"*Shing. Tap. Tap. Tap. Shing.* Its clunking carriage paving the sheets . . . *Shing* . . . slamming its dark hydra heads (*tap tap tap*) on its sable wall . . . *Shing* . . . singing its own mechanical songs . . . breaking nails, breaking hearts, the typewriter is not an instrument of love . . ."

—Death (dangling her unlit cigarette)

"Cherry-picking, we remember the way we want. In a daydream trance, the artificial baby is the warm peaceful baby with its creators hovering over its crib. They open their eyes, humming the end of *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat*—'the moon, the moon, they danced by the light of the moon.' The real baby is the dead baby."

—Time, knocking back all of it
(the rocks *and* the olive)

"How could we've ever understand *them*—smoking and drinking—when they can't even understand us? 'Those poor *things*. They pay taxes . . . and then beget more *things* . . .'"

—Great Scott's ghost

What Light Was

(a dialogue novel)

Shawn C. Hays | Stephen C. Hays

What Light Was

(a dialogue novel)

First Edition (on the centennial of the first publication of *The Great Gatsby*)

Published by Rilke Hopkins Press, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A.

Hays@SpeakLowPoetry.com

SpeakLowPoetry.com

What Light Was (Full Novel) ISBN: 978-0-9983504-4-8
What Light Was (Part 1: Mutability) ISBN: 978-0-9983504-5-5
What Light Was (Part 2: Necessity) ISBN: 978-0-9983504-6-2

Cover and interior design: Rilke Hopkins Press

Cover art: S. C. Hays (based on both C. D. Friedrich's 1818 painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" and F. Cugat's 1924 painting "Celestial Eyes")

Authors page art: Ivy S. C. Hays

This novel is adapted from the works of Mary W. Shelley, Percy B. Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, John Keats, Lord Byron, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda S. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Frankenstein* by Mary W. Shelly, Sir H. Davy, and the memiors of E. Trelawny and T. Medwin. These writings, characters, and incidents are used fictitiously.

– for Ivy

– for Ava

– for Callaway

Part 1: Mutability

Prospero: “Hast thou, spirit, performed to point the tempest that I bade thee?”

Ariel: “To every article.”

(1.) ghost-green sunshine

SCOTT

The disaster starts—Scott's *big crisis*—and the color of my lips deteriorates pleasantly. I am in the depths of an unholy depression—generally bored and feeling bad. At a dinner in an uncontrollable fit of grimacing, I chewed up and then spit out *a wad* of hundred-franc notes—like a scoop of war-ration green beans—and smiled.

A mania of bliss and rage now alternates in me like a jazz-mad shaking himself insane. If I'd spent this time reading or traveling or doing anything—even staying healthy—it'd be different, but I spent it uselessly, neither in study nor in contemplation but only, *generally*, in drinking and raising hell.

I got in trouble and was less welcome after a few of the garden parties turned too tame. I brought a little life to things with smashing some wineglasses and flinging food and tossing ashtrays at more *disciplined* guests. There was a tad more trouble after I poured a can of garbage over a patio of suspicious whisperings. Trouble is transitory. People forget the way they think they will remember. We'll bark like dogs until they let us back in—and it will be the best bourgeoise time when we collect all the purses, boil them, and serve them as high-class soup.

Well, it's Villa Marie on the lush, verdant, French coast. Autumn is falling on your great author—F. Scott—on his diaphanous Zelda, and on the youngest *Pie*—their warbler, Scottie girl—and we've tried to simmer our whirlwind of foolish cares and shameless personas on the rear eye of our quiet *Euromantic* stove. Through our easy stretch of pines and cicadas to our pleasant shore of our Riviera, these old villas rot like water lilies, and the Mediterranean yields its mesmerizing pigments—moment by moment—to the brutal sunshine filtering through umbrellas, murmurs of merchantmen, and fresh fading mirages.

