

THE 1920s

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to present major writers who reflect the hectic pace of life in the post-war America of the 1920s. There are also links to related writers of detective stories.

1 MUSIC OF THE 1920s



a) Talk about the two photographs of musicians from the 1920s. Which instruments do you recognize? Decide which expressions below most probably refer to each picture (some can refer to both) and say why.

- opera
- to play "hot"
- Broadway
- musicals
- studies in classical music
- to play jazz
- East Europe
- African-American music
- studies in classical music



b) Rhapsody in Blue (1924)



listening

Listen to the music. Is this classical music or jazz? Which solo instrument was the composition written for? Which other instruments can you recognize? Are they classical or jazz instruments? Read about the man at the piano. As your homework, find one more piece of information about him and tell the others.

George Gershwin ['gə:rʃwin] (1898–1937) was born in the same year as Hemingway, but in Brooklyn, New York, like many children coming from Eastern European families. He studied classical music but was drawn to jazz and popular music. Apart from songs, he wrote 16 musicals and his *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), the symphonic poem *An American in Paris* (1928) and opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935) have become classics.

c) Why is the *Rhapsody* called *blue*? Is there any connection between *blue* and *blues*?

Talk in small groups and try to think of other expressions with the word *blue* and explain their meaning. Can you remember any other unusual uses of *blue*? If not, try to guess the correct answer.

To *feel blue* means to:

- A – feel sad, depressed
- B – feel tired, exhausted
- C – be injured and bruised

2 THE ROARING TWENTIES [ˈro:riŋ]

a) This is one of the nicknames of the 1920s period in the USA (also called *the Jazz Age*). Here are some statements typical of the 1920s. Read and discuss them in groups.

The motto of the period: *Live now, pay tomorrow.*

President Calvin Coolidge (1923–1929):

"The man who builds a factory, builds a temple. The man who works there, worships there."



b) Look at these photos from the 1920s, the time of official Prohibition (1920–1933) when the sale of alcohol was banned in the USA. There is a special terminology attached to them which shows typical features of the Prohibition. Try to match the terms with their definitions:

1 flask, 2 booze, 3 bootlegging, 4 speakeasy, 5 mobs, 6 agents

Can you see any of the expressions mentioned above in the photographs?

A illegal drinking room, B illegal trade in alcohol (booze), C small bottle with alcohol, D alcoholic drink, E men working for the US government to enforce the Prohibition, F Mafia gangs

c) The skyline of big cities was changing dramatically, too, according to the slogan "Build up, not out". How do you understand this?

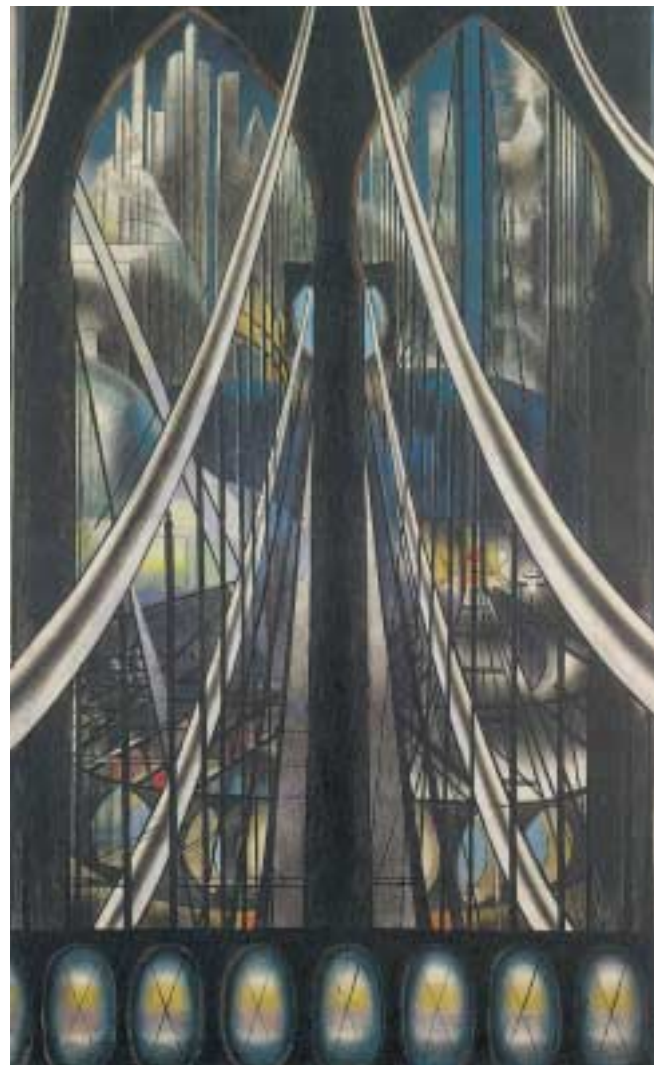
3 JOSEPH STELLA (1877–1946)

The Bridge (1922)

Read and discuss.

