Passos: Artist as American* and Townsend Ludington's *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey* are other notable works from this time.

² While Root described his collection of Dos Passos criticism as a "modest critical harvest" rather than a "bumper crop," Dos Passos scholarship would eventually begin to flourish, leading Douglas Brinkley to declare in *The New York Times* in 2003 that Dos Passos's reputation is "on the rise" after years of neglect. See "A Second Act for Dos Passos And His Panoramic Writings." See also Lisa Nanney's *John Dos Passos Revisited*, Virginia Carr's *Dos Passos: A Life*, Donald Pizer's *Dos Passos: Toward a Modernist Style*, and Maria Zina Goncalves de Abreu's and Bernardo Guido de Vasconcelos's *John Dos Passos: Biography and Critical Essays* for important examples of this recent critical attention.

Howells and Dos Passos, as both *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and *Manhattan Transfer* are “literary responses to the psychological shocks of the city” and both works struggle to map a city that is rapidly changing around them. Reading these works within the context of the historical development of urban transport systems, their analysis highlights that while Howells shows us “the city from above, from the windows of its elevated trains, Dos Passos writes it from below, from the underground of its developing subway system.” Emphasizing the speed as well as the blind spots of the new urban spaces of Jazz Age New York, Dos Passos shows us the difficulty or impossibility of mapping or even understanding the new metropolis. Indeed, *Manhattan Transfer*’s depiction of city life, they argue, anticipates Frederic Jameson’s concept of “cognitive mapping,” the process by which we learn how to “grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act under post-industrial or informational capital.”

Jean Alger also investigates how urban space is mapped, imagined and experienced in her chapter “Urban Ethnography and Migration in the Work of Langston Hughes.” Alger argues for an “ethnographic” and “geographical” approach to Hughes whose work demonstrates a “pattern of departure and return” as well as “a deep understanding of place in the formation of cultural and individual identities.” For Hughes, Alger observes, Harlem is not necessarily a black haven, but rather a “transitory place” where historical, spatial, and racial realities combine and often clash. Situating her reading of Hughes within the historical framework of The Great Migration and the theoretical work of geographer Edward W. Soja, Alger presents a compelling reading of Hughes. As Soja’s theories highlight, geographical spaces not only exist physically, but also as constructs of the individual and social imagination, and in addition to the binary of the perceived (what one sees) and conceived space (what one imagines), Soja postulates a “third space,” a real and imagined space that is “filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood.” In her reading of *The Weary Blues* and excerpts from *The Big Sea* and *The Ways of Whitefolks*, Alger traces how in so much of Hughes’s work from the 1920s and 1930s, images of the rural South and images of Africa combine with his image of urban New York to form a kind of thirdspace that allows him to examine black experience from multiple viewpoints, complicating Harlem’s “perceived” and “conceived place” in the history of the Harlem Renaissance.

Annika Eisenberg also focuses on the legacy of Langston Hughes, and she credits Hughes as the “founding father of a productive entanglement”

of jazz, poetry, and urban space in her chapter “Traffic of Music on Spring Street: Poetic Soundscapes of New York City in Jazz Poetry.” While Alger focuses on the meaning of Harlem for black identity in Hughes’s work, Eisenberg focuses on the technical aspects of Hughes’s language, his poetic form and the “deep structures” of his jazz poetry. She traces jazz poetry set in New York City through different decades and global contexts, to show that Hughes was a “trailblazer in not only establishing jazz and blues as poetic forms, but also as a new aesthetic for urbanity.” In her analysis of the sounds, noises and musical structures of the poetry, Eisenberg illuminates how the music of jazz crosses over into literary art. Her close readings of Hughes and other jazz poets—including Beat poet David Henderson and contemporary Native American poet, Joy Harjo—help the reader understand the crossover between music and poetry, and how the two arts may be deeply intertwined. She also reveals how both jazz poetry and jazz music incorporate the sounds and rhythms of the city itself, transforming as she puts it, “chaotic urban experience into a meaningful aesthetic.” Ultimately, this chapter emphasizes that jazz music and jazz poetry imagine an urban experience notably different from that imagined by Dos Passos, one that is “aligned with emancipation and expression.”