Through the evenings, the mercury-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs shine smokily through tranquil rain in the translucent movement of the streets and in the gleam of bistros. From the seaside promenade and open-air cafes comes a sweet pungent odor of flowers and chartreuse and fresh black coffee in the luxuries of music, low voices, and cigarettes. Yet, the perfume is not faint—it is not illusive. There is too much *love* here—enough to sometimes want to return home.

Imagination must run honest and must seize on its intuitions of semblance and doubt, of fealty and mystery. Zelda was a sun—radiant and glowing, gathering light and storing it, pouring it forth in a glance to that part of me that cherished all beauty and all illusion. Her kisses were flowers. I would baby her whims, indulge her unreason, and wear her as she wished to be worn.

Even so, this summer villa of impervious silence was then my veracity once my April—my *Keatzian* songs of spring—had vanished blank and vacant.

~LIQUEFYING

“The trees and clouds were carved in classical severity. It was a gray day—that least fleshly of all weathers—a day of dreams and far hopes and clear visions. It was a day easily associated with those abstract truths and purities that dissolve in the sunshine or fadeout in mocking laughter by the light of the moon.”

SCOTT

Disenchanted, my muse is shifting, and there is now a kindliness to intoxication—an indescribable gloss that it gives like memories of ephemeral and faded evenings. Here, idle, an outrageous betrayal has taken possession, supplanting my powerless foreign dream. It is finally now—sleepless at sunrise in my room full of such *morning*—that I am really alone amongst my patch of cold sun crisscrossed with shadows.

Presume, dare I deem what I might of myself—or that my marriage was mine—mercilessly, there is no delay to the deaf deadlines that destiny assigns. I didn’t understand that there is not a way. I knew something had happened that could never be repaired.

“What mad pursuit?” This year—me and these typewriter keys—*we* feel too old . . . the whole burden of this novel . . . the loss of these illusions that give such color to the world—which won’t again occur—colors that shield us from *caring* whether things are true or false . . . *Tap Tap Tap* . . . as long as they *partake* . . . *Tap Tap Tap* . . . of the magical glory . . .

(2.) Mesozoic structure

~SUMMERLAND
“Pomegranates in the leathery lacing of their foliage ripen outside the lattice to an exotic décor. The bronze balls of a mournful crepe myrtle at the end of the lot spill into lavender tarlatan gurgles. Japanese plums splash heavy sacks of summer on the roof of the chicken yard.

‘Cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck!’ That old hen must be laying again. Maybe she’s caught a June bug.

The figs aren’t ripe yet. A mother calls her children from a house across the way. Pigeons coo in the oak next door. The rhythmic flap of pounding a beefsteak begins in a neighbor’s kitchen.”

SCOTT
We snagged a Renault hayburner and combed eastward along the coast after this milquetoast gossip column on us lacked all humor, adventure, press, or even smug *humanity*. “This author describes the French Riviera as ‘the most fascinating amalgamation of wealth, luxury, and general uselessness in the world.’ Scott Fitzgerald, famous and still youthful American novelist, will return to Paris after a short sojourn. He was accompanied by his wife and little daughter, ‘Scottie Jr.,’ and will remain here until he has finished his latest book—the first in two and a half years.” The column had enough ad-plugs though, it was just that they’d realized their paranoia too soon that I only cared for their Parisian niches that catered to Americans—their hotels, bars, and nightclubs. Well, now, it’s Saint-Raphael for us in Villa Marie—out of the fire and into the sea.

Spirited in a clean, casual essence, it’s a stone house with eclectic gardens on a high, suburban hill with an open tiled terrace overlooking the moonlight on the dark oceanic coast—with a bright casino at the beach below. I’m growing a noble-minded mustache and trying to not singe it with my trench lighter. *Flick*. *Flick*. From my study—wrapped in an air of repressed carnival—I see Fréjus with its amphitheatre and other ruins of the Romans. On the balcony in the evenings, these ancient clouds of skeeters seem to want more blood and liquor than the scourges at Great Neck.

