

# F. Scott Fitzgerald

## The author and his work



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**F**rancis Scott Key Fitzgerald was one of the most important American writers of the early 20th century. He is best remembered for his novels which describe life in the American 'Jazz Age' – the 1920s. He is also remembered for his rather tragic life and early death.

Fitzgerald was born on September 29th, 1896, in St Paul, in the state of Minnesota. As a boy, he studied at the St Paul Academy, where he started to write for the school newspaper at the age of thirteen. He went on to a Catholic school in New Jersey, where his writing was encouraged. He then studied at Princeton University. At Princeton, he spent too much time writing and too little time studying.

In 1917, Fitzgerald left the university to join the army. While he was at an army camp in Alabama, in the summer of 1918, he met a girl called Zelda Sayre and he fell in love with her. But he was not very successful so Zelda refused to marry him.

Fitzgerald wanted to marry Zelda very much, so he decided he had to become a success. He returned to St Paul and continued work on a novel which he had begun writing at Princeton.

When the novel, which was called *This Side of Paradise*, was published in March 1920, it was a great success. Suddenly, Fitzgerald was famous and he had plenty of money. At last Zelda agreed to marry him, and they moved to New York. Here Fitzgerald wrote his second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*. This was also a success and the Fitzgeralds began to live a life of great luxury. Their daughter, Frances, was born in October 1921.

All was not well, however. Fitzgerald and his wife both drank too much. Their wild life was not making them happy. Zelda, especially, was often ill. In 1924, they moved to France where Fitzgerald finished another novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Although most people now think that *The Great Gatsby* is his best book, it was not as successful as his two previous novels. The Fitzgeralds travelled between the US and in France for two more years. Then they returned home permanently. During this time, Fitzgerald began to write short stories.

Back in the US, theatre adaptations and deals with the movie studios brought in more money, but Zelda's health was now a serious worry. In 1930, she had a complete nervous breakdown and had to go into a clinic. Her treatment was expensive, and Fitzgerald could not wait to finish another novel before he paid the bills. So he wrote more short stories. However, he really wanted to write another novel – one which would be as successful as *The Beautiful and Damned*. When he published *Tender is the Night* in 1934, he hoped that his luck would change. But the book was no more successful than *The Great Gatsby*, and Fitzgerald, who was now ill himself, was in a lot of debt.

In 1937, he moved to Hollywood, where he was hoping to make money as a screen writer. But this move was not successful. In Hollywood he met, and fell in love with, a newspaper writer called Sheilah Graham. Zelda was too ill to leave hospital and Fitzgerald spent the rest of his life with Sheilah. In 1936 he had tried to write a story about his own tragic life. This novel would be published five years after his death as *The Crack-Up*. He also had one more try at a novel called *The Last Tycoon*, which was left

unfinished at his death in 1940, at the age of 44, from a heart attack. Alcohol had ruined his life and now it had helped to kill him.

The completed part of *The Last Tycoon* was published in 1941. Zelda Fitzgerald died in 1948, in a fire at the hospital where she was being treated.

Although his reputation suffered during his last years, F. Scott Fitzgerald is now remembered as a great writer. Several films have been made from his novels, including *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night*.

### A selection of works by F. Scott Fitzgerald

#### Novels

1920 *This Side of Paradise*  
1922 *The Beautiful and Damned*  
1926 *The Great Gatsby*  
1934 *Tender is the Night*  
1941 *The Last Tycoon*

#### Short stories

1920 *Flappers and Philosophers*  
1922 *Tales of the Jazz Age*  
1926 *All the Sad Young Men*  
1935 *Taps at Reveille*  
1962 *The Pat Hobby Stories*  
1973 *The Basil and Josephine Stories*

(For a list of F. Scott Fitzgerald's stories that have been simplified for the Macmillan Readers series, see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)