



F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

HOW THE HIGH PRIEST OF THE JAZZ AGE WROTE THE GOSPEL OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

BECOMING GATSBY

Max von Gerlach and Meyer Wolfshiem

*A Look at the Real People Behind the Real Great
Gatsby*

Part I

Max von Gerlach

“ENROUTE FROM THE COAST. HERE FOR A FEW DAYS BUSINESS.
HOW ARE YOU AND THE FAMILY, OLD SPORT”

In *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work: The Making of 'The Great Gatsby'*, Horst Kruse, Professor Emeritus of English and American Literature at the University of Münster, puts together a very persuasive argument that the character of Jay Gatsby is based, at least in part, on a handsome gentleman bootlegger who went by the name Max von Gerlach, a shady acquaintance of Fitzgerald who the author had become acquainted with in Great Neck. Max certainly might account for the character's 'racier' side — the elegant young roughneck with the preposterous English mannerisms whose links to organised crime make him the subject of a bristling spark-house of rumours and innuendo — but he's not the only source for Gatsby by any means.

The situation that we are faced with looks a little like this; on the one hand we have the munificent host or 'party Gatsby' based partly around Theodore Dreiser's literary portrait of the disgraced 'Skyrocket millionaire' Joseph G. Robin (and perhaps even a bit of Scott's old friend, Shane Leslie, the dreamer of Old England weaving against the "shadowed tapestries of the past"), and on the other we have the dubious hoodlum dandy inspired by Max von Gerlach — the Mr Hyde to Robin's Dr Jekyll. Fitzgerald biographer Matthew Bruccoli took a slightly different view. He believed that Jay Gatsby was not a biological creature, but was created from a variety of sources, not least the author himself. When news first broke about Gerlach in the early 2000s, Bruccoli had contributed what was perhaps the wisest of all guesses, that Jay was none other than Scott himself: *"all of Fitzgerald's heroes turn into Fitzgerald before the novel is over."*¹ Bruccoli's assessment had been based on something that Scott had said in a letter to John Peale Bishop: Gatsby had "started as one man I knew and then changed

¹ 'PI searches for Real-Life Gatsby' Alton Telegraph, October 1st, 2002, p.B6. Matthew J. Bruccoli initially worked with Private Investigator Howard G. Comen in solving the mystery.

into myself.” The “amalgam”, Scott continues, had never been quite complete, and as a result the novel’s hero was “blurred and patchy.”² Just as the author splits the southern bays of Long Island into East Egg and West Egg, he also splits Gatsby into two very distinct people: there’s a ‘good’ Gatsby and there’s a ‘bad’ Gatsby. One of them is noble and giving, and the other is rough, tough and dangerous to know. If you’ve ever seen that other fantasy island drama, *The Tempest*, you might say that he’s part-Caliban, part-Ariel, a spirit trapped in a material world.

The idea of a dual personality would be explored more fully in Scott’s last completed novel, *Tender is the Night*, not only in terms of the actual psychological disturbances that some of its characters suffer but also in the way the book’s hero and heroine, Dick and Nicole Diver are presented in the novel as a ‘split personality’ — an idea that possibly harked back to Zelda’s own idea that she and Scott were psychic twins. To get a handle on all of this however, there is a little bit of work to do and a few more ciphers to resolve. It’s time to approach the *Gatsby* novel, not as a dreamy and iconic staple of American literature, but as a puzzle to solve, or a code to crack.



Max von Gerlach as he appears in a Police Surveillance image in 1915

² ‘Dear John, August 9’, 1925’, F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Life in Letters*, Brucoli, pp.125-126

Rum-runner or bootlegger?

Professor Kruse is the first to point out that there is no absolutely no evidence to suggest that Gerlach was ever a successful millionaire bootlegger as several biographers have claimed in the past.³ Instead, Kruse makes a reasonable case for suggesting that Fitzgerald may have drawn his inspiration from some other aspect of Gerlach's character or adventures, not least his skills as 'yachtsman', a common euphemism at the time for rum-runners operating incognito off South Bay and the Long Island Sound.⁴ Whilst I haven't been able to find an exact match for bootleggers of that name, I did come across a story from December 1919. This classic gum-shoe story has William Gerlach and his brother George being busted by agents acting on behalf of the Inland Revenue at Huntington Station on Long Island's North Shore. During the investigation that followed it was learned that William Gerlach kept a hotel on New York Avenue south of the Long Island Railroad Station, just a half hour walk from millionaire Otto Kahn's Gatsby-esque mansion, Oheka Castle. William's brother George kept another hotel at Oyster Bay. A tap was kept on their phones and a raid was carried out, but compared with the busts of Prohibition chief, Senator William C. McConnell and Secret Service chief, Matthew F. Griffin in Philadelphia two years later, it was comparatively small change.⁵ The bootlegging gangs at Oyster Bay hit the headlines again in February 1927 when the schooner the William T. Bell ran aground on the beach at Oak Neck Point during a storm. After being rescued, the crew of the schooner disappeared. Police investigating the abandoned vessel discovered a whisky galore hoard of bootleg liquor with a street value of over half a million dollars. If you were looking for a credible place to set the story of a liquor tycoon, then there was probably no place better suited than Long Island's swashbuckling North Shore, which in Scott's imagination at least must have occupied the perilous knife-edge of romance.

³ *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work: The Making of The Great Gatsby*, Horst H. Kruse, University of Alabama Press, 2014, p.24

⁴ *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, Matthew J. Bruccoli, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981, p.183

⁵ 'Contraband Liquor Seize', *Riverhead County Review*, December 19, 1919, p.2

That Gerlach and Scott knew each other is not in doubt. We have confirmation of this from Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda, and a mysterious postcard that the author appears to have received from Gerlach in the summer of 1923. Over a torn-out newspaper cutting of Scott, his wife and their 18-month old daughter Frances, Gerlach had scrawled, "*Enroute from the coast. Here for a few days business. How are you and the family, Old Sport.*"⁶ The newspaper caption beneath it read ominously, "*The Beautiful and Damned*". Scott had arrived on Long Island the previous October and the picture showed a smiling Scott and his wife reclining on the lawn of their home with the sweetly bonneted infant between them. In spite of the fairly chipper, Gatsby-esque term of endearment Gerlach had tagged on at the end of his message, the final result is, to my mind at least, a little sinister. Scribbling a message onto a sheet of notepaper or a postcard to let him know he was back in town was one thing, but why had Max gone to all that trouble of tearing out an old newspaper-clipping of Scott and his family when any old scrap of paper would have sufficed? What was the meaning in sending the picture? . It may be worth pointing out that Gerlach's arrival coincided with the rolling out of tougher federal measures to crush out the rum running trade on Long Island. Reports in the press reveal that an increasing number of pistol-fights between bootleggers and the sheriff's office had been breaking out in Suffolk County. On one occasion eight deputies had come under fire from fifty to sixty gunmen overseeing the transport of over 600 cases of liquor to New York.⁷

The gesture is made all the more sinister when you learn that a teenage Max von Gerlach, at that time known as Max Stork, had shot dead his eleven month-old brother when the family was growing up in Yonkers — an event overlooked by Kruse. A local newspaper report told a bizarre and tragic tale; the 15 year old

⁶ *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work: The Making of The Great Gatsby*, Horst H. Kruse, University of Alabama Press, 2014, p.17; F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby: a Literary Reference*, Matthew J. Bruccoli, Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2002, pp.21-22. The picture that accompanies the text appears to have been owned by 'Fotograms News Photo Service Inc' (381 Fourth Avenue, New York), an agency supplying press images for titles like the Washington Times, New York Tribune, New York Herald and Boston Post, during the period 1920-1925. It's not clear whether Gerlach mailed the cutting to Scott or just popped it through the letterbox of his house. It was kept in Scott's scrapbook.

⁷ 'Rum Rummors Face Crushing Attacks, Washington D.C, Evening Star, June 20, 1923, p.1

messenger boy had been playing with his stepfather's revolver when the gun had gone off accidentally at their 144 Herriot Street address. The child had been in its cot asleep. The parents and the two men who had raced to the scene, Doctors Shroonover and Kroner had failed to report it for two days hoping the baby would survive its initial wounds. It was an extraordinary story. According to reports in the local press, Max's mother Elizabeth had asked him to fetch some buttons from her sewing box in her bedroom. Max is said to have opened the bureau drawer, spotted the revolver and taken it out. Sitting at his mother's dressing table, the boy says he looked into the mirror and saw the infant lying in the crib. He turned around and not knowing the pistol was loaded, pointed it at the head of the sleeping child and pulled the trigger. The child was said to have screamed and the boy blacked out. The young Max was arrested and the boy was allowed to go home, pending an inquest. ⁸



The curious news clipping that Gerlach used to leave a message for Scott in July 1923

⁸ 'Shot Baby Brother, Max Stork, 13, Arrested on Homicide Charge (Yonkers)', Boston Sunday Globe 28 January 1900, p.4; Washington Times, January 29, 1901, p.6. The 1900 US Census has him down as Max Stock born Germany, 1885, living at 144 Herriot Street. He is living with his mother Elizabeth (37), brothers Bruno (16) and Alfred (5).

Cushman Rice and Russian Intrigue

Interestingly, the 24 East 40th Street apartment that Gerlach was using at the time he left the newspaper clipping with Scott in 1923 was little more than 500 metres from the 80 West 40th Street address used by 'Party Gatsby' Joseph G. Robin at the time of the 1910 US census.⁹ We know this because Gerlach's address had been scrawled in pencil over another of the addresses he had used on a Cuba to New York manifest in April 1924. The 42 Broadway address printed in type beneath it is more intriguing still, as the block was home to two major US relief missions at this time: Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration and the affiliated *American Committee for Relief of German Children*, a splinter organisation operating under the management of Major General Henry T. Allen. Allen had proposed the scheme to Hoover after learning that many of the country's charities had totally withdrawn from Germany to focus their efforts on Russia. The proposal had been accepted by Hoover who publicly endorsed the appeal and provided starting funds of \$50,000.¹⁰

Major General Henry Tureman Allen had been a military associate of Major Cushman A. Rice, a Spanish and Cuban mercenary who had made something of a small fortune in Cuba before re-enlisting with the American and British Armies during the war.¹¹ Just a few years earlier, Cushman Rice had been good enough to provide Gerlach with an affidavit in support of a passport application. According to Gatsby specialist, Horst Kruse, the affidavit signed by Cushman in November 1919, confirmed that he had known Gerlach well for some ten years

⁹ *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work: The Making of the Great Gatsby*, Horst H. Kruse, University of Alabama Press, 2014, p.23. Professor Kruse discovered this address on the manifest of the ship, SS *Esperanza* during a trip Gerlach made from Cuba to New York City on April 7, 1924. Kruse speculates that this may be his residential address and that the other address he lists, 42 Broadway may be his business address.

¹⁰ 'American Relief in Volga District extends', *New York Herald*, January 01, 1922, p.2; *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Imperfect Visionary, 1918–1928*, Kendrick A. Clements, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, p.457; 'Food From American Kin', *Bismarck Tribune*, March 24, 1924, p.11; *An American Epic*, Herbert Hoover, Regnery, 1961, p.335. Hoover based his Cuba business concerns at this address too. The Cuba Sugar Cane Corporation, under W.E. Ogilvie was among them.

¹¹ *When it's Cocktail Time in Cuba*, Basil Woon, Horace Liveright, p.181, p.241; 'Soldier of Fortune and Expert Engineer', *Warren Evening Times*, July 12, 1918, p.3

or more and knew him to be a native of the United States.¹² However, whatever Gerlach had told Cushman wasn't true. Not exactly. According to other documents unearthed by Kruse and private investigator, Howard Comen, Max was born in Germany in the mid-1880s. However, we have no real way of knowing if Major Cushman was aware of this fact or not. Major Henry T. Allen, who also used Gerlach's 42 Broadway address, was another man that Cushman knew well, this time from his days as a 'soldier of fortune'. Allen and Rice had both had volunteered to fight in the Spanish-American and Filipino Wars, and both men had similarly triumphed in putting down the Boxer rebellion in China shortly afterward. Like Gerlach, Major Allen was an "impeccable dandy" who had served as attaché in Moscow (1890-95), Berlin (1897-1898) and also as a combat officer in Cuba and the Philippines.¹³ Shortly before taking control of the Relief Mission, the Major had been in command of America's Army of Occupation in Germany. Clinching his appointment in the last few weeks of 1922 had been a report drafted by Hoover showing that over 20, 000, 000 people were now in a state of serious malnourishment and in danger of being starved. The man who had recruited Allen for the job was Irving T. Bush, President of the New York Chamber of Commerce.¹⁴

This wasn't the first time Gerlach's name had cropped up in connection with an American Relief mission. Federal agents running a background check on Gerlach in June 1917 had found that he had managed to procure a passport from Major James A. Ryan, during one particularly drunken evening at the Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin in 1914. In the period that the FBI were discussing, Ryan had just been installed as head of transportation at the American Relief Commission then operating out of its Embassy.¹⁵ Ryan, a friend of future President Harding, had, just like Max, interests and connections in Mexico dating back to April 1916

¹² *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work: The Making of The Great Gatsby*, Horst H. Kruse, University of Alabama Press, 2014, pp.32-38

¹³ *Squandered Victory: The American First Army at St. Mihiel*, James H. Hallas, Praeger Publishers, 1995, p.69

¹⁴ 'Bush Aids Relief Drive', New York Times, 23 December 1923, p.2

¹⁵ *Scott Fitzgerald at Work: The Making of The Great Gatsby*, Horst Kruse, pp. 28-29; Report on Operations of United States Relief Commission in Europe, H. Breckinridge, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914, p.71

when he had acted as chief of Intelligence during Pershing's expedition to subdue revolutionary leader, Pancho Villa. Also like Max, Ryan was fluent in Spanish.¹⁶ According to the report, Ryan was residing at the Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin at the time that that Max secured the passport. A report on Operations of United States Relief Commission in Europe confirms that James A. Ryan was conducting his relief effort from the hotel during this period.¹⁷ Max's anecdote about Ryan is made all the more intriguing when we learn that F. Scott Fitzgerald served as personal secretary to the *same* James A. Ryan when he arrived at Camp Sheridan in November 1918. An entry on James Augustine Ryan in General Pershing's memoirs tells us that he had joined the 10th Cavalry after graduating from the US Military Academy in 1890. A Catholic like Scott, Ryan had arrived at Camp Sheridan in September.¹⁸

The coincidences may be crude, perhaps, but they are not without merit: in 1914 Gerlach's first point of contact in Germany was Relief chief, Major James Ryan, and just ten years later we find that he is sharing an address with Major Henry T. Allen's Hoover-endorsed Relief mission. In addition to this, Major Allen, Major Ryan and Scott's brother-in-law, Newman Smith had all played prominent roles in the 1916 expedition to Mexico — an expedition that had given rise to a whole new Intelligence department, the MID. By the time that Gerlach was returning from his trip to Cuba in April 1924, his friend Cushman Rice appears to have been back on his ranch in Havana. A fresh plot to overthrow the country's Zayas government had just been narrowly averted. The plot, worked out secretly in New York by the newly exiled, General Carlos Garcia-Velez, had been swiftly put down by the government acting on Intelligence picked-up in America. As

¹⁶ *Patton in Mexico: Lieutenant George S. Patton*, Michael Lee Lanning, Stackpole Books, November 2023, p. 56

¹⁷ Letter from J. A Ryan, Major of Cavalry, Chief of Party, American Relief Commission, September 1914, Report on Operations of United States Relief Commission in Europe, United States. Relief Commission in Europe, 1914, United States. War Department, 1914, p.71

¹⁸ *My Life Before the World War, 1860--1917*, A Memoir, John J. Pershing, ed. John T. Greenwood, University Press of Kentucky 2013, p.579; Assembly (journal), July 1956, United States Military Academy. Association of Graduates, West Point Alumni Association, Inc. p.77. In July 1914, Ryan was sent on a mission to Europe, with the Assistant Secretary of War, and placed in charge of the U.S. Commission at Berlin, to assist American citizens in Germany and Austria to return to the United States.

Gerlach disembarked in New York the General's brother Mario Garcia-Velez and sugar merchant Carlos Alzugaray of the Patriot and Veterans Association were being arrested and taken into custody. Travel records show that Colonel Rice was making regular trips to and from Cuba during the same 1923-1924 period.¹⁹

According to Professor Horst Kruse, the nephew of expedition leader, General Pershing crops up in a character reference on Gerlach's 1942 World War II Draft Registration Card. In the field marked '*person who will always know your address*' Max had entered James Fletcher Pershing Jr, the son of the General's younger brother.²⁰ After being discharged from the Motor Supply Depot of the US Army in 1919, the 28 year old quickly moved on from his position as President of the Nonpareil Fuel Corporation to taking up the role of Assistant Prohibition Director of the State of New York. The appointment wasn't to last. By August 1922 he was out of the job. A Federal investigation had been launched into his immediate superior, Ralph A. Day and it was later reported that Pershing had resigned before he had been forced to quit. According to the Federal authorities, the investigation centred chiefly around the disappearance of 4,900 cases of Auld Scotch whisky and 295 cases of Champagne from the warehouse of the Republic Storage Company. Those indicted included six suspended prohibition agents. It was claimed that the Prohibition directors had accepted cash from King of New York bootleggers, Emanuel 'Mannie' Kessler, a known associate of gangster Arnold Rothstein. It is believed that each of the men had been involved in a conspiracy to obtain the liquor on forged customs permits. Much the same chain of events had led to the dismissal of Pershing's predecessor, Colonel. Herbert G. Catrow, the formerly respected treasurer of the

¹⁹ US Intelligence Operations and Covert Action in Mexico, 1900-47, W. Dirk Raat, Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 22, No. 4, Intelligence Services during the Second World War: Part 2, October 1987, p.623; 'Dismissed Diplomat', Washington Evening star, March 25, 1924, p.10; May 2, 1924, p.35. Rice's ship, the SS Orizaba arrived from Havana at Pier 15 in Brooklyn Harbour in the last week of May 1924.

²⁰ Kruse,

National Republican Club.²¹ A total of 171 dry agents, clerks and inspectors had been dismissed in little over 12 months.

As Ralph A. Day announced his resignation, the General made an urgent appeal for preparedness at a gathering of the Merchants Association in Madison Square Garden. If there was just one lesson we had learned from the war, the General growled, it was that the millions of men that they had expected to leap immediately into action had never materialised. America had had to wait a full year before it was able to fill its ranks and equip it with arms. A whole new threat had emerged in Communism. The consoling purr of providence offered little way of defence. War was a big business enterprise, and in business nothing was ever left to chance.²² The sentiments he expressed that day echoed those of his brother James F. Pershing Sr in October 1918, when he warned of Germany's peace efforts in the weeks before the Armistice. Speaking ahead of a United War Works drive on November 11, James cautioned the American people against the too-common tendency to become too apathetic. The message being pushed by this well-oiled machine amplified the emotions that steered the '100% American' campaign. When heaven was ready to negotiate with hell, the younger brother thundered, then American would be ready to make Peace with Germany.²³ As long as the tanks were rolling in, so were the windfall profits — a commercial reality that was as true in England as it was in America.

²¹ In 1908 Catrow had been charged with reckless driving, which had resulted in the death of a man in Dayton.

²² 'Addresses made by Pershing ...', New York Times, November 18, 1922, p.

²³ 'Pershing Warns of German Publicity', Corvallis Gazette, October 24, 1918, p. 6. The United War Works Campaign was supported by several organisations including the Y.W.C.A, Y.M.C.A and the Catholic Knights of Columbus. Its director of publicity was William L. Radcliffe, whose Chautauqua movement was once described by Theodore Roosevelt as the most American thing in America.

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMERCE AND TRADE.

I can not close this report without inviting attention to the valuable assistance rendered the American Relief Commission of Berlin by the American Association of Commerce and Trade. This association, through its president, Mr. I. Wolf, jr., as well as its secretary, Mr. Atwood, has been of great assistance to me, and has rendered relief to many destitute people who did not come within the province of the American Relief Commission. This association, founded for the purpose of cementing stronger friendly and commercial relations between the people of the United States and Germany, has fulfilled its mission to the utmost in the manner in which it has come forward at this time, when aid of all kinds was necessary, and it deserves the thanks of the people of the United States for all it has done for our people in Berlin.

I wish to invite the attention of the honorable Assistant Secretary of War to the excellent work done by the officers of this commission in Germany and Austria: To Capt. C. L. Fenton, Coast Artillery Corps, who handled the entire financial part of this commission in both countries; to Capt. M. A. Cross, Coast Artillery Corps, and to Maj. J. H. Ford, Medical Department, who looked after the wants of American citizens in Austria; to Maj. Geo. W. Martin, Capt. F. J. Miller, and to Capt. B. Enochs, who visited the various cities in Germany, extending aid to destitute Americans at those points. Their close attention to duty, without regards to hours, and the cheerfulness with which they responded to every call, has enabled me to carry out successfully the orders I received to bring assistance to stranded Americans in these parts.

Respectfully submitted.

J. A. RYAN,
*Major of Cavalry, Chief of Party,
American Relief Commission.*

Gerlach's Berlin friend, Major James A. Ryan of the American Relief Commission

Colonel Cushman A. Rice, the man who had provided Gerlach with a reference in support of his passport application in 1919 and helped grease his way into the army just two years before, would eventually feature in a book by journalist and traveller, Basil Woon in which the writer would present him as a larger-than-life adventurer, drifting from one crazy scheme to the next with his finger in many pies. The book was published, incidentally by Horace Liveright, a friend of both the author Theodore Dreiser and his sometime legal adviser J.G. Robin. Cushman's short but memorable entry in Woon's book reads: Cushman's short but memorable entry in Woon's book reads:

Cushman A. Rice: Son of ex-Governor A. E. Rice of Minnesota

Better known as "Cush" Rice to friends in Central America, Mexico, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, China and elsewhere. Left college in 1896 and almost immediately thereafter appeared as brigadier-general in Guatemalan Army, but when he returned to America for Spanish-American war service they only made him a captain of the Thirty-Fourth U. S. Volunteer Infantry. Had a good record in the Philippines, especially because he bought, owned and operated the first automobile ever seen in the Islands.

Since then has been mixed up in various Central American revolutions, it being said that whenever the munitions business was a little low "Cush" Rice would disappear from New York and soon thereafter the President of some small republic would lose his job.

*For some years now has “settled down” to leisurely tours of the world. Has cattle ranches in Cuba, homes in Paris and Shanghai and New York, and \$6,000,000. Is also a Major of Aviation, U. S. R, and was one of America’s first pilots”.*²⁴

At this point you’re probably thinking that the recruitment of a dubious playboy bootlegger into an official joint-military relief mission operating from 42 Broadway sounds like the stuff of fantasy, but there’s a little bit more to the story. In December 1922, Major Cushman Rice, the man who supported Gerlach’s application for the army and his passport overseas, had been dispatched by *American Relief Administration* chief, Herbert Hoover to Russia, where he was tasked with overseeing the mass evacuation of refugees amassing around the Turkish borders. Speaking at a Constitution Week address shortly after his return, Major Rice provided an emotional account of the appalling scenes of “tyranny, pestilence and poverty” he had witnessed in Soviet Russia: *“I wish I could get every parlour Socialist or person dissatisfied with the present American constitution to Soviet Russia for a few weeks residence ... I would guarantee that they have desire to do away with the present American constitution and establish a Soviet Government, a government that is run as tyrannically as any monarchy or oligarchy of the past ages.”* Rice then went on to explain how he had visited the Ukrainian city of Odessa where he found that all the freedom, prosperity, beauty and plenty of its wonderful past had simply vanished. In its place he had found poverty of the direst kind with bodies heaped in piles on the street and others left to starve in their homes.²⁵

²⁴ *When it’s Cocktail Time in Cuba*, Basil Woon, Horace Liveright, p.181

²⁵ ‘Col Rice says one trip to Soviet Russia would cure radicals and socialists’, *The Bismarck Tribune*, September 21, 1923, p.6



42 Broadway. Max Gerlach's 1923 business address. Also home to Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration.

More Relief Operations. More Coincidences

Extraordinarily, the coincidences didn't end with Cushman Rice. Among those who had been recruited into the operations of the Relief Administration was Scott's brother-in-law, Major Newman Smith, a die-hard Alabamian who had married Zelda's older sister Rosalind Sayre shortly before being deployed to France in October 1917. After serving with distinction in the Machine Guns battalion of the 42nd 'Rainbow Division' Newman was promoted to Major.²⁶ His experience dated back to before the war when Smith had organised a machine gun company back in his hometown when trouble had been brewing in Mexico.²⁷ The initiative the young man had shown wasn't overlooked, and in March 1916, Captain Newman and a detachment of the Alabama Old Fourth were dispatched as part of General Pershing's 'punitive' expedition to subdue the revolutionary forces being led by Pancho Villa in and around Nogales and the

²⁶In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald writes that Gatsby's friend Nick Carraway served with a Machine Gun battalion.

²⁷ 'Capt Smith Promoted', Birmingham Age Herald, July 3, 1918, p.6

border town regions. The troops would be joined here by cavalry regiment under the command of 42 Broadway's, General Henry T. Allen. Allen had previously captained Newman in the 6th Cavalry Regiment during the Moro Rebellion in the Philippines in 1906 to 1907. ²⁸

A short time later, the 29 year old Captain was re-appointed aide de camp to Herbert Hoover as part of his humanitarian relief operations in Europe. In 1925 a cable sent by Newman Smith to Captain James V. Martin of the A.R.A relief ship, Lake Fray, would find itself at the centre of a Senate investigation into illegal arms activities taking place in the final months of the war. Captain Martin had alleged that in July 1919, as anti-Bolshevik forces made serious advances against the Red Army defending Petrograd, he had received a message from Herbert Hoover's London and Paris offices instructing him to take the cargo of food intended for millions of famine victims and reload it with trucks and military supplies in support of an imminent attack on Lenin. Martin further alleged that it had all been part of a 'secret compact' between Hoover and Winston Churchill to conduct a clandestine war with Russia. A document shown at the 1925 Senate hearings reveals Newman giving Captain Martin specific instructions to change the assignment of this vessel and the cargo it had on board. ²⁹ A few years later, Martin would come to the aid of bootleggers when he announced plans for a 'floating booze palace' just outside the three-mile limit of New York. With the backing of several New York financiers, Martin's *Recreation Ticket Corporation* planned to serve alcohol on a recreation vessel moored in the farthest extreme of the harbour. ³⁰

²⁸ General Allen Relieved', Washington Evening Star, March 27, 1907, p.6; Allen, a favourite with William Taft and Henry Clay Ide when both men served the US Commission on the Islands, was also serving as Chief of the Philippine Constabulary at this time. He resigned this commission in March 1907 as a result of tensions with other officers. Max Gerlach's 42 Broadway address was also being used at the this time by Allen's *American Committee for Relief of German Children*.

²⁹ Inquiry Into Operations Of The United States Air Services Hearing Before The Select Committee Of Inquiry Into Operations Of The United States Air Services, House Of Representatives, Sixty-eighth Congress, On, Part 3, p. 2458

³⁰ 'Floating Booze', Brockport Republic, April 6, 1922, p.2

After his discharge in August 1919, Newman found work as chief auditor at the new office opened by the Guaranty Trust Company in Constantinople. In July 1920, whilst temporarily employed at the company's Belgium office, Newman set sail for Turkey aboard the *SS Megali Hellas*, his wife following him a few weeks later. The name of the ship, which had changed its name from the *SS Byron* that year before, couldn't have been any more apt, meaning 'Big' or 'Great idea' in Greek and embodied the restoration of a once powerful Christian empire. Arriving on the ship from Greece that same day was a young George Steffanides and his family. The Harvard educated scientist, born on Lesbos, the 'Island of the Poets', would recall the family's 12-day journey to New York in the steerage of the ship in his 1974 autobiography, *America, the Land of My Dreams: The Odyssey of a Greek Immigrant*. The ship had brought him and 3,000 other hopeful immigrants from Piraneus in Athens, the port used by the mythical 'Odysseus' to embark on his own epic journey.



Cable from Scott's brother-in-law, Major Newman Smith instructing Captain James V. Martin of Lake Fray to change his cargo, dated July 24 1919.

In an interview she gave to the *Birmingham Age Herald* in June 1921, Newman's wife Rosalind Sayre provides a moving account of the appalling scenes the couple had witnessed as result of the mass evacuations of Greeks and Russian 'whites' to the Turkish borders: "*There are Russians by the thousands too: all of Wrangel's defeated army and the entire population of the Crimea came here,*

fleeing the Bolshevik and they make a sombre spot on an otherwise gay and carefree place. They are penniless, most of them having come only with the clothes on their backs, and they're getting food any way they can, selling shoelaces and selling flowers or begging — princes and princesses alike and humble alike." The Straits (Constantinople, Sykes-Picot) Agreement signed by Britain, France and Tsarist Russia in April 1915 had placed the Near East region at the top of America's watch-list. The nation's dream was going global. The future possibilities of imports and exports to and from the Eastern Mediterranean, the Sea of Marmora, and the Black Sea were being described by analysts as unbelievable in their proportions. Having its most outstanding officers occupy senior commercial and relief positions in the city would have been essential to maintaining some degree of influence, traction and 'compliance' in the region. The 'freedom of the Straits' was fast becoming a very critical security and economic issue. After some twelve months monitoring the situation, representatives at The Guaranty Trust Company were reporting that after a promising start, financial conditions in the country were in a "chaotic state".³¹ Just six months earlier the company had been reporting that American trade in the region was developing fast and favourably. However, in January 1921, Turkey's Prime Minister, Kemal Pasha threatened a pact with Soviet Russia that would throw the whole country into turmoil — American and British trade with it. In October that year, Newman and Rosalind Smith were back in Brussels.³²

Another of the men who appeared on Gerlach's illustrious list of army referees in August 1918 was Judge Aaron J. Levy, a leading Democrat and hard-working head of the American Jewish Congress, who, like Major Rice, had also just returned from a fact-finding mission to Russia assessing the wretchedly desperate plight of the refugees in the Baltic States, Spain and Germany. As a result, the American Jewish Relief Committee was duly reinvigorated with Levy

³¹ 'Turkey Finances are Near Collapse', New York Times, March 9, 1921, p.20; 'The Freedom of the Straits', Alfred L. P. Dennis, North American Review, December, 1922

³² The Guaranty Trust Company's President, Alexander J Hemphill was, like Smith's Rainbow Division colleague, William J. Donovan, a prominent member of the National Security league, whose agents were believed to have played a part in the 1919 May Day Riots.

elected chief officer and the super-lawyer Samuel Untermyer offering the support *The Palestine Restoration Fund*.³³ A bill demanding the immediate cessation of restrictions on immigration was duly put together by the groups with Dr Stephen Wise and Aaron Levy pressing for urgent readings at the Senate.³⁴ Of course, there's no guarantee that Max von Gerlach was employed in any capacity at all by any of the various missions operating out of 42 Broadway. It was a large, sprawling building with numerous other companies inhabiting the same one block, but in light of other concerns we've looked at — and other concerns I'll come to soon — it's still something of a curiosity, especially when viewed against the young drifter's prior association with Relief leader, Cushman Rice.

Part II

The Usual 'Unusual' Suspects

"I WAS IMMEDIATELY STRUCK BY THE NUMBER OF YOUNG ENGLISHMEN DOTTED ABOUT; ALL WELL DRESSED, ALL LOOKING A LITTLE HUNGRY, AND ALL TALKING IN LOW, EARNEST VOICES TO SOLID AND PROSPEROUS AMERICANS."

Let's now go back to that other conundrum. On his 1942 World War II Draft Registration Card, Max Gerlach gives the name of James F. Pershing of 17 East 55th Street as a "person who will always know" his address.³⁵ No real explanation is provided. The field was typically filled in with the details of your nearest relative. Married men would usually name their wives. Single men or widowed men would usually enter the details of their parents, a sibling, a friend or employer. For whatever reason, Max names James F. Pershing of 17 East 55th Street as the person who was most likely to have this information. And because there is little chance the men were related by blood, it may be reasonable to infer that Pershing Jr was someone that Max knew in either a personal or professional

³³ It will be recalled that Untermyer had worked on the Carnegie Trust Company investigation and that Robin was by this time occupying an office at 50 Union Square, New York (Germania Life Insurance Company Building). The building also played host to the Palestine Restoration Fund (Keren Hayseod) where Untermyer was President.

³⁴ Chicago Sentinel, October 14 1921, p.4

³⁵ Kruse, pp.42-43. The property was just a few streets down from the Hotel Plaza in Mid-Manhattan.

capacity. Whatever the reason, Max would appear to have been in touch with him on a regular basis and might have occasionally felt obliged to inform him of his movements.

Extraordinarily enough, the man that named in this column was the nephew of General John J. Pershing, the legendary US Army Officer who led the hunt for Pancho Villa in Mexico in 1916 and acted as Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in the WWI. He was big deal then and he is a big deal now. In her interview with Henry Dan Piper in March 19147, Zelda Fitzgerald is alleged to have said that Max was a ‘nephew of General Pershing or something’.³⁶ This was patently not the case, but the reason for her confusion may be simple enough to explain: Zelda had been confused after being introduced to both men at the parties that she and Scott attended in Great Neck, or Max, for whatever reason, was being introduced as the General’s nephew (perhaps as a way of greasing his way into the more privileged elites). Thankfully, the information we have on James is a little less ambiguous than it is on Max.

At 26 years of years of age, James had enlisted with the Motor Supply Depot of the Medical Department in December 1918 before moving across to the Sanitary Corps as a Lieutenant in July 1918.³⁷ After his discharge from the army in 1919, James continued his work as President of the Nonpareil Fuel Corporation before taking up an appointment as Assistant Director of the New York State under Director Ralph A. Day.³⁸ An announcement was made to this effect in February 1922, but by August the young man had resigned. In a statement he made to the press, Pershing Jr explained that the position had grown ‘distasteful’ to him. The \$3000 salary was unattractive and the work was odious. Once he had seen out his notice in September, James said he intended to give his full attention to the

³⁶ ‘How are you and the family, old sport’?, *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual*, C. E. Frazer Clark, Matthew Joseph Brucoli, 1975, p.33

³⁷ *The Pershing Family in America*, George Ferguson & Company, 1924, p.236

³⁸ ‘Pershing Nephew Dry Agent’, *Washington Times*, February 17, 1922, p.1

affairs of the New York Mortgage Company, at that time being run by ‘War Bonds’ man, Oscar Price and the company’s chief, James F. Pershing Sr.³⁹

A short time later, the full dramatic truth of his ‘resignation’ emerged; Pershing Jr had in fact been forced to quit. According to Federal Investigators, New York’s two prohibition directors had been complicit in the disappearance of 4,900 cases of Auld Scotch whisky and 295 cases of Champagne from a US Customs held at the Republic Storage Warehouse on the corner of 12th Avenue and West 45th Street. It was claimed that the pair had accepted cash from ‘King’ of New York bootleggers, Emanuel ‘Mannie’ Kessler, a criminal associate of Arnold Rothstein.⁴⁰ The liquor would be reappropriated on forged customs permits and Kessler, using trucks organised by Rothstein’s man, Frank Costello, would haul the cases from the Hudson Yard warehouse to Long Island and load them on to boats moored off The Sound ready for distribution along the coast.⁴¹ Pershing Jr, who requested but was refused immunity declined to testify.⁴²

The most extraordinary development was yet to come. Among the Prohibition Agents serving under Pershing Jr at this time was Henry W. Grunewald, the man who just five years earlier had compiled an intelligence report on Pershing Jr’s friend, Max Stork Gerlach, for the Bureau of Investigation. On that occasion, Grunewald along with six other ‘dry agents’ were charged with conspiring to defraud the US government of duties and taxes on thousands of dollars’ worth of liquor.⁴³ As the whole embarrassing scandal was being played out in court, Pershing’s uncle, General Pershing, was quickly rethinking his plans about where he would write his memoirs. Press interest in the case was now spiralling out of control, and the damage that it was doing to the Pershing name, and to the estimated sales of his book, were beginning to look irreversible.

³⁹ ‘Behind the Screen in Hollywood’, *The Enterprise*, April 2, 1925, p.6

⁴⁰ ‘Pershing Nephew Quits Post with Dry Forces’, *New York Tribune*, August 15, 1922, p.4

⁴¹ *Costello v. United States*, 365 U.S. 265, 81 S. Ct. 534 (1961)

⁴² ‘Dry Director Day is Hailed Into Court’, *New York Times*, 27 October 1922, p.1

⁴³ *Dismissed Rum Jury Indicts 30 Men, 3 Firms*, *New York Tribune*, November 24, 1922

In September it was being reported that the General was arranging to lease the home of opera impresario, Oscar Hammerstein at Elm Point. The house, a modestly-sized colonial style affair was located on the north-westernmost fringes of the Great Neck peninsula.⁴⁴ Just down the road from Hammerstein at 6 Gateway Drive was Scott Fitzgerald, the author and his family having newly arrived from Minnesota. Among the General's neighbours was Sam H. Harris, the rags-to-riches Broadway producer at that time working with Scott on his Gatsby-prototype play, *The Vegetable*. The current occupant of the house was Hammerstein's son, the songwriter and theatre manager, Arthur Hammerstein, whose legendary work with his father for Otto Kahn and the Metropolitan and Chicago opera companies would almost certainly have brought him into contact with several associates of Gerlach.⁴⁵ The man who is most likely to have brought these vastly two different cliques together was Damon Runyon, the swashbuckling journalist with Hearst's newspapers who had accompanied General Pershing on the Villa Expedition and then introduced him to his friends in opera. One of those friends was the legendary Enrico Caruso, the dramatic tenor that Hammerstein had helped turn into a household name. At the other extreme of Runyon's circle was Owney Madden and Arnold Rothstein, two of New York's most notorious gangsters who would generously grease the wheels of Runyon's drink and gambling benders.⁴⁶ According to his biographer, Jimmy Breslin, Runyon had even dreamed of forming a company with his two formidable heroes; the name of Pershing would guarantee the respect of the nation's elites, and Caruso would ensure the glamour and the box-office draw.⁴⁷ Pershing's appearances in Great Neck are documented in Scott's letters from this period: "*Great Neck is a great place for celebrities—it being the habitat of Mae*

⁴⁴ 'General Pershing Purchases Hammerstein Residence', Boston Sunday Globe, September 24, 1922, p.6; 'House Where Pershing Will Write His Memoirs', Midweek Pictorial October 5, 1922, Vol 16, No.6, 00040

⁴⁵ 'General Pershing Buys Hammerstein Residence', Boston Sunday Globe, September 24, 1922, p.6. Gerlach appears to have known opera singers, Lydia Lindgren (coached by Hammerstein star Mary Garden) and Alice Peroux-Williams.

⁴⁶ *Damon Runyon*, Jimmy Breslin, Ticknor & Fields, 1991. The man who looked after Caruso in America was his old friend, Tommy Francis who became racing adviser to the Black Hand crime syndicate.

⁴⁷ *Damon Runyon*, Jimmy Breslin, Ticknor & Fields, 1991, p.180. Runyon is believed to have based a character in the musical *Guys and Dolls* on Rothstein.