Although some think of America as the vast upstairs to a butcher shop, this Riviera villa—from its marble fountain to its cordial glasses—is paid and paid with reproachless, middle-class, Americana *gold*. Yet, in the sudden problem of keeping my body and mind together, I have to think of something new that people want. Here, though, everything that people want has been thought of long ago.

~CONVERSION
Many had learned too much of painful and even exotic *ways to die* so that life presented itself—

by contrast—in less agonizing, if more immutable, terms than before the trouble in Europe. When nobody could think up any more mathematical formulas for destruction and no further ways for forwarding the plot, the war was declared to be a political inconvenience—and ended. People that had been spared active participation in the *gala debacle* converted themselves into a grand pleasure-chorus as effectively as possible.

SCOTT

I was twenty-one when the American Dream took possession of me and took to hatching my desperate stories. Occupied by my new *ethos*, we would stir up mistakable collegians, wanderlust, and poor immigrants from our debut of egoistic epigrams. I was madly in love with all our heroines, and my haunted mantra had emerged amidst this last year as a Catholic. “I will love this one beauty—her debutante body, her gypsy spirit, her elitist mind.” Though warring aviators flew their impressive stunts over her lovely head, my living dream had become honey enough for its two young avatars. I could forever live full of handsome promise—for her—as long as I died a young Romantic. I was twenty-two when I wired Zelda Sayre from NYC, “Darling, Heart—ambition, enthusiasm, confidence—everything is a game, *everything* is possible!”

There is no freedom from hysteria. I was twenty-three when Temperance and Suffrage were enacted—and I was an instant celebrity. At twenty-four—in the sweet prime of Keats—I *had* achieved all my aspirations. I’m twenty-seven, and this spring and summer have been the worst year since the tortures of nineteen. I’m in the dissonant snare of the twenties, and we’ve moved to the Old World to find a new rhythm to our lives from the growing *lack* of azure in our days, our defection that needs to maintain a Mesozoic structure before we dissipate—like after another bender—back into shapeless, spineless jelly.

~AU REVOIR, ARRIVEDERCI

“‘At the end of the page it mentions ‘orgies.’

‘Even the word makes me feel like a butterfly. Flap! Flap!’

‘Butterflies don’t make a noise.’

‘You’ve probably never seen a *tight* butterfly before—in all your life!’”

(3.) it’s an English thing

~SEA-CHANGE
“They—*Mama* and *Papa*—were all saying ‘yes’ to the gramophone owners of France. ‘Ariel’ now passed from the title of a book to three record wires on the house-top. What did it matter? It had already gone from a god to a myth to Shakespeare—and nobody seemed to mind. People still recognized the word. So, ‘Ariel’ it was! They hardly noticed the change.”

SCOTT
We’re a handsome crowd dancing in the same room, but we don’t all start the same. A sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth. Reserving judgments is a habit I have from some advice in my younger and more vulnerable years. It’s like light. It’s two mysteries at the same time. My habit of *reserving* is a matter of infinite hope and it’s opened up many curious natures to me.

Click. I think back when I drink. All of us were always talking, but I wrote things down. *Tap*. *Tap*. *Tap*. In the margins of my textbooks, I was writing the words that I wanted to read. I found theatre early, and it was the only school I wanted. My mother narrated ambition into me, and my boyhood was cradled in her reading me books. She had traveled Europe four times, and there was plenty “Mary”—my mother—before she married her Eddie Fitzgerald.

Typing is writing with two hands at once and it’s put me in both the worlds—of both halves of my head. I’m trying to tell her. I’m wearing around an Anglo-Saxon tragedy I started before we migrated our farce from Long Island. Draped on a hanger, it could market as a soothing bio of youthful love letters, but—as I move around in it—it’s become a pack of street sermons.

