

**F. Scott Fitzgerald: Sleeping and waking**

In a first-person, confessional tone, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s short story explores chronic insomnia: an unnamed narrator struggles each night to fall asleep. From the mosquito he blames for first disrupting his bedtime routine to the escapist fantasies he uses to try and lull himself to sleep, the narrator draws us in with self-deprecating wit — but as the night goes on his desperation boils over into a personal crisis, only to collapse with exhaustion and wake up to face another day and night of the same. Fitzgerald, a heavy drinker for most of his short life, portrays insomnia as a vicious cycle of self-reproach and oblivion eerily reminiscent of addiction.

**Questions**

1. Reread the first paragraph. What might be different about each person’s insomnia? What might be similar enough that the narrator can make generalizations, or hope that readers might recognize their own insomnia in his (as he seems to have with Hemingway’s *Now I Lay Me*)?
2. Why does the mosquito disrupt the narrator’s ability to sleep? Why has the effect of that night lasted?
3. What might it mean for the narrator to regret having “broken myself trying to break what was unbreakable” (61)?
4. What kind of relationship does the narrator seem to have to sleep? What kind of promise does it have for him? What does he crave about it? Is that craving a part of insomnia, a resistance to insomnia, or both?
5. Drinking comes up here in an interesting context. Where is it? What does he use it for?
6. Think about the dreams in this story. What are each of them like? What are some of the differences between the dreams the narrator tries to use to fall asleep and the dreams he has once he is finally sleeping?
7. Why might this be relevant to the process of addiction and recovery? Is insomnia similar to addiction, or potentially connected? How are they similar, and how different? Would sobriety/recovery be like waking, like sleeping, or not exactly either?

**References**

Allred, N. (2016). R4R discussion blurb for facilitators. (R4R LibGuide)

Fitzgerald, F. (2011). Sleeping and Waking. In *On Booze* (55-62). New Directions: New York, 2011.

**Notes on discussion**

The discussion questions provided here are suggestions. Groups should not feel required to work in order or to address all of them. Instead, these questions are meant to solicit observations that can lead to connections. Those connections can be to personal experience; participants should feel free to share if their experiences can help the group get some insight into the topic at hand, since after all that’s the point of the exercise. Don’t feel compelled to jump to the “point” or “lesson” of the text right away. Philosophically speaking, the text doesn’t contain the “lesson”; if anything, the discussion does. Give that discussion time to develop, and make sure participants respond to or build on each other’s points rather than jumping around. If you’re having trouble getting the ball rolling or finding something insightful to say, try focusing on a particularly complex passage and figuring out what makes it hard to follow or makes sense of. Don’t be afraid of asking questions you don’t know the answer to; articulating a question can be just as valuable to a discussion as providing an answer.

**About the author**

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (September 24, 1896 – December 21, 1940), known professionally as F. Scott Fitzgerald, was an American novelist and short story writer, whose works illustrate the Jazz Age. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. Fitzgerald is considered a member of the "Lost Generation" of the 1920s. He finished four novels: *This Side of Paradise, The Beautiful and Damned, The Great Gatsby*, and *Tender Is the Night*. [Wikipedia]

**Short story collections by the same author**

Flappers and Philosophers (New York: Scribners, 1921)

Tales of the Jazz Age (New York: Scribners, 1922)

All the Sad Young Men (New York: Scribners, 1926)

Taps at Reveille (New York: Scribners, 1935)

Afternoon of an Author (New York: Scribners, 1957)

Babylon Revisited and Other Stories (New York: Scribners, 1960)

The Pat Hobby Stories (Esquire Magazine, 1940–41)

The Basil and Josephine Stories (New York: Scribners, 1973)

The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Scribners, 1989)

The Price Was High: Fifty Uncollected Stories (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1995)

I'd Die For You. And Other Lost Stories, edited by: Anne Margaret Daniel (New York: Simon & Schuster, April 2017)