Murray, Frank Craven, Herbert Swope ... Samuel Goldwyn, Ring Lardner ... General Pershing. It is most amusing after the dull healthy middle west."⁴⁸ The man handling negotiations for the lease of the Hammerstein property was the General's brother, James F. Pershing Sr. As news broke of Ralph A. Day's indictment and the demands for Pershing Jr to testify at the trial, the General seems to have changed his mind about the move. By October, the General was informing the press that the house deal had fallen through. He'd be writing his memoirs somewhere else, perhaps on the infinitely more secluded Naushon Island between Buzzard's Bay and the Vineyard Sound.⁴⁹ Whether he actually went through with the alternative plan remains unknown although he certainly used the playground island to vacation from time to time. Scott's letters, written sometime after October 1922, suggest that the General stayed in Great Neck. Here he could relax among his much cherished ring of opera and theatre stars, his occasional bursts of writing frequently interrupted by invites from his and Fitzgerald's friend, Tallulah Bankhead and the colourful Broadway set hanging off the coat-tails of that ever-adventurous trader in gangster-chic, Damon Runyon.

Murray W. Garsson

The man who seems to have been pulling all the strings backstage at the New York Department of Prohibition and the illicit arrangement it had with Kessler, was Murray W. Garsson, a man of mysterious origin, reportedly born in London who, according to his own creatively massaged entry in the *Who's Who of American Jewry*, had served as a captain in the 'Special Services' department of New York Police under Commissioner, Arthur H. Woods during the 1914 to 1918 period.⁵⁰ Based on information learned during a 1946 Senate inquiry, it seems that Garsson's tenure in the NYPD had been brought to crashing halt

⁴⁸ 'Dear Cousin Cecie', after October 1922, Great Neck, Long Island, *A Life in Letters*, p.63

⁴⁹ 'Pershing in Mufti' *New York Herald*, October 1, 1922, p.13; 'Pershing at Naushon Today', *Boston Daily Globe*, September 30, 1922, p.1

⁵⁰ *Investigation of the National Defense Program: Hearings Before a Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, United States Senate, Seventy-Seventh Congress, First Session-Eightieth Congress, First Session. S. Res. 71. (1946), p.17698.* Neither Garsson or his family features in any British birth or census records.

when he was questioned as a material witness in an undisclosed murder case. Soon after, Garsson, now a fully-paid up member of the New York Republican Club, started a film company, helping to distribute, for no apparent fee, America's first anti-Communist propaganda film, *Dangerous Hours*.⁵¹ This film, and others that followed, received the backing of National Americanism Commission, an aggressively patriotic off-shoot of the newly launched American Legion who were formed in opposition to the undemocratic excesses of Revolutionary Communism. The work that Garsson appears to have performed for the Commission appears to have come off the back of the support he had provided in raising funds for the War Bonds campaign under US Secretary of Treasury, William McAdoo and his assistant, Oscar Price.⁵²

In January 1920 Franklin K. Lane, the founding chief of the Commission, was replaced by Garsson's old boss at the NYPD, Commissioner Arthur Woods. After leaving the Police Department, Woods has been drafted in as a Colonel in the US Army. Now he was a respected figure at the newly launched American Legion and a trusted ally of US Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover. Through his ongoing work with the Legion and the National (New York) Republican Club, Woods was tasked with promoting "100% Americanism". The films that Garsson (and others) produced acted as a supporting mechanism in the group's obsessive bid to the prevent the inevitable slide toward Bolshevism among the thousands of unemployed ex-Servicemen, and the swelling number of immigrants fleeing from Central and Eastern Europe. Woods and the Commission had been persuaded that in order to promote "100% Americanism" among members of the Legion, it would first need to be defined, and some kind of consensus reached across its broad and cross-party member base. Only then would it be able to gain traction among the local labour unions and improve

⁵¹ Investigation of the National Defense Program: Hearings Before a Special Committee, Seventy-Seventh Congress, First Session-Eightieth Congress, First Session. S. Res. 71. (1946), p.17698. *Dangerous Hours* was made by Famous Players Lasky, the studio behind the first movie version of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1926). It had originally been titled *American versus Bolshevism*.

⁵² Investigation of the National Defense Program: Hearings Before a Special Committee, Seventy-Seventh Congress, First Session-Eightieth Congress, First Session. S. Res. 71. (1946), p.17698.

accord between the two main political parties and the various clubs and groups promoting strong American values.⁵³ The ball got rolling in 1918 with the release of *100% American* in theatres across the States. The film, made by the Famous Players Lasky Studio and starring Mary Pickford (a 100% Canadian at the time the film was made), told the beautiful, heroic journey of a girl who donates her precious Liberty war bond to a friend. The actress, the press were quick to emphasise, had purchased several hundred thousand dollars of war bonds herself. Shortly after the film's release, the studio printed a full page tribute to the scheme in the New York Times. 'One third of the American people visited movie-theatres', the advert trumpeted. A word of thanks was now going out from the people who made this possible — the 'silent salesmen' of the American Dream.⁵⁴ After his death in November 1928 (alleged to have been over deals of bootleg liquor to Cuba), Arnold Rothstein — the Meyer Wolfsheimer of the Gatsby novel — was rumoured to have made as much as \$5 million in stolen liberty bonds. That Fitzgerald's novel revealed the sinister, criminal underbelly of trade in illegal bonds may well have chimed with Famous Players boss, Jesse Lasky whose studio produced the first-movie version of *Gatsby* for Paramount in 1926.⁵⁵

In the early 1920s Garsson, possibly on account of his voracious gambling habit, had somehow been drawn into bootlegging and racketeering, first with men like Mannie Kessler and Dutch Schultz and then with Owney Madden, co-owner of the El Fey Club with Larry Fay and a good friend of General Pershing's pal, Damon Runyon. The adrenalin rush that came at the poker table was now being stimulated and consumed by the risks of illegal enterprise. Supported by the strong arm of Madden and his boys, Garsson and his brother Irving — another of the Dry Agents charged alongside Day and Grunewald in October 1922 — arranged protection for the profusion of speakeasies, bars and restaurants

⁵³ 'Ask Definition of 100% Americanism', Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 7, 1920, p.12; *One Hundred Per Cent American*, National Republican Club, George H. Doran Company, 1918

⁵⁴ 'The Silent salesman of Liberty — Motion Pictures!', New York Times, October 14, 1918, p.4

⁵⁵ It is implied that Jay Gatsby was running trade in illegal bonds at the time he meets Nick.

operating clandestinely in Broadway and the Lower East Side. Astonishingly, just a few years later, Garsson would be appointed as a Special Assistant to the Secretary of Labour by President Herbert Hoover. It is alleged that within weeks of his appointment, Garsson would be seen in Cuba flashing his Bureau of Immigration badge around, busting human smuggling gangs and also, so its alleged, engaged in illegal arms sales.⁵⁶ Life in Havana was good. Rothstein's men Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano had made credible gains in the gambling and racketeering markets here, and the locals were gradually coming round to the uncompromising ideals of Mafia-freedom.

By 1940, Garsson was working from Gerlach's old 42 Broadway address on a much bigger arms project. Immediately prior to the war, and with no prior sales and manufacturing experience in the industry, Murray and his brother Henry set up a munitions company — Erie Basin Metal Products Inc. Within weeks of the deadly attack on Pearl Harbour, Garsson travelled to Cuba with Andrew J. Day, Chief of America's Military Affairs Committee.⁵⁷ Although Day denied being aware of Garsson's presence on the trip, it was learned subsequently that the men shared adjoining rooms at the same hotel in Havana. In the Senate inquiry that followed at the end of the war, it was discovered that May had awarded corrupt war contracts in excess of \$70 million to Murray and Henry Garsson. After failing to defend charges of war profiteering, all three men were sentenced to a two and half year stretch in prison.

Six years after his release, Murray W. Garsson died in abject poverty at the home of a friend. Among those not mourning his passing was director and screenwriter John Farrow. Shortly before his removal as special assistant to the Secretary of Labor, William M. Doak, Garsson had launched a blistering crackdown on all non-American movie professionals. Farrow was the second of his arrests, the

⁵⁶ *Congress: Corruption and Compromise*, H. Hubert Wilson, Rinehart & Company, 1951, p.88

⁵⁷ Travel records show both Murray and Henry Garsson making regular trips to Havana in the 1930s and 1940s. It is worth noting the timing of the case against May. May had just introduced a controversial draft resolution for the Atomic Energy Act of 1946. The resolution would place America's post-war nuclear research under the ultimate command of the military. It was believed that in peacetime the free exchange of ideas among civilian scientists was in the best interests of research.

first being Duncan Renaldo, a Romanian-born actor who would later find fame as *The Cisco Kid*. It was alleged the Farrow, an Australian, had overstayed his leave in the country and was faced with deportation. Hollywood reacted with fury, with many of its best known faces, including Farrow's future wife Maureen O' Sullivan, threatening to boycott the American movie industry forever.⁵⁸ The far reaching probe into overstayed permits, an obvious demonstration of strength on Hoover's nativist policy of eliminating inward migration, was threatening a mass exodus of foreign talent at the country's most vulnerable point of entry — Los Angeles. 'US Eclipse Looms', bawled the headlines. As usual, America was pushing and enforcing policy in the most theatrical of ways. It was shock and awe tactics at the level of public relations. Hoover had no sooner arrived in office than he was pushing his 'National Origins' bill through Senate. If Hoover got his way there would be a strict quota on immigrants for each country, and totally exclude those from Asia.⁵⁹ The headlines that followed Garsson's sensational warning to the stars ensured the message was being heard, not just in America but around the world.⁶⁰ In the 1940s it was disclosed that at the same that Garsson, was embarking on his campaign of intimidation against visa-defying actors, this shamelessly ambitious risk-taker was paying upwards of \$50,000 to suppress the deportation of his mobster friend, Owney Madden.⁶¹

In a bizarre twist of fate, it turns out that Farrow had originally been hired to direct Alan Ladd in the Paramount production of *The Great Gatsby* in 1949. Farrow remained on the production for several months but left after a disagreement with producer Richard Maibaum about the casting of Daisy

⁵⁸ 'US Opens Drive on Foreign Actors', Washington Evening Star, January 28, 1933, p.2

⁵⁹ 'Congress to Hold First Session on Sunday since 1923 over Alien Clause', Washington Sunday/Evening Star, March 3, 1929, p.1

⁶⁰ As the US adjustment to the mass unemployment of the Great Depression, Hoover made attempts to ensure that any jobs that were available would go to American (and preferably non-Hispanic) workers. The President tasked Garsson and the Secretary of Labor with reducing the number of visa to zero.

⁶¹ *Congress: Corruption and Compromise*, H. Hubert Wilson, Rinehart & Company, 1951, p.88

Buchanan. There would be a similar disagreement in 1974 when Farrow's daughter Mia was cast in the role.⁶²

17 East 55th Street

After his resignation from the Department of Prohibition, James F. Pershing Jr disappears from the news columns entirely. The sequence of events, as far as we are able to ascertain, has James leave his role at the New York Mortgage Company and take up a position at the Chelsea Management Corporation, where he serves for the next ten years as the company's Vice President. Chelsea Management, formed in the early 1930s to rescue the ever-decreasing fortunes of property developers, the Mandel Group, was part of a huge and dominating series of companies owned and founded by Henry Mandel, the man who built Pershing Square near Grand Central Station. In later years, Mandel's grandson, William, a talented student of art with firm links to the Labor movement, would battle it out with Joseph McCarthy at the House Un-American Activities Hearings over the latter's paranoid delusions about a Soviet fifth column in America. In the late 1940s, Chelsea Management would feature in a list of companies identified by the FBI in their investigation into Abraham Brothman, a member of the Chelsea section of the Communist Party of America, who was suspected of spying for Russia.⁶³ Among Brothman's wider circle was Julius Rosenberg, who with his wife Ethel was executed in June 1953 for sharing highly confidential military and atomic secrets with the Soviets. Interestingly, Pershing Jr's 17 East 55th Street address features in his FBI file too. The man who is believed to have been residing at this wasn't Rosenberg himself but Richard Dennis Flanagan, a 21 year old intern at *Life* and *Time* magazine. Ten years later Flanagan would be involved in another 'spy' sensation. Now serving as co-editor of *Scientific America*, Flanagan was questioned by the FBI over the

⁶² *Filming The Great Gatsby*, Bruce Bahrenburg, Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1974, pp.30-31. Mia Farrow's mother Maureen O Sullivan would later star in *Two Yanks at Oxford*, a screenplay that Scott had worked on in Hollywood.

⁶³ Names, Chelsea Management Corporation, Abraham Brothman, Federal Bureau of Investigation. During the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the Chelsea district of Manhattan was among the most Left-leaning neighbourhoods in New York. Brothman was a member of the Hettie Lapatins section of the Chelsea Communists.

role he had played in preparing for publication, an article written by atomic scientist and suspected Communist, Hans Bethe. According to reports Bethe had been making the argument that America's development of the H-Bomb was making the country more vulnerable to hostile actions rather than more secure. Although the government suggested that it was the technical aspects of Bethe's article that had led to it being censored, there's no hiding the fact that comments made by the Los Alamos scientist had brought him into direct conflict with the newly formed Atomic Energy Commission. ⁶⁴ The article was seized, shredded and then all 3,000 copies of the magazine were burned. ⁶⁵ Pro-Soviet and anti-American sentiments were believed to have played their part in the paper's destruction and Flanagan would spend much of that year defending his and the magazine's decision to print the views expressed by Bethe. In some ways, the incident couldn't have been any more apt, because in February 1943, just six months after arriving as Major at Fort Wingate — the depot that supplied over 100 tons of Composition B high explosives to the Manhattan Project — Pershing's brother Frank was redeployed to the relative mundanity of dispatching medical supplies at the Pueblo Depot in Colorado. ⁶⁶ Although no particular reason was given, one wonders if his brother's shameful record at the New York Prohibition office, and the vociferous, defiant stand that his uncle had taken against the non-action of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the summer and autumn of 1940, had played their own quiet but significant part in Frank's transfer. ⁶⁷

James F. Pershing's 17 East 55th Street address would also play a part in the life of James Fiene Hodgson, a long-time member of the American Consular Service Association, whose retirement details are recorded in the Foreign Service Journal

⁶⁴ 'Richard Dennis Flanagan: Security Matter', Julius Rosenberg, Federal Bureau of Investigation October 1, 1951

⁶⁵ 'U.S. Censors H-Bomb Data; 3,000 Magazine Copies Burnt', New York Times, April 1, 1950, p.1

⁶⁶ 'Major Pershing Now Stationed at Pueblo', Desert Sun Palm Springs, February 5, 1943, p.7

⁶⁷ Just prior to his discharge from the army, a bearded Frank Pershing would win an uncredited performance in MGM film, *They Were Expendable*.

of 1953 and onwards.⁶⁸ Like Scott's brother-in-law Newman Smith, Hodgson had begun his illustrious career in Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration. The immediate post-war period had seen the loyal and indefatigable officer serving as District Supervisor of Operations in Odessa, Ukraine. When Gerlach was residing at Hoover's 42 Broadway address, the former West Point cadet was in Russia ensuring the vital distribution of relief with boots on the ground support from Gerlach's army sponsor, Cushman A. Rice. After observing Hodgson's sad, impossible task in Russia, Rice had come to the same conclusion as Hoover: for all those Americans who sympathized with the Soviet or were "dissatisfied" with the American Constitution, they should spend some time in Odessa.⁶⁹ The 31 year old Hodgson had headed out to Russia with his family in December 1921 and remained there some two years, eventually heading back home to the US in October 1923 after spending an unspecified period of time in Moscow with Colonel William Haskell.⁷⁰ On his return to New York, Hodgson was re-recruited by Hoover, first as his Commercial attaché in Cairo and then as his personal assistant at the Department of Commerce in Washington.⁷¹ When Hoover succeeded Calvin Coolidge as President in 1929, Hodgson was immediately appointed chief of the district offices of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce in New York. In his boastful interviews with the press, Hoover made it clear that he was going to run The White House like a business. His approach to the Presidency was simple: he was going to tackle the Depression Era America as one 'vast engineering project'. If any top-flight businessman should arrive in New York from abroad, Hoover wanted to know about it. America would be approached as a 'reconstruction' program, and men like Hodgson would apply the diplomacy and

⁶⁸ 'Addresses of Former Foreign Service Personnel Retired or Resigned', Foreign Service Journal, November 1953, Vol 30, No.11, p.56

⁶⁹ 'Col Rice Says One Trip to Soviet Russia would cure Radicals and Socialists', The Bismarck Tribune, September 21, 1923, p.6

⁷⁰ 'Plan to Aid Russia in Solving its Tremendous Food Problem', Cincinnati Times Star, December 19, 1921, p.20; 'Last of American Crusaders Against Famine Leave Russia', The Bradford Era, October 23, 1923, p.2; American Relief Administration Bulletin, Issues 30-39, 1922

⁷¹ Foreign Service of the United States, Diplomatic and Consular Service, G.P.O, Washington, 1924, p.9; Indianapolis Times, May 23, 1928, p.2

hawk-like sensitivity to opportunity, progress and rehabilitation that they had brought to bear in Hoover's post-war Relief Administration.⁷²

Whilst James F. Pershing Jr appears to have been retained by Henry Mandell's Chelsea Management Corporation, there's no evidence that the company ever had offices at East 55th Street. In 1942, the company was in fact operating from 28 East 10th Street on the eastern flanks of Greenwich Village, near Union Square. In a copy of the New York Times dated January 1942, it is reported that the same five storey business property had just been purchased by Brett, Wyckoff, Potter and Hamilton for an undisclosed investor. The 17 East 55th Street plot, 16.8 by 100 feet had been valued at \$82,000.⁷³ Several years later, agents representing the Federal Bureau of Investigation would search the offices of the company for any information that might shed light on Communist activities in the Philippines, in an investigation that appears to have been triggered by interest in the activities of the League of American Writers. It would be the same 17 East 55th Street address that would feature several times in the FBI investigations into Julius Rosenberg and Klaus Fuchs.

What Pershing Jr was actually doing at East 55th Street, and whether any of the things that he was doing here reflected personal or business affairs, isn't known. The purchase of the building plot in January 1942 suggests there may have been a period of transition in ownership and use. However, in the period that Pershing was based here, the property also appears to have been among a number of offices being used by publisher, *Howell, Soskin & Co*, a brand new publishing venture that had taken control of Stackpole Sons. In 1939, Stackpole's groundbreaking translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* had created something of a sensation among the uncommonly vigilant members of the House of Un-American Activities committee. How the publisher's new executive editor, William Soskin had acquired the translation remains the subject of debate, with some alleging that Intelligence man, William J. Donovan with the support of

⁷² 'US Trade Heads to Attend Parley', The Evening Star, Washington DC, May 18, 1929, p. A-7; 'Foreign Relations Gives Hoover 3 Major Tasks', March 3, 1929, Part II, p.1; 'America's Sparrow Hawks of Commerce', Washington Evening Star, March 3, 1929, Part II, p.4.

⁷³ 15 East 55th Street Bought, New York Times, January 16, 1942, p.38

propaganda specialists, the British Security Corporation, had put it in his hands. The idea is not without some merit as Soskin's new publishing company, *Howell, Soskin & Co*, had drafted in Frank J. Manheim, an expert in International Relations, as President. Within twelve months Manheim would be recruited for Donovan's fledgling OSS — America's precursor to the CIA. The second sensation came in the summer of 1940 when yet another translation fell into Soskin's hands. This time, Soskin had the full support of the Berlin Foreign Office. The German White Paper as it became known, was the brainchild of Nazi propagandist, Dr Manfred Zapp. The book consisted of papers, allegedly seized in Poland, that made the shocking revelation that America's Ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, was presently engaged in secret discussions that would seal America's entry into World War II — contrary to the more cautious government policy that was being promoted, somewhat reluctantly, by President Roosevelt.

Unbeknown to the Nazis, British and American Intelligence had been covertly using the release of the paper to inform the American public of the full scale of the Nazi threat as experienced and shared by Ambassador Bullitt in France. Shortly after publication, Bullitt submitted his resignation and a full and immediate inquiry was launched into the whole Soskin, Howell affair. In August that year, Bullitt addressed the American people from Independence Square in Philadelphia, bluntly predicting an imminent attack on the United States of America by a relentless and totally uncompromising German war machine whose appetite for global domination was increasing by the day. "America is in danger", he said gravely. Bullitt then asked the people to contact their senators and representatives and tell them that they backed General Pershing.⁷⁴ The previous year, James' uncle John J. 'Black Jack' Pershing — a leading voice in the pro-war lobby of 1916 — had demanded that President Roosevelt shore-up Britain's defences with the donation of another fifty naval destroyers. Both men were supported by Intelligence man, Colonel William J. Donovan, who was now advancing the theory that Hitler's marauding success in Europe was down not to

⁷⁴ 'Bullitt Forecasts German Invasion of US If British Fail', *Ogden Examiner*, August 19, 1940, p.1

his passionate and well-drilled military but to his sympathizers in Europe and Latin America. The message that Donovan was pushing was that German spies were now actively engaged in espionage at every level — *everywhere*.⁷⁵ The inquiry into the whole German White Paper affair that followed in November that year would, perhaps unintentionally, help substantiate Donovan's claims. The war wasn't over *there*, it was over *here*. The whole stunt had been a genius stroke of entrapment; a sleepwalking American public was suddenly roused from their slumbers by news that a secret column of Nazi spies and sympathizers were jamming the liberty-loving mechanisms of American democracy in the most devious of ways. The German Embassy in Washington could do little more than watch as several Nazi officials were charged with espionage. The Embassy wasn't the only casualty. After being lined up as Bullitt's successor in France, General John J. Pershing was left with very little option but to decline the appointment on 'health' grounds. The two men had been close allies for years, and the General's appointment would have been a significant and practical boost among those lobbying for intervention on behalf of France and Britain.⁷⁶ Everybody was looking to Pershing to carry the torch of his old friend, but for the next fifteen months at least, the flame died.

One of the addresses being used by the publishers of the German White Paper was, incidentally, 17 East 55th Street — the building that was at that time being shared by Pershing's nephew — and Gerlach's draft buddy — James Fletcher Pershing Jr.⁷⁷ Whatever their agendas, the backgrounds of all four men — Gerlach, Grunewald, Garsson and Nosovitzky — remain a secret and perplexing mystery.

⁷⁵ 'Donovan Says Democracies Prove Easiest for Nazis' Fifth Column', New York Times, August 21, 1940, p.9

⁷⁶ 'Pershing Decline Diplomatic Post', November 23, 1940, p.1

⁷⁷ 'The Black Book of Fascist Horror' (advertisement), Howell, Soskin Publishers, 17 East 55th Street, Soviet Russia Today, November 1945, Vol 14, No 7, p.30. The company had started with an office on N.E 45th Street. It's not clear if they occupied the two locations simultaneously. The address is also occasionally given as 17 East 45th Street.

Part III

Russian Supply Chains

“HE CAME WITH PLAN FOR RUSSIAN BANKS IN THE UNITED STATES. GERLACH FRIENDS ROTHSTEIN AND BAUCHLE INVOLVED IN CARD SHARK STING WITH RUSSIAN COLONEL”

At the time that Max enlisted with Ordnance Corps of the US Army in 1918, the handsome thirty-three year old had refused to answer questions relating to his ethnicity and his parents. As a consequence, his application form was duly reviewed by the American Protective League, an organization made up largely of volunteers working alongside the Department of Justice whose job it was to identify foreign and subversives attempting to enlist in the US Military. According the research undertaken by Professor Horst Kruse, the review concluded that there “should rest grave suspicion” on bona fides that Max had provided.⁷⁸ Compared to the report compiled by Henry W Grunewald, it was a more challenge and cautious assessment all round. Josph Brennan, the man assigned to Gerlach case, had been unable to ascertain anything that might cast the subject in a favourable light. The list of references that Max had provided appeared to be ‘camouflage’. The only possible exception to this, was that of George Bauchle, a well-known figure on Broadway, turned out to be an attorney for gangster and Tammany Hall strongman, Arnold Rothstein — a man, who we can say with some confidence, is likely to have provided the character inspiration for Gatsby’s shady, Mephistophelean mentor, Meyer Wolfshiem.

Peculiarly enough, at the time that Gerlach was completing his application for the US Army, Bauchle and Arnold Rothstein had sent out an invite to Russian trade and banking official, Count Nicholas Iseguine to attend a series of card games, first at the Partridge Club at Hotel Imperial and then at the Olympic Club at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. It was alleged that the Russian officer had arrived in New York as part of an official trade delegation prior to the First Revolution in Russia with plans to raise loans for a series of Russian state banks throughout the

⁷⁸ *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work: The Making of The Great Gatsby*, Horst H. Kruse, University of Alabama Press, 2014, p.32

United States.⁷⁹ The \$26,000 losses the envoy would suffer at the hands of Rothstein and Bauchle's card sharks had dire results. A short-time after the game took place, Count Isegune was found with gunshot wounds to his chest at his apartment at 9 East Forty Seventh Street in the so-called 'diamond district' of Manhattan. Just a few hours earlier the Count had signed a cheque for \$26, 400 and handed it over to Rothstein and Bauchle's gambling associate, John Shaughnessy, President of the club. Admitted to hospital he was duly pressed by police about his injuries. The Russian, who had been seconded to the *Russian Supply Committee* operating at 120 Broadway some years before, claimed he had gone back to his room and shot himself by accident.⁸⁰ The envoy — a State Inspector of the Russian Savings Banks — had arrived in New York as part of a special commission assigned by the former Finance Minister of the old Imperial (Tsarist) Government, Pyotr Bark. After the February Revolution, Prime Minister Kerensky had replaced Bark with Mikhail Tereshchenko.

Having recovered from his injuries, Isegune would be asked to take the stand at an inquiry into gambling at Rothstein and Bauchle's Partridge and Olympic clubs that had been set up in some haste by Manhattan District Attorney, Edward Swann in March that year.⁸¹ When later questioned in court, the Count explained how a series of unfortunate circumstances had led to him visiting the gambling club. In Petrograd, Isegune had always been in the habit of carrying large sums of money around in his pockets and set out to walk one day from his apartment off Fifth Avenue to Washington Square. There was a lot of activity out on the street as the New York Boy Scouts were having their first parade. He had stopped to watch the spectacle and whilst doing so, was relieved of some \$1, 700 by light-fingered mid-town pickpockets. His trip to the club had been an attempt to recoup his losses. George Bauchle, one of the several prominent military and legal figures who had provided the necessary bona fides for Gerlach's army and passport applications, had served alongside Shaughnessy as President of

⁷⁹ 'Came with Plan for Russian Banks in the United States', Washington Post, January 17, 1918, p.1

⁸⁰ Cards Cost Russian \$24,000 in a night

⁸¹ 'Lost money gambling', Bisbee Daily Review, March 7, 1918, p.2

Rothstein's Club. When cross-examined in court the Count said he never been introduced to Bauchle despite the fact that Bauchle had appeared at the final game. According to Police, Count Iseguine had lost nine out of every ten games of bridge and whist he had played at the club. The anti-vice squad also revealed how they had found evidence of a spy ring operating at the club and the names of several important individuals had been recovered. When questioned about the incident, the Count said he had no idea who was in receipt of his money.⁸² Before long, Bauchle's council, the respected former judge, William M.K. Olcott helped get the charges against him and the Partridge Club dropped. Over the years Bauchle's handling of tricky divorces had endeared him to some of New York's most powerful families. In January 1920 he and Shane Leslie's cousin, William Travers Jerome had both been consulted by Mrs Harding Davis, the wife of Theodore Roosevelt's journalist friend, Richard Harding Davis after his particularly messy affair with Miss Bessie McCoy, the 'Yama Yama' girl of Broadway.⁸³

In October 1919, some 12 months after the shooting of Captain Iseguine, the envoy's immediate superior at the *Russian Supply Committee*, the long-serving munitions chief, Colonel Oranovsky, died as the result of injuries he had suffered in an accident on the Brooklyn subway. Oranovsky's recovery was sufficient enough that he was allowed to leave hospital. But just three weeks later, the former chief of the Tsar's Military Cabinet was found dead at his home in Long Beach, Long Island, an area closely associated with Broadway mobster Arnold Rothstein and his Prohibition triangle, affectionately dubbed 'Rum Row' by the New York coast guard.⁸⁴ Oranovsky's death coincided, curiously enough, with an investigation that was being launched into some shady illegal arms deal

⁸² 'Gambling Raiders Find Spy Evidence', New York Sun, March 18, 1918, p.14; 'Russian Count who Attempted Suicide', New York Tribune, March 7, 1918, p.14

⁸³ 'David, if divorced, may wed Yama Yama Girl', Boston Post, January 21, 1910, p.2

⁸⁴ Philadelphia Inquirer, 03 October 1918. p2. Colonel Oranovsky had arrived in New York in June 1917 just as Kerensky's provisional government began to make good on the trading opportunities discussed by former American Secretary of State, Elihu Root (one time legal partner of Robin and Dreiser's friend, Arthur Carter Hume) and Minister-Chairman Kerensky in Petrograd that summer. Oranovsky's colleagues at the Russian Supply Committee in New York included Professor Yury Lomonosov (Ministry of Railways) and Professor Nikolai Borodin (Ministry of Agriculture).

between Grayson M.P Murphy's Guaranty Trust and suspected German spy, James Manoil. A year later, Murphy would hit the headlines again. This time he was accused of withholding over \$5 million that had been deposited in Murphy's bank by the Provisional Kerensky Government in Russia in July 1917.⁸⁵ Long Island would get its first fictional makeover in 1919 when it became the focus of Harold MacGrath's baffling spy caper, *The Private Wire* from Washington in which a team of Secret Service agents stake out a country mansion owned by a millionaire on the Island's gold coast. In adverts it was described as tangle of intrigue and romance, so 'deep themed' that not even the Secret Service could unravel it. Innocent people are suspected of disloyalty to their country, while the guilty ones go free. Even Great Neck gets a mention.⁸⁶

The link between Rothstein and Gerlach becomes even more compelling on discovering that the 'Speakeasy' being run by Gerlach at 51 West 58th Street was owned by Rothstein. According to a report in *Variety Magazine* dated July 27 1927, Gerlach was charged alongside Los Angeles publisher Kenneth Ford for aggravated assault on a Police officer and selling bootleg liquor. According the magazine's reporter, New York detectives Thomas Wepler and Bill Shelly had walked into the four-storey 'brown-front studio' and found a bottle of whisky on the bar. Words were exchanged, a badge was pulled out and Gerlach and his patron, Kenneth Ford attempted to bundle Detective Wepler out of the premises. At this point a violent struggle ensued. The much taller Ford pinned back Wepler's arms while Gerlach punched him on the jaw. Detective Shelly leapt to Wepler's defence and wrestled him free. The detectives shouted to waiting officers and a full raid was carried out, the stout wooden doors of the studio crashing in. The bar was just a few hundred feet from the Plaza Hotel and Gerlach's patrons were said to be "quite exclusive". The following month Magistrate, Abrhama Rosenbluth awarded Gerlach a \$15.00 fine and Max returned to the club.⁸⁷ In 1929, bootlegger Sherman Billingsley opened the Stork

⁸⁵ Boston Post, January 8, 1919, p.6

⁸⁶ 'Book Reviews', New York Times, Supplement, March 30, 1919, p.

⁸⁷ 'Speakeasy Battle', *Variety*, 27 July 1927, Vol 88 Iss 2, p.56; 'Fighting Fines', *Variety*, August 3, 1927, Vol 88, No. 3, p.32

Club — famously dubbed “New York’s New Yorkiest place on W. 58th” by gossip columnist Walter Winchell — less than fifty feet from Gerlach’s Club. Billingsley claims to have no knowledge of why he chose the name but it’s tempting to think that Max Stork may have featured somewhere in the mobster’s decision.



Part IV

Berlin and Havana

“HALLAM KEEP WILLIAMS AND BARON MAX VON GERLACH HAVE JUST ARRIVED IN HAVANA ... HE IS GOING TO WRITE A BOOK ABOUT THE BARON THAT WILL TOP FITZGERALD’S FAMED WORK

How Max Gerlach became associated with Arnold Rothstein isn’t clear. There is an eight-year period in Max’s life, starting 1912, when his exact location and activities are the subject of much speculation. This becomes clear in the report put together by Agent Harry W. Grunewald in the summer of 1917. After serving with the Atlantic Fleet at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and a shorter stint at the Brooklyn Navy YMCA, Grunewald had found himself being head-hunted by US Congressman and Democrat, Murray Hulbert. Within weeks of being introduced to Hulbert he was

being hired by Hulbert's friend, Charles F. DeWoody, Chief of the Department of Justice Bureau in New York who gained some notoriety for helping boxer Jack Johnson escape a jail sentence for dating a white woman, and the far less progressive round-up of US Army draft 'slackers'.

In April 1917, the tough-talking 27 year old began his work as an agent on \$3.50 a day at its Bureau of Investigation in New York, his fluency in German and his broad knowledge of German affairs bagging him a leading role in tracking down German spies. According to Fred C. Kelly, a journalist come investigator who had assisted Grunewald in some of the Bureau's more outlandish plots, the agent and his men had once been responsible for spiriting a way a vast collection of secret papers belonging to the German Embassy. For this the men had been forced to temporarily resign their commissions and burgle the Swiss Consulate where the papers were being held. Another plot had Grunewald impersonating a German agent to crack the cover of another German agent in Cuba. Posing as friends, Grunewald and Kelly had lured the man's wife to a fake office at Union Square and quizzed her about her husband. The wife is believed to have been so taken in by the pair's performance that she blew the lid on everything. On another occasion the wonderfully talented 'G-Man', posing as a 'Mr Grimm' spearheaded a similar ruse on a deeply embedded German agent who was suspected of stealing navy and aircraft documents from navigations company, *Sperry Gyroscope*. To all those who were on the right side of law and the right of the war, this unusually clever agent was known as a rough and tumble, two-fisted spy-hunter who was capable of being all things to all men — jovial yet stiff-jawed, creative but task-driven. One minute he could be smiling and cracking jokes, and the next he might very well have you in a headlock.⁸⁸ It wasn't some minor gambling or bootlegging offence that interested Special Agent Grunewald in

⁸⁸ 'The Wily Woman it Took Uncle Sam to Find and Foil', Fred C. Kelly, *The Atchison Daily Globe*, September 25th, 1922; 'G-Man Grunewald was Spies Nemesis', Fred C Kelly, *Washington Post*, July 24, 1955, p.E7; 'Grunewald Took Toll of Germans in World War I', *The Washington Post*, November 3, 1952, No. 27662, p.1

Gerlach; he was attempting to cast some light on Gerlach's 'German Activities'.

It isn't exactly clear what led him to Gerlach. The report merely states that Max was believed to have been expressing sentiments that might have been perceived as vaguely anti-American and how he had also been a personal friend of Major Ryan at the American Embassy in Berlin during the first six months of the war. Grunewald was unlikely to be in the habit of grilling every German-born American saying bad things about Uncle Sam, so it is probably safe to assume that his decision to question Gerlach was based on a more specific lead he was following up in one of his many spy-busting operations. At the time that he compiled his report, Grunewald had been busy building a case against New York anarchist, Emma Goldman. Grunewald and the Justice Department had apparently come up with 'evidence' that showed that Goldman and her husband, Alexander Berkman had been cooperating with German spies in foreign countries to stir up rebellions in India.⁸⁹ The 'evidence', which was typical of the time, chiefly consisted of Goldman's objection to the British Raj and the anti-war message that she and Berkman were pushing at home. Nevertheless, a number of requests for aid made by Indian Nationalist Revolutionary, Har Dayal in Berlin, believed to have been found among letters at their home, were viewed as proof of 'collaboration'. As Grunewald looked into Goldman, he was also looking into several other notable figures in the Jewish-dominated Second Avenue, and it is quite possible that Arnold Rothstein was amongst them. The investigation would eventually bring Grunewald into contact with Broadway impresarios, J. L. Costello and Freeman Bernstein whose impressively broad network of contacts and distribution channels would help the Federal US Government thwart a plot by German spies. The spies, it was alleged, would place messages in movie-reels and then ship them to neutral Holland to communicate with

⁸⁹ 'US Revelations Link Goldman and Berkman with Teuton Spies', The Wisconsin State Journal, February 25, 1918, p.4

agents back home.⁹⁰ Grunewald's attempts to speak to Gerlach at his 700 Broadway address in the summer of 1917 — a location that may have been linked to his motor business concerns with Rothstein's legal counsel and 'fixer', George Young Bauchle — had proved futile.⁹¹ A search was made of the premises, further associates were quizzed, but there was simply no trace of him. Grunewald had better luck at his address at West 38th Street, home of the New York Institute of Photography.⁹² The official report suggests that Grunewald's investigation into Gerlach had been triggered by some 'pro-German' remarks that Max is alleged to have made. Who shared this information wasn't unspecified in the agent's report.

When interviewed, Gerlach very calmly cleared up any confusion about his birth, telling Grunewald that he had been born in Yonkers, New York in 1885 and that his father and mother had been born in Germany. When pressed about the change of his name his response was no less prosaic: his father had died and his mother had remarried. Max's story seemed so straightforward. In 1913 he had gone back to Germany and returned the following year. The extent of his 'German activities' consisted mainly of visiting relatives. The next bit was a little more interesting. Max confirmed that his father, Ferdinand von Gerlach, had indeed been a Lieutenant in the Royal Prussian Army as Grunewald's informant had alleged. A report compiled by the American Protective League the following year added a few more details. According to Gerlach, his father had served as some kind of 'secretary' in the Royal Court of Friedrich III — the father of Kaiser Wilhelm. It may have all seemed little grey and unsensational, but what Max was telling Grunewald was a confusing mixture of truths, half-truths and plain old lies. According to research undertaken by Professor Kruse in the mid-2000s, Max's father *does* appear to have served Friedrich III in

⁹⁰ *Hustling Hitler: the Jewish Vaudevillian Who Fooled the Führer*, Walter Shapiro, Blue Rider Press, 2016, 210-215

⁹¹ There is some indication that prestige cars were being bought and sold at this address in 1917. See: *The New York Times* February 9, 1917, p.18 (Van Dyke autos)

⁹² 'Situations Wanted, Men — Earn Big Money', *The New York Times* December 16, 1917, p.4

some capacity. Records retained from the archives of the German Royal Court reveal that a Ferdinand Gerlach served as Geheimer Kanzlei-Sekretar (Inspector of the Secret Chancellery) in the Ministry of the Royal House of Hohenzollern in Berlin sometime between 1874 and 1877. If it was anything like the Secret Chancellery of Austria or Imperial Russia, then this is was the seat of espionage and state police — the department of intrigue. Extraordinarily enough, the one thing that Max seemed a lot more anxious to lie about was the country of his birth. Gerlach had not been born in America but in Germany. Gerlach did, however, confess that he had been back in Germany as recently as 1913 and 1914. Although the report fails to identify the exact reason for Gerlach’s visit, it does tell us that he secured his passport back to the United States through his friendship with a Major James A. Ryan, an associate of Ambassador Gerard at the US Embassy in Berlin. After spending some 12 months in Berlin, Gerlach says he applied for his passport back to the US in August 1914.⁹³

According to travel records, Gerlach left Berlin in October 1914, spending some three weeks in Great Britain before continuing his journey back to the United States. The ship manifest for the trip on the SS Devonian shows that Max left Liverpool for Boston on October 1st. Accompanying him on the journey was 23-year old music student, Mary L. Morrison.⁹⁴ There are two reasons that we know the pair travelled together. The first reason is that Gerlach uses the young woman’s home address for his passport application: 309 Sterling Avenue, Joliet, Illinois. The very same address appears in the US census of 1910 and shows Morrison, a ‘musician’, living here with her parents.⁹⁵ On the ship manifest Max A. Gerlach lists himself as ‘broker’ but enters ‘German’ in the field marked ‘race’. Why Max did this isn’t clear, but it may be a subtle indicator of where his loyalties lay in the first few months of the war.