~MAD BAD BOOKCLUB
“I’m glad you’re deep in Shelley and Bryon. I was a great Shelley fan and I never fully got over it. But anyway, the book is the thing, and all the rest is inconsiderable beside it.”

“Shelley was a god to me once. Haven’t you read *Ariel* yet? For heaven’s sake, read it if you like Shelley. Still, who thinks ‘badly’ of Shelley now?”

— *To* and *From* Scott at Saint-Raphael

SCOTT
Ariel was great, but Shelley’s not an Italian thing. An English thing in Italy is still an English thing. Shelley’s an aristocrat who wants—more than people—to not be an aristocrat, but can’t. It’s an English thing. It’s our language—and so is love—with all the words that have to have their own sort of money to work. “His creed was to become as pure as he thought his conduct was.

Though he had many generous and exalted qualities, he yearned to cut out the canker of aristocracy." *Click*.

I'm trying to tell her and I'm trying to tell my old-sport dream. "One for us, and one for them." I must try some love stories with more action this time. We won't bicker *less*, so we'll just have to bicker better. Thank *Love* for letters—love letters. We can write her the storybook girl, and then she'll have the adamant boy—Romantics we can't escape. Engraving these lovers, we'll transcribe my *ella*—Zelda—and my typing-self into another story that's us again. Our letters will be love-triangles—*tap tap tap*—shaped in our brutal angles of being lovers, authors, and parents in one sporting math problem about time.

Time made us with a little more stardust. Mutating us through our determining adolescent deformities, we were marked for greatness. Like eccentric rotten children when we didn't get all that we wanted with our glittering gifts, everyone around us would have to pay and pay—and keep paying for all our brilliance. Besides, what would we do with freedom if we really ever found some of it? We seemed primed to find new chains—and vultures seemed primed to find us in them.

~BLOOD ALWAYS REMINDS ME
"'Maybe something will happen.'

Alabama wished nothing ever would again, but it was her turn to agree. They had evolved a tacit arrangement about waiting on each other's emotions, almost mathematical like the trick combination of a safe, which worked by the mutual assumption that
it would.

'I mean if somebody would come along to remind us about how we felt about things when we felt the way they reminded us of, maybe it would refresh us.'

'I see what you mean. Life has begun to appear as torturous as the sentimental writhing of a rhythmic dance.'

'Exactly. I want to make some protestations since I'm largely too busy to work very well.'"

SCOTT
Like a fresh silk square tucked in a breast pocket, this ink sheet is set for lively spatters of typing. *Tap*. *Tap*. *Click*. Well, I've got my parallel—a backstory transition as inexplicable as Shelley's—a "one-year Oxford man." Okay, now let's get this prologue-kid out into the fairgrounds and to his first gun. *Tap*. *Tap*. *Tap*. She'll like this one—"The Blood Spangled Handkerchief." There we go—and then back to the States. Let's see, yes, Kentucky—where Keats's brother deteriorated—back with killing on his hands, wistful. *Tap*. *Tap*. *Tap*. Just got to connect the tragic dots—and keep it where the blood's at and where the gossips whisper. *Tap*. *Tap*. *Tap*. Things start in England, and

there was plenty *Mary* before she married her Shelley. “Child of love and light, lovely from thy birth, of glorious parents—still their fame shines” from Saint-Raphael—from my mirroring villa of Mary.

(4.) . . . of Woman

~PROMISSORY

“I am well and tranquil, excepting the disturbance produced by *Master* William’s joy—or is it *Mistress* Mary’s?—who took it into its head to frisk a little at being informed of your remembrance. I begin to love this little creature and to anticipate its birth as a fresh twist to a knot, which I do not wish to untie. Men are spoilt by frankness, I believe, yet I must tell you that I love you better than I supposed I did when I promised to love you forever. Thus, I will add what will gratify your benevolence, if not your heart—that, on the whole, I may be termed *happy*. You are a tender, affectionate creature—and I feel it thrilling through my frame, giving and promising pleasure.”