1913 was an important year for the development of art in America. It was the first time when European Post-Impressionist paintings in the styles of Cubism and Fauvism were presented in New York. The exhibition had a deep impact on many painters who decided to leave for Europe to learn more about the new art.

- Look at Joseph Stella's painting *The Bridge*. Can you describe what you can see?
- Are there any historical, pre-20th century elements (shapes, motifs, objects)?
- Are there any modern elements related to European experiments in painting? Or anything that you understand as American or belonging to the 20th century?
- Can you comment on the use of colours?
- What impression does the painting make on you?



4 FLAPPER

Guess the meaning of the word *flapper*. It is connected with the 1920s lifestyle, which is often depicted in Fitzgerald's stories.

It is

- a policeman dressed in a coat wide enough to conceal a gun hidden underneath it.
- a popular young girl with a distinctive lifestyle – drinking, changing partners, smoking.
- part of a car that stops the windows from getting splashed with mud.

5 EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY [mi'lei] (1892–1950)

First Fig (from *A Few Figs from Thistles*, 1920)

- a) Think of the idiom *to burn the candle at both ends*. How would you explain its meaning? What situations can it possibly describe?
- b) Listen to the poem and then read it.

Is its form traditional? And why is it considered an expression of her generation? Millay is addressing her friends and those who are not her friends. Which word does she use? What does she mean by saying *it will not last the night*? And what is a *lovely light*?



listening and reading

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends –
It gives a lovely light!

6 FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD (1896–1940)

The Great Gatsby (1925)

- a) The story of Jay Gatsby contains many autobiographical features, as do all of Fitzgerald's works. In *The Great Gatsby*, they are mainly split between two leading characters, Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway. We do not hear the story from Gatsby himself. Instead, Fitzgerald decides to let Nick tell it. Why do writers sometimes do this? What is the tone of Nick's self-introduction?



reading

My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this middle-western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today.

5 I never saw this great-uncle but I'm supposed to look like him – with special reference to the rather hard-boiled painting that hangs in Father's office. I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and a little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War. I enjoyed the counterraid so thoroughly that I came

10 back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe – so I decided to go east and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business so I supposed it could support one more single man. All my aunts and uncles talked it over as if they were choosing a prep-school for me and finally said "Why – ye-es" with very grave, hesitant faces. Father agreed to finance me for a year and after

15 various delays I came east, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-two.

Glossary

descended [di'sendid] came from a family
wholesale ['həulseil] sale in large quantities for lower prices
hard-boiled tough, not showing much emotion
Teutonic [tju'tonik] Germanic
counterraid ['kauntəreid] counterattack
restless not staying still
ragged ['rægid] torn
grave serious
bond business stock exchange brokerage

- b) Daisy is Gatsby's great love, the centre of his life. Whatever he does, he does it for her. Listen to the extract and say what we learn about Daisy. Who is *he*? Who is *I*? Which word is the most important one in the dialogue?



listening and reading

"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of –," I hesitated.

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.

That was it. I'd never understood it before. It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... High in a white palace the
5 king's daughter, the golden girl...

- c) Listen and write down the verbs you hear. Then read what Nick is saying about Daisy and Tom. What does he mean when he says *they smash up things and creatures*?



listening and reading

"They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made."

- d) Throughout the story, Gatsby himself remains rather mysterious. We never learn much about his life or about how he became so enormously rich. Gatsby's luxurious mansion was the place of superb neverending parties for hundreds of people. Read what the place looks like now after his death. How does Nick feel about it? What does the sentence *the party is over* mean?

reading

Gatsby's house was still empty when I left – the grass on his lawn had grown as long as mine. I spent my Saturday nights in New York because those gleaming, dazzling parties of his were with me so vividly that I could still hear the music and the laughter faint and incessant from his garden and the cars going up and down his drive. One night I did hear a material car there and
5 saw its lights stop at his front steps. But I didn't investigate. Probably it was some final guest who had been away at the ends of the earth and didn't know that the party was over.