⁹³ *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work*, Kruse, pp.29-33

⁹⁴ Max A. Gerlach/Mary L Morrison, Massachusetts, Boston Passenger Lists, 1820-1943, Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Boston, Massachusetts, 1891-1943, SS. Devonian, 1914

⁹⁵ Mary Louise Morrison, born 1890, US Census. Her parents are Angus and Flora Morrison. Both Scots Gaelic, originally from Canada.

Some, but not all, of the details regarding Gerlach and Mary Morrison are repeated in a newspaper report that the pair featured in upon their arrival in Boston. On October 11, the *Boston Sunday Post* told the grim and tragic story of how 49 year-old Annie Robinson — a survivor of the Titanic disaster — was presumed to have drowned in the last hour or so of the journey. It is believed that poor old Annie had jumped into the water as the SS Devonian had entered port after its 3,000 mile trip from Liverpool to Boston. According to the press report, the ship had started groping through a dense, unsettling fog in the last few hours of transit. It was speculated that Annie, perhaps restless and agitated by the sounding of the ship's horn and by memories of the Titanic, may have panicked and fled the ship. It was only her absence at the breakfast table that alerted the Captain that anything untoward had happened. Nobody witnessed the leap, but the Captain had concluded that it was the only possible explanation. After the Titanic disaster Annie's daughter Gladys had settled in Boston with James E. Prentis, son of the former American Consul, Thomas Theodore Prentis.⁹⁶ She was on her way to see her daughter at the time of the incident.

The press report went on to describe how the vast majority of passengers were Americans who had managed to secure their passage to the United States as part of the American Relief Fund. Some four months earlier war had been declared, and many of those sailing had been caught in the crossfire in Europe. Among those interviewed by reporters as the passengers disembarked in Boston were Max A. Gerlach of New York and Mary L. Morrison of Joliet — both of them described in the article as “music students in Berlin”.⁹⁷ What happened between Max's return from Berlin in October 1914 and Grunewald's investigation in June 1917 isn't known. The only clue about Max's activities between October 1914 and

⁹⁶ Prentis had served as consul in Martinique, a territory of the French Republic until his death in an earthquake in 1902.

⁹⁷ ‘Titanic Survivor Jumps from Liner’, *Boston Sunday Post*, October 11, 1914, p.3. The SS Devonian made the return trip to England with several hundred horses for the British Cavalry Regiment.

enlisting with the US Army in August 1918 are the references he provides from two known Rothstein associates: Judge Aaron J. Levy and George Young Bauchle, the gangster's partner at the Partridge Club and high profile attorney among the 'Old Money' families of New York. The employment record that Max enters on his Army Application ends rather mysteriously some six years earlier in 1912.

Baron von Gerlach and Hallam Keep Williams in Havana

During research carried out for an upcoming podcast, veteran New York journalist, Joe Nocera shared some tantalising new information. A brand new report had come to light. According to a story published in the *San Francisco Call* in April 1950, 'Baron Max von Gerlach' had arrived in Havana, Cuba with "the eccentric Hallam Keep Williams". Despite the report being no more than 40 words in total, the newspaper had a bombshell claim: the 65 year old Gerlach had been the original inspiration for the hero of *The Great Gatsby* and Williams was going to write a book about the Baron "that would top Fitzgerald's famed work".⁹⁸ The news came just three years after Zelda Fitzgerald is alleged to have told Princeton researcher, Henry Dan Piper that some Teutonic-looking bootlegger called 'Guerlach' had been the inspiration for husband's fictional creation, Jay Gatsby. It also came hot on the heels of the 1949 movie remake of the novel starring Alan Ladd and Betty Field. Ever since the novel had been republished for American troops in 1945 there been a sharp revival in interest. If ever there was a good time for Max to tell his story, it was now.

The man behind the Gerlach story was 'Cholly Knickerbocker', the pseudonym used by powerful 'smart set' gossip-columnist, Igor Cassini for *New York Journal-American*, a paper owned by Cholly's onetime father-in-law, William Randolph Hearst. Cassini, an aristocratic Russian whose

⁹⁸ 'Cholly Knickerbocker Observes', The San Francisco Examiner, April 17, 1950, p.20

grandfather had served as Russian Ambassador to Washington at the time of Theodore Roosevelt and William McKinley, would eventually face serious criminal charges for having failed to register his interests as a paid agent of Spanish dictator, Rafael Trujillo and the Dominican Republic. The dictator, whose autocratic empire had been build-up partly in collusion with Arnold Rothstein's men, Frank Costello and Meyer Lansky had been a thorn in the side of America for years.⁹⁹ According to reports compiled by the FBI in 1943, Cassini, an uncompromising anti-Communist, had been in receipt of a number of grace and favour benefits from General Manuel Benitez — then serving as head of the National Police in Havana — and several other Cuban notables. Rumours were also circulating that 'Cholly' had been voicing 'un-American' sentiments.¹⁰⁰ Cassini reviewed the trip in his 1977 autobiography, 'I'd Do It All Again', rejecting any suggestion that he had been expressing un-patriotic views and pointing out that he had been invited back to Havana under President Eisenhower just a few years later. Cholly's host on that second occasion, the US Ambassador, Earl E. T. Smith, did, it must be said, share the columnist's abject loathing of the Liberal-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista, and so he was there amongst good company.

Gerlach made numerous trips to Havana over the years — invariably arriving at times of political or social turmoil or transition. This time was no different. Cassini tells us that Gerlach had arrived with the 43-year old eccentric playboy, Hallam Keep Williams in mid-April, but this wasn't the only trip that Gerlach had made to Havana that spring. Max appears on a flight manifest dated March 26th 1950, travelling back from Havana to Idlewild International Airport in New York. When Gerlach booked the

⁹⁹ *The Dictator and the Mafia*, Jonthan Marshall, Journal of Global South Studies , Spring 2018, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 56-86. Just one month before the assassination of President Kennedy, Igor Cassini was charged with abusing his family's relationship with Jackie Kennedy to influence decision-making at the White House (Igor's older brother, Oleg Cassini was a close friend of Jackie Kennedy). It is believed that Kennedy made last-minute attempts to prevent the assassination of Igor's paymaster, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic in 1961. See: Cedar Rapids Gazette, March 24, 1963

¹⁰⁰ Luis Posada, Igor Cassini Espionage, January 30, 1943, JFK Assassination Documents/Federal Bureau of Investigation/NARA Record Number: 124-90158-10003

flight, the airline, *Linea Aeropostal Venezolana* (LAV), had been promoting itself in ads as a ‘luxury’ direct flight linking New York with Havana and the sunny Venezuelan capital of Caracas. Money must have been no object to Gerlach, because no sooner had he arrived back in New York in March than he was back in Havana with Williams again in April. It is equally interesting to note that ‘Baron’ Gerlach and Hallam Keep Williams had arrived in Havana just in time for the *First Inter-American Conference for Democracy and Liberty*, a series of talks and lectures that had been organised to promote the ideals of American democracy to its South American neighbours. As Batista’s corrupt government began to show signs of collapse and the warlords moved in, America was keen to promote credible alternatives to fascism, communism and the oligarchic dictatorships of military strongmen like Trujillo.¹⁰¹ A few years later, Igor Cassini, still writing as Cholly Knickerbocker, would recycle the whole ‘Inter-American’ brand for his pro-Trujillo lobbying agency, “Inter-American Public Relations Ltd” — a clear attempt by Cassini and his friends to wrestle the spirit of pan-Americanism from the arms of the American Left and Roosevelt’s New Dealers. It is not without some irony that Max von Gerlach, the man who was promoting himself as the patron saint of the American Dream, Jay Gatsby, had found himself in Havana just as America was planting the seeds of the dream in the poor, ungiving soils of South America. With the release of the Paramount remake of *Gatsby* starring Ladd the previous summer, the time had never been more ripe to capitalise on his friendship with Scott.¹⁰²

Berlin 1914 — Max at the Opera

Based on Joe Nocera’s discovery about Gerlach and Hallam Keep Williams, I was able to determine that Hallam’s mother was none other than Alice Peroux-Williams (aka Alice Perew Williams, b.1871), an

¹⁰¹ According to his FBI file, Scott Fitzgerald’s friend John Dos Passos was among those helping to organize the conference with Frances R. Grant.

¹⁰² Alan Ladd’s previous film for Paramount had been about the formation of the OSS — the forerunner of the CIA. Paramount had been discussing plans to make the film since 1945.

American opera singer who was active in Berlin at the same time as Max Gerlach. Records show that Alice, a gifted mezzo-soprano singer, had separated from her husband, the Buffalo-based stockbroker, Gibson Tenney Williams, shortly after the birth of Hallam in 1907. In 1909, Alice moved the family to Berlin, where she resided for some twenty years or more, returning only occasionally for concert tours of the States and special shows at the Carnegie Hall.¹⁰³ In 1914, Hallam's father Gibson married his second wife, Rhode Island music student and teacher, Florence Alice Smith (b. 1881) in Rochester in England after spending the previous five years shuttling between London, Germany, Italy and New York. They tied the knot on July 22, just six days before the outbreak of war. Gibson and his wife left Britain and returned to Germany sometime in late October. It was their intention to spend the winter in Munich, away from their base in the Bavarian alps.¹⁰⁴ Gibson's time in Munich was marked by a new diplomatic crisis, when Irish-American Nationalist, Thomas St John Gaffney was forced to resign his role as US Consul General in Munich for expressing frank pro-German sentiments. It was also alleged that Gaffney had links to human rights activist, Sir Roger Casement. Back in Britain, Casement had been charged with high treason for the role he was believed to have played in the shipment of illegal arms between Germany and Irish Nationalists.¹⁰⁵

On October 14 1914, Max Gerlach arrived in Boston aboard the SS Devonian with music student, Mary L. Morrison. According to Agent Greenwald's report, after leaving Berlin, Gerlach had stopped for some three weeks or more in London. Gibson Tenney Williams, the father of Gerlach's friend Hallam, returned briefly to the United States in the

¹⁰³ Alice P Williams, Hallam Keep Williams, Department of Passport Applications, August 3, 1914, Embassy at Berlin; 'Mme. Peroux Williams Returns for Tour in Concerts', Musical America, August 28, 1915, Vol 22 No. 17, p.15 The application explains that the family had left America in December 1909.

¹⁰⁴ Stafford Springs Press, July 29, 1914, p.1. Casement was executed in August 1916.

¹⁰⁵ Gaffney to Lecture, Chicago Broad Ax, October 1915, p.2 .Gaffney had been a leading advocate of Bishop John Ireland of Scott's hometown of Saint Paul, when Rome was considering making him a Cardinal of the Catholic Church of Rome.

autumn of 1917 when he gave a series of lectures to students revealing the ‘bare truth’ of the ongoing war in Europe and the true nature of conditions in Germany, France and Switzerland.¹⁰⁶ According to Professor Kruse, Gerlach was in England at least twice during this period. A passport application from 1916 states that Gibson first arrived in Germany in November 1913. The place that he made his home was Oberammergau, a tiny Catholic enclave on the Austrian-Swiss border.¹⁰⁷ When America entered the war in 1917, Gibson surrendered his services to the American War Relief Society of Geneva, then operating under the auspices of the American Red Cross.¹⁰⁸ A news item from the *Harvard Graduates Magazine* of September 1917 gives his forwarding address as the Société de Crédit Suisse in Zurich.¹⁰⁹

Whilst there is no actual record of what Gerlach was doing in Germany during the 1913 to 1914 period, it is curious to note that the name ‘Gerlach’ features on a photo of Alice Peroux-Williams that appeared in the *Musical America* journal dated May 1914, some several months before Max returned from Germany when both of them were in Berlin.¹¹⁰ In light of the fact that Max was cavorting in Havana with Alice and Gibson’s son Hallam in April 1950, it seems likely that Gerlach was known to Hallam Williams and his family as early as 1913/1914, and that they had probably kept in contact throughout their lives.

Other items that appeared in the European Press during the 1913-1914 period suggest that Hallam’s mother was a popular and respected figure within the ‘American Colony’ that was ringing American Ambassador, James W. Gerard, at the US Embassy in Berlin. This is interesting in

¹⁰⁶ Stafford Springs Press, September 27, 1917, p.3; October 4, 1917, p.1

¹⁰⁷ Gibson T. Williams, b.1870, Passport Applications, January 2, 1906 - March 31, 1925, Roll 301. Oberammergau was the location of a very famous passion play which attracted international attention during its 1910 performance. The future of this small Alpine village was politically sensitive at this time.

¹⁰⁸ See: <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt1h4nd13n/dsc/>

¹⁰⁹ The Harvard Graduates' Magazine 1917-09: Vol 26 Issue, 101, p.136

¹¹⁰ ‘Mme. Peroux-Williams, Mezzo Soprano, A New Star’, *Musical America*, May 30, 1914, Vol 20 Iss 4, p.25

several respects as the investigation into Gerlach's German activities performed by Harry Grunewald and the Justice Department in July 1917 reported that Max's passport application had been secured through his personal familiarity with Major James A. Ryan, a close adviser to Ambassador Gerard in the Embassy staff. According to Grunewald's report, Ryan was residing at the Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin at the time that Max secured the passport. A report compiled by the Operations of United States Relief Commission in Europe confirms that James A. Ryan was conducting his relief effort from the hotel during this period.¹¹¹ Coincidentally, records show that Gerlach and Peroux-Williams had both completed their passport applications on August 3rd, 1914 — although they appear to have travelled back to the United States separately — Alice setting out on her journey alone in March 1915 and Max with student singer/musician, Mary L. Morrison in October 1914.¹¹² On August 2nd, the full mobilization of the German Army had begun and on the 3rd it was announced that all foreigners were forbidden to leave Germany until after mobilization.

In January 1914, Ambassador Gerard had been forced to issue a strong defence of the morality of American singers and musicians after an article in *Musical America* suggested that the women were exposing themselves to corruption and exploitation. The journal, owned by British-born American, John Christian Freund, said the girls were exposing themselves to danger by being in Berlin unchaperoned.¹¹³ The fears that Freund was expressing may have been spurred in part by concerns over blackmailing and spying in the months leading up to the war. A spy-mania had gripped the country, and the nation responded by closing its borders and introducing super-tight regulations on those entering and those leaving the

¹¹¹ Letter from J. A. Ryan, Major of Cavalry, Chief of Party, American Relief Commission, September 1914, Report on Operations of United States Relief Commission in Europe, United States. Relief Commission in Europe, 1914, United States. War Department, 1914, p.71

¹¹² *F. Scott Fitzgerald at work : the Making of "The Great Gatsby*, Horst Kruse, p.27; Alice P. Williams, Concert singer, b.1871, August 3, 1914 Passport Applications, January 2, 1906 - March 31, 1925

¹¹³ 'Mr Gerard Defends US Singers Abroad', The New York Sun, January 25, 1914.

country. Gerard, a neutral envoy who was representing British interests in Germany at this time, would subsequently describe how travellers would be herded onto trains and at every port and transit point would have their particulars triple-verified by non-commissioned officers as the *genheim-Polizei* (secrete police) looked on. Unless one's credentials were particularly strong you would then endure a strip-search. Every item of clothing would be held up to a strong-light so that any hidden messages sewn into the lining of the clothes would be exposed. Every bottle would be examined, every food container opened, and every suitcase, bag or portmanteau inspected for false sides, tops and bottoms. Precisely eleven separate operations would need to be completed before anyone could leave the country: several visits to the Police precinct would have to be made, questions answered, particulars checked, friends and associates called to verify your identity, and questionnaires filled-out. This would be followed by a similar procedure carried out by the *Polizei-Praesidium* — a series of four separate visits to seven different offices lasting the best part of a week. As Gerard explained, the method of making travel difficult had been reduced to an almost scientific formula — a process that would almost certainly have been reciprocated in America.¹¹⁴ Gerlach's application for a passport back to the States that August must be viewed in this context. Shortly after war in Europe had been declared, thousands of Americans, many of whom had not taken the precaution of travelling with passports, started lining up at the doors of the Embassy in Wilhelm Platz. Demand was such that even an eleven year old boy was recruited to help sort the papers. Trains were laid on to get citizens out of Berlin on a dedicated relief line that ran from Charlottenburg Station via Switzerland, Munich and Carlsbad to Holland and from Holland to England.¹¹⁵ Major Ryan had recently arrived as head of the relief and repatriation mission, taken up residency at the Kaiserhoff Hotel and it was down to Gerlach to get to know him.

¹¹⁴ *Inside the German Empire*, Hebert Baynard Swope/James W. Gerard, The Century Co, 1917, pp.109-126

¹¹⁵ *My Four Years in Germany*, James W. Gerard, George H. Doran, pp.143-154

When Ambassador Gerard returned to American in the first months of 1917 he co-wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning book called *Inside the German Empire* with the New York World's Herbert Baynard Swope. In the book, Gerard shares his first-hand impressions of the economic, political, spiritual and military conditions that helped sustain the German nation in the first three years of the war, making special mention of the mass of bureaucratic hurdles that all Americans faced in their bid to get back home. Although Gerard and his wife had a social network that extended all over Long Island, it would be Swope's parties that Scott and his wife Zelda would attend in Great Neck. It wasn't simply Scott's proximity to Swope in Great Neck — Scott and family on Gateway Drive and Swope on East Shore Road — that drew the pair into each other's orbit, it was Swope's close personal and professional relationship with Scott's main drinking buddy, Ring Lardner. The newspaperman also had a deep, abiding friendship with Gerlach's Speakeasy patron, Arnold Rothstein and his wife Carolyn. At around the time that Max was managing Rothstein's speakeasy at No. 51 West 58th Street, Swope was renting a city apartment at No. 135, and Rothstein was living in one at No. 145 West 58th Street. That's how cosy the pair had become. ¹¹⁶

Although divorced some several years, Alice and Gibson Williams would both provide talks on the 'truth' of the situation in Europe on their occasional trips back to the United States. In February 1915, *Musical America* reported that Alice was now striving to bring about an amicable understanding between America and Germany "by deeds rather than words". As a celebration of this special relationship she would be joining the famous German baritone Paul Knüpfer at the Beethoven Hall, a performance she hoped would represent a "veritable entente cordiale". ¹¹⁷ A little earlier in February 1915, Alice had sung at a benefit concert

¹¹⁶ *The World of Swope*, E.J. Kahn Jr, 1965, Simon and Schuster, p.289;

¹¹⁷ 'German Attitude Toward Americans', Alice Peroux Williams, *Musical America* 1915-02-27 Vol 21 Iss 17

organized by Mrs Hans von Bülow.¹¹⁸ Bülow, a virtuoso pianist and conductor, had been instrumental in popularizing the composer Richard Wagner, whose autograph Gerlach possessed and which he claimed had been handed to either his father or his grandfather when the family were still living in Germany.¹¹⁹

It's more that he was a German Spy During the war

Fitzgerald placed no small amount of emphasis on rumours of spying in the *Gatsby* novel. At Gatsby's parties, guests exchange furtive, short-breathed rumours about his possible wartime adventures. In dramatic terms, it was the verbal equivalent of puffing out a toxic cloud of smoke and asking his readers to pick shapes from it. Some say that Gatsby spied for Germany during the war and some say that he'd killed a man once. Others, who claim to have known him growing up in Germany, insist that he is either a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm or a nephew of Paul von Hindenberg, the former General of the German army who was poised to become President at the time the novel was published. There's no denying that Gerlach himself had done much to contribute to the various rumours flying around about his loyalties during the war. When agents acting on behalf of the American Protective League spoke to his character witness, George Young Bauchle, Bauchle claimed that Gerlach had once shown him a signed-photo of composer Richard Wagner, possibly the most iconic symbol of German Nationalism outside of Adolf Hitler. Gerlach alleged that the picture had been signed personally by Wagner for his father, Ferdinand von Gerlach, when he was acting as secretary in the Secret Chancellery of Frederick III. In Imperial Russia, the Emperor's 'secret chancellery' — or the *Geheimer Kanzlei* as Kruse describes it — was a dreaded organization consisting of spies and spy handlers, men and women who would have the unenviable task of keeping tabs on Royal subjects.

¹¹⁸ Musical America, February 20, 1915, Vol 21, No. 16, p.24

¹¹⁹ Kruse, p.33

The combination of Wagner and Privy Councils makes it all sound tantalisingly Machiavellian and full of fabulous intrigue, but maybe the House of Hohenzollern was very different to that of the Romanovs. The notion that Gerlach's father was some glamorous 'master spy' is an attractive one, but there is no firm evidence to support it.

It wasn't the last time that Max would reaffirm his roots to Imperial Germany. When approached by a reporter during a flight at Westfield International Airport in April 1930, Gerlach would present himself as a "former German Royalist".¹²⁰ Rumours of German spies were rife during the war. Not even the singers and musicians that Max was associating with in Berlin and Manhattan were immune. A report in *Musical America* in June 1917 spelled out the scale of the problem the singers were facing, Dr O.P. Jacob writing that that he had been struck "by the persistency with which the rumour, ever and anon, crops up that many German artists, opera singers by preference, are nothing less than German ex-officio, secret service agents."¹²¹ The rumours of spies operating beneath the veil of opera and musical theatre had arrived the same month as Agent Harry Grunewald and the Bureau of Investigation started compiling their report on Gerlach. His friends and associates on the Berlin music scene, like Mary L. Morrison and Alice-Peroux Williams, can't have failed to trigger some general interest, but equally, it may well have been prompted by something more specific.

Sure enough, the report, which Grunewald completed on June 29, 1917, just happened to coincide with news that leading New York Opera singer, Edyth Wilson, was presently on a tour of Berlin, Munich and neutral territories like Holland, pushing a peaceful, if pronounced, pro-German message. The news chimed with the previous efforts of Alice-Peroux Williams and Paul Knüpfer to bring about an amicable understanding between America and Germany "by deeds rather than words". The idea of

¹²⁰ 'Flies Again', The Courier News, New Jersey, April 1, 1930, p.10

¹²¹ German Opera Singers in America Victims of False Spy Rumours, *Musical America*, June 9, 1917, Vol 26 Iss 6, p.44

an “entente cordiale” might have seemed harmless enough when America was taking a neutral stance in the war, but the sentiment would have been deemed undesirably unpatriotic as the US started mobilizing its troops against Germany in May 1917.

The man accompanying Edyth Wilson on the tour was her musical director, Herr von Gerlach. A report in *Musical Courier* in February 1917 revealed that Wilson would be among several stars from Berlin and Munich who were scheduled to give a performance at The Hague under the direction of Intendant von Gerlach.¹²² The concert, curiously enough, was based around the work of Wagner, the composer that Wilson had become most famous for popularising in America and Europe. Contrary to what you might think, ‘Intendant von Gerlach’ appears not to have been Max Gerlach. The Intendant was Berlin-born Arthur von Gerlach, an Opera House aficionado who was lending his support to the German Foreign Office in their diplomatic efforts with America and the neutral territories. Nevertheless, word might have gone around that the pair were related.

There are several questions worth asking: was it possible that Max Gerlach was trading on some alleged (or real) family association with Arthur von Gerlach during his musical time in Berlin? Had Max inveigled his way into the operatic circles at the Embassy with the intention of gaining monetarily from these contacts, for the purpose of intelligence gathering? Was it in Berlin that he had got the autograph of Wagner and not, as not as he told Bauchle, as an heirloom from his father when he was in the service of Friedrich III?

14 Jones Street. Max Attempts Suicide

News of Gerlach’s links with the world of opera would continue well into the 1930s, when it was reported by the press of New York that Max had been living at the \$40,000 mansion of former singing star, Lydia Lindgren in Flushing. The story they told was a strange one. In the last week of

¹²² ‘Wagner at Dutch Capital’, *Musical Courier*, February 8, 1914, Vol 74 Iss 6, p.7

December 1939, some ten weeks after war had been declared in Europe, a 55 year old Max Gerlach sat in the apartment of his friend, Elizabeth Mayer in Manhattan, put a revolver to his head and pulled the trigger. Although the newspapers speculated that Max had been plagued by the collapse of some business concerns, they were also keen to point out that just a few weeks prior to the incident, Max had been living at the home of former ‘Swedish Nightingale’, Lydia Lindgren at 35-10 16rd Street in Flushing.¹²³ Like Gerlach, the American-based singer who could speak five languages and included the likes of Nietzsche and Goethe among her favourite reads, had spent time studying music in Berlin.¹²⁴ Her meteoric rise to stardom had been helped by her romantic association with German-American millionaire, Otto H. Kahn — chairman of the Metropolitan Opera Company and a powerful figure on Wall Street. In the early 1920s she had married Italian tenor and voice coach, Raoul Querze.

At the time of the Max’s attempted suicide, the 55 year-old Lindgren had been out of the newspaper headlines for some seven years or more. In the 1920s and early 1930s the startlingly beautiful soprano singer had featured in a steady glamorous stream of diva sensations, mysterious disappearances and high-profile sex scandals. But in the six years leading up to the incident, things had all been relatively quiet. The only exception to this was a story printed in the last week of October, just a matter of weeks before Gerlach pulled the trigger. According to the story, Lydia was seeking to petition her former husband, Raoul Querze, for the provision of a temporary allowance. In her customary dramatic fashion, the singer had claimed that the \$300,000 fortune she had earned originally, had finally been exhausted.¹²⁵ It is not known if Gerlach and Lindgren had been having an affair, nor if his suicide attempt at the home of Mayer had in some way been wound-up with the singer’s own declining fortunes.

¹²³ ‘Von Gerlach Tries Suicide in Village Apartment’, Long Island Star Journal, December 22, 1939, p.1-2

¹²⁴ ‘Lydia Lindgren: Mezzo of Chicago Opera Company’, Boston Sunday Post, September 10, 1916, p.42

¹²⁵ ‘Singer Asks Ex-mate’s Aid’, San Antonio Light, October 26, 1939,

According to a full page spread in May 1950, Lindgren had been left destitute. The \$40, 000 mansion she had shared with Gerlach in Flushing with was heavily mortgaged and the tax-burden on all her valuables, including her jewellery had been sold. She dismissed the few furnishings she had left in the house as ‘junk’. ¹²⁶

As Gerlach dragged his feet around Washington Square Park on the afternoon of December 21st, it would have been perilous underfoot. It was the first day of winter. Ice had brought traffic to a standstill and the roads around the main streets would have been peppered with sand. The temperatures looked set to plummet even further that afternoon, as another barrage of snow showers moved in. It was going to be a White Christmas. Three more shopping days to go. But poor old Max wasn’t thinking that far ahead. Gerlach appears to have let himself into Mayer’s apartment at 14 Jones Street the afternoon prior to the incident and spent the subsequent time writing letters as he waited for her return. The pair had sat reading until 10.00pm when Elizabeth looked up to see him put a revolver to his head, whisper very calmly his last goodbye and fire a single shot into his right temple. Police would find four sealed letters in his pockets. Who the letters were addressed to and what were included in them was never disclosed.

Mayer appears to have known as much about Max as the rest of us. As far as she was aware, Max von Gerlach was a retired army officer and former German baron. Describing him to the press echoed Scott’s description of Gatsby: he had an immaculate military bearing and a strong Oxford accent. Beyond that, she knew very little about him. ¹²⁷ When quizzed about Baron von Gerlach, the German Consulate in Manhattan said they had no record of any baron by that name. Lydia Lindgren claimed that she too had no idea about Gerlach’s background, only that he had left the house rather suddenly and had neglected to take his things. Police told reporters that

¹²⁶ ‘Artistic Mr Querze’s Persevering Prima Donna’, San Antonio Light, May 5, 1940.

¹²⁷ ‘Von Gerlach Tries Suicide in Village Apartment’, Long Island Star Journal, December 22, 1939, p.1-2

Gerlach was not given to talking about his past, his relatives or personal affairs, and as a result they had practically no further information on him. Just days earlier, a real German Baron was confronted with a no less violent tragedy when the 21-year old mistress of Baron Friedrich von Oppenheim, a wealthy German monarchist, plunged to her death from his 10th floor apartment in Lower Manhattan. The woman, Lola Lazlo was the stepdaughter of Hungarian film director, Aladar Laszlo. Friends of the girl were adamant that Lola was incapable of taking her own life and the Baron was grilled by Police.¹²⁸ At the time that of the tragedy the Nazi Party were pressing for the Baron's return. Pressure was being heaped on his wife back in Cologne, but according to his family, von Oppenheim was reluctant to leave America and provide his backing to a war that he and his conservative nationalist circle of friends believed to be ill-judged. With the prospect of his assets being seized and the safety of his wife and children now in jeopardy, he returned some eight weeks later. In 1942 he would be investigated by the Gestapo for assisting in the evacuation of Jews workers from the Netherlands.

Little or nothing is known about Elizabeth Mayer, the woman that Max was staying with at the time of his attempted suicide, although the address of the apartment, 14 Jones Street in Greenwich Village, does make it possible to get a snapshot of Max's lifestyle and the company that he kept at this time. For the best part of twenty years this fashionable Manhattan district was the heartland of New York Bohemia and in 1939 it was literally teeming with boisterous Marxist radicals, bearded artists, freethinkers — and Soviet spies. According to a report drawn up by the *Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, 14 Jones Street was home to no less than three card-carrying members of America's Communist Party that year: Mary Gutchess, Clarence Dorman and Silas Goodwin. If you were to look at the street as a whole you would find that a total of sixteen party members made up the tiny Manhattan block, composed of

¹²⁸ 'Actress Falls Ten Stories to Her Death from Baron's Rooms', Los Angeles Times, December 17, 1939, p.1 ; 'The Gay Dramatist's Tragic Double Trouble', Port Arthur News, 27 October 1940.

around thirty separate buildings.¹²⁹ At nearby 18 Gay Street were Communist Party members Frances Kline and Mary McCarthy, the Trotskyist author girlfriend of Scott's longtime friend and confidante, Edmund Wilson. Mary's neighbours at 17 Gay Street would eventually come to the attention of Federal Agents when it was learned that a Soviet GRU Cell was operating from its premises. The Soviet painter and spy, Esther Chambers was a regular visitor to this address too, and another good friend of Wilson and McCarthy. In later years, Chambers would famously describe how this tiny little apartment on a curvy block-long street was used as the secret base for a highly efficient communications system between the Communist underground in America and their counterparts in Germany. Letters and film would be carried by couriers using the North German Lloyd SS Line and the Hamburg American Line, developed in-house from a makeshift dark-room consisting of a short-tub, a shelf and battered old photographic enlarger, that had been squeezed in an almost impossible position beside a basin and toilet in the closet-like Gay Street bathroom. Once the film had been developed, couriers and Comintern agents would then meet up in clubs and cafes dotted around the Village and perform a crepuscular routine of 'dead-drops'.¹³⁰ According to the passionate anti-Communist crusader Kenneth Goff, foreign agents would hand Chambers and his friends money belts containing as much as \$10,000. The money would then be used promoting the revolution in South America, the Philippines and Japan. On other occasions Chambers would fly to San Francisco and to the Soviet colony in Hollywood and disperse funds there.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Signers of 1939-40 Communist Party Petitions for State and City Elections, Boroughs of New York City, Official Report, the Names and Addresses of the Signers of Petitions for Candidates of the Communist Party for State and City Elections, 1939-40, for the Confidential Use of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Estados Unidos. Congress. House. Special Committee on Un-American Activities (1938-1944), 1940

¹³⁰ *Perjury: the Hiss-Chambers Case*, Allen Weinstein, Random House, 1997, p.106; *Witness*, Whittaker Chambers, Random House, 1952

¹³¹ 'High Treason Exposed', *The Pilgrim Torch*, May 1950, Kenneth Goff, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Radical Greenwich

John Dos Passos (a prominent supporter of Leon Trotsky during the 1930 show trials) and Edmund Wilson were just two of Scott's friends who had been cool, contented residents of 'The Village'. At 3 Washington Square North, the pair would have once been just a five-minute walk from Max's flat at 14 Jones Street. Even closer to Max on McDougall Street was the passionately subversive, Washington Square Bookshop, one of the first book stores ever to stock the banned and 'obscene' *Ulysses* by James Joyce. The Village was about as extreme and as visionary as it got. The story being told in the press was that it had become something of a legend among "long haired poets" and artists. But this wasn't a new phenomenon by any means. In the early 1920s, the district had been home to Jane Heap and Margaret C. Anderson's censor-defying *Little Review*, before it had no option but to move to Paris. Just a few doors down from this was Samuel Roth's porn and 'banned-book' emporium, *The Poetry Bookshop*. It was here that the more discerning customer could get their sweaty little hands on 'bootleg' copies of *Ulysses* by James Joyce and Theodore Dreiser's *Genius*, invariably dispensed without the slightest shame in their beguiling brown-paper bags. The district famous for its radical art and politics was also home to one of the most radical Jazz Clubs of its generation too. Ten minutes' walk around the corner from Max and Mayer at 14 Jones Street was Barney Josephson's hot new venue, Café Society. The club at Sheridan Square, would be the first racially integrated nightclub in New York. Josephson, a former Cotton Club regular had launched the club just 12 months prior to Max's suicide attempt, its name handed to given to him by Igor Cassini's 'Cholly Knickerbocker' predecessor, Maury Paul, who dutifully promoted it as the 'the Wrong Place for the Right People'.¹³²

¹³² *Cafe Society, The Wrong Place for the Right People*, Sarah Bean Armann, 2015, <https://www.villagepreservation.org/2015/12/30/cafe-society-the-wrong-place-for-the-right-people/>

Josephson had originally been inspired by the clubs he had visited in Montmartre in Paris and in Berlin in the early 1930s. It was in Berlin that he had become utterly mesmerized by the reactionary political forces gathering in force around its bars. The bars would be tiny things with small stages. Singers and musicians would be boxed-up and eye to eye with artists, caricaturists, composers, poets and left-wing intellectuals. It was the ultimate in anything goes, from nude dancing to erotic performances, gay acts, drag acts, drug acts and everything in between. Josephson found the experience totally exhilarating and soaked it up. The smoky burlesque atmosphere of the club also packed a clear anti-fascist message. Once the doorman had shown you in and ushered you downstairs you would be met by the Hitler Monkey — a large clay sculpture of a monkey with the Fuhrer’s head dangling from a pipe on the stairwell. Just three years earlier, Barney’s brother Leon had been among thirty people arrested for plotting Adolph’s murder. A short time later, George Mink — duly charged alongside Leon that day — would be revealed as one of Stalin’s star assassins — a special agent in the G.P.U whose real priority was German naval plans. It was a world turned upside down. On the walls would be murals satirising their upper-crust Broadway rivals. Behind the bar was a mural of animals. A long, linear menagerie of walruses, bears, pigs, orangutans, lizards and dogs would provide a surrealist mirror of a noisy clientele hollering for drinks in front of them. A cigarette girl would drag her wares around the tables, and following her an ‘ashes girl’.¹³³ In March 1939 an ad appeared in Scott’s old campus paper, *The Daily Princetonian*: ‘Café Society: 2 Sheridan Square, Chelsea 2-2737 — Don’t miss, “What You Going to Do When There Ain’t No Swine” sung by Billie Holliday.’¹³⁴

Just four weeks before Max tramped up through the snow and let himself at 14 Jones Street, the unthinkable had happened — Kristallnacht, the

¹³³ *Cafe Society: The Wrong Place for the Right People*, Barney Josephson, University of Illinois, 2009

¹³⁴ *Don’t Miss*, Daily Princetonian, March 24, 1939, p.4

Night of the Broken Glass. Brutal Nazi groups had launched a series of furious assaults on German Jews. People were beaten, shops were looted, properties were burned and a brand new spectacle of hell spread like wildfire across the nation. When the SS Bremen docked at one of the nearby piers in the Village, a scuffle broke out between Nazi-sailors and outraged New York dockers. The atmosphere of holiday carnival at the club took on a peculiar, manic aspect, the tootin' of the trumpets and the boogie-woogie licks mingling in a way that only Jazz ever could with the schizophrenic mood of the city.

Like so many of the club's neighbours on Jones Street, the owner's brother, Leon Josephson would eventually be subpoenaed by the *House Committee on Un-American Activities*. Federal attention would also fall on its musical director, the civil rights activist and former aristocrat, John Hammond. Fast-forward to the early 1960s and Hammond, still intent on breaking down cultural barriers would play a critical role in launching the career of folk-singer, Bob Dylan. The cover for his second studio album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* was in fact shot just outside 14 Jones Street. All in all, 14 Jones Street was probably the last place on earth to find a preposterously affectatious German monarchist holding a gun to his temple.

Elizabeth Mayer

Nothing at all is known about Gerlach's girlfriend, Elizabeth Mayer, but a small ad run in Edmund Wilson's Marxist-lite journal, the *New Republic*, might just offer a clue. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the journal regularly promoted rooms here: "*Greenwich Village, 14 Jones Street, near Sheridan Square. Two separate rooms, automatic refrigerator, incinerator, fireplace, \$60 to \$90. References. Agent on premises.*"¹³⁵ The property itself was a five-storey building made up of around a dozen or so

¹³⁵ The New Republic 1929-10-02: Vol 60 No. 774, p. V; The New Republic 1931-10-07: Vol 68 No. 879, p.111. The cost of the room was approximately \$1000-1600 in today's money. The ad was run regularly for several years. In 1931 the price came down to \$50-60.

apartments. In years gone by the block had played a key role in New York's 'settlement' program. Musician and translator, Elizabeth (Wolff) Mayer, who fled from Germany to New York in 1936, had worked on several contributions to *New Republic* and it is possible, given the journal's popularity with journalists, authors and editors, that the owner of the two rooms, who also lived on the premises, may have been keen to let it out to likeminded souls in arts and publishing. The theory has other supporting elements. Scott's close friend Edmund Wilson, who appears to have used a similar caricature of Gerlach in his 1924 play, *The Crime in the Whistler Room*, was associate editor of the *New Republic* on an on-off basis from the mid-1920s to the 1940s. Perhaps aware of the room's existence, he had mentioned it to Mayer and Mayer had taken it on, or Mayer had mentioned it to Max and Max had taken it on.

