F. Scott Fitzgerald remains one of the major novelists of the 20th century, an author with the ability both to evoke an era and create an instantly recognizable vision of America, past or present. Nearly a century after the publication of his novels and stories chronicling the rootlessness and dissipation of what Gertrude Stein called "the lost generation," one that survived World War I with misplaced values, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), his masterpiece, remains an international as well as an American classic. In 2003, the British public voted it one of their "nation's best-loved novels." Numerous readers and some critics in both countries consider *Tender Is the Night* (1934), his expatriate novel, as his most ambitious. Fitzgerald, who was also a playwright, screenwriter, essayist, and poet, published 10 volumes of short stories, a number of which have been filmed.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota, to Edward Fitzgerald, a businessman, and Mary McQuillan Fitzgerald, an heiress, both of Irish stock, he of an impoverished but genteel ancestry in the South, she of northern midwestern "potato famine Irish" who had money. Scott was educated at Princeton University, where he wrote *The Romantic Egoist*, an early version of *This Side of Paradise*. That novel brought Fitzgerald respectability and security and persuaded Zelda Sayre's parents to agree to their marriage on April 3, 1920, one week after *This Side of Paradise* appeared to uniformly positive reviews. (The couple met when Fitzgerald was serving in the U.S. Army, as a second lieutenant, from 1917 to 1919.) *This Side of Paradise* centers on Amory Blaine, an American college student, versed in the old ways but primed for the new. Rosalind Connage is the young woman who rejects him because, like their real-life prototypes, Ginevra King and F. Scott Fitzgerald, she could not marry a man with no prospects of money and success. His second novel *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), relates the bleak wasting away of the glamour and potential of young Anthony and Gloria Patch. By the time their lawsuit for Anthony's inheritance succeeds, Anthony has lost his mind and Gloria her beauty.

*The Great Gatsby*, begun as the Fitzgeralds moved to the French Riviera, became the most American of novels, taking as its subjects love, money, murder, and the corruption of innocence. Set on Long Island, New York, the novel describes transplanted midwesterners who, immersed in the postwar rush for financial success and high society, have lost the ideals of their youth. Ironically, only Jay Gatsby, involved with corrupt friends and shadowy deals, retains the innocence of his prewar self. His innocence about love results in his death at novel's end. Fitzgerald, influenced by the earlier British writer Joseph Conrad, is still praised for his innovative use of the narrator Nick Carroway, a childhood friend of Gatsby's.

*Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald's fourth novel, focuses on Dick and Nicole Diver, the Fitzgerald-like couple living on the French Riviera. Their beauty, fame, and wealth are dissipating from the beginning of the novel. Dick is the self-confident one; Nicole, who has suffered mental and emotional problems, the weaker spouse. However, as they encounter—and Dick partakes of—increasing instances of corruption, confusion, and perversion, Nicole gains strength while Dick declines into alcoholism. He returns to the United States and is last seen in a tiny town somewhere in upstate New York. Fitzgerald's final novel, *The Last Tycoon*, was published posthumously. It portrays Hollywood in the 1930s, focusing on Monroe Stahr, Fitzgerald's example of a flawed but effective studio head, and his love for a young woman named Kathleen Moore. Although unfinished at the time of Fitzgerald's death, close friend and literary critic Edmund Wilson pieced together Fitzgerald's many notes and outlines with excellent results; many critics believe this novel exemplifies Fitzgerald at his best. This time the narrator is Cecilia Brady and, as the story draws to a close, the reader finds in the ultimate failure of Stahr a touch of grandeur.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, who drank too much for too long, died of a heart attack on December 21, 1940, in Hollywood, California. His burial place is in St. Mary's Cemetery in Rockville, Maryland. His books still sell more than a half million copies a year, and films have been made of *The Beautiful and Damned* (Warner Bros., 1922), *Tender Is the Night* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1962), *The Great Gatsby* (Players-Lasky-Paramount, 1926, Paramount, 1949 and 1974; and a TV movie in 2001), and *The Last Tycoon* (Paramount, 1976). Fitzgerald's papers are housed at the Firestone Library at Princeton University.

**Further Information**

**Novels**


Sources


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