

FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD

LIFE (1896 - 1940)

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was born in 1896, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in the Midwest of the United States. In 1913 he went to Princeton, a prestigious university. He did not graduate from university, taking a commission in the army in 1917. While he was in Montgomery, Alabama, he met and fell in love with a seventeen-years-old beauty, Zelda Sayre. She agreed to marry him, but, led by her overpowering wish for wealth and leisure, she delayed the wedding until he could become a successful man. In 1920 Fitzgerald published his first novel, *The Side of Paradise*, which was a best-seller and launched him as a writer. This allowed him to earn enough money and fame to convince Zelda to marry him. The couple threw themselves into a hectic social life requiring enormous sums of money, which Fitzgerald desperately tried to earn to please his wife. But in the period of the Great Depression the old lifestyle was no longer possible. Zelda suffered a series of nervous breakdowns; the marriage degenerated into a violent and embittered relationship, with Zelda finally being hospitalized as a schizophrenic in 1934. Fitzgerald turned to writing for Hollywood, while succumbing to alcoholism, which hampered his writing. He died suddenly of heart attack in 1940.

ACHIEVEMENT

Fitzgerald will be remembered as the chronicler of the aspirations and delusions of the generation that came to maturity in the 20's, a time of wealth and hedonism known as the Jazz Age. All his works turn on some recurrent themes: the theme of success, in the form of wealth and social position, closely linked with the aspects of American life usually referred to as "the American Dream". Fitzgerald's fame rests on some novels and collections of short stories:

- ***This Side of Paradise***, a partly autobiographical depiction of the life of the rebellious younger generation;
- ***The Great Gatsby***, general regarded as his masterpiece;
- ***Tender is the Night***, using autobiographical material to tell the story of the tormented marriage of an American psychiatrist and his schizophrenic wife;
- ***Tales of the Jazz Age***;
- ***All the Sad Young Men***;
- ***The Pat Hobby stories***.

THE GREAT GATSBY

The Great Gatsby is regarded as Fitzgerald's finest work, the one which provides the fullest and most satisfying study of the recurrent theme of wealth and its role in American life.

PLOT. **Jay Gatsby** is an enigmatic figure, a mysterious "self-made man", who appears to have achieved the American dream of immense wealth and is the owner of a palatial mansion where he holds fabulous parties, open to everyone, given week after week all through the summer. At the heart of this glamorous world (as **Nick Carraway**, the narrator, discovers), are inner solitude and emptiness - emptiness and Gatsby's unhappy love for **Daisy**, whom he had met when he was too poor to marry her. Daisy is now married to **Tom Buchanan**, a brutal representative of the older

wealthy families. Buchanan has a squalid love affair with **Myrtle**, the wife of a desperate garage owner, **George Wilson**. Gatsby has now made the fortune he so desperately wanted. All through the book people speculate about the source of his wealth and about Gatsby's true identity; only at the very end do we learn that he made his money as a bootlegger (a seller of illegal liquor during the Prohibition period). All he can do with his wealth is buy a house in the neighborhood where Daisy Buchanan lives and give party after party, hoping one day she will appear at one of them and fall in love with him again.

One day the garage owner discovers his wife's love affair with Tom Buchanan. To escape his violent reaction, Myrtle runs out of the house, and is struck and killed by Gatsby's yellow car driven by Daisy. To protect Daisy, Gatsby pretends he was driving the car at the moment of the accident, and he is killed by Wilson. Without revealing the truth, Daisy returns to her frivolous and vacuous existence. Nick Carraway, the narrator, turns away in disgust from lives founded on amoral passions, self-assertion and emotional indulgence, to go back to the simpler life of Mid-West, based on sounder principles.