In the summer and autumn of 1961, 14 Jones Street was the home of future Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Holbrooke. Still in his early twenties, Holbrooke was an occasional student writer for the New York Times. At this time Greenwich Village was still very much the refuge of unknown artists and radical thinkers. Jazz may now have taken a backseat to Rock n' Roll, but the quick-witted snarl of folk flicked the Vs at the establishment in the same casual and prickly melodious way. Holbrooke's one room, ground floor apartment was shared with Lawrence Chase, the editor of his college newspaper. When Holbrooke was offered an advisory role at the White House during the Johnson administration, the FBI performed the usual background checks. During the course of their investigations they found that the youngster's name was included in the records of the *Fair Play for Cuba Committee* at Brown University. This would be the 1959 to 1961 period, in the run-up to the Bay of Pigs. Until it was disbanded in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, the Cuba Committee was believed to have served as Fidel Castro's propaganda arm in the United States. It was during this same period that Holbrooke began spending much of his time at the home of David Rusk whose father, Dean Rusk was serving as President Kennedy's Secretary of State. It was in fact Rusk who would

guide the beleaguered President through the Bay of Pigs fiasco that same year.¹³⁶ Although concerned about what they had found, the FBI found no tangible evidence of espionage.

It is interesting to note that it was the same Elizabeth (Wolff) Mayer who was a one-time romantic interest of the poet W.H. Auden. Auden, also a friend of Wilson and a contributor to *New Republic*, moved to New York the very same year that Max attempted suicide. The address that Auden provided on the ship manifest in January 1939 was that of Random House founder, Bennett Cerf. Like Wilson, Cerf was another prominent figure in the anti-censorship movement then energizing the left-wing cliques and stormy petrels of Lower Manhattan. British Intelligence would open their own file on Auden in the 1930s and years later the poet would be suspected of playing a part in the escape of Cambridge Spies, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. Auden would eventually settle at 7 Cornelia Street in Greenwich Village, a property that was practically back to back with 14 Jones Street. During the early phase of his arrival Auden was reliant on Mayer for emotional and artistic support. Her ‘open house’ on Long Island functioned like some Parisian salon, a refuge for any artist, singer or musician looking to recharge their creative batteries on the constant flow of energies buzzing about the home. There is, however, no record of Auden’s patroness, Elizabeth (Wolff) Mayer having a separate apartment in Manhattan to the house she had on Long Island. Despite this, she remains a credible, if not totally satisfactory suspect in our search for Gerlach’s girlfriend. A trawl through the US census of 1940 reveals that by April 1940 Mayer was no longer using the Jones Street address. Research undertaken by Horst Kruse in 2014 suggests that Max himself had little option but to move on: the bullet that had entered his temple had left him

¹³⁶ Richard Charles Holbrooke, Federal Bureau of Investigation; ‘The Journalist’, E. Benjamin Skinner, *The Unquiet American: Richard Holbrooke in the World*, eds. Derek Chollett & Samantha Power, Public Affairs, New York, 2011, pp-13-14.

blind. Six months after his attempted suicide, Max could be found among the 36 inmates residing at the State Blind Asylum.¹³⁷

Max and Mizener

When Gerlach arrived in Havana with Hallam Keep Williams in April 1950, Cholly Knickerbocker had made a point of observing that Baron von Gerlach, who was going to write a book about his life was now 'blind'. The way that Cassini phrases it, however, suggests that Gerlach's real-life adventures had been every bit as sensational as the spy and bootlegging rumours that swirled around Scott's hero: "*The eccentric Hallam Keep Williams has just arrived in Havana with Baron Max von Gerlach, who is the protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby'. Hal says he is going to write a book about the Baron, who is blind now, that will top Fitzgerald's famed work.*" Given the scope for criminal prosecution, one might speculate that the book, were it ever to be written, would be more likely focus on Max's many experiences among the fantastically rich and talented denizens of New York than his bootlegging exploits with Arnold Rothstein. Lifting the lid on his time in Berlin and on his on-off romance with opera was one thing. Revealing the inner workings of organised crime was another. It would have come with considerable risks to his safety.

In February 1951 Gerlach made the first of many attempts to contact Fitzgerald's biographer, Arthur Mizener. Max, now 65, was desperately keen to talk to him about Gatsby, and Mizener seems just as desperately keen to avoid him. Horst Kruse has done an excellent job of summarizing the scene: Gerlach hears Mizener talking on the Mary Margaret McBride radio show about his new, groundbreaking biography of Scott. Minutes later, Gerlach contacts the radio station telling them that he is "the real Jay Gatsby". A secretary working at the station approaches Mizener and informs him of the call. The pair exchange a series of letters, and Mizener, who has already mentioned "a Teutonic-featured man named von

¹³⁷ Kruse, p.25

Gerlach” in a footnote in his book already, seems determined to avoid a meeting. As far as Mizener is concerned, Scott may have taken some inspiration for the Gatsby character and some superficial characteristics of Gerlach, but the things that really define Jay Gatsby — like his “motives” and “ideas” — were not those of Max. Mizener suggests that Gerlach puts down everything he knows in writing, but Max is reluctant to do this. As much as he would like to share the evidence that would back it up, he would prefer not to put it in writing. Frustrated by the obstacles being put in his way, Max shares his disappointment. Responding to Mizener’s letter, he describes the scholar’s rather dismissive assessment of the role he had played in the creation of Gatsby as purely “speculative”. In a letter dated July 2, 1951 Gerlach suggests they communicate via “through other channels”, before mysteriously adding: *“I would prefer it this way as there are few people to whom I could express my candid comments with regard to F. Scott Fitzgerald, who might not, perhaps, misinterpret them”*.¹³⁸ Kruse asks a very reasonable question in his book: why, after going to all that trouble to mention Max’s name in his book, was Mizener able to dismiss his tale so casually? And why didn’t he want to meet him? You have to try and understand how Max might have felt at the time; on the one hand Mizener had mentioned him to others as a possible source for Gatsby, and on the other he seemed curiously keen to reject the idea outright when approached by the man himself. What was undoubtedly curious from Gerlach’s perspective, was that Mizener now had little or no curiosity at all.

Mizener appears to have first learned about Gerlach through conversations that Princeton scholar, Henry Dan Piper had with Scott’s wife, Zelda Fitzgerald, shortly before her death in a hospital fire in March 1948. The story told by Zelda’s biographer Nancy Mitford (another one-time Princeton scholar) is that Piper had visited Zelda in a fairly spontaneous fashion at her home in Alabama in March 1947, just as he was being discharged from the army at the nearby Anniston camp. What

¹³⁸ Kruse, pp.14-15

Mitford says, however, isn't strictly true. By the time that Piper was interviewing Zelda, he had already taken up his position within the Graduate School at Princeton. A local news item dated November 1945 suggests that Piper had already received his discharge and had made the rather surprising transition from Princeton's Department of Chemistry, where he graduated in 1939, to the Department of English.¹³⁹ During the war Piper had worked on the highly classified Manhattan Project, the research and development program headed by Robert Oppenheimer, that would culminate with the world's first atomic bomb. The work that Oppenheimer and his team produced would result in the complete annihilation of the cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki — and sealed the end of the Second World War.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Piper, who had provided problem solving support to the head of research on the Manhattan Project, exchanged his lab coat for the neat pair of slacks and corduroy jackets that were common among the tutors at Princeton's literature department — the emotional fallout of the bombs perhaps having no small amount of impact on the path that his post-war career would take. Mitford writes that Piper had been greatly intrigued by Fitzgerald's work whilst writing for the Princeton magazine as an undergrad. In the frightening new world he had partly created himself, the simple pleasures of Piper's youth must have shone like light at the end of a very dark tunnel. Whilst science could so easily destroy the world, art could so easily save it. Sometime between March 13 and March 14 Zelda invited Piper across for tea, during which he told her of his great admiration for Scott and his plans for writing his biography. The conversations went well, and although still emotionally and mentally drained from her regular trips to the Highland View sanatorium for treatment for schizophrenia, Zelda was relaxed and lucid enough to talk about her and Scott's life together. It was only when Piper told her that he had been given access to papers and letters the possession of Scott's

¹³⁹ 'Henry D. Piper', Swarthmore Swarthmorean, November 20, 1945, p.1; <https://paw.princeton.edu/memorial/henry-dan-piper-%E2%80%99939>

attorney Judge John Biggs Jr that things became a little more tense.¹⁴⁰ Within minutes of mentioning the papers, Zelda seemed shaken. She needed to lie down. The chat, for now at least, was over. When he arrived the following day Zelda was wringing her hands and seemed visibly distressed. Piper recalled that all the old energy and confidence that had radiated from her the previous day had been lost.

On November 2, Zelda returned to Highland Hospital for further treatment. Before stepping into the taxi she went and hugged her mother and told her that she was not afraid to die. At midnight on March 10th a fire broke out on the floor where Zelda was sleeping. She had several other patients, each of whom had been given strong sedatives to help them sleep, were among the nine fatalities as the fire swept from the kitchen, up through a dumbwaiter shaft to the very top floor of the building. One month after a coroner's inquest returned a verdict of an accidental fire, 44-year old Willie Mae Hall, night supervisor at the institution, claimed responsibility not only for the fire but for over sedating patients. At nine o'clock on April 13, Hall walked into the city police department, demanding that officers lock her up immediately, clearly terrified of what might happen next.¹⁴¹

The gossip that Zelda shared about a "Teutonic featured man" called "Guerlach" was never actually published in Piper's eventual biography of Scott in 1965. Instead Piper appears to have handed the information to Mizener, who featured it as a footnote in *The Far Side of Paradise* in 1951. Exactly when Piper had handed his notes to Mizener isn't known. Mizener appears to have started his biography of Scott in 1945 but the inclusion of the detail only in the endnotes of the book suggests it may only have been shared with Mizener shortly before going to print. This is a possible explanation for why it didn't appear in the main body of the text. Either way, if Piper had first learned about the identity of Gerlach from

¹⁴⁰ Scott had known Biggs at Princeton. He acted as executor to his will and supported his daughter Frances. Biggs had served as a Circuit Judge in the Court of Appeals under Franklin Roosevelt.

¹⁴¹ 'Night Nurse at Highland Enters Jail', Burlington Daily Times, April 13, 1948, p.1.

Zelda as he claimed, then Zelda was no longer alive to corroborate his story. The huge revival in interest in Scott triggered by the production and release of Paramount's 1949 *Gatsby* remake would have to pass by without comment from the one person who knew Scott — and perhaps Gatsby and 'Gerlach' best — Zelda Fitzgerald.¹⁴²

Gerlach's Ghost Writer — Hallam Keep Williams

What, if anything, became of the book that Gerlach had intended to write with Hallam Keep Williams in April 1950 isn't known. Journalist Joe Nocera thought him worthy of investigation. Sadly, our knowledge of Williams turned out to be little better than our knowledge of Gerlach. Looking at their both lives is like looking through frosted glass; you can make out the vague, blurry outline of things, things you think you can see, but these things are so lacking in definition, so full of gaps in our understanding that they have all the substance of ghosts. The whole thing is like looking at some fascinating antique tapestry, where it is the holes and not the fabric that dominates.

What we know about Williams can be summed up fairly quickly and some of which has been touched on already. Hallam was born on April 14, 1907 to Alice and Gibson Tenney Williams, the former a respected opera singer and the latter a prominent broker from a wealthy and respected family in Buffalo, New York.¹⁴³ Hallam's Uncle, Charles Hallam Keep, was the former US Secretary of State during the Roosevelt and Taft administration and Hallam and his siblings would be embroiled in claims over his estate for the best part of fifty years.¹⁴⁴ In 1910, his parents separated and in

¹⁴² Piper also appears to have shared much the same anecdote with letters with Matthew Bruccoli in April 1974, just weeks after the release of Robert Redford's *Gatsby* in the cinemas. Piper also claimed that Zelda had expressed some support of fascism in the interview. This seems doubtful.

¹⁴³ Hallam's father was a member of one of America's oldest patriotic societies, The Society of the Cincinnati. He was also a member of the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York. He was based in Germany from 1913 until the late 1920s when he relocated to Italy, before eventually living near Caltech in Pasadena (1936-1944)

¹⁴⁴ 'Sues Mother As Guardian', New York Times, September 14, 1926, p.25. Hallam sued his mother for access to a trust fund set up by his aunt, Margaret Turner Williams. Margaret's

March 1914 the marriage was dissolved. It was around this time that Hallam left with his mother and siblings for Germany. During the war and post war years, Hallam's education is believed to have been "received and polished" in Budapest, Vienna and Petrograd in Russia.¹⁴⁵ From 1909 he was living in Berlin, and during the late 1920s had joined his mother in the concert halls of Paris, playing the Ukelele and singing in several different keys and languages as vaudeville act 'Bubbles' Williams.¹⁴⁶

An item in the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune* in June 1928 describes him as 'jazzing' his way through music halls and salons attended by European kings, queens and nobility with stage-act, The Happy Trio, a group that comprised Hallam, the Oxford-Harvard educated Billy Walker and the young, black jazz musician Gene Ramey. Hallam is described in the report as a former 'vaude entertainer' and radio and recording artist. By 1928 the group were appearing nightly in the grill room of the Chez Paul & Paul on Paris Right Bank ('champagne not obligatory' it says in the ad). The teenage trio appear to have first found fame in New York. Hallam's manager at this time was Jim Carroll, the brother of producer and Broadway band leader, Earl Carroll.¹⁴⁷ In 1926 Earl found himself in jail after bringing out a nude young woman reclining in a bath of illegal liquor at a party thrown at his theatre on Seventh Avenue. One of Carroll's 'Vanities' stars was the former 'Follies' showgirl, Peggy Hopkins Joyce — sometime lover of Arnold Rothstein.

It was during his time in Paris that Williams is believed to have met Ann Murdock, the beautiful millionaire actress whose marriage to Wall Street banker, Harry C. Powers had ended in divorce some years before. According to press reports it was a whirlwind romance and the couple married in August 1928 in Rye, New York. The word going round was that

husband, Charles Hallam Keep also served as treasurer of the American Red Cross and the Knickerbocker Trust.

¹⁴⁵ 'Blue Eyes, Blue Auto', Laurel Morning Call, march 2, 1929, p.1

¹⁴⁶ 'On the Left Bank', The Paris Times, May 29, 1928, p.3

¹⁴⁷ 'Happy Trio Comes to Paris Cabaret', The New York Herald Paris, June 1, 1928, p.3; Hallam Williams in Paris, Chicago Daily Tribune, Paris edition, March 1, 1929, p.2

the handsome blond lothario with boyish curly locks had come back to New York with dreams of being a music agent. Within a month of the marriage, Murdock had become seriously ill and the relationship faltered. As Murdock convalesced in a New York sanatorium, Hallam, a serial philanderer with no fixed job or abode, met and romanced Ruth Anderson, a rival actress. As media speculation intensified about the couple, Hallam made his escape to Paris and it was here that he met the Mexico-born Byron Khun de Prorok. Another fraudulent Baron, Prorok had somehow blagged his way into the Adventurers Club of New York and onto some bizarre archaeological dig in Africa. According to the press of New York, Hallam would be going with him.

In 1929 Murdock filed for divorce and Hallam continued his romance with former 'Vanities beauty', Ruth Anderson.¹⁴⁸ For several months he had been in Nice where he had continued to perform as multi-lingual 'uke' player, Gayne 'Bubbles' Hallam.¹⁴⁹ After this he was back in New York. The details that Williams provides on a ship manifest in 1929 show him sharing rooms at 120 West 58th Street in New York with journalist Heywood Broun, a close friend of Ring Lardner, Harold Swope and several other Algonquin Round Table regulars that Scott and Zelda used to party with back in Great Neck.¹⁵⁰ Scribners editor Max Perkins mentions Broun in a letter he scribbled off to Scott whilst the author was working on *Gatsby* in France. Max was telling the author that he had found a new place in New Canaan and Broun was among the most hospitable of his

¹⁴⁸ 'Why Ann Murdock's Latest Beautiful Adventure Blew Up', Ogden Standard Examiner, December 8, 1929

¹⁴⁹ 'Ann Murdock's Career', Variety, May 29, 1929, p.52

¹⁵⁰ Hallam Keep Williams, SS Bremen, Cherbourg to New York, October 22, 1929, New York City Passenger Lists, 1820-1957. Scott and Broun had a complex professional relationship. After Broun lampooned Scott's efforts at self-promotion in 1920, the writer felt he was one of the few critics who were "on his trail". The fear related to his anxiety that he would eventually be revealed as a literary 'fake' or 'lie' and that his status was undeserved. Broun had dismissed him as a very self-conscious and pretentious young man.

neighbours. His invites across for supper were about as close as he got to parties, Perkins jokes.¹⁵¹

The detail about Hallam and Broun's apartment is interesting for several reasons: the apartment was just around the corner from Max Gerlach's speakeasy at 132 West 58th Street and there is some indication that Broun was on very friendly terms with a mutual acquaintance of the pair called Texas Guinan — the notorious actress and Speakeasy hostess who provided glamorous front-of-house entertainment for gangster Larry Fay and Owney Madden at their El Fey nightclub on West 47th Street. The former actress had, like Gerlach, been schooled in the art of running speakeasies by Arnold Rothstein, the man who is believed to have provided the initial capital for the club. In what might be an intriguing coincidence, it is interesting to learn that that club had two large swastikas on either side of its door. It is something that may have an echo in *Gatsby*. As the novel's narrator Nick Carraway pushes open the door to Meyer Wolfshiem's New York office, it is marked by a sign reading 'The Swastika Holding Company'.¹⁵² When Nick enters the office he hears someone whistling the popular Catholic opera-tune, The Rosary. Rothstein's partners in the El Fey, Larry Fay and Owney Madden, were of Irish-Catholic heritage, and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Scott was alluding to the pair's partnership with Rothstein (Wolfshiem) in the club and was using the swastika motif as a nod and wink to amuse fellow regulars like his friend, Edmund Wilson.¹⁵³ The swastika also appeared on the cars in Fay and Hallam's taxi-firm: one on the driver's door, one on the passenger door and one on each of the four hubs of the wheels.

¹⁵¹ 'Dear Scott', August 8, 1924, *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973, p.74

¹⁵² *Rothstein: the Life, Times, and Murder of the Criminal Genius Who Fixed the 1919 World Series*, David Pietrusza, Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003, p.206; *The Great Gatsby*, p.161

¹⁵³ The episode is packed with symbolism and irony. The song is about someone handling the rosary beads (a Catholic prayer accessory) as if they were pearls. The song, which has several references to preserving someone in their memory, has a number of references to Christ upon the cross (which *Gatsby's* death in the novel to some degree allegorizes). The Swastika symbol also appears in Scott's original preface for *Gatsby*, the short story *Absolution*.

A report in New York's *Daily News* in August 1930, would describe how Hallam had been hired by Fay as a \$50 a week taxi-cab salesman. It also describes how Hallam's friend, Tex Guinan had once taken him aside to reveal the true age of his wife, Ann Murdock and advised that he should curb his spending habits.¹⁵⁴ It is alleged that Fay's entry into the nightclub business had been bankrolled by Gerlach's old boss, Arnold Rothstein. Guinan, who was roughly the same age as Max, would die in 1933. One of the pallbearers at her funeral was Hallam's flat-mate, Heywood Broun. Scott's friend Edmund Wilson would famously describe her as a formidable, glittering woman operating under the "great glowing peony" of a ceiling that melted from pink to deep rose. To woozy, beguiled patrons like Wilson there was something coarsely hypnotic about her.

The Hostess and the Kaiser

Interestingly, there are indications that Guinan was in Berlin at roughly the same time as Max Gerlach. Like Hallam Keep William's mother, Alice, Guinan had begun her career as a soprano singer with a New York Opera company. Taking a break from a 'Whirl of the World' concert tour Guinan had made the trip to Germany. It was in here, according to an interview she gave to the press 1915, that Texas received the personal attention of Kaiser Wilhelm. In a short, teasing interview with the *Seattle Star*, Guinan described the scene. She had been sitting alone on a bench under a linden tree enjoying a book when several German officers passed by. Suddenly there was commotion. A battalion of infantry were marching through the street, and when some overzealous officers, keen to subdue subversive characters, started mingling amongst the crowd. As Guinan stood to observe the procession, the burly hand of an officer who was "shouting in vigorous German" gripped her by the arm and pushed her backwards. Guinan's spontaneous cries of injury attracted the attention of the Kaiser who quickly moved forward to help. The reason for his intervention, Guinan tells us, is that he discerned that she was American. He then

¹⁵⁴ 'Hallam Keep Williams Calls Larry Fay Boss', *Daily News*, August 3, 1930, p.3

explained how much he would like to visit America.¹⁵⁵ In all fairness, Guinan's story was a typical piece of pro-German propaganda at time a when many American newspapers were reflecting public fears about imminent war with Germany. Either way, if any part of the story is true then the incident places Texas Guinan in Berlin in 1913, the same year that Max Gerlach and Hallam's mother, Alice Peroux-Williams were in also Berlin.

Hallam's marriage to Ruth Anderson appears to have lasted little longer than his marriage to Murdock. By 1931 the couple were in the throes of a very public divorce and for the next fifteen years Hallam disappeared from the headlines — the only notable related events in his life being the murder of his cab-boss, Larry Fay in January 1933 and the no-less sudden death of their mutual friend Texas Guinan in November that same year. In the immediate aftermath of Arnold Rothstein's murder in November 1928, a number of better known establishments were raided by Police, including those being managed by Guinan. The hostess appears to have had every intention of sharing her memories of Rothstein in a book she planned to publish called 'Hello Sucker'.¹⁵⁶ In July 1930, the publisher Alfred A. Knopf signed a contract with Carl van Vechten — a friend of Scott — for his novel *Parties*, a book that depicted the wild and sensational antics of Americas boundary-breaking club lovers. Pictured witnessing van Vechten's signature was Texas Guinan — Queen of all parties.¹⁵⁷

Among those who served as models for von Vechten's novel were Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald who appear in the book as David and Rilda Westlake. The *Parties* author had been introduced to Scott when he first arrived in Great Neck in October 1922 and the group partied regularly until Scott's

¹⁵⁵ 'Texas Guinan, Prima Donna', Tells of Chat With Kaiser, Seattle Star, March 4, 1915, p.3. The Whirl of the World was a Broadway revue by Hungarian composer, Sigmund Romberg and bankrolled by Manhattan's Schubert Organization. In 1913 Texas was touring in The Passing Show of 1912, often billed as 'German repertory'.

¹⁵⁶ 'When Rothstein Was Peeved', Chicago Sentinel, October 3, 1930, p.4; 'Glamour Gets the Blame', San Antonio Light, December 1, 1946, p.14. Guinan had just started writing a column in the gossipy *New York Graphic*.

¹⁵⁷ The Publishers Weekly, July 26, 1930, Vol 118 Issue 4, p.340

last-minute departure in May 1924.¹⁵⁸ Von Vechten's publisher, Alfred A. Knopf would, incidentally, go on to publish the second edition of Arthur Mizener's groundbreaking biography of Scott, *The Far Side of Paradise* (1951). It was this book that featured the first ever public mention of Gerlach as a source for Gatsby. In May 1925, van Vechten reviewed *The Great Gatsby* for *The Nation*, hitting the nail right on the head when he wrote: "The theme of a rather soiled or cheap personality, transfigured and rendered pathetically appealing through the possession of passionate idealism." His diary entries in 1923 also reveal that he attended the gatherings of the Algonquin Round Table with Hallam K. William's 1929 'roommate' Heywood Broun and their mutual friend, Texas Guinan.¹⁵⁹ There is no record of Guinan ever publishing 'Hello Sucker', but one wonders that if she had, it may well have been published by Knopf. Shortly before her death the last of her legendary speakeasies was firebombed and Texas returned to the stage in America, having already been denied to entry to England and France. Headlines like 'Actress Silenced By Death' duly followed.

The next press reports of the 37-year old Hallam have him hooking up with twenty-one year old glamour star, Josi Johnston. Like Hallam's first wife Murdock, Josi was heir to a million dollar fortune and had fallen head over heels in love with him. Against their parent's wishes, the two Stork Club regulars married on August 1st 1944. The venue they choose for the wedding was the University Chapel at Princeton. The reason why they chose Princeton to tie the knot remains unknown. There is certainly no indication that either of party was enrolled at the university, so it may have been at the suggestion of an unknown third-party. Either way, it's extraordinary to find a friend of Gerlach's so close to the Ivy League college that produced Fitzgerald. The romance lasted barely 18 months, and despite the birth of their child, Turner, the couple divorced.¹⁶⁰ Two

¹⁵⁸ *The Splendid Drunken Twenties*, Carl van Vechten, 2003, University of Illinois Press, p.22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp.23-36

¹⁶⁰ 'Get Away Young Man, Get Away', *Detroit Evening News*, October 15, 1944

years later Williams married Ann Baldwin. After starting and aborting a film production company, Hallam tried his hand at writing dramas: *Façade* (a three-act play with wife, Ann Baldwin in 1946), *Alimony Pete* (a three-act play in 1949) and *What Happened Then?/This Is Why I Pray* (musical compositions with John Vroman, 1961).¹⁶¹ It is April 1950 when Hallam is still married to Baldwin that we see him in Havana with Max von Gerlach, promising to spill the beans on the man behind Jay Gatsby. We have to wait another ten years before there is any further news of him. This time the date is 1957 and Hallam is in Palm Springs with former Vaudeville man Joe Frisco and 'LA Confidential' columnist, Paul Coates (L.A Mirror). According to the Desert Sun's Paul Rashall the group had made their way to the Celebrity Lounge of the Rossmore Hotel.¹⁶² An ad in the Desert Sun also suggests that Hallam was acting as agent for a multi-volume collection of academic reference books known as *The Great Books of the Western World* and the new and 'startling' *Syntopicon*. Billed as a great new concept in self-education, this 54-volume collection was published under the banner of the British-American, *Encyclopædia Britannica* from its base in Santa Barbara. The man behind the project, Robert Maynard Hutchins, denounced by Hearst newspapers as Communist sympathizer, would later go on to found *The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions*. On October 9 1975, some eight years after joining the American Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers, Williams died in New York. He was 68 years old. On October 17 that year, just eight days after his death, the State of New Mexico district Court published their final account and report into the hotly contested estate of Hallam's aunt, Margaret Turner Williams. Any legitimate claim that Hallam had to be missing millions would now be rendered meaningless.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ 'Two Incorporate' (H.K.W. Productions Inc), Motion Picture Daily, October 6, 1944, p.11

¹⁶² Palm Springs Desert Sun, March 29, 1957, p.4

¹⁶³ Final Account and Report to Harriet Williams, Hallam K Williams and Philip St George Cooke: All Unknown Heirs of Margaret T. Williams, Sante Fe, New Mexico, October 31, 1975, p.16. The heir and executor was the grandson of Philip St George Cooke, 'Father of the US Cavalry' who had played a heroic part in the American-Mexican war of the 1840s.

More Trips to Germany

Max, as it happens, continued his trips to Germany well into the 1930s. On one of those trips he can be seen travelling with wealthy widower Estelle Rolle. On May 7, 1931 the pair set sail on the S. S Hamburg from Hamburg. Details on the ship manifest reveal that Gerlach was then living at the prestigious New York Fraternity Club. His stay there couldn't have been any more ironic, coinciding as it did with a raid by baton-wielding prohibition agents — the first raid of its kind in a private club.¹⁶⁴ Rolle, meanwhile was residing in St Albans in Queens.¹⁶⁵ Journalist Joe Nocera recently discovered that just twelve months earlier, Gerlach and Rolle had grabbed the headlines when their small auxiliary yacht, the *Zara* was lost for eight days at sea. The battered schooner was eventually picked-up 45 miles northeast of the Virginia Capes and towed back berth in the Municipal Boat Harbour near Newport, Virginia. The boat had set off from the Marine Basin, New York on November 26 for Miami, intending to stop at Hampton Roads for supplies. It appears that a wild storm had blown in and taken the intrepid pair 500 miles off course. Gerlach, who captained the vessel, told reporters how he had signalled a coast guard vessel, assuring them that they had no liquor on board “but needed plenty of help.”¹⁶⁶

Although the news report suggests that Max's yacht, the *Zara* was owned by Mrs Rolle, the Lloyds Register of American Yachts has no record of a yacht by that name owned by either Rolle or Gerlach. Pat Schaefer, a researcher at *Mystic Seaport* tells me that there was a sloop *Zara* in the 1930 Register, designed and built by Herreshoff, but unlike Rolle and Gerlach's yacht, it was not powered. However, the same Lloyds Register reveals that there was a Max Gerlach listed as the owner of *Rambler*

¹⁶⁴ 'Uphold Third Spectacular N.Y Dry Raid', Washington Evening Journal, May 3, 1930, p.1

¹⁶⁵ Estelle Rolle/Max Gerlach, Hamburg to New York, New York City Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, May 7, 1931

¹⁶⁶ 'Yacht in Port After Fierce Fight with Raging Waves', Daily Press, Newport News, December 7, 1930, p.1, p.2

(formerly, Ramallah) which was an auxiliary sloop, 44'6" (32' waterline) x 12'6", designed by Henry Read and built by Read Brothers of Fall River, Massachusetts in 1896. The owner was logged as Max Gerlach of Bayside, Long Island. Its former owner was Alex Girtanner, also of Bayside and prominent member of the Bayside Yacht Club.¹⁶⁷ Among Girtanner's former neighbours on his 'Old World' Freeport Bay estate was German aristocrat and flying enthusiast, Baron von Beaulieu-Marconnay of Hildesheim. The Baron's wife Betsy was Broadway stage star, Marise Naughton. Just several months before the yachting incident, 'Baron Max von Gerlach of New York' had been telling reporters about his days as a pioneering aviator at Westfield International Airport.¹⁶⁸ Whether Max was using the story as a means of inveigling his way into yachting and flying circles of von Beaulieu-Marconnay is anyone's guess.

Mrs Estelle Rolle is an interesting figure in the broader context of Gerlach's Long Island adventures. In April 1927, Rolle had lost her husband, Edward F. Rolle in a tragic car accident. According to a report in the New York Times, Edward, a chief buyer for the McCrory chain store, was thrown from his car after skidding into a lamppost as he was driving home to Great Neck. It seems he had been playing golf at the nearby Soundview Country Club and was speeding back home to his wife when the accident happened.¹⁶⁹ Just a few years earlier, Edward and his wife had purchased the famous Gracefield Estate, previously owned and built by William Grace, the first Catholic Mayor of New York. Grace was the man who had personally received the Statue of Liberty to New York from Paris in 1885. There was a poetic kind of aptness about it. Not only was it the year of Gerlach's birth, it was also the year that Scott had originally intended setting the *Gatsby* novel. Look over a Google map today and you

¹⁶⁷ Email, Pat Schaefer to Alan Sargeant, July 27, 2023 3.23pm, Collections Access and Research, Mystic Seaport. Bayside is located at Little Neck Bay, is just a few miles west of Great Neck in Queens. Girtanner regularly entered the boat in the Block Island Race.

¹⁶⁸ 'Flies Again', Courier News, New Jersey, April 1, 1930, p.10

¹⁶⁹ Obituary, Norwich Sun, May 11, 1931, p.31; 'Freeport Home Purchased by Baron', Nassau Daily Review, May 7, 1927, p.1. Estelle died in Miami having never remarried in 1971.

will spot ‘Gatsby’s Pool’ (now closed) where the estate once stood at Gracefield Drive, Kings Point.

In 1937 there is a record of Herr Max Gerlach travelling first class to Hamburg on the Hansa. Immediately above him on the list is Herbert Blankenhorn. At the time that he made the trip, Blankenhorn was serving as private secretary to German Ambassador, Hans Luther at the German Embassy in Washington. Blankenhorn, who doesn’t appear to have joined the Nazi Party, was later credited as being part of the Nazi-Resistance. The trip was taken as a temporary leave of absence from his role in Washington.

Had it not been for information that has come to light only very recently, it would probably have been fair to regard Gerlach as some tragic, house-bound invalid after blinding himself in his botched suicide bid in Greenwich Village — a sad and aging dreamer scraping a hand-to-mouth existence on the vaguely appetizing scraps of the past. However, Max’s regular first-class flights to Havana and his adventures with Hallam Keep Williams in the spring of 1950 suggest that this was almost certainly not the case. To what extent he was incapacitated is likely to remain unknown, but if there’s one thing we can take away from all this, it is that the 65 year old Gerlach was still pursuing life with a enthusiasm and resilience most folk don’t even possess at twenty. And he was pursuing it all on a first-class ticket to boot.

With so many gaps and contradictions in Gerlach’s life it’s a little difficult to know what to make of him, but Professor’s Kruse’s work on Gerlach has made it possible to explore new routes, and as with any cold case review, the best place to start would be with the figures that we know a little bit more about, people whose lives, or more specifically, people’s whose criminal activities, may have criss-crossed with those of Gerlach. And the person I am thinking of is Arnold Rothstein, the legendary New York gangster who gave rise to Meyer Wolfshiem, the man who really created Gatsby.

Part V

Meyer Wolfshiem

“THE OLD METROPOLE,’ BROODED MR WOLFSHIEM GLOOMILY. ‘FILLED WITH FACES DEAD AND GONE.
FILLED WITH FRIENDS GONE NOW FOREVER.”

Among the masses of articles and books on the Jewish origins of Jay Gatsby, by far the most popular evidence that gets cited on a regular basis relates to Gatsby’s small, flat-nosed friend and mentor Meyer Wolfsheim — ‘the man who fixed the World Series in 1919’.¹⁷⁰ His depiction in the novel is also (and probably not unfairly) used to offer proof of the author’s casual anti-Semitism.

Biographers and critics are generally in agreement that Fitzgerald’s Wolfsheim was based on Broadway mobster, Arnold Rothstein, the son of an immigrant family whose forebears had been forced to escape the vicious spate of pogroms being carried out by the Tsarist regime in Bessarabia in Southern Russia during the late 1840s and 1850s. By the mid-1920s Rothstein was being hailed the ‘Moses of Jewish Gangsters’ — his work with the American Communist Party’s, Maurice L. Malkin helping preserve Communist control of the American clothing unions. Competing for control was Morris Sigman, another Bessarabian who at that time was serving as President of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. Believing that the activities of the American Communists were being driven by purely Soviet interests and belligerent ‘anti-capitalist’ mischief, the Socialist, Morris Sigman was making a bold, concerted effort to weed out as many Communist members as he could from the ranks of the union executive. Yes, Arnold Rothstein was a big-stakes gambler and bootlegger, but he was also a powerful figure in city and union affairs, providing the kind of muscle that could maintain stability and production within New York’s fractious clothing industry. He could be both the architect of chaos and the arbiter of peace. Judged along more Platonic lines and it might be possible to say that this charming, snub-nosed villain was the unacceptable truth of modern-day America. As David Pietrusza explains in his 2003 biography, Rothstein emerged from the swamp of

¹⁷⁰ The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Penguin Classics, 2000 (first published 1926), p.71

criminal New York to become the great ‘go-between’. If politicians needed the support of vice lords, Rothstein was their man: “he made things happen and without fuss”. And more importantly, he never left any trail of evidence. ¹⁷¹



Arnold Rothstein aka Meyer Wolfsheim

Given the ease with which Fitzgerald could to stitch together multiple thematic threads and then tug them into life with lively contemporary references, the mysterious calls that Gatsby receives from Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia may well have been a thinly disguised allusion to emerging union tensions breaking out in those two key trade union districts at the time that Scott was writing the novel (the three cities are also where the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union had their headquarters). ¹⁷² Cast your eyes over the news columns of the period and you’ll see that Rothstein and his men were at the centre of a labour racketeering scandal in each of the three cities mentioned in the book. However, the mobster and his cronies were just as formidable in the bootlegging trade as they were in labour racketeering, and the handful of allusions to these cities could reflect either of Gatsby’s crime concerns. Gatsby’s love rival Tom Buchanan certainly seems to think it’s the latter: “I picked him

¹⁷¹ *Rothstein: The Life, Times and Murder of the Criminal Genius who Fixed the 1919 World Series*, David Pietrusza, Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003, p.92

¹⁷² *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Penguin Classics, 2000 (first published 1926), p.49, p.54

for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn't far wrong', he roars at one point.¹⁷³

What we do know is that when Scott Fitzgerald was first sketching out plans for *The Great Gatsby* in the autumn of 1922, Philadelphia's Prohibition chief, Senator William C. McConnell and the city's Head of Secret Service, Matthew F. Griffin, were being investigated by Special Agent Frank J. Wilson for corrupt relations with the city's bootleggers. Fitzgerald had also addressed the twin menace of illegal liquor and civil unrest in his short-story *May Day*, which depicts drunken, chaotic violence breaking out between the city's Socialists and anti-Socialists at the annual worker's parade. The author, like others, perceived an intricate relationship developing between organised civil lawlessness, organised crime, organised labour and bootleg liquor. Men like Rothstein provided the brains. The hooch provided the fuel. As Scott writes in his story, the "poets of the conquering people" were gathering in the provinces to drink "the wine of excitement". It was a time of riotous prosperity — just not for everyone.

¹⁷⁴

Gatsby and Wolfshiem. Gerlach and Rothstein

At this point it may be worth reminding ourselves that it was the elusive Max von Gerlach — or Max Stork as he was better known in his youth — who had provided the most likely source material for Gatsby's more lurid dimensions. He had his charm, he had his mannerisms and like Gatsby he had his dark side: the classic devil with the face of an angel. Some ten months after being arrested for shooting dead his baby brother, it appears that the 15 year-old Max may have been involved in some worker skirmishes taking place in Brooklyn. According to the New York Times of November 3rd 1900, six speakers of the Socialist Labour Party had been whipping up crowds between Seventh Street and Avenue C on the East Side of Manhattan. As the crowd grew ever more threatening, its believed that officers had drawn their batons and started clubbing back at the

¹⁷³ Ibid, p.127

¹⁷⁴ 'May Day', F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tales of the Jazz Age*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922, p.61

fractious troublemakers. A riot soon broke out and before long six men had been arrested, among them a young Max Stork. The men were only in the cells a short time before they went back to their party headquarters at 98 Avenue C, where another crowd of supporters had begun to gather waving red flags and jeering the Tammany-controlled patrolmen.¹⁷⁵ If it is the same Max Stork (and there doesn't appear to have been another man by that name in the district), then the incident would have occurred just ten months after accidentally shooting dead his baby brother in Yonkers. Had the 15 year old Max somehow been roped in as 'thug for hire'? As provocateur, even? In actual fact, it may not be as far-fetched as it sounds. In the months that followed the 1919 May Day investigations, new information started coming to light which suggested that agents acting on behalf of the National Security League and the Department of Justice had been among those inciting the violence. They were also said to have been among the most vicious of the protesters in the right-wing counter demonstrations that followed.¹⁷⁶ Rothstein wasn't the first villain to use his power and influence to first call and then settle unlawful strikes. Workplace sabotage had gone for years, and this was no less true of counter-sabotage. Government agents were commonplace.