– Wollstonecraft to Godwin

SCOTT

Tap. *Tap*. *Click*. The beloved infamous author of controversy—the bold, bright, and scandalous mother of Mary Godwin—has died. For four years on his own, widower William Godwin—a more legendary author—raises Mary and her older sister, Fanny. Though, once he remarries, young Mary remains in argumentative discord with Godwin’s wife, the mother of three other children. Mary is raised in her busy, blended home until she is fifteen.

When Mary is eight, her father and stepmother establish the M. J. Godwin and Company Juvenile Library—near the stenches of the slaughterhouse and sewer—in the heart of London. Headquartered from their pungent home, Godwin runs his popular bookshop and publishing business, heavily influencing the education of Mary and Fanny’s generation. Their picture-book series of rhymes, tales, and educational fables spark young imaginations with their originality, producing a handful of influential volumes that will endure. His “juvenile radical propaganda” is famous for former fables being rewritten with some form of compassion for all the characters in each tale—giving a proud fly a convicted conscience and having the ants spare some food for the ignorant grasshopper.

In his book of collected poems for the rising generation, Godwin argues, “Prose in its purest acceptation is the vehicle of truth, is geometry, is logic, is chronicle, but it is poetry that represents to us the passions and feelings of the soul. It lays before us the sentiment and heart of the writer, or for the personages he introduces to our knowledge. Thus, we are acquainted with the world in our early years and before we are called upon to take an active part upon its theatre. Poetry is, in this sense, a school of morality.”

Mary and Fanny are given advanced educations, steeped in history, mythology, literature, and languages from the schoolroom and library of their publishing firm. Coleridge's son plays games with Mary and Fanny, and they take drawing lessons from a friend of William Blake. Although Godwin's second wife is a translator and skilled editor, Godwin is the direct educator of Fanny and Mary, guiding them to prize their intellectual pursuits and the principle of practicing introspective scrutiny. For Mary, her dearest pleasure—writing stories—is conveying her curious sets of images into poignant and vibrant life. When Mary is eleven, her father prints Mary's clever contributions to a comical poem about an Englishman's misunderstood trip to Paris in a booklet under Godwin's promising imprint.

Academically, Mary's formative understanding of her society is from the intellectual milieu of both of her parents. Mary's outlook is shaped as she nurses on the refuge of her mother's name—whose enterprise was to displace the "pernicious effects which arise from the unnatural distinctions established by society" with "virtuous equality." The consummate approach of Wollstonecraft's cultivating text is that *mind* has no sex—no gender—and that *woman* should become socially emancipated as rational, moral, and independent, rather than remain disreputable through indolent, passive, and limiting roles, defending the needed redirection of the *artificiality* of early impressions and upbringings that "currently" form young women.

Godwin views rising intellectual and moral opportunities as links in the progressive chain of "Necessity," which, he endorses, will lead to the eventual dismantling of institutions. "Rotten institutions encourage hypocrisy, and the misuse of moral intelligence seeks control." In his millenarian vision for the future, Godwin argues that all institutions which seek to limit the power of the human mind and its acquisition of knowledge—such as government, punishment, religion, and marriage—are evils *in need* of eradication. Simultaneously, from her antimonarchist father, *the* architect of anarchism, Mary solidifies that the basis of his system—Godwin's controversial belief that "no vice can exist with perfect freedom"—is "the very keystone of the arch of justice" and foundation of the moral-truth-oracles of London's own philosopher king.

For Godwin, "cogent reasoning" is a "power" of intuitive perception, resembling Coleridge's theory of "Reason" and Blake's concept of "Imagination." Godwin, the rational Romantic, looks to the improvement of reason as the means of improving social conditions—toward "universal benevolence." Furthermore, Godwin stresses the practical and moral "culture of the heart," asserting that Necessity without love undermines the assumptions of "actual life." Under these authorial causes, Mary hopes to enjoin others as *rational* enough to live out the optimistic social theories of her parents.