The Jazz Age in Our Time

The final section of the volume, echoing Hemingway’s classic *Jazz Age* text explores what the Jazz Age has meant in the cultural imagination and what it continues to mean in the early 21st century, nearly a hundred years on. What cultural work is being done in our revisions, in our endless return? How are we to understand our “nostalgia without memory” for this iconic decade? These final chapters with their emphasis on contemporary popular culture focus specifically on how the Jazz Age has been re-imagined in film.

In her chapter, “Re-Imagining the Jazz Age: Nightclubs, Speakeasies and Shady Crime in Jazz Film Noir Musical Performances,” film historian Sheri Chinen Biesen examines the Jazz Age’s significance for the history of cinema. Her sweeping survey of twentieth and twenty-first century film persuasively demonstrates what Lyons had said earlier about contemporary culture: we are unable to “relinquish” the ghosts of the Jazz Age. Biesen dramatizes how the Jazz Age lives on in a seemingly endless array of visions and revisions. Guiding the reader through the Hollywood Code system and its impact on film making and film history, Biesen argues that filmmakers “cleverly used jazz as a cinematic device” to evoke

“salacious, taboo or censorable content that could not be directly shown.” Atmospheric ‘Jazz Age’ settings that appeared in silent 1920s films, reappear in 1930s gangster pictures which evolve into 1940s and 1950s jazz musical film noir. The moody noir milieu, as Biesen demonstrates, has been brought to life again in so many contemporary productions such as *The Aviator* and *Downton Abbey*, reinforcing how filmmakers construct a Jazz Age that is deeply intertwined with the history of cinema as well as with their own cultural moment.

Roberta Fabbri Viscardi’s essay, “The American Dream in Baz Luhrmann’s *The Great Gatsby*,” also examines how filmmakers’ constructions of the Jazz Age are deeply intertwined with their own cultural moment. For Luhrmann, Viscardi argues, 1920s hedonism is “revisited as an opportunity to critically analyze the reification of social relations in both the Jazz Age and the present American scene right after the 2008 crash.” As she points out, Luhrmann’s version of Fitzgerald’s novel is – in Luhrmann’s own words – a conscious struggle to “reveal the book in this moment, in this time.” After focusing on how the failure of the American Dream is intertwined with the “reification of social relations” in Fitzgerald’s novel, Viscardi develops an insightful analysis of Luhrmann’s film, attending to its sound track, its camera angles and movement, as well as its recurrent motifs and imagery to demonstrate how, in bringing Fitzgerald’s novel to the 21st century, Luhrmann highlights capitalism’s relationship to race and class struggle. This is evident in his choice of hip hop, “a former marginalized genre” as a “substitute for jazz.” She also points out, for example, that the film gives us “clear visual dialogue between the imagery of the post-party decadence and the Valley of Ashes where the majority of black male workers calls our attention.” Visually connecting these separate settings, Viscardi observes, encourages viewers “to watch scenes from the perspective of the marginalized, as opposed to being limited to the perspective of Nick Carraway,” thus illuminating the specific racial/class divide corrupting America’s dream more emphatically than Fitzgerald’s novel does or perhaps could in 1920s America.

Finally, in his chapter, “Woody Allen’s Dreamwork in *Midnight in Paris*,” Marcos Soares also analyzes a recent popular film within the context of economic crises. In particular, Soares focuses on the role of nostalgia to highlight how Allen’s film illustrates Frederic Jameson’s observation of “the disappearance of the historical referent” in postmodernism. As Soares points out, postmodern nostalgia insists on the opposition of Europe and America where Europe is viewed as “the proper soil” for the artist since America is an “unashamedly commercial culture.”