Another of the men arrested alongside Max that day was Irving Herman Weisberger. A lifelong Socialist, Weisberger was some ten years older Max and living at East 72 Street Upper East Side at the time the riot took place. Twelve months prior to his arrest Weisberger had had a letter published in the Marxist journal, *The People* critical of Humpy Hanover, a Tammany 'heeler' and Mayor of Avenue C who kept a tight rein on the district police.¹⁷⁷ Daniel de Leon, an influential Socialist with firm links to Russian anarchist and 'Paris bomb plotter', Boris Reinstein was running against on the 16th Assembly ticket against

¹⁷⁵ 'Police Arrest Speakers, New York Times, November 3, 1900, p.1; 'Socialist Labour men released', New York Times, November 4, 1900, p.16; 'Socialists Arrested, Police Break up a political meeting in New York', Oil City Derrick, November 3, 1900, p.1

¹⁷⁶ For more on the tactics being used by agents representing the Justice Department see The American Civil Liberties Union report entitled *Report of the Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice*, May 28, 1920.

¹⁷⁷ 'Retrospect and Prospect', Irving H. Weisberger, *The People*, Vol VIII, No.43, January 22, 1899, p.1; Daniel De Leon, *the Man and his Work*, NEC Socialist Labour Party, 1919, pp.84-85

Tammany man, Samuel Prince. At the time the arrests took place, Prince and his Tammany wirepullers had been determined to shut down de Leon and the ‘anarchist’ front. If this is not the same Max Stork then it’s remarkable that Max, his brother Alfred and his mother Elizabeth should end up living just 35-feet away from East 72nd Street in the US Census of 1910.¹⁷⁸ World Series gangster Arnold Rothstein and his father Abraham would be just a mile or so north of the pair at East 93rd Street.

Not a great deal is known about Max’s exploits and adventures in the period between the death of his baby brother in January 1900 and his exit from the US army in 1919, and what we do know doesn’t reflect on Max at all favourably. Some five years after the incident with the gun, Max was arrested for burglary in Yonkers. On that occasion he gave his name as Max Novak, using the maiden name of his mother. *The New York Tribune* described a fairly chaotic and ungainly scene. A youth had traded blows with a woman as he attempted to rob a shop belonging to Fannie Altman. The nineteen year old Max is believed to have entered the shop on the pretence of making a purchase. As the woman went to fetch something from the back of the shop Max is said to have leapt behind the counter, opened the cash register and tried to make off with around \$5 in cash. However, before Max could make it out of the shop the woman grabbed him by the coat collar. As he struggled to break free of her grip, Max assaulted her. A passing fireman by the name of Edward Fitzgerald is believed to have intervened and restrained him until Police arrived. The Sergeant who arrived on the scene would later tell reporters that he thought the boy had been involved in several other neighbourhood thefts. The 19 year old, still living at the family’s 144 Herriot Street address, later gave his name as Max Albert Stovak, a chauffeur in the employ of car dealers, John J. Walsh and Frederick Pardee Fuller of 71 South Broadway. Fuller, a respected member of the Psi U fraternity, had like his father, initially trained as a lawyer before investing all his money in cars. In 1905 Fuller had caused no small amount of sensation when he launched the luxury four cylinder model, ‘The Ardsley’ . His grandfather was George Fuller, a

¹⁷⁸ Max A Stork, b.1887, Germany, 1394 Second Avenue, US Census 1910, Manhattan Ward 19, New York, United States

Presbyterian congressman and newspaper owner from Connecticut who claimed direct descent from one of the original Mayflower settlers.¹⁷⁹

Shortly after his encounter with Mrs Altman, Max moved to Manhattan. Here he got the job of chauffeuring around the dubious Broadway and gambling impresario, John H. Springer, manager of the Grand Opera House. Before long, the pair were involved in a collision featuring Springer's brand new \$12,000 French touring car on West 23rd Street. The car, which had been carrying Springer and his entire family at the time, had burst into flames as it smashed between two cabs. Luckily for Stork, he and the Springers had made it out of the car and were out on the street at the time that it exploded. According to the press, the car had literally been torn to pieces. Gasoline had then leaked from a broken tank and the whole thing had gone up in smoke. The family were treated for concussion and superficial injuries but no lasting damage was done.¹⁸⁰

It was, incidentally, Springer's second near fatal collision in a very short space of time, the previous one happening almost one year before to the day. On that occasion the impresario had gone berserk. He just flipped. When handed a ticket by a local traffic cop, the usually cool and unflappable Springer yelled at the policeman that he would "have his head chopped off for this". Appearing in court, Stork accused the cab men who caused the second smash of acting "little better than anarchists and murderers".¹⁸¹ If it is the same Max Stork who was arrested as a Socialist during the worker skirmishes in Avenue C in Brooklyn, then the reference to 'anarchists' is an interesting one, as it suggests some specific grievance against the group.

For Springer it was business as usual. But it wasn't just his cars that got him trouble, it was his racy theatre productions too. In January 1913, responding to what he perceived to be the impossible demands of the censors, Springer headed

¹⁷⁹ 'Police in Yonkers Believe they have broken up a gang of thieves', New York Tribune, February 2, 1905; The Ardsley Villager, November 2014, https://www.ardsleyvillage.com/sites/g/files/vyhlf4126/f/file/file/ardsley_villager_november_2014_.pdf

¹⁸⁰ 'Touring Car Ground to Pieces', The Olean Democrat, September 21, 1906, p.1

¹⁸¹ 'Smashed New \$12,000 auto', New York Times, September 21, 1907, p.1

to Berlin to produce a series of performances there. As Max is also believed to have been in Germany around this time, it may be the two trips were somehow related. Shortly after losing money in a theatre house there, Springer filed for bankruptcy, citing an unprofitable series of “lemon plays” from his booking company, Klaw and Erlanger for the theatre’s dire fortunes. In addition to his gambling and theatre interests, Springer was also the owner of the Empire State Garage near East Seventy Fifth Street. In 1909 one of his touring cars ferrying eight passengers to a house party in New Jersey had ended up in a ditch. Nobody was badly hurt but its driver was charged with speeding.¹⁸² Max’s home on Second Avenue would have been little more than a ten-minute walk from the incident.

Max Marries into the Mob

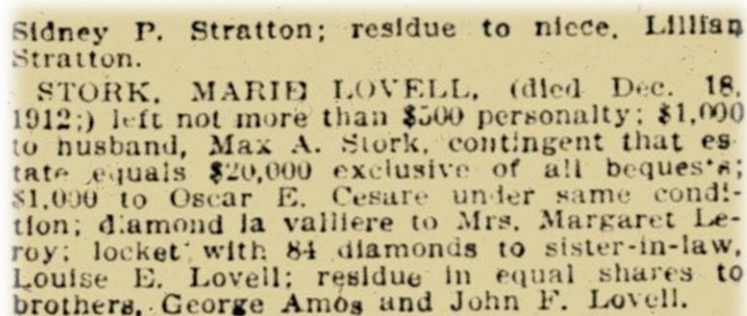
It may have been through his work with Springer or Colonel Cushman Rice that Max came into contact with Marie R. Lovell, the footloose Socialite daughter of racing millionaire, William Lovell, a Liverpool-born bookmaker with a “shady reputation” who had immigrated first to Australia and then to the United States after amassing a fairly considerable fortune in mining.¹⁸³ Like Springer, Lovell was not without baggage. In the summer of 1877, a warrant had been issued for his arrest and that of and gambling partner, James B. Kelly. The order for Lovell’s arrest had come from Judge Hoffman in New Jersey as the district began to get tough on a virulent pool-selling racket that was then operating with impunity in New York. Law reports from Hudson County describe how Lovell had been charged with publicly organising lotteries known as Auction pools, French pools and Combination pools which he later deposited at the Jerome Racecourses in New York. Lovell was fined \$800 and ordered to pay the full legal costs.¹⁸⁴ Just three years later another arrest warrant would be issued, this time for Lovell’s son who was reported to have absconded with over \$5,000 in diamonds from his stepmother. It seems that three previous terms in prison on

¹⁸² ‘Jersey Auto Smash?’, New York Times April 26, 1909, p.4

¹⁸³ ‘Turfman William Lovell Dead’, Rockland County Journal, 10 February 1900, p.2

¹⁸⁴ New Jersey Law Reports, Volume 39, Supreme Court, Soney & Sage, 1877, pp. 458-459

Blackwell's Island had done little to curb the young man's vices.¹⁸⁵ A regular face on the race rigging circuit being run by Peter De Lacy and Tammany Hall leader 'Boss Croker', William Lovell would also serve for a time as Vice President of the Jockey Club in Coney Island, Brooklyn. This would almost certainly have placed him in the orbit of Tammany grandees like August Belmont Snr and August Belmont Jr.¹⁸⁶ The Belmonts were powerful men of means, both financially and politically. In years to come the pair would feature prominently in the lives of Joseph G. Robin and the gangster, Arnold Rothstein, the novel's 'Meyer Wolfshiem'.¹⁸⁷ With the exception of Robin, each of the men would become prominent figures in the running of the club at Coney.



Sidney P. Stratton; residue to niece, Lillian Stratton.
STORK, MARIE LOVELL, (died Dec. 18, 1912;) left not more than \$500 personalty; \$1,000 to husband, Max A. Stork, contingent that estate equals \$20,000 exclusive of all beques's; \$1,000 to Oscar E. Cesare under same condition; diamond la valliere to Mrs. Margaret Leroy; locket with 84 diamonds to sister-in-law, Louise E. Lovell; residue in equal shares to brothers, George Amos and John F. Lovell.

By 1908, Max Gerlach, still going by his regular name, Max Stork, had married Lovell's daughter Marie in Manhattan. A report in the New York Sun in May revealed that the 22 year old 'importer' had known Miss Lovell for a long time and that they would sail by the Red Star Line to honeymoon in Belgium. Lovell's previous marriage to John D.B. Dunbar had ended in disaster when she discovered that he already had a wife and five children living in Flushing. The extent of the deception didn't end there as Dunbar had also made away with \$20,000 of Lovell's savings. Despite being heiress to a \$150,000 fortune, her

¹⁸⁵ 'Pool Sellers Showing Fight', New York Herald, June 7, 1877, p.12. Lovell would also sell stakes at the Travers, Belmont and Withers racecourses.

¹⁸⁶ *The Sport of Kings and the Kings of Crime: Horse Racing, Politics, and Organized Crime in New York 1865-1913*, Steven A. Riess, Syracuse University Press, 2011, p.86

¹⁸⁷ *Rothstein: The Life, Times, And Murder Of The Criminal Genius Who Fixed The 1919 World Series*, David Pietrusza, Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004, p.104, pp. 106-112. Second generation bookmakers Arnold Rothstein and August Belmont II had been partners in various racing concerns from 1910, including the Havre de Grace Racecourse in Maryland.

marriage to Stork can't have been a smooth one as on the 1911 census Max can be seen back living with his mother Elizabeth (Novek Stork) and stepfather Thomas J. Reilly in Upper Manhattan. Max's wife meanwhile, was boarding at the home of George H. Oakley and his wife on Amity Street in Patchogue, Long Island. This put Lovell and her volatile brother Amos at Blue Point within just a few miles of Rothstein's brand new pleasureland base at Long Beach where he ran a gambling house and a racing stable. Rothstein had arrived in the district some 12 months earlier.

Baroness von Stork

Max's Gatsby-esque delusions of greatness must have been in force quite early in his life, as a local item in *The Suffolk County's* Patchogue news column dated June 1909 proudly announces the arrival of 'Baroness von Storck' at the Ocean Avenue, the home of her brother Amos Lovell. It seems clear that for a time at least, Max Gerlach had adopted the entirely fabricated nobiliary particle 'von' for his Stork-Storck moniker.¹⁸⁸ But he wasn't the only one in the family who was doing it. Just twelve months earlier the newspapers had been reporting that Max's brother-in-law, Amos Lovell, appearing in court over a minor bootlegging offence, had instructed his lawyer, District Attorney, Ralph C. Greene to make it known that his grandfather was Lord Lovell of England. Amos explained how his mother had died recently leaving a \$400,000 estate but that it was so tied-up that he couldn't get access to a cent of it. He was indicted on two counts and held under \$1000 cash bail. Eventually he got off with a \$100 fine.¹⁸⁹ There had in actual fact, been no formally recognised Lord Lovell for about four centuries. The last one had been a staunch supporter of King Richard III and Sir William Catesby. The family had forfeited its title after the defeat of Richard by Henry Tudor after the War of the Roses. After the Battle of Stoke Field, Lord Lovell disappeared and his remains have never been found. The name had since become the stuff of ballads and legends. On a more sinister note, when acting as manager

¹⁸⁸ The Suffolk County news, June 25, 1909, p.2

¹⁸⁹ The Suffolk County news., May 15, 1908, p.2

of the Oceanic Inn in Red Bank, New Jersey, Max's brother-in-law Amos had been implicated in a murder inquiry connected with the sale of illegal liquor.¹⁹⁰

PATCHOGUE.

The Baroness Von Storck, formerly Miss May Lovell, sister of A. Lovell is spending the summer here with her brother, Amos Lovell, and Mrs. Lovell, at their home on Ocean avenue.

On December 18th 1912 Marie Lovell Stork died at the home of her neighbour, Belle Carman. The 29 year old woman's will reveals that she left a modest sum of money to her estranged husband Max, who was by this time doing quite well for himself on the car racing circuit.¹⁹¹ In light of Stork's 'rum running' credentials the next bit makes an interesting footnote. According to the 1920 census, Carman's nephew, Harry Thompson had been working as a government employee off the Long Island 'Rum Coast' as part of the New York City Coast Guard.¹⁹² A Wills and Probate notice in the New York Times dated January 10 1913 reads: "*STORK, MARIE LOVELL (died Dec. 18, 1912) left not more than \$500 personalty: \$1,000 to husband Max A. Stork, contingent that estate equals \$20,000 exclusive of all bequests.*" Some items of jewellery were left to her siblings and another \$1000 to the Swedish American caricaturist and wartime propagandist, Oscar E. Cesare. Cesare would have an extraordinary career by any standards. In October 1922 he would find fame as one of the only American artists to gain entry to the Kremlin building in Moscow where he was invited to produce sketches of Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky.¹⁹³ The sketches, together

¹⁹⁰ 'A Murder Case to Come Before a Grand Jury', Red Bank Register, New Jersey, p.1

¹⁹¹ In August 1911, Mrs Carmen had \$2000 worth of jewellery stolen from her Patchogue property. Marie's sister-in-law, Mrs Amos Lovell boarded with her. See: The County Review., August 04, 1911, p.1

¹⁹² US Census, 1920, Belle Carman, b. 1868, Suffolk, Brookhaven Township, Patchogue Village

¹⁹³ 'Estates Appraised, Stork, Marie Lovell, died Dec 18, 1912, husband Max. A Stork', New York Times, January 10, 1913, p.20; 'Mrs Marie Stork', The Suffolk County news., December 20, 1912, p.4. Cesare worked for several leading newspapers including the New York Sun and

with a fascinating and very candid account of his meeting with Lenin in Moscow, would be published by the New York Times on Christmas Eve, 1922.

¹⁹⁴ Oscar had immigrated to America from London in 1894. By 1900 he was living at Alexandra Place in Buffalo, little more than a thirty-minutes' walk from Scott Fitzgerald and his parents, Edward and Mary on Summer Street and Elmwood Avenue.

Interestingly, Cesare's trip to Russia had been arranged as part of the American Famine Relief expedition organized by Herbert Hoover and overseen by Gerlach's 'old friend', Cushman Rice. Cesare and Mrs William Henry Chamberlain had been seconded for three months to the *American Committee for the Relief of Russian Children*, then under the management of Captain Paxton Hibben (a friend of John Dos Passos, a friend of Scott) and the *Near East Relief* organization. It was their job to check and report on the distribution of supplies. Although critical of Hoover, and sceptical of his abilities to ensure successful distribution of the aid, Hibben's special relief effort for children had no other option but to operate under the direction of his Congress-backed A.R.A. The arrangement probably went a little like this: in return for the full cooperation of the Russian Government in getting the goods distributed to all those genuinely in need, Cesare's series of sketches would show Lenin and other leading Soviets in a more favourable, human light. ¹⁹⁵ Either way, it's intriguing to think that Gerlach's friends Oscar Cesare and Cushman Rice together with Scott's brother-in-law, Newman Smith all enjoyed close dealings with relief efforts in Russia and Eastern Europe under Hoover's sanction. However, it may yet transpire that Max himself may have been far more interested in redirecting the odd consignment of grain, barley, yeast and sugar bound for the starving peoples of Europe to the no less needy colony of illegal distillers and brewers back home. Prohibition had created an altogether different kind of famine. Hoover was

the New York Evening Post. Cesare married Princeton graduate, Margaret Worth Porter, daughter of the author, O Henry. \$1,000 is about \$30,000 in today's money.

¹⁹⁴ 'Lenin and His Moscow', Pictures and Text by O.E. Cesare, New York Times, December 24, 1922, p.50

¹⁹⁵ *Report on the Russian Famine, 1922*, Hibben, P. United States: American Committee for the Relief of Russian Children, p.4. See Dos Passos's portrait of Paxton Hibben— A Hoosier Quixote. Hibben tried hard to get Dos Passos to join the Russian mission.

unlikely to care either way. He'd never been a strong proponent of the law in the first place. And if his illicit activities in Russia in July 1919 were anything to go by, Hoover wasn't averse to playing fast and loose with the hold.



An excerpt from Oscar E. Cesare's four page exclusive for the New York Times on December 24, 1922 in which he shared his sketches and interview with Lenin.

Merchant on Broadway. Elections in Havana.

Professor Kruse's research into Max's life has uncovered many intriguing details, but perhaps none more so than an East Side street address he mentions. The address is one that is listed in the 1910 edition of Trow's General Directory where it lists Max A. Stork (Gerlach) as a merchant with a business at 99 Second Avenue in Manhattan's Ukrainian Village. ¹⁹⁶ Max would have shared the building with 44 year old Austrian, Rosie Shoenberg, President the Rachel Richter Lodge, a Jewish benevolent association. ¹⁹⁷ Several years later the same address would be used to host meetings for the Manhattan Eighth Assembly of the Jewish Socialist Federation of America. There's no evidence to suggest that Gerlach was Jewish. A look at his family in Germany makes this terrifically unlikely. Even so, according to the Jewish Communal Register, its branch Secretary, Minnie Sussman would hold meetings from the premises (possibly 'The Second Avenue Theatre' or an earlier Yiddish theatre) every Wednesday

¹⁹⁶ Kruse, p.22

¹⁹⁷ *American Jewish Year Book*, American Jewish Committee, 1910 p.270

evening.¹⁹⁸ The organisation's HQ was at 175 East Broadway under Secretary Max E. Lulow and treasurer Jacob B. Salutsky, better known as J. B. S. Hardman, a Russian born Socialist activist who had found himself Editor of the *New World Weekly* at 175 East Broadway. Critical of American Communist movement, Salutsky would make a number of attempts to bring his group, the Committee for a Third International under the banner of the Communist International of Russia. The Bolshevik supporters, the Jewish Socialist Verbund would also host meetings at this theatre. At the time that young Max was roaring his engine around the streets of New York, Manhattan's Second Avenue was the entertainment area of the Yiddish quarter. With its eclectic hub of theatres, restaurants, cafes and clubs, the district would come to be known more colloquially as the 'Yiddish Broadway' and feature prominently in the routes taken by legendary anarchist Emma Goldman and her partner, Alexander Berkman. The Café Monopole at 144 Second Avenue (Veselka today) was even a favourite haunt of Leon Trotsky during his pre-Revolution trip to New York.¹⁹⁹ At one point in the novel, Gatsby's friend Nick Carraway remarks that he would "have accepted without question" the idea that this elegant young rough neck may have sprung from the Lower East Side of New York. Well this was the Lower East Side of New York. And just like Gatsby he had "drifted coolly out of nowhere".

Whatever business Max von Gerlach did have in the area, there's little denying that it was a thriving and prodigious district for the passionate young radicals of East Village. Both the Socialist Party of America and the Allied Hebrew Citizen's League had based HQs at 99 and 122 Second Avenue. The site was popular with the Irish too. Since the early 1900s, 99 Second Avenue had practically been the second home of Tammany Hall speakers like Edward E. McCall, who would use the venue to rally the support of German voters for the Democrat vote.

¹⁹⁸ 'The Jewish Communal Register of New York City', 1917-1918, p.1262

¹⁹⁹ Leon Trotsky on Second Avenue (memoir; 1944). *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary Reader*, Louis Waldman, New York University Press, 2012, pp. 214-218

Much of the speculation about Max's activities in Professor Kruse's groundbreaking archaeology focuses on his frequent trips between Cuba and Berlin under the alias Max Stork. Whilst there is no firm evidence that has so far come to light that would prove that the trips that Max made between 1915 and 1918 were part of some illegal, mobster enterprise or some clandestine mission for the US military, it does seem very plausible that his adventures in Cuba at least had arisen as a result of his friendship with Cushman Rice, the very rich and very mysterious mercenary from Minnesota who had made Cuba, the 'Sugar Empire', his second home. But even if the nature of these trips remains difficult to pin down, the timing of them is certainly curious.

In November 1916, a very crucial and controversial General Election had taken place that had left Cubans fiercely divided. Liberals started screaming that the whole thing had been a fix, that the election had been stolen from them. It was said that even the sitting President's people had been preparing for defeat. In scenes not totally dissimilar to those we saw on Capitol Hill in January 2021, a blistering counter-movement led by José Gomez began to take shape. Within weeks there was civil-war. American interest in the whole affair was intense. War with Germany had reduced sugar production in Europe to a disturbing all-time low. Buoyed-up by US investors like Colonel Rice, Cuba started quadrupling its production. Suddenly it was sugar that was going to decide the war, making it the target of a complex of foreign intrigues. Civil war was creating a vacuum that drew in all kinds of opportunists.

In March 1917 the American press reported on the breaking up of a German spy ring that had been operating between Mexico, Cuba, and Germany. It was alleged that German agent provocateurs were intending to foment rebellion among revolutionaries in Cuba and Mexico and blow up the Alvear Canal, the main water-supply in Havana. Two Germans had already been arrested, one of them known to be a close friend of rebel-leader, José Gomez, the main contender in the alleged revolt. The press had an even more sensational claim to make; one of the other men arrested was believed to be a member of an exclusive Chicago Club and maintained a "luxurious apartment" in the city. As a way of gaining

leverage over key political and financial players, the man was said to have ingratiated himself with a large brokerage house with offices in Chicago and New York. The reports described how a number of American detectives were known to be in Cuba mingling with revolutionaries in an attempt to get to the bottom of an organisation that was being referred to as The Iron Cross.²⁰⁰ A short time later, Walter T. Scheele, the American President of the New Jersey Agricultural and Chemical Company was arrested on suspicion of pro-German work and conspiring to set fire to munitions ships operating between Havana and Europe. Within days, President Menocal was announcing Cuba's entry on the side of the Allies into the war. America had pledged to go in, and Cuba would now be joining them. President Woodrow Wilson immediately cabled a message to the Cuban President describing his deep satisfaction that the people of Cuba had come out to defend the rights and liberties of "all humanity".²⁰¹

In March 1918 there was one final dramatic development. A special cable had been received by the *New York Times* informing them that Otto Riners, the former American Consul in Cuba had committed suicide. The dispatch explained that the former consul been accused of being a German Spy.²⁰² Whether Colonel Cushman Rice, generally regarded as a bit of a 'our man in Havana' figure, or his young protégé Max Gerlach had played a part in providing intelligence that had led directly or indirectly to the smashing of the ring (or even complicity in the ring) may well be the stuff of fantasy, but the timing of the various trips the pair made during this same period is certainly curious.

According to his US army application, Gerlach's own activities in Cuba dated back to 1906 and 1908 when he alleges to have been racing cars and opening a garage for the Winton Motor Carriage Company in Havana. In 1921, Z.W. Davis, the millionaire director of the garage, would be arrested by Federal

²⁰⁰ 'Seek Iron Cross in Cuba; American Detectives Hunting for German Plotters There', *New York Times*, March 7, 1917, p.2

²⁰¹ 'Detective Tells of German Bomb Plots', *San Antonio Light*, March 23, 1917, p.2

²⁰² 'Former U.S. Consul in Cuba Accused as Spy, Kills Himself', *New York Times*, March 3 1918, p.1

Agents as part of a major investigation into stolen bonds and securities said to be worth in excess of over \$8,000,000. ²⁰³

Strangely enough, the 1906-1907 also covered the period in which Cuban Liberal party had staged the first of its ten year power grabs. As the government of its President Tomás Palma began to collapse, America's President Roosevelt sent in US troops to restore some balance and protect lucrative American interests. Among those making arrests and communicating via long secret cipher messages to President Roosevelt directly was Gerlach's 1914 passport provider, Major James A. Ryan who had complete control of the Havana Police. News reports in September 1907 described how Captain Ryan had rounded-up and detained three senior Cuban Generals along with twenty-four other rebels and charged them with conspiracy. ²⁰⁴ Over in Camaguey was Gerlach's 1918 and 1919 sponsor Colonel Rice, where, according to signals picked by the MID, some 2000 new English rifles had been heading to support the insurrection. Just a few months prior to this, Frank G. Carpenter, Special Correspondent of the *Washington Evening Star* had caught up with a very relaxed Colonel Rice at his 'quaint' Camaguey ranch. During the interview 'Cush' Rice cheerfully talked-up the prospects in Cuba for American cattle farmers. ²⁰⁵ A little time later he was back in New York buying a brand new racing car. Just when an uprising was being feared in Camaguey, stock farmers had flooded market with cattle, driving beef prices down as much as 30 per cent. Cushman, incidentally, was among several prominent cattle buyers profiting handsomely from the rumours. The claims made in Gerlach's 1919 application do however, contradict reports in newspapers that he was in the employ of John H. Springer at a garage in New York during the 1906-1907 period. It is of course entirely possible that Gerlach had, like Colonel Rice, been shuttling between New York, Mexico City and Havana on a regular basis, perhaps on the pretext of business or racing concerns.

²⁰³ 'Nationwide Swindle Runs into Millions', New York Tribune, August 24, 1921, p.1

²⁰⁴ 'Cuban Generals in Jail', Baltimore Sun, September 27, 1907, p.2; *The Politics of Intervention, The Military Occupation of Cuba, 1906-1909*, Alan Reed Millett, Ohio State University Press, 1968, p.151

²⁰⁵ 'City of Camaguey', Washington Evening Star, September 2, 1905, p.10

The Man Who Fixed the 1919 World Series

Professor Kruse's research into Max's life has uncovered many intriguing The scope for espionage and intrigue is, you can imagine, quite immense, but what the exact nature of Max's relationship was to Colonel Rice is something that can only ever be guessed at. It certainly wasn't unknown for resourceful young crooks like Gerlach to be hired on a casual basis by the MID and American Secret Service. Such men were confident, self-possessed, well-connected and more than capable of handling themselves in a crisis. As long as they were able to provide ballast to domestic and foreign objectives, the power and reach of members of organized crime had always been greeted with no small amount of tolerance, and perhaps even with a pinch of respect. What we do know is that each of the three referees that featured on Max's 1919 passport application — Cushman A. Rice, George Young Bauchle and Aaron J. Levy — had either strong or casual links to notorious World Series gangster, Arnold Rothstein, making the much speculated link between Gatsby, Max Gerlach, the 1919 World Series and Rothstein as plausible as it is fascinating.

If you've seen the film or read the book you may recall a scene in which Gatsby and Nick Carraway make their way across Queensboro Bridge and into New York. Gatsby has an old friend that he would like to introduce to Nick. Arriving at noon in a basement restaurant on West 42nd Street, the three men meet for lunch in an a private ante-room of the bar. The Times Square district of New York is where the real Arnold Rothstein conducted business and this is the place we meet his fictional equivalent, Meyer Wolfsheim. Wolfshiem is dining alone when Gatsby joins him. The gangster looks up at the ceiling and remarks on a pair of sea nymphs painted on it. He orders some high balls and the three of them sit and talk.

The bar they meet in is likely to be based partly on George Considine's 'New' Hotel Metropole on 43rd Street and the 'Old' Metropole Hotel on 42nd Street.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ 'Want Considine Declared Bankrupt, Three Creditors of his New Hotel Metropole File Claims', New York Times, May 26, 1912, p.8

The latter was a swanky Tammany-era saloon whose dimly-lit backroom was popular with New York's sporting figures and muckraking journalists. Rothstein and Considine had been among a handful of investors in Coney Island's fantasy amusement park, *Dreamland* and had run a series of regular poker games here in the early 1900s. The bar had an ornate mural and tall, coffered ceiling with frescoes. In December 1906, it was the location of a meeting between New York's unflappable crime-busting DA, William Travers Jerome and the Metropole's poolroom emperor, George Considine. According to The New York Times, Considine had led Jerome to a quiet back room and divulged some of the secrets of his rival bookmakers.²⁰⁷



The Rosy Rosenthal Murder case that featured in The Great Gatsby.

The story that Wolfshiem regales them with as they dine is a true one, even if the location has been switched. In 1912, the notorious Times Square gambler and club owner Herman Rosenthal decided to take a stand against corrupt New York Police Officer, Lieutenant Charles Becker, generally assumed to be managing the more seedy affairs of the Tammany Hall. Rosenthal had refused to be brought into his schemes and was gunned down in front of astonished customers in the café of the 'New' Metropole on 43rd Street. In his nostalgic yet confused

²⁰⁷ 'Only One Acceptance of Jerome's Invitation', New York Times, December 9, 1906, p.1

reverie, Wolfshiem (or rather Scott) has switched the locations around: he meets Gatsby and Nick in what bears a much greater resemblance to the Old Metropole on 42nd Street. The New Metropole on 43rd Street is where the real Rosy Rosenthal was gunned down. In Scott's novel the three of them have literally gone back in time: they sit in the old time ante-room of a gambler's den on 42nd Street talking about a murder that took place at its new location on 43rd Street. "Four of the men were electrocuted", remembers Nick. "Five, with Becker", adds Wolfshiem. And electrocuted they were. He may have switched locations but the outcome was just the same. The men responsible for murdering Rosenthal were also executed in real life. The time-switch could either be a genuine mistake on Scott's part or a clever little attempt to repeat the past through comingling old world and new world events. The neatness of the design is easy to overlook; here we have three men discussing the past in a bar that no longer exists, talking about part-real and part-invented people being shot in a future version of the same bar that has been moved around the corner. The spatial and temporal fabric of this world is all confused. Scott has created a parallel universe in which past and future collide. The idea of an alternate reality had first introduced by Scott's hero, H.G Wells in his novel, *Men Like Gods* and had been more comically explored in his Gatsby hors d'oeuvre, *The Vegetable*. First serialized in America in *Hearsts International Magazine* in November 1922, Well's Nietzschean fantasy contemplated what it would be like to have two dimensional universes "lying side by side like sheets of paper" in a many-dimensional space. A place where men could experience "a roughly parallel movement" through time and space, "universes, parallel to one another, and resembling each other, nearly but not exactly."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Men Like Gods, H.G. Wells, Cassell and Company, 1923, pp.46-47; H.G Wells New Novel', Washington Times, November 8, 1922.



Considine Bar New York. Possible inspiration for Meyer Wolfsheim scene in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

When a somewhat woozy Nick Carraway relates an out of body experience in the second chapter of the novel, is he expressing his sense of dislocation with his immediate situation or describing a brief encounter with a disorientating mirror universe?: “*I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.*” The terms he uses — *withing and without* — are likely to have been borrowed from the quasi-esoteric philosophies of the time, when self-styled Vedic mystics like George Gurdjieff were teaching the young bohemians of Paris and New York how to penetrate the wall of illusion that prevented us from experiencing and enjoying paradox in a world of multiple dimensions. Like Well's *Men Like Gods* it is a study in plurality. What we get in the scene at the Hotel Metropole is a cross-pollinated world of both the frightfully real and the hopelessly romantic. It is a scene that is rich in nostalgia, and the time-switch would make perfect sense: it is a New York that is full of contradictions and full of ghosts.²⁰⁹

As the three of them continue talking, Nick notices a pair of ivory cufflinks that Wolfshiem is wearing. “Finest specimens of human molars,” he informs Nick. When Wolfshiem leaves he asks if the gentleman was a dentist. “Meyer Wolfsheim? No he’s a gambler. He’s the man who fixed the World’s Series back

²⁰⁹ ‘Rose Discloses Murder Plot’, New York Tribune, October 13, 1912, pp-1-2

in 1919.” Nick is palpably shocked and asks why he isn’t in jail? “ They can’t get him, Old Sport. He’s a smart man.” The penny has finally dropped. Nick seems finally prepared to believe that all the rumours about Gatsby are true. The story’s historical resonance continues in a later chapter, when we learn that Walter Chase, a gambling friend of Tom Buchanan had been ‘left in the lurch’ by Wolfshiem and Gatsby. The character’s real-life equivalent is probably Hal Chase, the baseball player, friendly with gangsters and gamblers alike, who was indicted for the role he was suspected of having played in fixing the 1919 World Series. The opinion of the press was that Chase and other players had been framed and double-crossed by Rothstein and his men after taking \$40, 000 in ‘safe bets’. ²¹⁰ Corrupt police chief, Big Bill Devery, Chase’s former boss at the Yankees, had been an influential figure at Tammany Hall for years under Richard Croker. By aligning himself with Chase, the reader can only conclude that Daisy’s polo-playing husband had his own circle of dubious characters around him. He’s not only a thug, he’s also a hypocrite.

Did Scott Fitzgerald meet Arnold Rothstein?

To date, any plausible connection between Scott and Arnold Rothstein has usually been put down to legend and the work of an overactive imagination. But there may be a little bit more to it than that. As Scott sat down to work on his last unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon* in 1937, he dashed off a letter to fellow writer Corey Ford at MGM. Scott’s letter talks about the challenges the two men faced as screenwriters in Hollywood. Two things were occupying his mind about the movies: the hold that the Mob retained over Hollywood, and the increasing dominance of Communists in studio unions. As a result of the stifling combination of members-only attitudes coming at them from all sides, few of their friends had succeeded here. Dos Passos had “nibbled”, and Erskine Caldwell appeared to have ‘got in’. It was a pretty “unsatisfactory business all round” wrote Scot, saying that he understood how simple it would be to be a

²¹⁰ TGG, pp.127-128; ‘Burns Gives Details of Frame Up to Throw 1919 World Series: Intimates Players were Double-Crossed Out of Much Money’, *The Great Falls Tribune*, July 20, 1921, p.8

Communist under these conditions, “being able to explain away the worlds inadequacies” in a single swipe. Unlike at Gatsby’s, Hollywood was a party that didn’t admit anybody who hadn’t been invited. It was a closed-shop. Scott then went on to explain that he was working on his next “selective” novel, confessing that he had deliberately excluded the more salacious real life elements of life in Great Neck to give the novel its haunted, ethereal feel. All of the “ordinary material” he had experienced at Long Island, “the big crooks, adultery themes” had all been toned down to suit the novel’s poetic intentions. The next one would be similar in tone, but like his first novel *This Side of Paradise*, it would be a little more “comprehensive”. There would be more in the way of background and historical content, more detail — more revelations. As Shane Leslie was apt to remind him, his indiscretion in sharing private conversations he’d enjoyed with men like Fay was likely to do him harm.

The next statement was altogether more intriguing. One of the few bizarre events that Scott hadn’t left out of the Gatsby novel had been his “own meeting with Arnold Rothstein”. Scott explained that it had been one of those “small, focal points” that had “impressed” him whilst at Great Neck. If what Scott was telling Ford was true, then the scene in the novel in which Nick meets Meyer Wolfshiem had actually been based on Scott’s real-life encounter with the man who fixed the 1919 World Series: Arnold ‘The Brain’ Rothstein. Scott hadn’t minded sharing this fact because Ford had liked the novel so much. He was aware he was being candid.²¹¹ But how had this meeting come about? Who, among Scott’s friends and colleagues, was the one who introduced the pair?

If you were to look over the cast-list of Scott’s friends in Great Neck there are two possibilities that really stand out: the sports journalist Ring Lardner, a close-friend and neighbour whose name featured prominently in coverage of the World Series scandal, and gentleman bootlegger, Max Gerlach. The former would have been well acquainted with the back-room of the Considine bar on West 42nd Street, whilst Gerlach would have been the better match where liquor was

²¹¹ *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Letter from Scott to Corey Ford, July 1937, Bantam Books, 1971, pp.557-558

concerned. Was it possible, on the otherhand, that a situation had arisen that would pool the talents of all these men: Cushman Rice, Arnold Rothstein, Max Gerlach and Ring Lardner? Chicago journalist Lardner had enjoyed especially close relations with the White Sox, and had provided several important leads, insights and suspicions into the 1919 World Series scandal in which Rothstein was alleged to have paid eight members of the Chicago White of throwing the game against the Cincinnati Reds. The tip-offs and information that Ring would receive during this period would be syndicated across America's press columns.

In the inquiry and trial that followed, Ring would also be called as witness. Scott's friend had played an influential role in exposing the fix and was left feeling bitter about the whole affair. There had been a conspiracy to defraud the public and he had a hard time hiding his sense of betrayal. To him, baseball had offered one of the purest and most simple of dreams and the team that he loved had let him down. Lardner would later write that there had been something prophetic about the scandal. The events of 1919 had ushered in a decade of unprecedented crime, corruption and immorality: *"Say it ain't so Joe ... say it ain't so. It had been like the last desperate plea for itself."* ²¹² It's easy to see why Scott had included references to the scandal in the novel and why it had become something of a "small focal point"; the death of the game was nothing less than the death of the American dream itself. Contrary to what you might think, however, it wasn't a game that Scott liked especially, viewing it as a game for boys played by a "few dozen illiterates" and "bounded by walls" that removed any real sense of danger or adventure. What he did get though, was the part that baseball played in the psyche of the American nation and how very precious it had been to his friend. ²¹³ Scott was a little bit more philosophical than Ring: the enclosure of the ball park was both an escape route and a prison. Its rules were there to be broken.

²¹² Eight Me Out: The Black Sox and the 1919 World Series, Eliot Asinof, Henry Holt, 1987, p.198

²¹³ 'Ring', The Crack Up, 1965, p.32

A completely fresh find in the newspaper archives may shed some additional light on the matter. The story dates back to 1915 when Max von Gerlach's army and passport pal, Colonel Cushman Rice was still in Cuba and the infamous 1919 World Series scandal was still some four years away. The story starts as most of the best stories do, with another story. In April 1915 a Pennsylvania newspaper was reporting that a whopping \$27, 000 was being offered for the 'twin brother' of a lucky penny that was believed to have secured a sensational World Series triumph for Boston Braves chief, George Stallings. The man who was making this remarkable offer was the Yankees owner, Captain Tillinghast Huston. The man who claimed he had the penny but was firmly rejecting the offer was Gerlach's friend, Colonel Cushman Rice who was described by the story's reporter as the "foremost American in Cuba". Frustratingly for Huston, as long as Colonel Rice was the owner of the penny, the irascible old adventurer said he had no intention of handing it over. As far as Rice was concerned, whilst the penny was in his possession he had full control over the outcome of the championship.

