The Great Gatsby and its 1925 Contemporaries

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Abstract
ABSTRACT This study focuses on twenty-one particular texts published in 1925 as contemporaries of The Great Gatsby. The manuscript is divided into four categories—The Impressionists, The Experimentalists, The Realists, and The Independents. Among
The Impressionists are F. Scott Fitzgerald himself, Willa Cather (The Professor’s House), Sherwood Anderson (Dark Laughter), William Carlos Williams (In the American Grain), Elinor Wylie (The Venetian Glass Nephew), John Dos Passos (Manhattan Transfer), and William Faulkner (New Orleans Sketches). The Experimentalists are Gertrude Stein (The Making of Americans), E. E. Cummings (& aka “Poems 48-96”), Ezra Pound (A Draft of XVI Cantos), T. S. Eliot (“The Hollow Men”), Laura Riding (“Summary for Alastor”), and John Erskine (The Private Life of Helen of Troy). The Realists are Theodore Dreiser (An American Tragedy), Edith Wharton (The Mother’s Recompense), Upton Sinclair (Mammonart), Ellen Glasgow (Barren Ground), Sinclair Lewis (Arrowsmith), James Boyd (Drums), and Ernest Hemingway (In Our Time). The Independents are Archibald MacLeish (The Pot of Earth) and Robert Penn Warren (“To a Face in a Crowd”). Although these twenty-two texts may in some cases represent literary fragmentations, each in its own way also represents a coherent response to the spirit of the times that is in one way or another cognate to The Great Gatsby. The fact that all these works appeared the same year is special because the authors, if not already famous, would become famous, and their works were or would come to represent classic American literature around the world. The twenty-two authors either knew each other personally or knew each other’s works. Naturally, they were also influenced by writings of international authors and philosophers. The greatest common elements among the poets and fiction writers are their uninhibited interest in sex, an absorbing cynicism about life, and the frequent portrayal of disintegration of the family, a trope for what had happened to the countries and to the “family of nations” that experienced the Great War. In 1925, it would seem, Fitzgerald and many of his writing peers—some even considered his betters—channeled a major spirit of the times, and Fitzgerald did it more successfully than almost anyone.

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