While the recent European crises demonstrates the falseness of this opposition, it nevertheless persists in the nostalgia of Gil Pender, the film's romantic hero. Soares argues that Allen sets up Gil as an unreliable narrator whose daydreams are "narcissist projections," and that the film's narrative frame uses Freud's dream-work, especially the strategies of repression, displacement and condensation, to "structure Gil's subjective life." The Paris we see (through Gil's vision) is at odds with the "images of burning cars and the loud protests of students, immigrants, and strikers" that have filled the recent news. Ultimately, Gil's postmodern nostalgia prevents him from seeing the complexity of Europe as well as his own relationship to the capitalist commercial culture he so disdains.

Soares then, along with Biesen, Viscardi and Lyons, helps to elucidate how contemporary depictions of the Jazz Age are crucial in constructing contemporary culture and postmodern identity. Indeed, each of the essays in this collection demonstrates—to quote from Siobhan Lyons—that "contemporary culture is unable to relinquish the ghosts of the Jazz Age." Whether it be in our imaginative reconstructions of this period, our investigations into the anxiety surrounding gender roles or our desire to better understand the relationship between urbanity, identity, perception and artistic experimentation, the Jazz Age beckons. As we move beyond postmodernism and continue to grapple with the legacy of modernity, we may be looking back at the Jazz Age for some time to come.

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I.

THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF THE FLAPPER

FLAPPERS BEFORE FITZGERALD

LINDA SIMON

The playful flapper here we see,
The fairest of the fair.
She's not what Grandma used to be—
You might say, *au contraire*.
Her girlish ways may make a stir,
Her manner cause a scene,
But there's no more harm in her
Than in a submarine.
She nightly knocks for many a goal
The usual dancing men.
Her speed is great, but her control
Is something else again.
All spotlights focus on her pranks.
All tongues her prowess herald.
For which she may well render thanks
to God and Scott Fitzgerald.
Her golden rule is plain enough—
Just get them young and treat them rough.
(Parker 292-93)

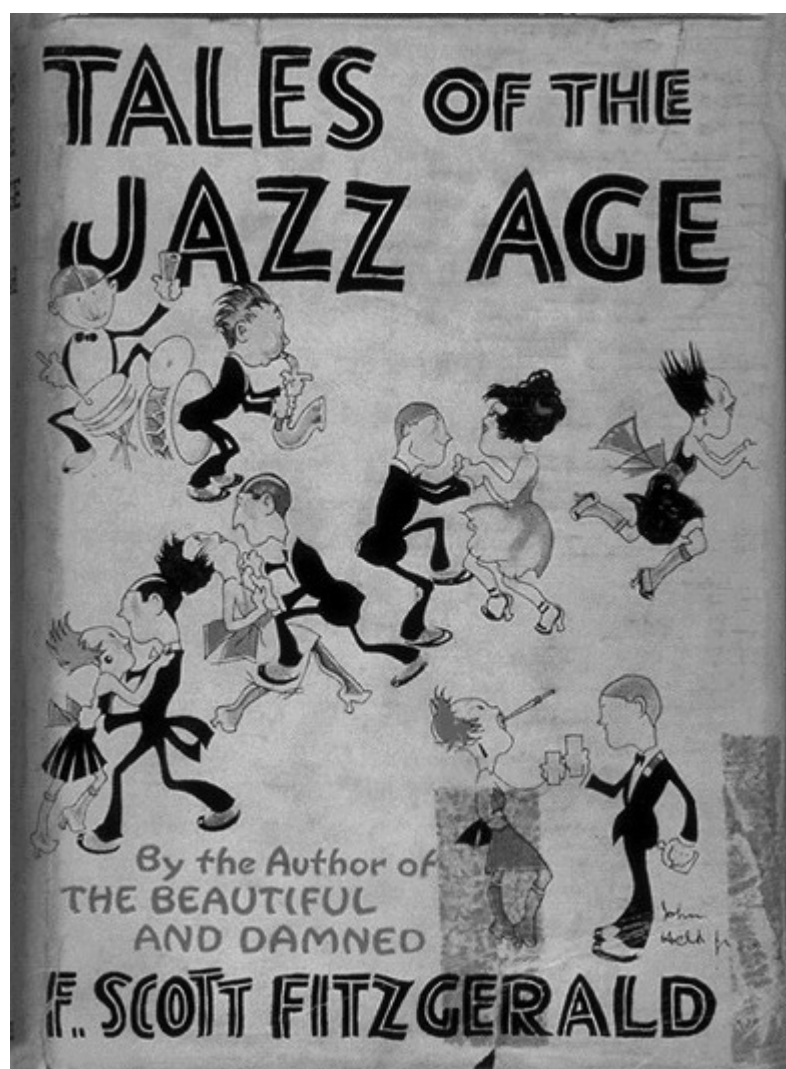
Dorothy Parker's verse about the flapper reflects the popular belief—in Parker's time and ours—that the flapper was invented in, and by, the Jazz Age. It was Fitzgerald, after all, whose short stories publicized and romanticized boyishly slim young women in short skirts and slinky gowns, drinking, smoking, and falling into a parade of love affairs. He modeled his flappers, he said, on his wife, Zelda. (illus. 1 and 2)