The next claim that Huston made was more astonishing still. These weren't just any pennies. They were magic pennies. According to the story that Huston told the newspaper, the pennies had been taken from the neck of a "Cuban negro" killed during Cuba's escalating race wars. He claimed the small, shiny pair of pennies had been in a little bag along with a number of "hoodoo" items, including charms. He had given one of the pennies to Stalling to bring him luck at the World Series. The next thing he divulged was no less intriguing; the man who Huston was hoping to buy the penny for was Wild Bill Donovan. Huston told the reporter that he and Donovan were "old pals" and he would have done "almost anything" to get his hands on that penny. ²¹⁴

Just four years later the same Wild Bill Donovan would find himself at the centre of the Black Sox scandal, the 1919 World Series game that gangster, Arnold Rothstein (Meyer Wolfshiem in the book) would be accused of rigging. As President of the National Sporting Club in Havana, Colonel Cushman carried

²¹⁴ 'Lucky Penny Wins Flag For Braves', New Castle News, April 7, 1915, p.5

some weight in several gaming areas, so the six degrees of separation linking him to Rothstein were hardly surprising. At the end of the World Series, Donovan, now manager of the Chicago White Sox and ten of his players stood before a grand jury accused of throwing the game in a complex, wide-ranging deal organised by Arnold Rothstein and George Young Bauchle's gambling syndicate. According to witnesses, Donovan had learned of the teams' decision to throw the game some time beforehand.²¹⁵ Although cleared by the jury, his new boss William F. Baker, owner of the Philadelphia Phillies owner would later sack him. Donovan was replaced, of all people, by 'Kaiser Wilhelm' (Irving Key Wilhelm).

The decision to throw the game is believed to have arisen during a disagreement with club owner, Charles Comiskey. When his players threatened to strike, the Tammany Hall strongman refused to pay their wages. Trouble had been brewing since September the previous year when the Boston Red Sox had threatened to strike during the remaining games of the 1918 World Series.²¹⁶ On that occasion, the League's Ban Johnson, a little worse for the booze, had decried the threat as 'Bolsheviki'. It was a case of Red Sox, Red Scare. Rothstein's newspaper friend, Harold Swope, used this disastrous near-miss as part of a bid to have Ban Johnson removed permanently as President of the League. Writing in the *Evening World* in December that year, Hugh S. Fullerton said that baseball now needed a peace conference almost as much as Europe did. A claim was being made that Johnson, in a state of war-era panic, had bungled and mismanaged the League. His failure to give the demands of the Red Sox players a fair hearing and for refusing to allow the Cleveland players to attend the Labour Day Series, was creating the kind of turbulence that could easily destroy the game. For the sake of the game Johnson had to quit.²¹⁷ As Kevin Coster's heroically sentimental movie would later make clear, baseball wasn't just a game

²¹⁵ 'Unravelling Baseball Scandal expected to shoot lid sky high', *Washington Times*, September 29, 1920, p.15; 'Statement on their Testimony in Baseball Probe', *Boston Globe*, October 27, 1920, p.20

²¹⁶ 'World Series Players Strike', *Fort Wayne News*, September 10, 1918, p.1

²¹⁷ 'Ban Johnson Must Quit Job in Order to Secure Peace for American League', *The Evening* December 11, 1918, p.14

for many Americans. The crudely sketched diamond of dirt, dust and grass that made up the typical ballpark was the vigorous field of dreams upon which the corn of America's greatness would grow. As far as the pundit John B. Foster was concerned, baseball shouldn't be hampered by 'secret organizations' claiming to represent the interests of the players. Writing as the First Revolution was taking place in Russia, Foster laid-out his belief that Baseball was not a business but a "clean, honest and open sport" that should be played with the fiercest sense of rivalry. It was an honourable and ennobling discipline. The sense of fraternity and brotherhood that was beginning to enter the game was increasingly being seen as "foreign, hostile and injurious to the sport". There was way too handshaking going on for Foster's liking. ²¹⁸

The fact that Rothstein never faced trial makes one wonder if the whole scheme had been devised to deal with the threat posed by striking players and to close down the various economic and ideological threats to club owners being presented by militant unionism on the ballpark. When the time had come to pay the players, Rothstein reneged on the deal. In an attempt to get their money the players went public. As a result, the authorities had little option but to prosecute them, and Rothstein just walked away. ²¹⁹ The plight of the striking players had been dealt the heftiest of blows. Eight of the players were banned from playing for life, other men went to jail and public support for the strikes collapsed.

A few years later tragedy would strike again when the disgraced former White Sox manager, Wild Bill Donovan was killed in a horrific train accident in Forsyth, New York. Donovan had been travelling in the observation car (the rear carriage) of the train when another train had ploughed into the back of it. His own train had been forced to stop when a car had stalled on the railroad crossing. The driver and the passengers had been forced to escape and could only watch as the carnage unfolded. All of those travelling in the observation car were killed on

²¹⁸ Editorial Comment, John B. Foster, Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide, March 1917, Spalding's Athletic Library, Group. 1, No.1 41st Year, p.5

²¹⁹ *The Life, Times, and Murder of the Criminal Genius Who Fixed the 1919 World Series*, David Rothstein Pietrusza, Carroll & Graf, 2003.

impact.²²⁰ Donovan, who died instantly appears not to have been carrying the lucky Cuban penny that day.

That Arnold Rothstein and Colonel Cushman A. Rice occupied the same social and gambling spheres is supported by a story told by journalist Arthur ‘Bugs’ Baer in the 1940s in which Rothstein and Rice both feature. The story told by Baer takes place on the evening of Election Night in 1916, an election that would prove to be dominated by fears over a Mexican Revolution and America’s entry into World War One. Woodrow Wilson had defeated Hughes and Cushman Rice and Arnold Rothstein had made their way to the Waldorf Hotel bar on 34th Street. It was here at the Waldorf that ‘Bugs’ Baer claimed ‘Cap’ Rice had taken over “thirty-five thousand smacklers” off the bookies that night after betting on Woodrow Wilson to pull off his bid for the White House. Rice’s lucky streak had extended so far as running Rothstein out of chips. Baer confessed that he never did get to know how Cap Rice made had his fortune, “he was a fellow who bobbed up at all big fights, World Series, conventions and Kentucky races. You would meet him in London, Mexico, New Orleans or any spot where you could stick a pin. I always thought he was government agent but I never knew for certain.”²²¹

Was Rice a government agent? It’s certainly an interesting statement, especially in light of Rice’s easy familiarity with Rothstein and the power the Broadway mobster would be asked to exert over America’s striking workers, but if there is the faintest credibility of Max being involved in Socialist politics (most likely as an agent provocateur or errand boy), then the next story involving Rothstein and the *Russian-American Trading Corporation*, means it could all get murkier still.

Un-American Activities

This story takes us back to the investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities heard at Congress House in the late 1930s, but first we need to rewind

²²⁰ ‘Nine Killed, Wild Bill Donovan one of Wreck Victims’, The Washington Post, December 10, 1923, p.1

²²¹ ‘One word led to another’, The San Francisco Examiner, November 10, 1944, p.17

a little bit further and go back the claim made by Maurice L. Malkin of the American Communist Party. Malkin had claimed that during the US General Strike of 1926 he had been instrumental in hiring Arnold Rothstein to bolster the efforts of the furriers union, who were at this time broadly under control of the American Communist Party. In order to create the right kind of impact for the press Malkin had wanted Rothstein and his boys needed to bring the city to a standstill. For this, huge volumes of workers would be required to flood the streets. To ensure the stunt ran successfully, and that the workers weren't removed from the streets as quickly as they arrived, Malkin also required the cooperation of the New York City Police. This meant buying off the office of Police Commissioner McLaughlin in addition to several other precincts including Fifth Street, Charles Street, West 30th Street, Clinton Street and 47th Street. The heads of the New York Industrial Squad, Jesse Joseph and Barney Rudevitzky were also bought off too, receiving \$45,000 and \$50, 000 respectively. Out of the \$3,500, 00 raised for the strike over \$110,000 of Rothstein's money had gone into paying off police. Much of the remainder was skimmed off by various individuals by falsifying receipts.²²² The men acting as bag men for the \$150, 000 loan were Malkin's attorneys, Abraham Goodman and the Russian-born Judge, Leonard A. Snitkin. Rothstein would provide the initial cash-input and the repayment of the loan would be guaranteed by AMTORG, the Russian-American Trading Corporation, which had opened its first American offices at 136 Liberty Street and 165 Broadway in June 1924.²²³ Managing the corporation's affairs in Britain was ARCOS chief, Philip J. Rabinovitch who had relocated to London from New York sometime in 1919. Rabinovitch was

²²² *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Hearings, Congress House, Volume 2, 1939, pp.5751-5772.*

²²³ 'US-Russia Trade to Grow under New Company', *The Daily Worker*, June 27, 1924, p.3. AMTORG was the first trading organisation set up in America after the October Revolution of 1917. As a result of the failure of Britain, France and America coordinated efforts to restore a Liberal-Monarchist regime in Russia, economic realities meant the governments had little option but to suspend the sanctions against Lenin and start trading with Russia.

supported in his US efforts by a series of AMTORG presidents, Isiah J. Hoorgin (aka. Isaj Churgin), Paul J. Ziev, Alexis Y. Prigarin and Saul Bron.²²⁴

Another key figure at AMTORG was Taganrog's Dr Mark Solomonovitch Sheftel, a former member of Russia's Socialist Revolutionary Party who would subsequently be accused of being chief of the Soviet Secret Police (Cheka) in New York by Inspector John Lyons of NYC's Political Department and AFL leader Matthew Woll. Dr. Sheftel's visa to the US from Berlin had been secured and his bona fides guaranteed by the deep-rooted and well-respected, Society of Friends of Russian Freedom.²²⁵ Like Joseph G. Robin, practically all of the directors at AMTORG were Ukrainians and all four of them lasted little more than one or two years as leaders. Hoorgin was killed in a boating accident in the Catskills district of New York in August 1925 and Prigarin resigned for personal reasons less than twelve months after being appointed.²²⁶

During his cross examination by Congress in 1939, American Communist leader Malkin is clear about one thing: Rothstein had been driven by money, not by politics. Rothstein was no cadre; he was a cash-cow who had no apparent interest in the nobler aims of Communism at all. The only thing that interested Arnold was how much profit he could make on the interest once the loan had been made.²²⁷ Rothstein had assumed a similar dispassionate role in the 1912 garment strikes when he provided muscle and funds to the garment strike force and unions of 1911 and 1912. In Baku the city's wirepullers had Stalin. In New York they had Rothstein.

²²⁴ 'British Soviet Treaty of Great Importance to Both nations, says Delegate; Phillip J. Rabanovitch, Hattiesburg American, August 21, 1924, p.4

²²⁵ The full story, including Sheftel's arrest over the assassination of Grad Duke Sergei Alexandrovich in February 1905 and his execution by Stalin after his return to Russia in the 1930s, can be read in *Andrée Aelion Brooks' Russian Dance: A True Story of Intrigue and Passion in Stalinist Moscow*, Andrée Aelion Brooks, Hoboken, Wiley, 2004. You will find references to both Marc Cheftel and Mark Sheftel in the book.

²²⁶ 'Death of Hoorgin and Aid Mourned by N.Y Workers', The Daily Worker, September 4, 1925, p.2; New York Times, August 30, 1925, p.12

²²⁷ *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Hearings, Congress House, Volume 2, 1939, pp.5751-5772.*

Malkin's attorney, Leonard A. Snitkin was a different proposition altogether. The Russian-born former Justice Chief had been embroiled in one radical escapade after another, from draft evasion schemes, to eviction evasion schemes. He was also an associate of Robin's friend, Theodore Dreiser. In 1927 Snitkin had represented the wife of Dreiser's friend, Ervin Nyíregyházi when she filed for a divorce.²²⁸ It was another lurid story of casually careless people doing casually careless things. Erwin, a pianist who had made his sensational debut at the Carnegie Hall in 1917, had been invited by Dreiser to a concert in Manhattan. The pair would be joined Dreiser's partner Helen Richardson. Within weeks Helen and Erwin were having an affair. Dreiser was furious with his friend's behaviour and in a cruel, vexatious bid to get the best settlement possible for Ervin's wife, and exact the sweetest revenge, he drafted in the sharklike and totally loathsome, Snitkin. The paths of Dreiser and Snitkin would frequently cross at other points in the decade, collaborating on various civil rights and civil defence issues with all the energy and commitment that one might expect of Jazz Age 'crusaders for justice'.

Like his legal associate Aaron J. Levy — the man who provided the draft-board reference for Gatsby's bootlegger twin, Max von Gerlach — Leonard A. Snitkin had been an influential member of the Tammany Hall executive. In 1901 and again in 1903, Snitkin and several other Tammany figures had been pulled up and charged with illegal vote rigging practises. Officials alleged that the and the group had been using fake registrations among immigrants on the Lower East Side to boost their standing at the polls.²²⁹ This wasn't the first time that Snitkin and Rothstein had crossed paths either. In 1923, 'bucket shop' operators Edward M. Fuller and W. Frank McGee hired Snitkin during a probe into the finances of city broker, Charles A. Stoneham, owner of the New York Giants baseball team and one of several men who had stood to benefit handsomely from the Black Sox World Series scandal. In the days leading up to his arrest, Fuller, who had been embroiled in a number of criminal schemes over the years under several different

²²⁸ *Lost Genius: The Story of a Forgotten Musical Maverick*, Kevin Bazzana, McClland & Stewart, 2007, p.132

²²⁹ 'Illegal Voters Scarce', *New York Times*, September 16, 1903, p.3; 'Tammany Men Accused', *New York Times*, October 23, 1900, p.3

aliases, had been hiding out at the home of Arnold Rothstein. It was later discovered that the gangster had been dipping into Fuller's funds to the tune of \$425,000. Investigators suspected that both men had been complicit in fixing the 1919 World Series but were never able to prove it.²³⁰

It's at this point that films like Oliver Stone's *JFK* generally crowbar in some totally unnatural kind of recap into the script, largely on account of the dizzying array of characters and the unreasonable demands placed upon the viewer to follow and make sense of an impossibly complex mesh of motives and scenarios. A similar approach is needed now, because it was during the period in which Rothstein's friend Edward Fuller was being investigated over his bucket shop and World Series activities that Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald made the decision to up sticks from White Bear Lake in Minnesota and take up residence at 6 Gateway Drive, close to where Fuller had an estate.²³¹ It's something that's been mentioned by several biographers already, some speculating that the parties thrown by Fuller may even have inspired the ones we see in the Gatsby novel. The evidence for this though is thin on the ground. Fuller wasn't particularly well known for his parties and there was absolutely nothing of Jay Gatsby about him. Nevertheless, there are a number of authors who place him tantalisingly close to the author and his wife in Great Neck. But in terms of an Oliver Stone-style mid-movie recap I'd like to begin to pull the various strings together; and for this I'd like to hold in your mind Arnold Rothstein, Scott's relationship with Max von Gerlach and the whole thing with Fuller going on in court just as Scott arrives in Great Neck and starts sketching out the outline of the book that would eventually become *The Great Gatsby*.

²³⁰ 'The Great Gatsby, the Black Sox, High Finance and American Law', Allen Boyer, in *Baseball and the American Legal Mind*, Garland, 1995, pp.438-439; 'Used the President's Name', New York Sun, February 26, 1909, p.4. Fuller's real name was believed to be Ernest Fuller. He also used the name Harry Dexter. In 1909 he and Charles H Hyde were investigated over a care home investment scam. Hyde would later be convicted alongside Joseph G Robin as part of the probe into the Northern Bank and Carnegie Trust.

²³¹ *Apparatus for F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*, Matthew J. Bruccoli, University of South Carolina Press, 1974, p.137; 'E.M. Fuller & Co Fail; Brokers owe over a million', New York Times, June 28, 1922, p.1

The period that we are looking at is October 1922. Scott has set up his writing base close to his World Series friend Ring Lardner and their sometime employer, the newspaper man Herbert Bayard Swope — editor of the New York World. It is here that Scott will begin to observe the “big crooks” of Long Island be introduced, at some point or other, to Arnold Rothstein, a long-time friend of Swope and his wife Pearl, whose illustrious dinner parties Scott, Ring and Zelda would occasionally attend. Things were hotting up for Rothstein. May 1923 would see the first mentions of Rothstein’s name in relation to the Fuller case. A witness had come forward with proof that the former gambler had paid Fuller and McGee’s \$25,000 bail bonds and the America was about to wake to the full derisible scope of the 1919 World Series scandal.²³² Just 24 hours before Gerlach scrawled his message to Scott saying he was “enroute” back from the coast, the Department of Justice were beginning to share their fears for the safety of missing witness, Ernest Eidlitz who had been accused by Rothstein’s lawyers of stealing documents on behalf of William Randolph Hearst and his newspapers. They believed the ‘all round scoundrel’ Eidlitz had been cooking up a case against them in collusion with the State Attorney’s Office. A statement made by prominent racing man, Colonel Samuel L. James had accused Arnold of attempting to pay-off Eidlitz on James and Fuller’s behalf. Rothstein, Fuller and McGee denied all knowledge of this. There was no going back at this point: Rothstein’s name was now in regular circulation.²³³

Clean Books, Immoral Measures

At the time that Gerlach was leaving his message saying he would be dropping in from the coast, Scott had just been putting the finishing touches to *Absolution*, the dark and unsettling story that the author had originally intended using as a preface to *Gatsby*. His frustration with the Catholic faith of his youth had entered a new and thoroughly unforgiving phase. The note that Max would leave had

²³² ‘Fuller To Be Tried Despite Jail Term’, New York Times, May 19, 1923, Vol 72, No. 23856, p.3

²³³ ‘Says Hearst Papers Conceals A Witness New York Times’, 21 July, 1923, Vol 72 No.23919, p.22

been scribbled over a newspaper item captioned 'The Beautiful and Damned'. Beneath the headline was a picture of Scott, Zelda and the two-year old Scotty posing on the lawn of their home. The Warner Bros 'photo play' version of the novel had been released in January and was still doing the rounds in theatres. The summer of 1923 had found the 27 year old author in an irascible, intolerant mood. Money was a constant struggle and America couldn't modernise quickly enough. Scott wanted to push forward in huge, artistic leaps. He felt that American literature was on the threshold of something great but that the default conservatism of its social elites were holding it back; the nation's rocket thrusters were icing up and his race to the stars had failed to lift-off. Twelve months earlier Scott had pleased with Scribner's to follow the example of more edgy publishers like Boni & Liveright and Doubleday Page and introduce a library of modern classics at more affordable prices. Great American literature was being held back because it was too elitist. Too many "lively books" were dead too soon. Scott felt that there was room for something a little more popular and a little more sensational. Bounding them uniformly would make them cheaper to produce and would add a sense of 'permanence' and sense of 'honour'.²³⁴ His appeal was duly acknowledged and filed. This was an old established publisher and things would be done their way, as unfashionable as that was.

In his ledger Scott records that 1923 was the most miserable year he had had since the age of nineteen. In January the author had learned of the death of his friend, Prince Val Engalitcheff (an apparent suicide) and by July he was hard at work on the first (and only) production of his play *The Vegetable*. Things began to improve in the second half of the year. His 18-month year old daughter Scotty had learned to talk and Zelda's sister Rosalind had arrived. Scott was meeting one challenge after another, and they weren't just confined to the distractions of everyday life in Great Neck. The world of publishing was under attack from a whole new menace: a demand for greater censorship.

A letter that Scott had written to the editor of *The Literary Digest* in April reveals his deep frustration with New York censoring laws: "*The clean-book bill*

²³⁴ A Life in Letters, Schuster & Schuster, 1995, p.56

will be one of the most immoral measures ever adopted. It will throw American art back into the junk heap where it rested comfortably between the Civil War and the World War". Scott couldn't understand how a book like *Simon Called Peter*, a testy and provocative novel openly critical of Catholicism, could pass the censors and not books by more powerful and deserving authors like Theodore Dreiser and James Branch Cabell.²³⁵ There was little or no sense of justice in the world. The heroes of the war had vanished and people clung on to what they knew. The pioneering spirit that had shaped the American nation was being nervously exchanged for all that was safe and familiar. Faced with an uncertain future in an uncertain world, America had handed a battery of extra powers to its instruments of law and order. Men were jailed and books were seized. The surface of the world was cracking and the past was slipping away. Anyone found to be letting go of the rope and letting the past drift idly away on the immense electric tsunami then coursing up the Hudson and through all the five boroughs of New York was classed as outlaw, Fitz included. Editors like Margaret C. Anderson and authors like James Joyce, who had been obliged to flee to Paris as the only means of keeping their freedom and continuing their art, were quickly becoming the bewildered new faces of the criminal underground. The running of illegal ideas started shuttling between the bays in cases that were every bit as illicit as those holding rum: there were bootleggers and there were bookleggers. Books were being sold in brown paper packages and kept upstairs at bookshops. Scott had been contemplating moving across to the publishers *Boni & Liveright* but had rejected it at the last moment. It had dawned on the young author that there were "curious advantages" for radical writers like himself being published by "ultra-conservative houses" like his present one.²³⁶ Scott had applied a simple enough logic: it was mainstream conservatives who needed change the most, and his route to them was through his current publisher, Scribner's. This was no time to preach to the choir.

²³⁵ *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Bantam Books, 1971, p.482 Scott would mention this book in *The Great Gatsby*.

²³⁶ *Dear Max, Dear Scott*, p.108

The Cotillo-Jesse Clean Book Bill that Scott refers to in his letter to *The Literary Digest* had just been passed by the New York Assembly. Within days it was being presented to a specially prepared Senate hearing. John S. Sumner of the *New York Society for the Suppression of Vice* did all the running on it, personally placing in the hands of the Senate Committee a half-dozen sealed envelopes which he alleged contained evidence of some serious obscenities.²³⁷ The opposition objected on the basis that it was impossible to judge a book based on a selection of paragraphs taken out of context. Among those who raised their objections at the hearing was Horace Liveright, the publisher behind Theodore Dreiser and his friend and legal adviser, J. G. Robin. The sponsors of the Bill were Justice John Ford and Martin Conboy Jnr, President of the New York Catholic Club and a powerful Irish-American ally of Scott's mentor, Shane Leslie (now serving as Chamberlain to the Pope) and Shane's father-in-law, William Bourke-Cockran.²³⁸ Conboy Jnr had come out with all guns blazing against the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses*. His reasons were twofold: the first was that he loathed the casual obscenity used by so-called 'artists' and the second was that the book's Cyclops scene featured a brutal caricature of Arthur Griffiths, a close personal and political associate of Conboy's friend (and legal client), the Irish Republican leader, Éamon de Valera.

Adding additional weight to the Bill was the Italian-born Senator, Salvatore Cotillo, the East Harlem Democrat who had been decorated by Italy for the work he had carried out on behalf of President Woodrow Wilson during the war. Cotillo returned to Italy as envoy in 1923, hoping to strike a deal with Pope Pius and Mussolini to help stem the flow of immigrants to America. The request had met with some resistance from Mussolini, who believed that if America were to pass the new and much tighter immigration bill, less money would be sent back to Italy by relatives working in the United States. This would mean fresh woes for an already struggling economy. Cotillo had returned to America in the spring of 1923 with a number of vague concessions. In Italy he had told the press that

²³⁷ The Publishers Weekly April 21, 1923, Vol 103, p.1262

²³⁸ 'Clean Books Bill is Voted Down by New York's Senate', Catholic News Service, 7 May 1923, p.1. Martin Thomas Conboy Jr. was a leading defence counsel for Tammany Hall leader, Charles F. Murphy.

once he returned to the States he would do everything in his power to make America more tolerant of Fascism and to promote Mussolini as a noble and commanding leader “of the highest order”. Cotillo wished to press home the idea that the Duce of Italy was not only legitimate but also credible. Contrary to what many Americans had been thinking, Fascism was not mere “brigandage” but a “lawful and strong government, full of patriotic ardour.”²³⁹ However, back in America the Senator was quick to downplay this sentiment, insisting that Fascism in America was not only something to be resisted but something that could never work. Cotillo faced the challenge of striking a very delicate balance. There were multiple parallel concerns to consider, and various stakeholders to please. Rome was now a vital ally in the war against ‘godless’ Russian Bolshevism. And also quite possibly, the silent and uncompromising partner in the war on obscenity.

Whilst in Rome, Cotillo had series of private meetings with the newly coronated, Pope Pius XI who duly assigned Bishop Michele Cerrati to assist with the Senator’s request.²⁴⁰ The official word on Cotillo’s visit was that he was here to ease the tensions between the supporters of Mussolini in the Italian communities of New York and the anti-Fascist movement that was swelling among the city’s Communists and Socialists. Unofficially he was there to secure their cooperation as part of a solution to an urgent immigration crisis under the banner of criminal exploitation. Italians who feared prosecution and persecution in Fascist Italy were now turning up on its shores in droves, bringing with the them the bloody, relentless feuds that Italy had become world-famous for.

Was it possible there was a link between Cotillo’s mission on Immigration and his fairly unexpected support of the Clean Book Bill? The three main sponsors of the Bill, John Ford, Martin Conboy and Senator Cotillo were certainly all Catholics. As the senate hearing reached its climax, Justice Ford brought out a

²³⁹ *The Mafia at War: Allied Collusion with the Mob*, Timothy Newark, Greenhill, 2007, p.56

²⁴⁰ ‘Catholics Named To Assist Work of Cotillo Committee’, Catholic News Service, 13 August 1923; ‘Vatican Will Aid in Saving Immigrants from Banking Sharks’, Catholic News Service, 3 September 1923. Max Gerlach associate Oscar E. Cesare would interview Mussolini in 1926. His interview and series of sketches (‘Firebrands of Fascismo’) were published in *The World’s Work* in January 1927.

raft of religious and patriotic groups. The Catholics were among those most strongly represented with the Holy Name Society, the League of Catholic Women, the Knights of Columbus and the Federated Catholic Societies all coming forward to share their views. The Roman Catholic Church had always taken a fairly liberal view of alcohol and prohibition but its generous attitude to booze didn't always extend to modern literature and contraception — both of which were regarded as the totally unnecessary evil of fashionably liberal democracies.

Sex was turning up everywhere and everywhere more and more people were getting comfortable with it. 1922 had witnessed the birth of the latex condom. The old Comstock Law still prohibited its promotion, but the public demand was insatiable. Practically everybody was now able to pick up a 'Prophylactic' cheaply at any drugstore. The bland and inoffensive rubber sheath, which had long been associated with promiscuity and adultery, was condemned with the utmost ferocity by the Church in Rome. No matter where you looked in America at this time there was a crisis. The unholy trinity of booze, books and bottoms was wreaking havoc with America's crumbling moral fabric. Worse still, the undue influence of a climate of quid pro quo, certainly in regard to America's unhealthy reliance on the cooperation of the Fascists in Italy and the provision of a suitable resolution to the Irish Question, was tearing it apart still further. If Nick really had looked up at the moon in Gatsby's garden that year, he would have seen that the sky was falling.

Pioneer Debauchees

The fantasy I have in my head is that when Scott did finally the door to Max Gerlach, probably with a pair of Whisky Sours clinking in his hand, he had just that minute finished reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*. On the table next to it would sit *The Satyricon* by Petronius, freshly re-translated and published by Albert Boni and Horace Liveright, the two main nemeses of the Clean Books League. Just as he hears someone knocking at the door, Scott would be skipping to the infamous Trimalchio 'banquet' scenes of the book— one of latest works of

fiction to fall victim to the New York censors. In my own little fantasy scenario, Gerlach would be familiar with the book and toss out a few quotes as he stepped through the door. *“To think that wine has a longer life than man, Old Sport”*, Gerlach would quip as he glides through the porch and into the hall, glancing around to see if his host had company. *“While there’s still life in the wine let’s fill our glasses. Slaves are men, my friends. Even if hard luck has kept them down, they should join us in drinking this water of freedom!”*

In his tipsy and carefree state, it would probably have been quite easy for Scott to equate the gaudy and irreverent nouveau-riche slave created by Petronius with smooth-talking villains like Gerlach and Rothstein — Princes and Kings among the rulebreakers of Long Island. The two men’s gutsy disregard for authority and their wily dry-witted elegance would, to anybody who didn’t know better, probably have had a bit of a Wild West charm about it. Like the glamorous raw men that a young James Gatz would encounter around the ports of the Barbary Coast, Scott might have thought he was being presented with a pioneer debauchee who had “brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon.” Meeting Rothstein is likely to have been no less thrilling. Men like these were living what Nietzsche only preached. Here was a snub-nosed, tough-talking Superman that existed beyond the usual conventions and orthodoxies of society. There is no small amount of irony in knowing that it was Rothstein’s money that went into producing the spectacular and dazzlingly lit *Dreamland* amusement park at Coney Island. It may have been ex-Senator William H. Reynolds who bagged all the credit but it was Rothstein who had both the magic and the capital to make it happen. The 15 acre plot at Surf Avenue overwhelmed its visitors with a dazzling display of lights and chaotic noise, before gently and very gorgeously depriving them of their hard-earned cash. Here was a man who was as capable of creating the darkness as he was of lighting it. Zarathustra had come down from the mountain with the news that America as we knew it was dead. And for a while at least men like Gerlach and Rothstein might have seemed quite impressive. Heroic even.

At the beginning of 1923 Scott had been having a tough time focusing his energies into work. Since his arrival in October, Great Neck had just been long party, with Ring Lardner and himself getting 'stewed' on a regular basis. The couple had been completely bewitched by the sheer eclectic volume of the town's celebrities: Frank Craven, Herbert Swope, Mae Murray, Fontayne Fox and Samuel Goldwyn, to name just a few. Even General Pershing, another vague associate of Max von Gerlach, had been an entertaining enough distraction after the "dull healthy middle west". There's no actual telling how close Scott's house was to Rothstein's friend, Edward M. Fuller, or how much Scott knew of the investigation into his bucket shop activities, but if his 1937 letter to Corey Ford at MGM bragging about his meeting with Rothstein is anything to go by, he was certainly wasn't unfamiliar with the Great Neck crooks. Of course, getting stewed on a regular basis meant getting liquor on a regular basis and this itself would have brought him into contact with some of Long Island's more undesirable (or more resourceful) characters, Max Gerlach among them. Living beyond your means on this lavish scale often meant living beyond the law.

It is certainly curious to note that Max von Gerlach's 42 Broadway address at this time was also within just a few yards of *Edward M. Fuller & Co* at 50 Broadway. In November that year the same 42 Broadway address would feature in another 'bucket shop' investigation, this time with fatal consequences when 33 year old broker, Jesse A. Wasserman, a key witness in the case, committed suicide at his home in New York. It is believed that Wasserman had shot himself through the head in the bathtub at his home on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Several letters from his wife Carla von Bergen in Baden, Germany were found alongside his almost fully-submerged body in the tub. Two suicide notes were discovered, one addressed to his wife and the other to *The Lotos Club*, a New York Gentlemen's Club that had been formed to promote the more liberal concerns of journalists, actors, singers, writers and artists. In January that year Wasserman had attended a Lotos Club dinner. Among its speakers was Otto Kahn, the owner of the mock-Gothic 'Oheka Castle' which movie director Baz Luhrmann would use in 2012 as the basis for Gatsby's mansion. During the speech Kahn renewed his vows to America: more and more it was "a land of

high striving” made up of a magical, winning compound of “sentiment and idealism”. America had been called “the land of the almighty dollar”, but he no longer believed this to be true. Even in its most materialistic days “the power of the idea and the and the impulse of the ideal” had been proven to have had a far greater influence over the spirit of the nation than its famous green crinkly dollar. America’s most valuable asset had always been the imagination of its people. Kahn called upon the artists of New York to help educate its soul to help awaken in its people the love and understanding of “all that was beautiful and inspiring”. Beneath the nation’s crudeness, its newness, “its strident jangle and its jazziness” was the rich, raw grist of a great culture. All that was really needed to ignite that latent talent was a spark. It wasn’t a man of unlimited wealth that America needed right now but a man of unlimited imagination and poetry. Kahn’s “land of unlimited possibilities” was in desperate need of its prince, someone whose “capacity for wonder” was even greater than even his love and control of the dollar. What America needed right now was someone like Jay Gatsby.

Kahn’s speech that evening had been ably backed-up by the Scottish soprano, Mary Garden, making her debut speech at the gala as the club’s first female member. The singer talked of her love of Jazz and her even greater love of breaking the rules. Had he attended, Scott would probably have rattling his cutlery in boisterous agreement. Tinkling his glass more modestly beside him, would be Jay Gatsby, the patron saint of all dreamers.²⁴¹ The previous year, Jesse Wasserman, a long-time patron of Kahn’s club, had featured as witnesses in the ‘draft-dodging’ Grover Bergdoll scandal. Bergdoll had been hard-drinking, womanizing racing car driver and aviator who had somehow managed to dodge being drafted into the army. A worldwide manhunt ensued and Bergdoll was eventually traced to Germany.²⁴² Within months of Wasserman’s tragic suicide, Chester Sanders Lord, long-time editor of the left-leaning *New York Sun*, announced that he was stepping down as president of the Lotus Club in favour of Mussolini-admirer and diplomat, Nicholas Murray Butler.

²⁴¹ Dinner in Honor of Mary Garden by the Lotos Club, New York, January 29, 1922, The Lehmaier Press, 1922, p.2, pp.16-17

²⁴² ‘J.A Wasserman’, New York Tribune, November 14, 1922, p.1; November 15, 1922, p.1; New York Times, July 20, 1921, p.1

During the court case that followed the arrest of Scott's neighbour, Edward M. Fuller in February 1923, it was disclosed that the swindler had received cheques totalling nearly \$200,000 from Arnold Rothstein. These cheques were dated between November 10th 1920 and Nov 9th 1920, certainly years before Scott arrived on the scene. The judge investigating the bucket shop practices admitted that he was unable to fathom the mystery of Rothstein's connection with Fuller's firm, despite Rothstein being one of the known sureties behind Fuller & Company.²⁴³ The various links between New York baseball owner Charles A. Stoneham and Arnold Rothstein were even stronger, the gangster having brokered the deal that saw Stoneham pick up the Chicago and New York Giants just months ahead of the 1919 World Series.²⁴⁴ There were also plausible links between Stoneham and Cushman A. Rice, Stoneham having opened the first racetrack and casino — the Casino Nacional — in Havana with Giants manager, John J. McGraw.²⁴⁵ By and by, the interests of both the track and the Jockey Club were sucked in the Cuban National Syndicate. There was another thing too. The 99 Second Avenue address that Max Gerlach used to conduct his business affairs in 1910 was little more than twenty-feet away from the law firm of Fuller's legal counsel, Leonard A. Snitkin in Manhattan's Eighth Assembly. It had been Snitkin's legal colleague, Aaron J. Levy who, like Cushman Rice and George Young Bauchle, had supported Gerlach in his application to enlist with the US Army.²⁴⁶ As Rothstein biographer David Pietrusza points out in his *Life and Times* account of the World Series criminal genius, Judge Levy's position as majority leader of the New York State Assembly, and his graduation to the bench at the Supreme Court was to prove critical in protecting Rothstein's gambling clubs. Levy was Arnold's go-to man at the courthouse, and regarded by most as the man who fixed-up the charges against Lieutenant Charles Becker in the

²⁴³ 'Make Change of Counsel: Fuller and McGee see Long Summer Spent in Jail', *Circleville Daily Union Herald* 24 May 1923, p.1;

²⁴⁴ *The Life, Times, and Murder of the Criminal Genius Who Fixed the 1919 World Series*, David Rothstein Pietrusza, Carroll & Graf, 2003

²⁴⁵ *Baseball: The Golden Age*, Harold Seymour, Oxford University Press, 1971, p.389

²⁴⁶ 'Judge Fallon Turned Down', *New York Times*, October 7, 1909, p.3. The law firm was at 46 St Mark's Place. Levy and Snitkin served together at the Municipal Court in New York's Second and Fifth Districts. They were also colleagues on several charitable boards.

Herman ‘Rosy’ Rosenthal murder case, clearing Rothstein and his men of any suspected involvement in his death.²⁴⁷

If Scott ever did come into contact with Fuller as some biographers have suggested, then it had probably come about through some casual relationship the two men may have had with Gerlach. It is certainly curious to think that Scott’s decision to head to France to complete his novel in May 1924 coincided with the full sensational exposure of Rothstein, Stoneham and Fuller in the nation’s press. In April, President of the American Baseball League Ban Johnson pledged to rid the game of corruption, and it would start with the complete removal of Rothstein and Stoneham. By this point in time, Eddie Eidlitz, key witness in the Fuller and Rothstein investigation was missing, presumed dead. On April 12, Scott had written to his editor Max Perkins, apologising for his ‘laziness’ and the series of ‘bad habits’ he’d fallen into and was now committed to producing something of lasting value. At this point there was no indication in his letters that Scott had any intention of moving the family to Europe — a place he had previously very little regard for. A simple entry in his ledger for April reads: “Decision on 15th to go to Europe”. No explanation is provided. He wouldn’t return to America for two years. And when he did, it wouldn’t be to New York.

A decision to indict Rothstein and Fuller was made public one week later on April 22.²⁴⁸ Edward Fuller responded to being indicted for a second time by agreeing to testify against his former friends. On May 3, Scott and Zelda packed only what items were necessary and boarded the *SS Minnewaska* for Cherbourg, their four-year daughter Frances in tow. On May 16, 1924 Mayor John F. Hylan wrote triumphantly in the *New York Times* that he had successfully put Arnold Rothstein out of the gambling business forever. He also poured scorn on the part played in the whole affair by Arnold’s ‘intimate friend’ (and Scott’s neighbour)

²⁴⁷ *Rothstein: the Life, Times and Murder of the Criminal Genius who Fixed the 1919 World Series*, David Pietrusza, Publishers Group West, 2003, p.xiv, pp.70-91

²⁴⁸ Ban Johnson After McGraw and Stoneham, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 10, 1924, Vol 83, No.239

Harold Swope.²⁴⁹ The pressure that Scott's friend Ring Lardner must have been under after being the first to expose the scam must have been immense.

It's probably fair to say that men like Arnold Rothstein took the rule-book and tore it up in a way that Scott had always wanted to. The gangster had no interest in anarchist theory, Communism or Socialism, just the practical monetary gains of having the muscle and brains to control them. Nevertheless Rothstein's own unique brand of criminal syndicalism was not significantly different from its cousins in organized labour unions. The narratives of 'rise and fall' were shared by each, as were the basic principles of solidarity. The only real difference was that the dominant principles of organized crime were based on the science of survival and self-determination — the crude philosophy of the scar-faced Übermensch. There were common players in the unions and the mob, even if there weren't always common objectives. The criminal syndicalist state that many associate with Putin's Russia almost certainly has its roots here: a dangerous, combustible mix of organized crime, strong government, and big business; not a 'commerce without rules', but a commerce with its own rules operating under an umbrella of state protection, which in this instance had included the support of the Tammany Hall executive and New York Justice behemoths, Aaron J. Levy and Leonard A. Snitkin.