Synthesizing her primal touchstones—child of love and light—Mary aspires to authorship under her two muses. The original British Romantics, both Wordsworth and Coleridge, were directly

inspired by the independent writings and personalities of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. Academically, Coleridge defended Godwin and—admiringly—offered to write works for Godwin's press. Blake was also fascinated by Wollstonecraft and fashioned a series of his famous copperplate engravings as the illustrations for a collection of Wollstonecraft's tales.

Books are Mary's childhood companions. Feeling socially isolated, her youth culminates in a stint at a shabby boarding school. Experiencing life via reading, Mary lives in her ideas, in paper worlds made from ideal words. Her parentage is her books, and her first faith is that *those* from her father's library are the ample provisions needed for life.

Suffering backlashes from her mood swings and stubborn temperament, Mary discovers her lack of worldly readiness. Yet, to further encourage Mary's academic depths and to sharpen her perceptions, Godwin sends Mary to better weather. Voyaging up the east coast of England, Mary finds stability with the family of one of his philosophical devotees in Scotland. Godwin's wish is for her to become more self-sufficient and to be brought up with more of an independent mind—"like a cynic"—honoring the convictions of Mary's mother "to resist feminine subjection" and "to effect the growth of *woman* as more affectionate, more rational, and more moral."

Tap. *Tap*. *Click*. Mary is blossoming. Like autumnal foliage when played upon by the rays of the setting sun, her strawberry blonde hair has a natural aura of sunny and burnished brightness. Mary recollects that while in Scotland her "true compositions," the airy flights of her imagination, are born and fostered. The tinder of the creative imperative is primed for kindling. *Tap*. *Tap*. *Click*. Here, Mary envisions this whaling port as the framework for her fictive explorer to embark on a quest through the northern pack ice. "Alone, alone, all all alone," agonizing to claim discovery of the nautical passage to India, Mary imagines the downfall of her early protagonist to be a semblance of Coleridge's tormented mariner. While she is still fifteen, Godwin records, "My own daughter is, I believe, very pretty" and describes his Mary as "singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind." He boasts that, through "her perseverance in everything she undertakes," his Mary "is almost invincible."

As exuded from Godwin's frequent guests, Mary is well aware of the conflicted social repressions that have altered London society after continual decades of war. Mindful of the active censures from reactionary political instabilities and the continual miseries that impel "the meager" toward revolution, Mary is youthfully ready to take part in the reformational aspects of her social order. Under her spring cloud of red-gold hair, Mary's homecoming from two formative years abroad rashly shifts to her flirting with a young radical scholar—an aspiring disciple of her father who begins to frequent the Godwin residence. Conquering Mary's earlier social sense of "incapacity and timidity" that had surfaced from her father's overly academic

parenting, this vitalizing young poet has pledged his philanthropic assurance to relieve her family's debts in accordance with Godwin's economic, socialist values.

~COLD INKWELL

"Writers, poets—*authors*—suffer from the early prerequisite to not only need to fall in love with another's body and emotions, but also with the *mind* of this other. This extra criterion of *thought*, a tacky romantic requirement, further shrinks the pool of the admiring author for Cupid's archery—a diminished collective already horrified by the other dirty absolute that one of these two lovers must also seem to have a bottomless purse."

SCOTT

Concluding her curious childhood, Mary returns from those wild green heathers of Scotland as a young lady, having beautifully transformed into the mesmerizing image of her daring mother—fair, gloomy, piercing, and magnificent. During this energetic summer, her father's promising protégé then announces his ardent passion for Mary—transfixed in the grey-hazel-eyed daughter of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. Her agile scholar is tall, attractive, and youthful. With wavy, winning, dark hair and deep blue stag-eyes, her philosopher is restless, brooding, and untamed. Under his alluring, intelligent spell, Mary pens her poignant reply to her vibrant suitor—to her Percy Bysshe Shelley.