Glossary

gleaming ['gli:miŋ] shining clearly

dazzling ['dæzliŋ] highly impressive because of light or splendor

faint ['feint] weak

incessant [in'sesənt] never stopping

- e) Read the very last lines of the novel which are poetic and full of symbols. Think about the meaning of the expressions *the green light*, *we beat on*, *boats against the current*, *ceaselessly borne back into the past*.

reading

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther ...
And one fine morning –
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

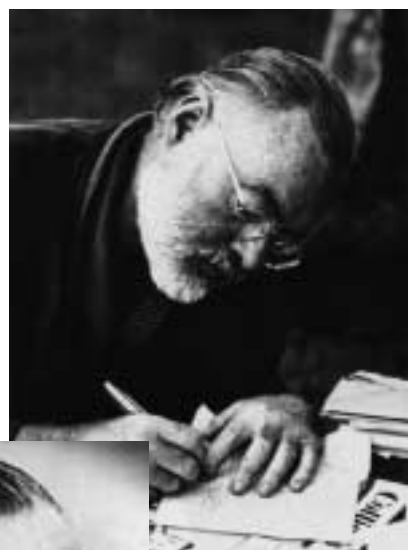
Glossary

recedes [ri'si:dz] vanishes, disappears

eluded [i'lu:did] managed to escape

borne back carried back

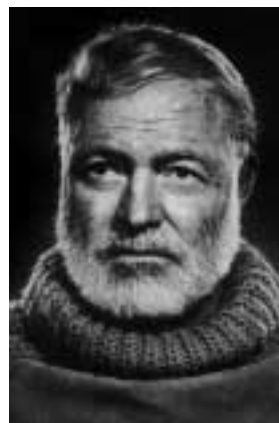
7 HEMINGWAY IN PHOTOGRAPHS



Look at the different portraits of Hemingway. Although taken at different stages of life, they reveal a lot about the writer's qualities. Talk about which qualities you can judge from his appearance or the way he is dressed. If you did not know he was a writer, what would you think he did? What would you expect his topics and heroes to be like?

8 ERNEST HEMINGWAY (1898–1961)

The Killers (1927)



listening

- a) Listen and say what "What's yours?" means?
- b) Listen on while reading.

It is 5 o'clock now, one hour before the dinner menu can be ordered. Listen and read the extract and say who the two guests are. Why do they wear the same clothes and gloves? Why are their overcoats too tight?



listening and reading

"What have you got to eat?"

"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

5 "That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it."

"I can give you ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver –"

"I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore a silk

10 muffler and gloves.

"Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them.

Glossary

muffler ['maflə] scarf

- c) Listen on while reading.

In the meantime the two men have shut a young man Nick and Sam, the black cook, in the kitchen. George has to stay at the counter to deal with the customers. What will happen next?



listening and reading

The man called Max sat at the counter opposite George. He didn't look at George but looked in the mirror that ran along back of the counter. Henry's had been made over from a saloon into a lunch counter.

"Well, bright boy," Max said, looking into the mirror, "why don't you say something?"

5 "What's it all about?"

"Hey, Al," Max called, "bright boy wants to know what it's all about."

"Why don't you tell him?" Al's voice came from the kitchen.

Glossary

saloon [sə'lu:n] a bar where alcohol is sold

d) Listen on while reading. Compare with your version.



listening and reading

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Andreson?"

"Yes."

"He comes here to eat every night, don't he?"

5 "Sometimes he comes here."

"He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?"

"If he comes."

e) Listen on while reading.



listening and reading

The two of them went out of the door. George watched them, through the window, pass under the arc-light and cross the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team. George went back through the swinging door into the kitchen and untied Nick and the cook.

5 "I don't want any more of that," said Sam, the cook. "I don't want any more of that."

Nick stood up. He had never had a towel in his mouth before.

"Say," he said. "What the hell?" He was trying to swagger it off.

"They were going to kill Ole Andreson," George said. "They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat."

10 "Ole Andreson?"

"Sure."

The cook felt the corners of his mouth with his thumbs.

"They all gone?" he asked.

"Yeah," said George. "They're gone now."

15 "I don't like it," said the cook. "I don't like any of it at all."

Try to predict Nick's reaction. Why is Sam frightened?

Glossary

swagger it off ['swægə] play it down

f) Nick finds Ole and warns him. Read and listen to say what Ole will do. What will probably soon happen? Why do the killers want to kill him?

How clear is the reason for Ole's problem from his words "I got in wrong."? And from what the others say about Ole "He was in the ring.", "He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago.", "Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for."?



listening and reading

"I was up at Henry's," Nick said, "and two fellows came in and tied up me and the cook, and they said they were going to kill you."