The evolution of the mob requires a greater depth of study than can be offered here, but suffice to say that the historical and cultural links between America's various mafias and the anarchist and Syndicalist movements of Chicago have already been duly noted.²⁵⁰ There's certainly little denying they share large illicit stashes of DNA. By the time that Scott started work on his final novel, *The Last Tycoon*, it seems he had realised that the corrupt practices of powerful men had a devilishly mean grip on helping one realise one's dreams. The hold that the

²⁴⁹ 'Hyland and the World', *New York Times*, Vol 73, No. 24219, p.3; 'Two Brokers (Fuller and Rothstein) Indicted', *Amarillo Globe*, April 22, 1924, p.2

²⁵⁰ You may want to take a look at Mussolini, Sacco-Vanzetti, and the Anarchists: The Transatlantic Context by Philip V. Cannistraro (*The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 68, No. 1, March 1996, pp. 31-62), the *History of the Mafia* by Salvatore Lupo (Columbia University Press, 1983), *Fascism, the Mafia, and the Emergence of Sicilian Separatism: 1919-43* by Jack E. Reece (*The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 45, No. 2, June 1973, pp. 261-276

Mob had over Columbia and Paramount and men like Louis B. Meyer (Pat Brady in the novel) was well known. They didn't go much for outsiders in Hollywood. That much he did learn. It was all based around plausible, respectable fronts. And such was their influence that Scott opted out of addressing the threat directly, Marilyn Monroe once commenting that the author had done little to expose the true, violent criminality of individuals within the industry. It was the actor's point of view that Scott had taken an "artful view" of Hollywood that was far "too romantic". Even his bastards seemed "sort of civilised", she sniped.

Part VI

I am the Resurrection. The Death and the Birth of an American Legend

"THE BODY IS SOWN IN CORRUPTION; IT IS RAISED IN INCORRUPTION. IT IS SOWN IN DISHONOR, IT IS RAISED IN GLORY."

Undeterred by Arthur Mizener's refusal to meet him in person, Max Gerlach persisted with his letters. In one of the final letters he wrote to Mizener in June 1954 he was assisted by Belle Trenholm, who dutifully related his desperate situation. Although Mizener wouldn't have known it, Trenholm had her own extraordinary story to tell. Born Belle Grosse in New York to a German father and Bohemian mother, Belle would somehow become entangled in the extra-marital affairs of John William Beauchamp Pinder, a British Canadian mining engineer "with interests in Mexico and Yukon". Pinder, whose sister was singer and actress Grace Vernon Webber, was reported to have links to President William Howard Taft's sometime Russian and English ambassador, John Hays Hammond. His brother-in-law was Colonel Horace Webber of the British Army.

In 1909 Pinder, his resume and financial status suitably galvanised by New York's Yellow Press, had married Broadway chorus girl, Mary Mayo.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ 'Pinder Weds an Actress', New York Times, November 4, 1909, p.1; Seeks Divorce from Engineer: Wife of Partner of John Hayes Hammond Files Petition, Oakland Tribune, March 17, 1911, p.16; <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Grosse-229>

The following year he had a fling with Trenholm, who was at that time in the service of Seattle piano teacher and voice coach, Edythe Melville.²⁵² The affair produced a child — Alwyne Compton Pinder, born 1911. The next six years saw the pair travel around Canada, ostensibly as married couple. For whatever reasons the relationship failed, and in April 1919, Belle married George Macbeth Trenholm, Jr, relocating to California. By 1925 she was back in New York working as an insurance broker. Five years later she returned to Washington State, enrolled at a University and then took up a job as journalist. At some point during the late 1930s, Belle found herself living and working in Japan. Her son Alwyne, a reporter himself, had followed her on the trip and taken up a position at the *Japan Chronicle*. By 1946 he had found himself working for America's precursor to the CIA, the Office of Strategic Services, managing a station desk in Shanghai.²⁵³

On her return to New York in 1945 Trenholm became involved in Anton Romatka and Max Bodenheim's Raven Poetry Circle — a group of passionate outsiders eking out a glamorously meagre existence in the city's Bohemian capital, Greenwich Village. A report on the death of Raven poet, Anton Romatka in March 1948 features Trenholm among a colourful menagerie of mourners at his funeral. The journal that featured the report was *Different: Voice of the Atomic Age*, then serving as organ of The Avalon World Arts Academy, a loose coalition of writers affiliated with Romatka's Raven Poetry Circle. Edited in Long Island's Floral Park by pulp-fantasy author (and occasional Communist) Lilith Lorraine, the journal fed an eclectic, space-age diet of Socialism, eugenics, Zoroastrian philosophy and bunk-led ufology to the eager Bohemian masses.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Belle Grosse, b. 1893, Thirteen US Census 1910, Seattle, April 18.

²⁵³ Station Activities, X-2 China, July 1945, US Intelligence on China CI00162, Top Secret, Report, c. August 01, 1946

²⁵⁴ 'A Poet Dies', *Different: A Voice of the Atomic Age* - Volumes 4-5, p.22. It's possible that 'Poetry doctor' Anton Romatka came over to the US from Russia in 1899 as Anton Romaika. In the late 1920s Anton served as Director of the Labor Temple Poetry Forum, donating its proceeds to The Daily Worker.

Accompanying Trenholm and several other well-known Village faces that day was James A. Keel, an eighteen year old poet who would eventually find fame with the 1975 cult-favourite, *The Mothman Chronicles*. It was Keel who had found Romatka's body after turning up for one of his legendary poetry salons. Keel recalled how he rang the doorbell several times and getting no response sought the assistance of a nearby police officer. When they broke down the door and entered the poet's scruffy garret, they found Romatka dead in bed, old German anatomical charts on the wall, a carpet of papers on the floor and an old roll-topped desk foaming over with letters and verses. His death was put down to heart failure.²⁵⁵ As the mourners assembled at the Labor Temple on East 14th Street, they remarked how the former cowboy, farmer and prize-fighter had become a symbol of true Bohemianism and its "willingness to sacrifice the material things of life for ideals" in a land whose very survival "depended on their preservation". Like Gatsby, Romatka was viewed by those who loved him as an idealist in a material world, a spirit locked inside the machine. Curiously enough, Romatka's apartment at 25 West Third Street was just 300 yards away from Gerlach and Elizabeth Mayer's flat at 14 Jones Street. Interestingly, there is some indication that Romantka had been associated in the 1920s with dramatic soprano singer, Rita Hamsun of Washington Heights.

In 1961, Trenholm's son, Alwyne would publish *Annals of the Sea*, in which he provides a blow by blow account of time in Shanghai and Japan and his experiences with his services with the US Intelligence. Chen Tsui-lien, Professor of History at National Taiwan University has recently made the claim that future US diplomat, George H. Kerr, whom Trenholm was corresponding with in Japan in the 1930s, was passing intelligence back to

²⁵⁵ 'Friends to Bury Anton Romantka', New York Times, March 22, 1948, p.42; <http://www.johnkeel.com/?p=578>. Despite being known for his extreme poverty, Romantka continued to advertise his tutoring services in everything from Scribner's Magazine to New Leader. Trenholm return to New York in January 1939 on the Empress of Japan. Her son remained a key player in US media relations with Japan into the 1980s. See: 'Anti US Films Gain in Japan', A.C. Pinder, Motion Picture Herald, June 26, 1954, p.27

the MID and MIS. Her son Alwynne's recruitment into the OSS certainly makes this plausible.²⁵⁶

It was during Trenholm's time in The Village in the mid-1950s that she wrote the letter to Scott's biographer, Arthur Mizener, on Max's behalf. Despite her valiant efforts to portray Gerlach as a Nietzschean character ("he lives alone and dies alone") Mizener doesn't take the bait and continues to dodge all of Gerlach's requests to write to him. Kruse notes that it was with no small amount of irony that the only time Mizener ever came *close* to telling the world a little more about Gerlach's existence came a few weeks after Max's death in New York October 18, 1958. Mizener had been taking an aggressive swipe at Scott's friend and mentor, Shane Leslie. The article had been published in *The Times Literary Supplement* on October 31st 1958. In it, Leslie makes some casual claim to having helped inspire the *Gatsby* novel. It's a fairly innocuous claim. Leslie was recalling how he had launched the "joyful schoolboy prodigy" among the great millionaire mansions of Long Island — Scott's "first view", or so he believed, of the "wealthy and successful" lifestyles that were enjoyed by the New York elites. Leslie had been Scott's mentor at school and the pair had struck up a friendship that would last much of the author's life.²⁵⁷ Two weeks later, Mizener wrote to the paper's editor, attempting to set the record straight. Contrary to what Leslie was implying, *Gatsby* was "evidently based on Fitzgerald's experiences in Great Neck", he snarled. What's more, the scholar added, "the remote model for *Gatsby* himself, a man named Max von Guerlach, is still alive to tell about it."²⁵⁸ Mizener's surly response, printed in the *Times Literary Supplement* came just three weeks after Gerlach had died at Bellevue Hospital. The 'remote

²⁵⁶ *Reconstructing 228: The Post-War US-China Framework, the Chinese Model of Political Control, and Taiwan*, Chen Tsui-lien (Professor of History at National Taiwan University); 'George H. Kerr collection,' Okinawa Prefecture Archives, GHK4E01004

²⁵⁷ *Some Memories of Scott Fitzgerald*, Shane Leslie, *Times Literary Supplement*, October 31, 1958, p.632

²⁵⁸ *Letters to the Editor, Some Memories of Scott Fitzgerald*, Arthur Mizener, *Times Literary Supplement*, November 14, 1958, p.657

model' wasn't very much alive, as Mizener suggested. He was, in fact, very much dead.

There are several points worth mentioning in the timing of the spat between Arthur Mizener and Shane Leslie. Firstly, Mizener was in London at the time of the exchange. On November 11th he would speak at the American Embassy in London on Ernest Hemmingway. He would also complete a BBC 'World of Books' broadcast whilst he was there. Mizener was clearly scouting for fresh publicity and a little bit of controversy was hardly going to go amiss. Charles Scribner's Sons had just that year published another edition of *Afternoon of An Author*, a selection of essays and short stories by Scott, with a new introduction by Mizener (like Scott, a Princeton graduate). A second edition of his Fitzgerald biography, *The Far Side of Paradise* was also due to be published by Arnold A. Knopf's *Vintage Books* in spring the following year. Leslie had made the unforgivable mistake of not mentioning any of them. Instead he had shared his joy that "great critics like Priestly" were now editing volumes about Scott's writing and that a brand new biography was being promised. Somewhat cryptically, Mizener's name was left out of Leslie's article and no reference at all was made to the second offing of his biography from Knopf. Perhaps Leslie had privately shared the view of Mizener's book that Scott's friend Edmund Wilson had expressed to Christian Gauss: "*He has assembled in a spirit absolutely ghoulish everything discreditable or humiliating that ever happened to Scott. He has distorted the anecdotes that people have told him in such a way as to put Scott and Zelda in the worst possible light.*" Wilson had been even more offended by the way that Mizener had misinterpreted Scott's dark humour. The various "jokes and nonsense" that Scott would often scribble off in letters were invariably re-served by Mizener as "sinister realities". Wilson had been so disturbed by what he had read that he told Gauss that he was in actual fact "very much worried about it".²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ 'Edmund Wilson to Christian Gauss, February 24, 1950', *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977, p.475

Contrary to what you might have expected, given his furious ‘reveal’ about the ‘real’ inspiration behind Jay Gatsby in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Mizener offered no further information about Max in his 1959 Vintage Books edition, quoting only the same titbit of gossip that Zelda had shared with Princeton researcher, Henry Dan Piper in March 1947. The sum total of the scholar’s faith in Gerlach comprised of the same, dismissive footnote: “Zelda said late in her life that this was a Teutonic-featured man named von Guerlach. (ZSF to H. D. Piper.)”²⁶⁰ Why Mizener felt compelled to promote Max as the source for Gatsby in his furious challenge to Leslie in *The Times*, but casually breeze over Max in his book can only ever be guessed at. It certainly wasn’t consistent.

Gerlach had been terrifically unlucky. The huge revival in interest in Scott Fitzgerald triggered by the Armed Service Edition of *The Great Gatsby* in 1945 had been nothing short of a phenomenon. Over 155,000 copies of this handy little pocket-sized book had been distributed to army personnel, giving the novel to a level of success that had never been achieved in the author’s lifetime. The book’s timing couldn’t have been better. The ground war was over, and the cold war had just begun. That blinding flash of light observed behind sunglasses and welding goggles in New Mexico wasn’t the 5,300 pounds of high explosives that defined the ‘Trinity’ experiment, but the birth of a new and dazzling legend. Oppenheimer had named his bomb Trinity in reference to a poem by Donne: “*In all flat maps (and I am one) are one, So death doth touch the resurrection.*” Out of death would come life. Out of war, peace. Out of the smoke and the dying flames, strode the golden figure of Gatsby and his arms, the American Dream.

²⁶⁰ *The Far Side of Paradise*, Arthur Mizener, Vintage Books, January 1959, p. 188. Interestingly, Alfred A. Knopf travelled extensively in South America and published a lot about Cuba. The publisher’s half-brother, the film producer, Edwin Knopf became a good friend of Scott. It’s worth pointing out that despite having exchanged a stream of communications with Max, Mizener failed to correct the spelling of his name in his letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*. It more the same misleading traits as the spelling of the name in the footnotes. Mizener was in England to work on a book on T.S Eliot: ‘Prof Speaks at Embassy’, *Ithaca Cornell Daily Sun*, November 24, 1958, p.5

As the American scholar, Maureen Corrigan observes, “The Great Gatsby endures because it’s our most American and our most un-American novel at once: telling us the American Dream is a mirage, but doing so in such gorgeous language that it makes that dream irresistible.”²⁶¹ It was the kind of bitter-sweet contradiction that would have made Oppenheimer proud. The crown that Gatsby wore was a crown made of thorns. The dream, when it had arrived, had come in the wake of the atomic nightmare. Although it was James Truslow Adams who had helped popularise the term in his 1931 book, *Epic of America*, it would be twenty-five years before Scott’s biographer, Arthur Mizener would perform a purpose-driven refit of the phrase within the context of *Gatsby*. On page 178 he writes: “*The last two pages of the book make overt Gatsby’s embodiment of the American dream as a whole by identifying his attitude with the awe of the Dutch sailors when, ““for a transitory enchanted moment,” they found “something commensurate to [their] capacity for wonder” in the “fresh, green breast of the new world.”*”²⁶²

It was in fact a full 25 years before anyone formally recognised the novel’s confused but delirious engagement with the notion of the American Dream; the primary reason being that ‘The Great American Dream’ wasn’t a concept or ideal that was being used with any particular regularity by America at this time. Although the phrase had appeared at intervals for the best part of seventy years — invariably with a small ‘d’ and without the definite article — it was the columnist Charles G. Smpas who had really pumped life into the phrase.²⁶³ Smpas, who would work closely with John F. Kennedy during his 1961 trips to Europe to meet Russia’s Khrushchev and France’s DeGaulle, would provide a stirring “I

²⁶¹ *So We Read On: How the Great Gatsby Came to Be and Why It Endures*, Maureen Corrigan, Brown and Company, 2014, p.11

²⁶² *Ibid*, p.178

²⁶³ The usage of ‘the American Dream’, certainly as an almost a priori notion or ideal only really entered common parlance in the 1970s when it was used by those who challenged its legitimacy (often within the context of the Vietnam War). In these instances it was often preceded by the usually ironic qualifier, ‘The Great American Dream’. Prior to 1940 the phrase, ‘the great American dream’ had been used predominantly by doe-eyed American nativists yearning for the wild frontier.

Am the American Dream” column for *The Lowell Sun* in July 1940.²⁶⁴ That same week in Cuba, America would sign the Act of Havana treaty, pledging to protect any Southern American territory that came under threat from Germany. Sampas’ pledge was no less rousing: “*I am the American Dream ... I am all Americans, of all years ... I am Washington, citadel of the world last civilisation and I am George Washington, crying in the deathly stillness of the night, seeing blood streaming from the feet of American revolutionists without shoes at Valley Forge.*” The speech continued in this way for another two thousand words, each of its segments beginning with the powerful declaration “I am the American Dream”.²⁶⁵ Sampas and *The Lowell Sun* would continue pushing the phrase for the full duration of the war.

It may seem crazy to think now, but prior to Mizener, Fitzgerald’s most famous novel had only ever really been read as a critique of the excessive greed and carelessness of the rich. Until Mizener published the first biography of the author in 1951, the words “American Dream” and the “Great Gatsby” had never once been uttered in the same breath. All this would change with Mizener’s 1951 biography. In June 1960 the scholar would consolidate any ideological gains he had made with a series of talks on *The Great Gatsby and the American Dream* as part of an annual gathering looking at pressing social concerns. Joining him on the evening of June 10th would be Stuart M. Brown of the Philosophy Department asking the now forty-year old question, ‘Are American Moral Standards Declining?’²⁶⁶ Almost overnight, Scott’s 1925 novel would provide a theatre of war for those who championed and those who doubted the American Dream. As modern readers will probably appreciate, nobody was entirely sure whether *The Great Gatsby* was a furious critique or ecstatic celebration of the nation’s ideal. You could look at the book three

²⁶⁴ Charles G. Sampas Obituary, *The Lowell Sun*, Massachusetts, p.36. His brother in law was fellow Lowell Sun writer, Jack Kerouac.

²⁶⁵ ‘This, Then, Is The American Dream’, Charles G. Sampas, *Sampascoopies*, Lowell Sun, July 23, 1940, p.40

²⁶⁶ ‘Alumni Return to Ithaca for Annual Reunion’, *Itaca Cornell Daily*, June 10, 1960, p.1

ways: Gatsby was a fraud, Gatsby was good or Gatsby was able to hold the two opposing ideas at the same time and still function as a romantic hero — a definition of genius that Scott would put forward in his 1936 essay *The Crack Up*.²⁶⁷ For the last seventy years, all attempts to reconcile the two have become an exercise in national cognitive dissonance. In the end, Max Gerlach's efforts to capture the zeitgeist would prove every bit as grim as Gatsby's efforts to fulfil the dream.²⁶⁸ Any commercial or artistic value that Max may once have been able to trade on now belonged in the past and there was simply no way of repeating it.

The Resurrection – America Rises from the Valley of Ashes

Just one year after arriving in Havana with Hallam Keep Williams, pledging to spill the beans on the real inspiration behind Gatsby, Scott's publisher, Charles Scribner, duly republished all of the author's novels. The business of turning a tragedy into a triumph and a long forgotten author into a legend had begun. Spurred on by the success of Alan Ladd remake of *Gatsby* in 1949 and Mizener's biography in 1951, *Scribners* and the *Council on Books in Wartime* had realised the full potential of winning complex ideological wars with words. One of those supporting the Council's efforts was Bennett Cerf — the man who had brought W. H. Auden to New York and fixed him up with an apartment in Greenwich Village. At the outset of the Cold War period, books continued to be "weapons in the war of ideas." With the publication of books like *The Great Gatsby* on a mass, and easily pocketable way, America was able to give 'the Dream' the seductive, romantic makeover it needed to beat Stalin's Russia. Gerlach, however, hadn't grasped the full significance of America's renewed interest in Gatsby: it wanted the romance of the dream, not the foul smelling reality that lingered in its wake. It was the dreamer,

²⁶⁷ *The Crack Up*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Laughlin, 1945, p.69

²⁶⁸ *So We Read On: How The Great Gatsby came to be and why it endures*, Maureen Corrigan, Little Brown & Company, 2014, p.11

not the bootlegger, that Americans craved at this time — something that would restore, not kill the dream. As a result, a whole new filter had been put in place. This was no more apparent than in the *Playhouse 90* production of *Gatsby* broadcast live on TV in June 1958. Although poorly received by some critics at the time (“it isn’t Great, and it isn’t Gatsby”) they did agree on one thing: the makers of the show had turned Scott’s tragic modernist fairytale into a love story about America. Ever since Ladd’s 1949 portrayal, *Gatsby* had always been a queer combination of Lord Byron and Al Capone in the world’s imaginations. Now he was more like Shelley — there was nothing of the fraud about him, and everything of the dreamer.²⁶⁹ The following year saw the biggest sales of the novel’s life. After 33 years in the making the book was finally a hit. The *Playhouse 90* broadcast and the publication of Sheila Graham’s ‘life with Scott’ biopic, *Beloved Infidel* the previous year, had seen had seen the appetite for *Gatsby* quadruple.

The *Playhouse 90* show had been directed by former secret service man, Franklin J. Schaffner. Just a few years after the show was made, Schaffner would work closely with First Lady, Jackie Kennedy on a much-hyped TV special that would throw open the doors of the White House and push the full dramatic weight of American democracy (and Kennedy’s handsome charisma) to the world.²⁷⁰ Schaffner’s 1968 film, *Planet of the Apes* would continue to work with the themes of *Gatsby* — albeit in a more pessimistic fashion. At the end of the film, Charlton Heston famously drops to his knees and beats his hands against the sand. The head of the Statue of Liberty lies in rubble on the beach before him: “You maniacs! You blew it up! Damn you!”, he screams. As a cautionary parable on the future of the American-Soviet arms race it works very nicely, but as a commentary on the looping, cyclic failure of the America Dream is where the movie really delivers. Poor old Captain Taylor can’t move forward and he can’t go

²⁶⁹ ‘TV’s Great *Gatsby* Isn’t F. Scott Fitzgerald’s’, *Oxnard Press*, June 1927, 1958. The CBS show went out on June 26, 1958. The script was written by David Shaw.

²⁷⁰ *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy*, Jacqueline Kennedy/Franklin J. Schaffner, CBS, February 14, 1962

back. Schaffner's film summed up the paralysing stalemate of a Cold War world — and Gatsby's world — just perfectly.²⁷¹

Max Gerlach had been served an impossible challenge. If he had tried to tell the world that he was the real Jay Gatsby prior to 1945, more people might have listened, but fewer would have been interested. Neither Scott nor the novel were very popular at that time. Max could have screamed it from the top of the Empire State Building, but nobody would have paid any attention. Scott was an obscure, forgotten author and his creation, Jay Gatsby, was more obscure still — a gaudily-dressed clown in a circus that had left town long ago. After the popularity and success of Alan Ladd's *Gatsby* in 1949, Gerlach had thought he'd been given another opportunity to get the truth out there. But he couldn't have been more wrong. The book's original publication on Good Friday 1925 couldn't have been more apt: the death of Gatsby had captured the moment of crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension — a pivotal moment in time when the wily, dishonest dreamer is transformed into the prophet and his flesh becomes divine. For the grand ideal of Gatsby to remain pure, there could be no Max Gerlach lurking in its shadows.

At the precise moment that the dream no longer seems possible, the beautiful death of Gatsby gives us hope. At the moment of his death, Gatsby and America, are absolved of all sins. Having the character rooted in some dubious, shapeshifting grifter with links to organised crime and the fraudulent webs of American intrigue, would only ever have obstructed the spreading of the gospel. In this instance Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and Cowardly Lion would be perfectly content to leave Oz behind the curtain, his sinister machinations allowed to continue undetected, his fantastical but ultimately vaporous dream preserved. Revealing Max Gerlach as the title character of the novel would have rooted Jay Gatsby in a disappointingly sinful, earthly world. The energy that America needed lay not in Gatsby's earthly, criminal ministry but in

²⁷¹ During the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, Schaffner was asked by Kennedy to help him prepare for his address to the nation.

his magical, miraculous afterlife. That beautiful spirit of idealism had to leave its tainted body. There is a line in the New Testament of the Christian Bible which better illustrates the point: “*The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.*”²⁷² Scott’s friend, Carl Van Vechten had been right all along: they had taken the theme “of a rather soiled or cheap personality, transfigured and rendered pathetically appealing through the possession of passionate idealism” and turned into a national religion. There was a natural body and there was a spiritual body; there was Gerlach and there was Gatsby — a man of dust rebuilt for heaven. Gatsby may die violently at the end of the novel, but it is a death that is swallowed in victory. What the high priests of the American media were collectively performing in the late 1950s was nothing short of a resurrection. The publishers and producers who were now clamouring to re-tell the story were simply finishing what Scott had started. For Gatsby to live, Gerlach had to go. Immortality was calling.

There are a couple of questions still worth asking: did the sudden revival of interest in Gatsby in the 1945 to 1949 period have any impact on Gerlach and Hallam Keep William’s decision to spill the beans in 1950? And did the follow-up wave of interest in the 1958 *Playhouse 90* broadcast in any way contribute to Max’s death? Gerlach’s failure to have recognition for the part he’d played in the novel must have plagued him greatly and we can only imagine what it had been like for his literary counterpart, Jay Gatsby to rise like the proverbial phoenix from his own anonymous ashes. Watching his life-story unfold on a live broadcast from CBS, with little more than a footnote by way of recognition, must have been a wound that cut pretty deep for Max. The shadow that he had thrown was fast becoming a phenomenon: the soul was leaving the body. Mentions of Gatsby in America’s press hit very obvious peaks between November 1950 and November 1951 (1033 returns) and then again from July 1958 to April

²⁷² 1 Corinthians 15:42-54, New Testament

1960 (2322 returns).²⁷³ There's no telling if the success of the show and the huge increase in the sales of the book had seen Max pick up the phone and talk to anyone who would listen but if the article for the Times Literary Supplement was anything to go by, then Shane Leslie was one former friend of Scott who wasted little time in trading on the respect that Fitzgerald now commanded. And, let's face it, Leslie's own contribution had been really rather small in comparison to that of Max. Perhaps Max had sat down on that warm Thursday evening in June and watched with the rest of America, the torturous 90-minute death of himself and the extraordinary birth of the legend. Perhaps his heart had stopped at that moment, and it had taken a full three months before the switch was finally thrown on his life-support at Bellevue. In his *Documentary Volume to Gatsby* in 2000, Matthew J. Bruccoli writes: "*The New York City Department of Health refuses to make Max von Gerlach's death certificate available.*" His probate records have also not been located. The nature of his death remains unknown. Much like the good man himself.²⁷⁴

Part V

A celebrated tenor sung in Italian, and a notorious contralto sung in Jazz

DID MAX GERLACH INTRODUCE GREAT GATSBY COVER DESIGNER FRANCIS CUGAT TO SCOTT FITZGERALD?

In a tale of many mysteries there is one last mystery to solve. In 1924, Spanish-Cuban artist, Francis Cugat submitted several surreal drafts of an idea he had for the dust-jacket of *The Great Gatsby*. The art historian Charles Scriber III, a close relation of Scott's original publisher, remarked in his essay, *Celestial Eyes: From Metamorphosis to Masterpiece*, that Cugat was not a regular contributor to Scribners and nobody seemed to have any idea who commissioned him. If you haven't seen this now

²⁷³ These figures were produced after entering the search term 'Great Gatsby' at newspaperarchive.com. They show very significant and visible peaks of interest.

²⁷⁴ *F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: a Documentary Volume*, Matthew J. Bruccoli, Gale Group, p.20

legendary first edition cover you will find that it features two large, faceless eyes staring out above a New York Skyline. The eyes, which are angled down at the gentlest of degrees, are looking at us. They belong to a woman, possibly Daisy, and they make a forlorn, ethereal appeal to the eyes of the viewer. Painted almost imperceptibly into the pupils of the eyes are male and female nudes — partly-classical and partly-erotic and vaguely hinting at the Epic-Heroic fantasies of the ‘great man’ himself. Exploding like fireworks in the scene below are the bright lights of the Coney Island amusement park, the compelling yellow glare of the Ferris Wheel dazzling the eyes like a beacon, the soft bleeding blues of the night a melancholy reminder of love’s losses. Looking at the cover gives us a glimpse of how Gatsby might feel. The thrills of the park below are transitory at best. You can look but you can’t fully engage — it’s too far away. It’s a joy observed but not experienced. All that remains is the glow of the joy that the park promises. It’s how a child might feel standing by watching others play. It’s portrait of detachment, a moment of forbidden, unspoilt pleasure frozen in time.

Cugat was never mentioned in any of Scott’s letters, nor was he mentioned in any correspondence that his editor Max Perkins shared with Scribner. Nobody knows when he was hired. Nobody knows why he was hired. Cugat’s painting appeared on the first printing of the book in 1925 and was never used again in Scott’s lifetime. His sketches of other ideas suggest a considerable familiarity and emotional connection with the themes of Scott’s novel and yet as Charles Scribner III remarks, not even Scott’s editor Max Perkins got to see any of Scott’s manuscripts until November 1924 — some six months after Cugat had begun work on the paintings. Max had the basic idea of the story and a variety of possible titles, but precious little else. Scott was keeping it tightly under wraps, promising him that unlike his ‘trashy’ stories for the magazines, it would be a “purely

a creative work” showing the “sustained imagination of a sincere and radiant world.”²⁷⁵

August 27, 1924 found Scott in an excitable state. At some point that week he had received a copy of Cugat’s gorgeous gouache painting. He was over the moon with the cover. “For Christs sake don’t give anyone that jacket you’re saving for me. I’ve written it into the book,” he screamed at Max.²⁷⁶ The author’s biographers have tight themselves in knots over the issue, some even going so far as saying that Scott’s inspiration for the haunting billboard eyes of Dr T. J. Eckleburg had come directly from Cugat’s painting, partly because Scott confides to Max that he has written the two large eyes into the novel, and partly because Cugat seems to have been connecting with the unfinished novel in the most unusually prophetic of ways; not only did Cugat manage to produce a surreal approximation of the iconic billboard image, he also had the foresight to include the amusement park Ferris Wheel that Scott had featured in his discarded prologue to the novel.²⁷⁷ In the absence of any further information to go on, Scribner Jnr had very little option but to conclude that “credit might go to some anonymous angel in the Scribner art department”.²⁷⁸ It was the work of fairies, or so he believed. But the truth might be a little different. What if Cugat had information about the novel that not even Scott’s editor Max was aware of? Contrary to newspaper reports at the time, Francis Cugat was not a strictly a ‘Spanish painter’. He was a Spanish-Cuban painter, whose family had fled to Havana in the first years of the twentieth century. In light of Gerlach’s regular trips to Havana in the twenty year

²⁷⁵ ‘Dear Max’, April 10, 1925, Great Neck, *Dear Scott/Dear Max*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973, pp.69-70

²⁷⁶ Scott to Max Perkins, August 27, 1924, *A Life In Letters*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Simon & Schuster, 1995, p.79

²⁷⁷ In the book, Scott writes: “*The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic — their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles.*” Another critic has rightly pointed out that when Scott says he has written it into the novel he probably means the line: “*Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs*” which appears as Nick and Jordan head out of New York along Queensboro Bridge.

²⁷⁸ *Celestial Eyes: From Metamorphosis To Masterpiece*, Charles Scribner III, Princeton University, Library Chronicle, Volume LIII, No.2, Winter 1992, pp.141-154

period leading up to *Gatsby's* publication — and in light of the fact that Gerlach appears to have known Scott well during this period — is it just possible that the man responsible for commissioning the project was Max Gerlach himself? Perhaps Gerlach had introduced Scott to Francis, shown him some of his paintings, and Scott had seen how the surreal, ethereal quality of his work might well match the themes of *Gatsby*?

In the years before Francis started working as set designer in Hollywood, he had worked for several years as an illustrator for the Chicago Opera Company and the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York. The work had come off the back of his poster work for the Mutual Film Corporation of Chicago — the studio behind the world-famous Charlie Chaplin — the highest paid entertainer in the world at that time.²⁷⁹ The work that Francis produced for Mutual was carried out by the Greenwich Litho Company of New York. The company, which features in Cugat's US draft papers in 1917, was owned by Chicago-Buffalo businessman, Freeman Worthing Butts — or 'Worthy' Butts as he was known to friends. Interestingly Butts, a film and car pioneer, was a cousin of Major Archibald Butt, the military aide of President Taft who went down with the Titanic in April 1912.²⁸⁰ At the time of the incident Butts was on his way back from Rome where he had been tasked with negotiating a settlement over disputed Catholic territories in the Philippines. The Major's commitment to Spanish and Catholic affairs had similarly seen Butt dispatched to Havana in 1906 where he was put in charge of logistical operations and supplies in support of America's efforts to restore order in the aftermath of the collapse of President Palma and Cuba's first democratic government. 1906 was also

²⁷⁹ 'Chicago Opera Posters to be Designed by Film Company's Expert', *Musical America*, July 14, 1917, Vol.26, No. 11, p.2; 'Chicago Opera Posters Show Good Taste', *Chicago Examiner*, November 3, 1917, p.3. The posters for the Mutual Film company were produced by Greenwich Litho Co in New York. This company featured as Cugat's employers in his 1917 draft papers.

²⁸⁰ Mrs Butts May Get Decree, *Washington Post*, November 3, 1914, p.9. Butts was director of several lithographic companies and car garages. He was also a director at the Universal Film Company and several other studios in Los Angeles.

the year that future ‘logistics’ officer, Max Gerlach, made his way to Cuba.

Like Major Butt, the duration of his stay lasted from 1906 to 1908.²⁸¹

There’s an interesting crossover here. In 1914, the Mutual Film Company were paid by the Mexican Revolutionary General Pancho to produce a film of his life. The man who signed the deal with Villa was Gunther Lessing. Some twenty years later Lessing who would arouse controversy for Disney when rumours that he had attended meetings of the German American Bund — a pro-Nazi organisation — began to circulate among the company’s employees. The lawyer, born the same year as Max, would travel to Mexico again in April 1919 and February 1921.²⁸² As the US Cavalry pursued Villa and men across the desolate plains of Mexico, the *New York Sun* told the thrilling account of Lessing’s bromance with the General and Mutual Films.²⁸³

This lavish propaganda exercise starring Villa as himself, was carried out under the sensitive direction of Raoul Walsh in a project that was financed and promoted by Villa’s specially-formed, Mexican War Film Company on West 23rd Street. The three sheet full colour poster set advertising the flick were most likely produced by Francis, who by 1917 had been made chief poster designer at Mutual Films.²⁸⁴ The company’s decision to film the movie would put them on a war footing with the censors. In 1915 Mutual Film Corp would take the Industrial Commission of Ohio to court. The court’s eventual ruling would have far-reaching consequences for the industry. The following year, Gerlach’s passport pal in Berlin, General James A. Ryan would become the head (and founder) of the Military Intelligence Department in the expedition to subdue General Villa in Mexico. Joining him in the hunt on the ground would be Scott’s brother-in-law, Captain Newman

²⁸¹ ‘Application for Service US Army, Ordnance Department’, *Scott Fitzgerald at Work*, Horst Kruse, 2014, p.33. Alzey is close to the French and Belgian borders.

²⁸² Gunther R. Lessing (b.1885) 1919/1921, Passport Applications, January 2, 1906 - March 31, 1925. Lessing’s father was born in Alzey, Germany.

²⁸³ ‘Meeting Pancho Villa in the Days of His Glory’, *New York Sun*, March 26, 1916, p.3

²⁸⁴ ‘Mexican War Pictures under Special Contract with Pancho Villa’, *Reel Life*, Mutual Film Corporation, May 1914, p.32. The deal was signed by Frank N. Thayer. also see: *Filming Pancho: How Hollywood shaped the Mexican Revolution*, Margarita de Orellana, Verso, 2009

Smith. In light of the revolutionary principles adopted in Spain and Cuba by his father, Juan Cugat, one might well suspect that film was something Francis could connect with. Havana at this time was home to an efficient German and Intelligence Network and agents loyal to Villa in Mexico had made their way to Cuba to broker a deal with supporters there.²⁸⁵ Also making a trip to Havana that year was Francis Cugat and his father.²⁸⁶

Cugat's first opera subject in 1916, was Rosa Raisa, the Polish-born Soprano who had sang with Enrico Caruso. As we've learned already, when Max was in Berlin he was familiar with several female opera singers —among them Hallam Keep William's mother, Alice Peroux-Williams and his sailing pal, Mary Morrison. Furthermore, his 1939 hostess in Flushing was former opera singer, Lydia Lindgren, one of the most notorious American divas of them all. At the time that Francis Cugat got his break designing posters for the Chicago Opera Company, Lydia Lindgren, was one of its most outspoken stars.²⁸⁷ Cast your mind back and you may just remember that Lindgren was embroiled in an ugly scandal with Otto H. Kahn — the CEO of the Metropolitan Opera Company. What's more Lindgren's first husband was Raoul Querze, the respected Italian voice coach who at just eighteen years of age trained the internationally famous dramatic tenor, 'The Great Caruso'.²⁸⁸ The young man accompanying Caruso on violin for Caruso during this time was none other than Francis Cugat's younger brother Xavier, who would go on to become one of America's most popular band leaders.²⁸⁹

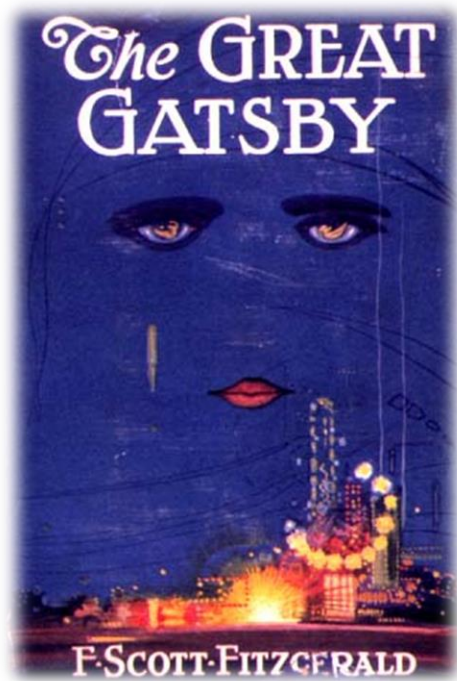
²⁸⁵ 'Plot to Estrange Villa and Caranza Reported', Bridgeport Evening Farmer, January 21, 1914, p.2

²⁸⁶ Francisco Cugat (b.1893), 1914, SS Saratoga, Havana to New York, New York City Passenger Lists, 1820-1957

²⁸⁷ 'Lydia Lindgren: Mezzo of Chicago Opera Company', Boston Sunday Post, September 10, 1916, p.42

²⁸⁸ 'Lydia Lindgren: Former Opera Star May Sing Again', Musical America, Oct 6, 1928, Vol 48, No. 25, p.25

²⁸⁹ 'Rumba Is My Life', Xavier Cugat, S. Low, 1948



Freedom Loving Exiles

Even if the chronology isn't perfect, much of what happened in the lives of the two brothers can be gleaned from Xavier Cugat's 1948 autobiography, *Rumba is My Life*. The brothers were born in Girona in Spain. After being jailed by Spain's Royal Government for subversion, their father, Jean Cugat de Bru, an inventor and rebellious anti-monarchist, came under increasing pressure to leave Spain and in 1900, the family fled to Cuba, finally settling in Havana as freedom-loving exiles. Supported by Dr Eugenio Sanchez de Fuente, Secretary General of the Cuban National Red Cross, their father immediately got to work organizing 'bicycle brigade', a team of mounted-cavalry, drilled to perfection in matters of childbirth and emergency first-aid treatment, and managed with the assistance of the Pan-American Union.²⁹⁰ According to Xavier, one of the only personal items his father had been able to bring out of the old country was his uniform and sword of the International

²⁹⁰ Bulletin of the Pan American Union, Volume 34, Pan American Union, 1912, p.730

Red Cross in Spain.²⁹¹ Within 18 months of Cugat's arrival, Cuba would win its independence from Spain. In May 1902, the Republic of Cuba was born, taking her volatile place among the nations of Pan-American. Within a few years Captain Cushman Rice, the American friend of Gerlach who had helped liberate the country under Cuban Revolutionary, General Calixto García, would make his second home here. A short time later, the opera houses, the cattle farms, the American millionaires — and the crime bosses — would all move in. By July 1902 Cushman Rice was telling American newspapers that opportunities for investments were 'numerous'. Land was 'cheap' and the climate was 'healthful'.²⁹² Pretty soon the theatres and the tracks would become Havana's biggest attractions — and Rice would become an influential, if slightly mysterious, figure in all of them.

