**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896– 1940) Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was an American novelist, short-story writer, and cultural critic. He is best-known for his 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*, and coined the term “The Jazz Age” to refer to the riotous lifestyle of alcohol and excess that characterized the *zeitgeist* of the Roaring Twenties.

Fitzgerald was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota and was named after a well-known distant relative, Francis Scott Key, author of “The Star Spangled Banner.” Fitzgerald attended but did not graduate from Princeton University, and he enlisted in the United States Army but did not see combat in the First World War. He did, however, meet the woman whom he would marry while stationed in Alabama for training exercises. Zelda Sayre was the daughter of a prominent Montgomery family and a well-known Southern debutante. After a tempestuous courtship, the couple wed in 1920 on the heels of the publication of *This Side of Paradise* (1920). *Paradise* was an overnight sensation, with the first run of 3000 copies selling out in three days.

Not only were the Fitzgeralds fixtures of the early 1920s New York social circuit; they were also notable members of the American expatriate circle in Paris after their arrival in 1924. In France, Fitzgerald met a then-unknown Ernest Hemingway, who had just published *in our time*. Fitzgerald and Hemingway shared a lasting if difficult friendship, which has been famously chronicled in their correspondence. In addition to *This Side of Paradise,* Fitzgerald also completed three additional novels: *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *Tender Is the Night* (1934). He also wrote a play, *The Vegetable* (1923). Fitzgerald also wrote over one hundred and fifty short stories, many of which were published in magazines such as *Esquire*, *The Smart Set*, and *The Saturday Evening Post,* and subsequently (by Scribners) in various collections. At the time of his death in 1940, he had been working on a fifth novel based on his experience working for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) as a screenwriter in Los Angeles in the late 1930s. It was published posthumously as *The Last Tycoon* (1941).

During his lifetime, Fitzgerald survived as a writer thanks to the market for his magazine stories, which at the height of his reputation earned him a reported $4000 per story (Mangum 70), which was among the highest rates of his day. The stories were lucrative, but Fitzgerald resented them as a distraction from the serious work of writing novels, despite the fact that after the initial success of *This Side of Paradise*, novels did not bring him the recognition or financial stability that he craved. Fitzgerald’s ability to write longer fiction was also compromised by difficulties with alcohol and an increasingly strained relationship with Zelda, which culminated in the first of her several breakdowns in the spring of 1930.

Fitzgerald’s prose style is characterized by a deceptively simple lyricism, and his work explores themes such as the relationship between material success and romantic love as well as the emotional and economic cost of individual ambition. Many of his stories contain elements autobiography, most famously Daisy Buchanan’s utterance upon the birth of her daughter in *The Great Gatsby*, “I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool” (17), which Zelda herself had said upon the birth of the couple’s only daughter in 1921. Through these autobiographical similarities, Fitzgerald explores the extent to which the modern subject, whether James Gatz, Jay Gatsby, or Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald himself, is a construct or a performance rather than a stable and fixed personage.

Fitzgerald died of a heart attack, his second, in 1940. Unfortunately, at the time of his death, he was regarded as a cautionary tale and a failure rather than a respected writer, though Fitzgerald himself contributed to this image with some of his final published stories, *The Pat Hobby Stories*. Originally published individually in *Esquire* magazine between January 1940-May 1941, the stories were collected into a single volume in 1962. They focus on the misadventures of a washed-up, alcoholic screenwriter who spends his days hanging around the movie lot trying to figure out a way back into the good graces of studio executives. In the decades after his death, however, Fitzgerald’s literary reputation rose significantly, and by the 1960s his transformation from failure to respected author was complete.

**List of Major Works:**

**Novels**

*This Side of Paradise* (1920)

*The Beautiful and Damned* (1922)

*The Great Gatsby* (1925)

*Tender is the Night* (1934)

*The Love of the Last Tycoon* originally *The Last Tycoon* (1941 posthumous)

**Short Story Collections**

*Flappers and Philosophers* (1921)

*Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922)

*All the Sad Young Men* (1926)

*Babylon Revisited and Other Stories* (1960)

*The Pat Hobby Stories* (1962)

*The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1989)

*The Crack-Up* (1945 essays, notebook excerpts, letters)

Cambridge University Press has published a fourteen-volume authoritative annotated edition of Fitzgerald’s complete body of work. These are the definitive sources for anyone interested in doing research on Fitzgerald.

**References and for Further Reading:**

Bruccoli, Matthew. *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (1983) New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich. Widely regarded as the standard source for those interested in the life and work of F Scott Fitzgerald.

Mangum, Bryant. “The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald.” *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Ed. Ruth Prigozy. 2001.

Meyers, Jeffrey*. Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography* (1994) *N*ew York: HarperCollins. Focusing on Fitzgerald’s alcoholism and Zelda’s illness, Meyers’s biography draws upon new material and contains detailed literary criticism. It is one of the more balanced of the many Fitzgerald biographies.

Mizener, Arthur. *The Far Side of Paradise* (1951, rev 1965)*.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Mizener’s was the first book-length biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald that was published and helped legitimize Fitzgerald’s place in the American literary canon.

Prigozy, Ruth, Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald* (2001) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. This collection of academic essays from noted Fitzgerald scholars provides a good introduction to critical issues in Fitzgerald’s fiction.

Smith, Scottie Fitzgerald, Bruccoli, and Joan P. Kerr, eds. *The Romantic Egoists: A Pictorial Autobiography from the Scrapbooks and Albums of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (1974) New York: Scribners. Drawing upon Fitzgerald’s scrapbooks, journals, and personal effects, *Romantic Egoists* provides a unique and compelling glimpse into the lives of one of American literature’s most glamorous and tragic couple.