- It sounded silly when he said it. Ole Andreson said nothing.
 "They put us out in the kitchen," Nick went on. "They were going to shoot you when you came in
 5 to supper."
 Ole Andreson looked at the wall and did not say anything.
 "George thought I better come and tell you about it."
 "There isn't anything I can do about it," Ole Andreson said.
 "I'll tell you what they were like."
 10 "I don't want to know what they were like," Ole Andreson said. He looked at the wall. "Thanks
 for coming to tell me about it."
 "That's all right."
 Nick looked at the big man lying on the bed.
 "Don't you want me to go and see the police?"
 15 "No," Ole Andreson said. "That wouldn't do any good."
 "Isn't there something I could do?"
 "No. There ain't anything to do."
 "Maybe it was just a bluff."
 "No. It ain't just a bluff."
 20 Ole Andreson rolled over towards the wall.
 "The only thing is," he said, talking towards the wall, "I just can't make up my mind to go out.
 I been in here all day."
 "Couldn't you get out of town?"
 "No," Ole Andreson said. "I'm through with all that running around."

Glossary

bluff [blaf] a deliberately false idea

- g) Listen while reading the last lines of the story. Do you feel this is a satisfactory ending? Or do you feel the story is incomplete? Which ending do you prefer? What might happen to Nick? Is he right to leave the town?



listening and reading

- "I'm going to get out of this town," Nick said.
 "Yes," said George. "That's a good thing to do."
 "I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too
 damned awful."
 5 "Well," said George, "you better not think about it."

9 HEMINGWAY'S STYLE

- a) Read the extracts again and pay attention to the style of writing, the language, vocabulary, dialogues, descriptions, and the way the story is told. How much information do we get about the characters? How much does Hemingway explain to us? How do we learn about the characters then?
- b) Imagine a huge iceberg with the largest part hidden under the water and only a small tip above it. Draw a simple outline of this image. How much is still under water, what does it look like, what colour is it? How would you compare Hemingway's story to such an iceberg?
- c) Does this style of writing make the reading more difficult, interesting, exciting or not? What do you prefer as a reader?
- Compare his style of writing to Fitzgerald's. Can you think of any other writers with a style similar to Hemingway's?

10 RAYMOND CHANDLER [ˈreɪmənd ˈtʃɑːndlə] (1888–1959)

Farewell, My Lovely (1940)

Together with Dashiell Hammett, Chandler established a realistic style of detective story. Their formula (known as the *hard-boiled school*) still dominates the US approach to writing detective fiction. Chandler's private eye Philip Marlow's office in Los Angeles is rather shabby, he is constantly short of money but never fails to act as a real gentleman in front of beautiful women.



Chandler consciously reduced the mystery element in his stories in order to concentrate on atmosphere and character. Read these loose sentences extracted from Chandler's novel *Farewell, My Lovely*. All the sentences are comparisons. Work in pairs and decide what the author is actually saying. Then match the sentences with the adjectives.

1. "He was looking up at the dusty windows with a sort of ecstatic fixity of expression, like a hunky immigrant catching his first sight of the Statue of Liberty."
2. "He was a big man but not more than six feet five inches tall and not wider than a beer truck."
3. "Even on Central Avenue, not the quietest dressed street in the world, he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food."
4. "She was as cute as a washtub."
5. "I was as green as the back of a new dollar bill."
6. "The voice was as cool as a cafeteria dinner."
7. "You look like Hamlet's father!"

Glossary

hunky ['hʌŋki] physically strong and attractive
angel food a light airy cake

ADJECTIVES:

- A longing
- B pale, ghost-like
- C naïve, inexperienced
- D eccentric
- E huge, gigantic
- F unattractive, plain or ugly
- G cold, unpleasant

11 HOMEWORK

EDWARD HOPPER (1882–1967)

Nighthawks (1942)



The door of Henry's lunch-room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.

"What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."

5 Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. Two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched them.

- Read the opening of *The Killers* and explain. Who is Henry? Who is George? Who is Al? Who is Nick Adams? Where are they?
- Then look at Hopper's picture *Nighthawks*. Though painted in 1942, it shows a similar place with a similar atmosphere to Hemingway's story. You can describe the restaurant and say who the people may be, what you can see and what time of day it is. What is the effect of the colours that Hopper uses?
- Your homework task is to write a dialogue (a conversation of 5 – 8 exchanges) between the couple. First decide about their relationship and why they are in the restaurant and then try to express some of it in the dialogue. Try to write in the style of Hemingway.