²⁹¹ 'Rumba Is My Life', Xavier Cugat, S. Low, 1948, p.30; Xavier Cugat, The Scribner Encyclopaedia of American Lives, V.II, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998-

²⁹² 'Speaks Well of Cuba', Cushman A. Rice, Saint Paul Globe, July 24, 1902, p.7

BILLING GRAND OPERA LIKE A CIRCUS



Maestro Campanini was captivated by the young Spaniard's art shown in the first portrait, the initial subject being Rosa Raisa, and immediately gave Cugat a commission to paint poster likenesses of twelve or fifteen other members of his organization. These works, exhibited in many Chicago shop windows, attracted such complimentary attention that this feature was made a regular part of the publicity department. Later, a large number of Cugat's posters were reproduced in lithographed one-sheets and half-sheets, including those of Galli-Curci, Melba, Muratore, Campanini and others, and were used extensively on the Chicago Company's preliminary tour of the Middle West, and in their recent invasions of New York and Boston.



There is a vague idea in the back of many heads that art and efficiency are incompatible. Patrons of art who "take their pleasures sadly" often confuse efficiency with commercialism, and the aspect of business methods being applied to the administration of an artistic institution offends them deeply. The admonition is heard: "Instead of lavishing money on advertising, apply it to the artistic effort." But they overlook the proven fact that dollars spent on publicity bring double-dollars and triple-dollars back through the box-office—excess receipts which may be used to increase the artistic worth of the organization and take the "De" out of Deficit. When an institution of this sort becomes self-supporting it reaches its healthiest and most fruitful estate.

The advertising campaign in Chicago was carried out by experts for the vulgar purpose of merchandising grand opera tickets, and consequently the advertisements were worded and framed in real department store style, presenting grand opera as a necessity, shown in its most attractive guise with all of the "selling points" deftly brought out. It was also planned so that direct results could be absolutely computed, and that it paid for itself several times over was demonstrated in the advance subscriptions. The same result was apparent in the preliminary tour, which was probably the most successful ever made by such an organization. The same great success of the Chicago offerings in New York and Boston was evidenced in the attendance average.

THEY are billing grand opera like a circus. It's an outrage!

So wailed the high priests of art when Cleofonte Campanini slammed the door in the face of tradition last summer and began a remarkable advertising campaign for the Chicago Opera. Not only did he use a larger amount of newspaper space than had ever been bought before for a grand opera institution, but he even committed the heresy of using posters on billboards and in windows. Artistic posters, too, and attractive, which made it arch-heresy, for does not everybody know that to make a sin attractive is to make it the more insidious and irresistible?

These striking posters are the work of Francis Cugat, a young Spanish painter whom Mr. Campanini discovered in Chicago two years ago. Cugat came to the general director of the opera asking for permission to paint poster portraits of some of the stars. He had studied at the Academy in Rheims, graduated from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, had painted portraits in the French capital, in South America and in Cuba before coming to the United States at the age of twenty-two. His object in billing the opera singers was merely to introduce himself to Chicago, and his request was granted.

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ing grand opera as a necessity, shown in its most attractive guise with all of the "selling points" deftly brought out. It was also planned so that direct results could be absolutely computed, and that it paid for itself several times over was demonstrated in the advance subscriptions. The same result was apparent in the preliminary tour, which was probably the most successful ever made by such an organization. The same great success of the Chicago offerings in New York and Boston was evidenced in the attendance average.

There are many musicians and dilettanti who seem to assume that the artistic forces of such an enterprise must be contaminated by close relationship with efficiency in the business management. To them art is deserving of a capital "A" only when it is extravagant, imprudent and impractical. These two departments have complete autonomy under Mr. Campanini, who believes that excellence in either one is beneficial rather than detrimental to the other.

Those who grate about the lack of dignity in advertising grand opera like a circus overlook the fact that Jenny Lind was brought to America by the greatest of all showmen, P. T. Barnum, and that Col. Mapleson was not only a genius as impresario, but also as press agent.



A "stand" poster showing the director M. Campanini and the different members of his operatic company (inset) Francis Cugat, the artist

At some point in 1912, Francis, Xavier and their father Juan make the first of several trips on the Saratoga to New York.²⁹³ Despite news (from Cushman Rice) that Cuba was entering a 'boom' period, the family have been seduced by the all the glorious promises of the American Dream and are scouting for a new home in Manhattan. The arrival of successful US companies in Cuba had left little room for smaller merchants like Jean Cugat. Using funds secured from an exhibition given by Francis in Paris, the family book tickets on the SS Saratoga. The first home they have is in Washington Heights — alternatively known as the Little Dominican Republic on account of its large, vibrant contingent of Spanish and South Americans. By this point in time the

²⁹³ New York City Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, Javier Cugat, Francisco Cugat (b.1893) and Juan Cugat (b.1870)

brothers have both taken up painting, and although Xavier remains a talented caricaturist all his life, he is a prodigious violinist whose fame had spread in Cuba. The family begins to seek funds for the education of the brothers abroad. At some point in between 1914 and 1919 Francis leaves New York to be tutored at the Beaux-Arts in Paris. A little later, Xavier is enrolled at the Conservatory of Music in Berlin, studying the violin under the immortal Willy Hess and the renowned Karl Flesch. After studying Berlin, Xavier returned to Paris, sailing back to New York at intervals to play brief, but noteworthy shows at the Carnegie Hall. Having already been recruited on an ad-hoc basis by the Metropolitan Opera Company in Havana, Xavier continued to support their most famous vocal star, the tenor Enrico Caruso. His talented artist brother was also recruited, this time providing the illustrations that would accompany the company's programmes, posters and souvenirs. His work was not to the taste of everyone. An article on Francis in the *Theatre Magazine* of January 1918 told how they were now billing grand opera "like a circus". It was "an outrage!" they teased. The High Priests of classical theatre thought it was cheapening the art. The report wisely pointed out that there were those who thought that art and commercial efficiency, or even efficacy, were incompatible. Scott would encounter similar objections with Scribners, which is probably why Cugat was hired. As far as Scribners was concerned you couldn't commercialize art. Scott had other opinions and would tell them so. Making money from a book didn't de-value the value art, it simply evidence that more people were enjoying it. The benefits would then be poured into maintaining and producing *even better* art. When it came to combining High Art with the bare-knuckle principles of popular advertising Cugat had a proven track record. He'd been able to mix it up already and as a result, had dramatically increased concert attendance.²⁹⁴

The artist's big day came in June 1919 when Francis was commissioned to provide the graphics for lavish 64-page brochure that would accompany

²⁹⁴ 'Billing Grand Opera Like A Circus', *Theatre Magazine*, May 1918, vol. XXVII, No. 207, p.278

Caruso's Jubilee performance.²⁹⁵ It was an important year for Caruso because he was also being honoured for the tireless work he had done for the war efforts promoting Liberty Loans. Over the course of the next few years Francis would also provide material for the Chicago Opera Company, whose most infamous star, Lydia Lindgren would open her Long Island mansion to Gerlach in the late 1930s. At this point in time Lydia was married to Raoul Querze, Caruso's vocal trainer.

Shortly after Max returned from Havana in March 1920, Xavier and Caruso were caught in a crisis. On June 14 a bomb exploded in the city's National Theatre. A short series of dates, organised by the Metropolitan Opera Company, saw them trying to repeat the success of their earlier shows. Caruso and Cugat were in their dressing room when the bomb went off. Mounting the stage they saw a large hole at the top of the proscenium arch — the great theatrical window that frames the stage. The orchestra made attempts to calm the audience with the Cuban National Anthem, but panic spread and the audience bolted for the exits in their hundreds.²⁹⁶ Caruso would later ridicule the idea that the explosion had been meant for him but investigators were far from certain. Just several days before Caruso's home in East Hampton, Long Island had been broken into and robbed. The thieves made off with over \$400,000 worth of jewellery. It was his wife that was home at the time. A short time later Caruso's Irish-American chauffeur, George Fitzgerald, who claims to have pulled out his revolver and shot into the dark in an effort to deter the robbers, was quizzed by Police. Caruso, still in Havana, came to the Fitzgerald's defence, but subsequently terminated the man's employment.²⁹⁷ For a year or so, Xavier and Francis remained in Cuba before heading back to New York in 1921. By August, the Great Caruso was dead, the deluge of recent tour dates and events having had a devastating impact on his health.

²⁹⁵ 'To the Many Admirers of Enrico Caruso', Metropolitan Opera House Grand Opera Season 1918-1919 Program, p.20. Francis would also design posters for Cleofonte Campanini. See Chicago Examiner, November 3, 1917, p.22. 'Chicago Opera Association contracted for the services of Francis Cugat', Musical America July 14, 1917: Vol 26 Iss 11, p.2

²⁹⁶ 'Caruso Scouts Idea of Plot on His Life', The Sun and New York Herald, June 15, 1920

²⁹⁷ <https://www.easthamptonstar.com/east-magazine-villages-arts/2020521/enrico-caruso-caper-1920>

The *Times Literary Digest* of April 12, 1919 included an extended feature on Caruso's Silver Jubilee celebrations. Elsewhere in the magazine there was a small but significant tribute to others who had helped the war effort, among them Oscar E. Cesare, the Swiss-Italian caricaturist who appeared as beneficiary in the will of Gerlach's first wife, Marie Lovell in 1912.²⁹⁸ It is of course intriguing to note that Xavier Cugat had, like Cesare, initially earned his crust in New York as a caricaturist with several leading newspapers.

In light of Gerlach's ubiquity on Broadway (not always for legitimate activities) and his familiarity with several singing stars, the opportunities for Gerlach to have encountered Francis and Xavier Cugat are fairly substantial. The brothers could have met him in Havana — either around the concert halls or the bars — and then picked up their relationship in Manhattan. When Gerlach received his discharge from the army in 1919 he made almost immediately for Cuba, leaving in December 1919 and returning in March the following 1920 — just as Xavier Cugat and Caruso were taking up their residency in Havana. Caruso arrived at the beginning of May, whilst Cugat appears to have been in and out of the city for the past few years or more, returning occasionally to his family base in New York.²⁹⁹

A Tale of Two Elenas

By 1924 there is someone else in Gerlach's life. According to research undertaken by Professor Kruse, the manifest for a return trip from Havana in 1924, sees Max travelling with the 24 year-old Elena Gerlach. Kruse infers that this is his wife but a trawl of US marriages during this period refuses to throw up any useful match. As the name is predominantly used at this time by young Mexican women, it just might be possible that Max got married in Mexico or in Cuba sometime during the 1920 to 1924 period. Although Kruse records that Elena uses Huntington as her place of birth (either Huntington

²⁹⁸ 'Some Cartoonists who helped win the war - caricatured by themselves', *The Literary Digest*, April 12, 1919, p.16; 'Caruso The Golden Voice Celebrates His Silver Jubilee', *The Literary Digest*, April 12, 1919, pp.84-88.

²⁹⁹ The US Census of January 1920 sees him living with his brother Francis and his parents at 344, 180th West Street.

Long Island, or Virginia), a similar trawl through birth during this period similarly draws a blank. According to birth collection held online there were only a handful of people born with the name Elena in the United States between 1898 and 1902 period — all clearly of Spanish heritage.³⁰⁰ They appear to belong to two families in all: one family in Wisconsin and the other one in Rhode Island (suggesting a tiny enclave of Mexican families in each). Factor in the number of illegal immigrants from Mexico and Cuba (and the number is likely to have been large) and it might that Max's wife had arrived during the mass arrival of Mexicans from 1910 onwards.

There is however another possibility. In 1929, Xavier Cugat married opera star, Carmen Castillo. But this was only her stage name. Her real name was Elena Castilla. Elena had arrived in New York from Vera Cruz in Mexico in 1919 aboard the SS Monterey. It was only in 1927-28 that Elena Castilla became Carmen Castillo. Until this point she was plain old Elena, born like Gerlach's wife in 1900. Even if there if the two Elenas have nothing more in common than their Spanish heritage and their age, its curious to see the same uncommon name appearing twice in related circles. It is also interesting from a cultural point of view that in her earliest reports she is presented as being Spanish and not Mexican — a sizeable part of the American media still treating them with some prejudice.³⁰¹ According to Xavier, Castilla and her mother had a good rapport in Hollywood with several Cuban visitors, among them a young Manuel Benitez, in the late 1930s would be become General Manuel Benitez, head of the Cuban National Police, right-hand man to coup leader, Fulgencio Batista and good friend of J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. Back in mid-1920s Palms Springs, Cugat and Carmen knew him as an eager Hollywood movie extra and although urban legend maintains that Fidel Castro appeared in one of Cugat's later films, the greater likelihood is that it was his old friend Manuel Benitez.³⁰² When Scott's friend Ernest

³⁰⁰ The number of Elenas increases substantially in 1910 when America began to experience mass immigration from Mexico. Until this point there had been much resistance to Mexican immigrants.

³⁰¹ 'Coming Concert', Coronado Eagle and Journal, March 13, 1928, p.4

³⁰² *Rumba is My Life*, Xavier Cugat, p.95

Hemingway was running his private network of spies in Havana in the early 1940s, one of his tasks was to keep an eye on Benitez and Batista — generally regarded as self-seeking opportunists, so mixed-up in the affairs of the American Mafia that they could seriously embarrass America at any moment.³⁰³ It may be worthwhile noting that it was Cugat's friend, General Benitez who was found to be entertaining Gerlach-gossiper, Cholly Knickerbocker (Igor Cassini) during his visit to Havana in the early 1940s. After the Castro removed them from power, Benitez and Batista were offered temporary asylum in the Dominican Republic under the protective arm of Cholly's 1959 sugar-daddy, Rafael Trujillo.³⁰⁴ Benitez would eventually spend out his days his exile in Miami. In April 1961, Cholly Knickerbocker gave us an update on the 'writer' Hallam Keep Williams, when it was learned that his son Turner from his marriage to Josi Johnson was about to start college.³⁰⁵ What Hallam had been doing to maintain his profile in one of the most popular columns of its day remains unknown because he certainly wasn't making the headlines. Maybe Cholly just had a soft spot for playboys.

In the two or three years before he was commissioned to design the cover for Gatsby's Francis Cugat appears to have left New York for Los Angeles where he began his work as a set-designer. One of his first jobs in 1922 was ensuring the authenticity of Mae Murray's Metro production, *Fascination*, set in Spain.³⁰⁶ By December 1925 he was working with Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Interestingly, when Gerlach left his 'Old Sport' message informing Scott that he was on his way back from 'the Coast' in July 1923, the phrase was often used as short-hand for Los Angeles. Could it be that Gerlach had hooked-up with the Cuban brothers (and perhaps even Elena) as the brothers settled into

³⁰³ Ernest Hemingway, Federal Bureau of Investigation

³⁰⁴ In 1963, the Federal authorities charged Cassini (Cholly) with failing to declare himself as a paid agent for the President of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo. It is believed that Cassini had been using his family's friendship with President Kennedy and his father Joseph to have the CIA suspend an assassination plot on Trujillo.

³⁰⁵ Society News & Fashions, Philadelphia Inquirer, April 2, 1961. Cassini also updated us on Hallam 'hanging up his Wall Street activities' in his Cholly Knickerbocker column in 1954.

³⁰⁶ The Washington Herald, April 16, 1922, p.18/ Hamilton Daily News, December 7, 1925, p.15

their work in Hollywood? Sadly, like so many other things in Gerlach's life, we may never know.

Part VI

Henry W. Grunewald

100% AMERICAN. ONE 100% CORRUPT

In 1953, Jim Pershing Jr's old pal Harry Grunewald — the man who questioned Gerlach over rumours that he was spying for Germany — became the subject of a Senate inquiry every bit as sensational as the one into their old friend, Murray Garsson. It seems that Grunewald, dubbed by the press as a 'mysterious wirepuller in Washington', had been involved in arranging various illegal tax schemes featuring senior members of both the Republic and Democratic parties. The charges dwarfed anything he had faced as Ralph A. Day's personal investigator in the Federal bust of the New York Prohibition Department back in 1922. By comparison, the bungs that he and Day had taken from Mannie Kessler and his bagman, Murray Garsson, had amounted to little more than small change. There was another bombshell three years later when a further inquiry revealed that Grunewald had been paid \$75,000 by the Chinese Government to purchase 100 fighter planes in defiance of government policy. Grunewald said he wasn't certain of the dates, but it was probably when the Japanese were threatening British interests in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).

Since his shameful exit from the New York Prohibition Department, Grunewald had become the go-to man for getting dirt on everyone from judges to district attorneys. Politics didn't even come into it. Just as it was for Rothstein, it was always about the cash and the sheer uncomplicated joy of wielding power. Among his broad and unfussy parade of clients was Union leader, John L. Lewis, a hardened isolationist who had broken with Roosevelt on entry into the Second World War, and sprawling media behemoths like the American Broadcasting Company. Another of his clients had been Pan American Airways, and it had been his involvement in the wiretapping of their rival, Howard Hughes. Unfortunately for Grunewald, it had been this relatively routine job for the

airline that had first put him under the scrutiny of *Washington Merry G-Round* journalist, Drew Pearson. Word about Grunewald had bubbling to the surface for months and Pearson would later say that it was only the intervention of Grunewald's friend, Joseph McCarthy that prevented him from being exposed much earlier.³⁰⁷

Among the more controversial individuals that Grunewald had helped over the years was Tommy Corcoran, the reconstruction and New Deal wizard who was then serving as advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt — a man who had been given unconditional by Grunewald's whistleblower, Drew Pearson during his 1933 presidential campaign. If you wanted unsavoury information about your rivals, Grunewald was the man for the job. His ability to ignore all the traditional political and ethical boundaries that narrowed the field of his rivals meant he was always in demand. From his swank Westchester apartment, the gravel-voiced fixer, fluent in German, moved from lifting top secret documents of the German High Command from their hiding place in the Swiss Consulate to being a top-tier public relations man to the some of the prominent names in Congress. He could even count the former US Secretary of War, Harry Hines Woodring, among his friends. Nothing and no one was off-limits. After several years of inquiries, the 'influence peddler' was sentenced to five years in prison for tax fixing. Just two weeks before Gerlach died at Bellevue Hospital in New York, Grunewald, the 'colourful mystery man' suffered a fatal stroke in Washington. At the time of his death, he was awaiting a third trial on conspiring to fix income tax lawsuits.³⁰⁸

Like Garsson, Grunewald stonewalled any attempt by the press to get a clearer picture of his early life and career. Although his 1917 draft papers and his various passport applications and census entries all state that he was born in America to German parents, the press had other ideas. At the height of the inquiry, news started coming through that a 17 year old Grunewald had arrived in New York from South Africa in the early 1900s. According to the details he

³⁰⁷ 'The Washington Merry Go Round ... Mystery Man', Drew Pearson, Yuma Sun, May 4th, 1953, p.10

³⁰⁸ 'Mister X', Albuquerque Tribune, September 27, 1958, p.4; 'Grunewald Dies in Capital', New York Times, September 26, 1958, p.28

supplied on his ship manifest, he was German.³⁰⁹ In 1910, Grunewald became a clerk in the US Navy at Newport, Rhode Island and in 1914 he joined the Bureau of Investigation. The whole thing was ambiguous at best. Either Grunewald had spent some time in South Africa and returned to the United States, or he had lied on both his passport applications, his census records and his draft records. Grunewald's passport application in 1923 states that he had visited Germany in 1908 and his marriage certificate informs us that his parents were Heinrich Wilhelm Grunewald and Anna Wieben.³¹⁰ At some point in 1917 Grunewald was tasked by the Justice Department with building a case against anarchist, Emma Goldman and it was also in June that year that he compiled his rather shallow and unimpressive intelligence report on Max Stork Gerlach. Grunewald's efforts to stamp out anarchism in the USA came to head in 1919 when acting as head of a private detective agency, he spearheaded raids on Ludwig Martens' so-called 'Soviet Bureau' on West 40th Street, work that led directly to Palmer Raids — the most brutal and comprehensive sweep of anarchists and communist sympathizers to date.³¹¹ The legendary 'Red Scare' had been born and Harry Grunewald was leading the charge.

During the course of the Senate Inquiry into Grunewald's affair in the 1950s, it was learned that 'The Dutchman', as he was now being referred to by the press, had been recruited for special assignments early on in his detective career by millionaire anti-Communist, Henry W. Marsh. Marsh, who had earned his wealth in Insurance Brokerage was something of a mystery-man himself. As an ultra-nationalist trustee of the American Defense Society, Marsh had lobbied hard for American intervention into World War 1 and the cultural marginalisation of 'hyphenated' Americans (German-Americans). After the war had finished, Marsh, together with the support of the Society's President, Theodore Roosevelt and fellow-trustee, Lothrop Stoddard switched their attention to the 'American

³⁰⁹ Henry Grunewald, New York Passenger Lists & Arrivals, 1909, SS Oceanic, residence: Rustenburg, South Africa, b.1892. On his 1916 marriage to Christine Marie *Schumacher* he lists Heinrich Wilhelm Grunewald as his father, and Ann Wieben as his mother.

³¹⁰ There is a record of a 17 year old Henry Grunewald arriving in New York on the Oceanic in 1909. He had travelled via England from Rustenburg in South Africa. His date of birth ranges from 1890 to 1893.

³¹¹ 'Martens and Tons of Data Subpoenaed', New York Tribune, June 1913, p.1

Bolsheveki'.³¹² On the one hand he was the great summation of the American Dream and on the other, a slippery, elusive wirepuller for the British. Marsh's cosy relationship with the British Secret Service in America resulted in several audacious plots — the most sensational of them being the recruitment of ex-Soviet spy (and probable double agent) Jacob Nosovitzky.³¹³ The pair's relationship with the British Secret Service adds an intriguing new dimension to Gatsby's English affectations and the large number of well-dressed Englishmen "dotted about" at Gatsby's parties. Marsh was a notorious anglophile. In fact his fondness for England ran so deep that for several months of the year he would lease Warwick Castle from the Earl of Warwick where he would entertain friends like Charles Spencer-Churchill, the 9th Earl of Marlborough, first cousin of Winston Churchill.

In September 1925, Nosovitsky revealed that Marsh, working closely with Scotland Yard and J. Edgar Hoover, had hired him on behalf of a private organisation made-up of capitalist businessmen from around the world. His job, he was told, was to infiltrate the Communist Party of America and sabotage it from within. Accompanying Marsh to the pair's first meeting at the Hotel Plaza in 1921 was ex-Commissioner Woods, the man who appears to have been personally responsible for recruiting Grunewald's bootlegging associate — and fellow arms trader — Murray W. Garsson into the 'special services' department of the NYPD in the previous decade. Nosovitzky's name would crop again in 1937 when he was declared the main suspect in the kidnap and murder of old Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Jr — the two year old son of aviator, and future anti-war activist, Charles Lindbergh. In a worrying twist it transpires that Grunewald's old bootlegging associate, Murray W. Garsson had attempted to shift the focus of the Police investigation onto the parents themselves when he volunteered to 'solve' the case in March 1932.

³¹² American Defense Society Inc, National Headquarters, 1133 Broadway, NY, *The Lying Lure of Bolshevism*, William T. Hornaday (pamphlet) 1919

³¹³ It is possible that the various mentions to quiet and earnest looking Englishmen at Gatsby's parties, and the hero's own Anglophile tendencies are a nod and wink to British influence in American domestic and intelligence affairs. The British Secret Service had a bureau in New York including several bases on Long Island. Gatsby mentions ordering all his shirts from London and attending Oxford University.

Just how long James F. Pershing Jr remained with the New York Mortgage Company isn't known, but the appointment of Oscar Price as President of the company in April 1925 is an interesting one, as it had been Price who had assisted Secretary McAdoo in the State-wide Liberty Bonds campaign of 1918. According to the 1946 Senate inquiry, Pershing Jr's liquor associate, Murray W. Garsson, ably assisted by his newly formed 'Film Foundation' had also played a role in raising these Liberty funds with Price and McAdoo. After the success of Mary Pickford's *100% American*, the group had immediately got to work on producing *Knocking Knockers* starring Pickford's fiancée, Douglas Fairbanks Snr, another Treasury-backed effort made specifically to promote the War Bonds effort.³¹⁴ Before long, Price along with Fairbanks, Pickford and Chaplin — the movie industry's most successful fundraisers for the first and second war bonds campaigns — formed United Artists, with McAdoo brought in by Chaplin as company counsel.³¹⁵ 1925 would also be the year that Scott's book cover designer, Francis Cugat would relocate to Hollywood to begin his job as Fairbank's set-designer.³¹⁶ Joining Price and Pershing in their New York Mortgage concerns was Veterans chief, General Frank T. Hines, who would provide Garsson with support at the US Department of Labor, when he served as assistant secretary during the Hoover administration of 1929-33.

Part VII

Echoes and Reverberations

"IT TAKES HALF A DOZEN PEOPLE TO MAKE A SYNTHESIS STRONG ENOUGH TO CREATE A FICTION CHARACTER"

Max Gerlach isn't the only man to have ever been credited with being the *real* Jay Gatsby. Other persons of interest have come forward over the years, among them skyrocket millionaire, Joseph G. Robin — a man whose legendary weekend parties on Long Island, with his sparkling procession of Broadway

³¹⁴ 'Victory Loan Picture to Be Taken East by Oscar Price', Los Angeles Daily Times, March 27, 1919, p.3

³¹⁵ *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean, Rutgers University Press, 2011, p.238

³¹⁶ *Lucille Lortel: The Queen of Off Broadway*, Alexis Greene, Limelight, 2004, p.43

stars, opera singers and caterers, matched in no small way those vividly drawn scenes in the novel. Robin's own career as Trimalchio collapsed in 1911 when he was investigated and jailed on Grand Larceny charges that practically brought down Tammany Hall and the Treasury of New York. Next-up, we have Scott and Zelda's mysterious and rather reclusive neighbour in Westport, Captain Frederic E. Lewis. Not a bad match at all in some respects. The couple's modest cottage on Compo Beach Road in Westport sat, like Nick's, on the scruffy beach-side edges of Lewis's 175 acre Longshore Estate, right across from his palatial house and just occasionally (but not always) there would be parties.³¹⁷

A handsome multi-millionaire, some thirty-five years of age, who had extended his father's wealth with the fantastically successfully Diamond Bar ranch in Los Angeles, the Captain was, as you'd expect, a passionate sailor. If you were to compare Frederic's life and interests with Gatsby's mentor, Dan Cody — the florid sozzled sea-cowboy who represents the 'savage violence of the frontier', the seafaring drifter of brothel and saloon, then you might well be able to spot a spark of inspiration in the well-dressed swashbuckling figure that Lewis might have cut as he glided around the lawns of his enormous mansion. When he wasn't flying around the desert on horseback in Nebraska, Lewis was sluicing through the waves of The Long Island Sound on his auxiliary yacht, *The Stranger*. There are also some intriguing spy dimensions to his story too. Cast your eyes over the ship manifest of the yacht *Nourmahal* on April 22nd 1938 and you'll notice that Lewis is travelling with two very public figures: Vicent Astor, the adventurer son of John Jacob Astor IV who died on Titanic, and soldier-explorer, Kermit Roosevelt, the restless, steam-powered son of Theodore Roosevelt who joined the British Army at the outbreak of World War II before registering his interests with 'Wild' Bill Donovan's Office of Strategic Services. It has subsequently been revealed that all three of the men had been involved on a secret civilian mission to gather intelligence on Japanese activities in and

³¹⁷ There's no evidence that Lewis hosted regular parties. He was a very private man. The one party that everyone seems to cite, which featured guests like Houdini and Belasco and a menagerie of circus animals and performers, is rooted in a one-off gala that Lewis and his wife hosted on the grounds in support of the American Red Cross in 1917. There was nothing at all decadent about it. It was all frightfully establishment.

around the Marshall Islands.³¹⁸ The fact that Lewis had given up his Longshore mansion for Pearl Harbour that same year suggests that his much-speculated work for naval intelligence may well have consisted of more (perhaps much more) than whispers and innuendo. But as we mentioned at the very beginning, Scott himself was in absolutely no doubt about who his character was based on: Jay Gatsby had started off as someone he “once knew”, and then “changed” into himself.

Not that any of it should really come as a shock. Scott was little different from any other novelist in that he took, stole and recycled practically any kind of flotsam and jetsam that strayed onto his beach. The pages of his novels were filled with things he’d found elsewhere. Things that he’d read in the papers, people that he’d met, people his friends had met, snippets of conversations he’d heard in the bar, words of wisdom that would scream out of letters from his friends, small incidental anecdotes, tales of epic triumph, short, melancholy confessions of loss. Ideas would arrive in his head and like Jay Gatsby, rummaging furiously through the rooms of a house that is both literally and metaphorically “blazing with light”, Scott would scratch around in his memory looking for suitable matches that might flesh out some scenario or support some point he was eager to make. Making a living from writing had become an almost impossible task. Bills would have to be paid, and the extravagance of living a lifestyle that never really matched his earnings, required a constant supply of colourful source material. As he told his friend H. L. Mencken in 1925, the trash that he had been writing for *The Saturday Evening Post* had grown worse and worse and that there had been less and less heart in it. After the commercial failure of *Gatsby* that year, Fitzgerald wrote another letter to his editor, Max Perkins, outlining his plans to go to Hollywood as part of an emergency rescue plan: “*I have a book of good stories for the fall. Now I shall write some cheap ones until I’ve accumulated enough for my next novel.*”³¹⁹ It wasn’t just his funds that needed storing up, but his pool of fresh adventures. Like any writer, Scott needed to be able to draw on a regular and reliable bank of word-worthy

³¹⁸ *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*, John Prados, Ivan R. Dee, 2007, pp.97-98

³¹⁹ ‘Dear Max, April 24, 1925’, F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Dear Scott, Dear Max*, p.102

encounters. Special emotions and special experiences were the only credible way of giving his readers not only something new but something of substance. In the words of his biographer, Matthew J. Bruccoli, people like Gerlach, Frederic Lewis and even many his closest friends, would all have been part of this “creative capital”. Casual or close associates would have been banked and cashed like cheques. Unlike his creation Nick Carraway, Scott Fitzgerald didn’t feign sleep every time there was an “intimate revelation” quivering on the horizon. Instead he would train his eyes and ears upon them, ingesting every useful detail. In an article for *The Editor* in 1920, Scott described how his idea for his short-story, *The Ice Palace*, had grown out of a conversation he had had with a girl in Saint Paul. This conversation had got him thinking about the cold and melancholy evenings of almost infinite length he’d experienced back home in Minnesota during the winters. Scott had played with the idea for about two weeks until he found himself having another conversation with a girl in Alabama. They had been sitting in a graveyard and their casual exchange of pleasantries had evolved into a rather deep discussion about the graves of confederate soldiers. From these two very separate conversations, a whole new story had been born, the contrast in the stories and the contrast in the girls, colliding like stars to create new worlds and new ideas.³²⁰ Fitzgerald had later confessed that he remembered little of the time in which he wrote novels like *Gatsby*.³²¹ They were periods in which all the usual laws of time and space had collapsed. His experience of the world had become relative to whatever dreams and whatever philosophies were occupying his mind at that time. The world of matter would disappear — and with them, the people and places they had once been.

It is probably fair to say that the writer absorbs experiences rather like a prism absorbs light. The light enters the prism at one end and leaves at the other in a magical display of colours every bit as spectroscopic as those dazzling personalities that emerge at *Gatsby*’s parties. The author has little compunction

³²⁰ ‘Contemporary Writers and their Work’, F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Editor*, July 2, 1920, No.53, pp.121-122

³²¹ Excerpts from Notebooks, 1029.

in moving people and places around on the board. He or she becomes their own location manager. Scott could take those long-lost cherished dreams and experiences that he and Zelda had shared at Westport and transplant them to his new home in Great Neck. In this world, the genial millionaire host with his horses and his yachts who he rarely sees at his palatial beach-side home can be blended seamlessly with the kooky, Teutonic bootlegger whose appalling sentimentality and ridiculous English accent makes him such a striking figure at parties. *That fairytale Gothic castle you saw at Sands Point? Let's move it across to West Egg, but not the grounds of the house, let's take those from Otto H. Kahn's place over at Huntington. We'll film the library and fountain scenes somewhere else and green-screen them in. Nobody will ever notice the joins.* The movies had just arrived and they were having the wildest and profoundest impact on the author's creative processes.

At the heart of any novel there are two stories trying to be told. There's the story that the author tells us, and the story that life tells the author. All the usual ontologies of time and space collapse under the sometimes unwanted creative impulse the author uses to make sense of it all. The novel works like the dreams we have at night. As real and compelling as they seem at the time they are not always emotionally or logically consistent. In order for the author to process and contextualise those experiences they have, they first have to be uprooted from their place in the historical world. Only then do they make some kind of sense or stumble toward some kind of narrative. Scott was acutely conscious of the complete lack of fidelity between the dream and the reality. America was "the story of the moon that never rose". He carried it around in his heart, but shook it off in his dreams. In a letter to fellow writer, Marya Mannes Scott described America as brave, shallow, turbulent and empty. Its children were damned before they were even born. The city, like people, had had its own secret life. This was something that Scott had identified in the first few pages of the novel: the "intimate revelations" of wild, young men like himself were "usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions". People were a mystery to even themselves. And the novelist is little different.

The novel too has its secrets that not even the author can unlock — and perhaps had never wanted to unlock. Any attempt to reunite the world of fiction with the world of fact, will see the novel splinter into a thousand unequal pieces, spanning dozens of geographical places, and scattered throughout space and time. The author compresses everything into the book and the reader who is driven by historical impulses only, finds that the process of decompression rarely results in seeing a unified whole. It is the novel that binds these things together. Let's face it, without the novel, Gatsby simply never had any meaning. The noises we hear at the parties would only ever be whispers. The guests in the garden, only ghosts. There's a moment in the novel when Nick turns a corner to Gatsby's house and sees it lit up from "tower to cellar". The light and shadows it casts fall "unreal on the shrubbery" and make "thin elongating glints upon the roadside wires". The scene that Nick observes is a lot like the disturbed, distorted world of the creative imagination, sometimes magically, and sometimes brutally transforming all it happens to fall on. Ernest Hemmingway had once written to Scott sharing his opinion of *Tender is the Night*. He told Scott that he felt he was taking liberties with the pasts and futures of people they knew. In his melding of various personalities and traits he was creating fakes. You just couldn't go around fooling with people, Hemmingway griped. You could base characters on real people but they would have to *stay* those people. They would have to do the things that those people would do: "*Invention is the finest thing but you cannot invent anything that would not actually happen.*" ³²²

Scott had wasted no time in writing him back. He didn't agree. How could Hemmingway possibly know what any of the people he met would truly do in any situation? It wasn't possible that an author could see into the souls and motivations of people — to know them better than they knew themselves. Were the people that Hemmingway met in his life the actual, solid people they were or had they had arrived in his imagination in the same spectral way that figures arrived in dreams? Scott reasoned that it was far more likely that the people that Hemmingway knew were being filtered through his own personality as they

³²² 'To Scott, May 28, 1934', Ernest Hemingway, *Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, Scribner, 1981, p.407

arrived in his own unique consciousness. The author would have to rely on his own superficial and limited knowledge of how these people behaved in private. As Scott would tell his friend Sara Murphy, it took “half a dozen people to make a synthesis strong enough to create a fiction character”.³²³ How could Hemmingway trust his own detached judgement? Experiences of other people, and daily events were all subjective. There would be gaps in our understanding, and these gaps would always be filled creatively. When did the “proper and logical combination of events, cause and effect” end and the “field of imagination” begin? There were precedents for all this too. Shakespeare and the Renaissance writers had no difficulty in superimposing the writings of Plutarch and Hollinshed on their own observations of life around them. Hemmingway had no right to tell him it couldn’t be done, because writers like Shakespeare had already done it. The bard had proved beyond all reasonable doubt that a monument could be built “from three types of marble”.³²⁴

Poets like Keats and Shelley had realised long ago that it was not the duty of the artist to reflect life, but to improve life, to bring things to the surface that might otherwise have never been seen. Art was a short-term damage you did to things to make them better. Scott never said this, but it was almost certainly what he was thinking: you had to almost destroy the marble to produce the shape. Explaining his technique to his friend Sara Murphy, whose likeness Scott had used in *Tender is The Night*, the author revealed that it wasn’t necessarily Sara that he had been trying to evoke in the novel, but the effect she produced on men — “the echoes and reverberations”. It was, he admitted, a fairly poor return for what she had contributed as a “living presence” in his life, but his intent had been to preserve a “true fragment” of the impression she had made on his world, rather than the photographic realism of a simple portrait. Looking at the impact that friends like Gerlach might have had on the composition of the novel, could be looked at in this way too. *Gatsby* is not a portrait of Max the man but the “the echoes and reverberations” he may have had on those around him, and those

³²³ ‘Dearest Sara, August 15, 1935’, *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Andrew Turnbull, Scribner, 1963, p.441

³²⁴ ‘Dear Ernest, June 1st, 1934’, *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Andrew Turnbull, Scribner, 1963, pp.335-337

echoes and reverberations” that had been brought to bear on Max by the culture that produced him and in whose damp, dark corners he took shape. It was not the details of the man’s life were truly important, but the imprint he left on time. Sara’s husband Gerald Murphy had no trouble recognising this. He’d observed his own likeness in *Tender is the Night* and had absolutely no problem with its shortcomings. Only the “invented part” of their lives — the “unreal part” that Scott had featured in his novel — had any scheme or any beauty. Prior to this, they were fragments. The vagaries of domestic life would blunder in, do their usual damage and leave their inevitable scars.³²⁵ Gerald and Sara Murphy would probably be forgotten, but the best part of them would live forever in Dick and Nicole Diver. In the end, the novel isn’t great because of its fidelity to real-life, but because of the way it adds and preserves something better than real-life. Gatsby isn’t ‘great’ because he’s any one man. He’s ‘great’ because he’s none of them.

*The paper above is an excerpt from a selection of chapters from
Becoming Gatsby: How the High Priest of the Jazz Age Wrote the
Gospel of the American Dream*

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Sargean

³²⁵ ‘Dear Scott, December 31, 1935’, *Correspondence of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Random House, 1980, p.425