Although much scholarship reiterates this history, in reality, the term “flapper” was in use more than a decade earlier, referring to girls between the ages of 12 and 16. From the early 20th century until the end of the First World War, the flapper referred to a popular female role in theater and vaudeville: a slender, playful, coquettish young woman who engaged in comic escapades. By the 1920s, however, the “flapper” would become an epithet for any woman, of any age, who adopted boyish style of clothing and hair, and displayed youthful exuberance, flirtatiousness, impetuous behavior, and unself-conscious sexuality: in short, a woman of any age

who acted like an adolescent. She was the new woman, but not as new as some historians have maintained. The flapper was not a result of post-war euphoria, nor the advent of jazz, nor Fitzgerald's seductive creation; instead, she was a female type reflecting deep cultural anxieties about adolescent girls prevalent around the turn of the 20th century.

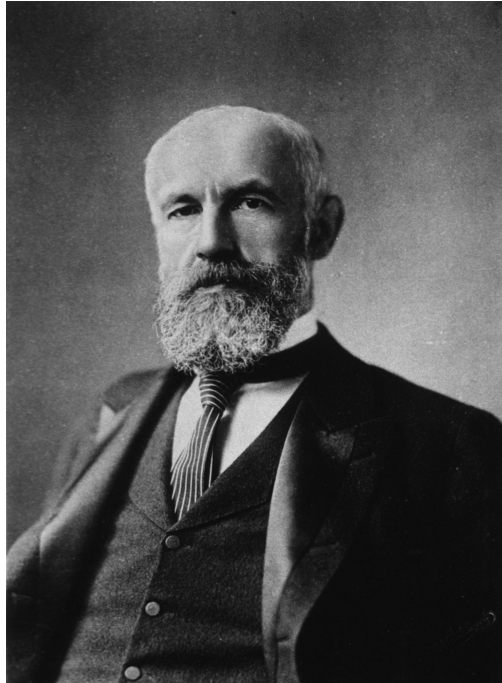


Illus.1. Zelda Sayre, circa 1919



Illus. 2 John Held, Cover of 1922 Edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald's book *Tales of the Jazz Age*

G. Stanley Hall's Adolescence



Illus. 3. G. Stanley Hall, circa 1910

An intense interest in adolescence arose in Great Britain and America in the early 1900s, notably with two concurrent events: the acclaimed stage production of *Peter Pan* in London and New York in 1904 and 1905; and the publication of psychologist and Clark University president G. Stanley Hall's controversial *Adolescence, Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* in 1904. Both revealed attitudes about female sexuality in a newly identified transitional stage, the years between childhood and adulthood. Girls in those years, Hall asserted, posed "the most intricate and baffling problem perhaps that science has ever yet attacked" (Hall "Budding" 47): How did these girls think? What did they want? Hall's exploration of these questions highlights a desire among his contemporaries to assuage anxiety surrounding female biology and women's roles in society.