

Alternative titles for the novel

Read through the following extract which is from: *The Making of a Bestseller* by Arthur T Vanderbilt

On October 27, 1924, Fitzgerald sent to Max Perkins the manuscript ... which he alternately was calling *Trimalchio* in West Egg* or *The Great Gatsby*. In his covering letter, he noted, 'I have an alternative title: *Gold-hatted Gatsby*.' A week later ... he was floundering: 'I have not decided to stick to the title I put on the book, *Trimalchio in West Egg*. The only other titles that seem to fit it are *Trimalchio* and *On the Road to West Egg*. I had two others, *Gold-hatted Gatsby* and *The High-Bouncing Lover***, but they seemed too slight.' A month later, he was still mulling over titles, including *Among Ash Heaps and Millionaires* and still *Trimalchio in West Egg*. 'Maybe simply *Trimalchio* or *Gatsby*.' On January 24th, 1925 in a ... letter to Perkins, he noted: 'I'm returning the proof of the title page, etc. It's O.K. but my heart tells me I should have named it *Trimalchio*. However against all advice I suppose it would have been stupid and stubborn of me. *Trimalchio in West Egg* was only a compromise. *Gatsby* is too much like *Babbitt**** and *The Great Gatsby* is weak because there's no emphasis even ironically on his greatness or lack of it. However, let it pass.'

What a mistake! Too late he realized it, two weeks before publication date sending off to Perkins ... a frantic wire: 'CRAZY ABOUT TITLE UNDER THE RED WHITE AND BLUE. WHAT WOULD DELAY BE?' ... Too late, wired Perkins ...

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The Making of a Bestseller: From Author to Reader, published by McFarland

* *Trimalchio* was the host of lavish parties in the *Satyricon* by the Roman writer Petronius.

** These two titles refer to the poem which appears at the beginning of the novel. The verse, written by F Scott Fitzgerald, is attributed to Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, a character in his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920).

*** A novel by American writer Sinclair Lewis, published in 1922.

1. Looking at each title in turn decide why you think F Scott Fitzgerald considered it and why he rejected it.
2. Rank the titles in order of the one that you think is the most appropriate for the story through to the one that you think is the least appropriate. Be prepared to explain your ideas.
3. Why do you think he kept returning to the *Trimalchio* title?
4. What do you think Fitzgerald meant when he referred to *Gold-hatted Gatsby* and *The High Bouncing Lover* being 'too slight'?
5. Why do you think Fitzgerald felt *The Great Gatsby* was a weak title? Consider his words, 'there's no emphasis even ironically on his greatness or lack of it.'
6. Why do you think Fitzgerald decided to let the title, *The Great Gatsby* 'pass'?
7. Consider why Fitzgerald suddenly felt compelled to send the urgent wire to Perkins with the last suggested title? Why might he have felt this to be such a pertinent title for the book?
8. Although the novel was well received by critics when it was first published it did not sell particularly well. Fitzgerald felt this was, at least partly, down to the title. Do you think the title could have affected the way it was perceived by readers?