



Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography

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A biography of one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century that includes new material. Fitzgerald rose to fame in his 20s with stories chronicling the upheaval of manners and morals in the Jazz Age, and with his wife Zelda blurred the line between literature and life.

Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography Details

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From Reader Review Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography for online ebook

Kate says

Disrespectful and gossipy.

Dan says

The worst of the Fitzgerald biographies, crabbed and inessential. Beatrice Dance and the almost completely unproductive years in the mid-30s seem to dominate it if only because nobody else had let them dominate a biography before; meanwhile, an absurd, oblivious preface dismisses the far superior work that other biographers had already done. Milton Stern, another superior Fitzgerald critic, was being charitable when he opened his review with, "This is a readable book that leaves one wondering why it's been written."

Read literally anything else with Fitzgerald's name on it before trying this one. Unless you're looking for the definitive biography of Beatrice Dance.

Keenan Johnston says

It would be difficult to find a person who sustained more ups and downs throughout life than F Scott Fitzgerald, and for that reason he makes for a wonderful study. Though viewed largely as a failure upon death at 44 years old, F Scott Fitzgerald's appreciation and genius as a writer has sadly grown only posthumously.

Though classified as fiction, Fitzgerald's novels are based on characters and events from his own life. Scott famously acknowledged, "All my characters are Scott Fitzgerald's." which makes all his writing deeply personal. It's for this reason that Jeffery Meyers biography of Fitzgerald was so fascinating to me, and I'll do my best to summarize the intricacies of his life which influenced his characters and novels.

I can't imagine the personal struggles that Scott Fitzgerald went through, though he was hardly a victim, and it is challenging to find a more pessimistic and depressing person. One of his most telling quotes was, "Find me a hero, and I'll write you a tragedy" which is a microcosm of his own life from fame and fortune to isolation and poverty.

Scott was born out of suffering because his two older sisters died of disease while his mother was pregnant with him. His father was a failed business man who got fired one day, became a broken man, and was never able to support his family. With little support from home, Scott lacked basic social skills his whole life, and was largely unpopular amongst his peers. Nonetheless, he was smart, athletic, charming at times and a hell of a writer. The success of his first two novels, "This Side of Paradise" followed by "The Great Gatsby" catapulted Fitzgerald into a household name and the most elite social circles.

Now imagine not handling that success well, drinking/partying excessively, losing all diligence and falsely believing that every one of your novels would automatically find the same success. His beloved wife had an

affair and became so embarrassed that she unsuccessfully tried to kill herself, and Fitzgerald's life began spinning out of control. All of this set up what would become a tumultuous last 10 years of his life.

10 years after writing Gatsby, Fitzgerald was a drunk who couldn't control himself in social situations, with a mountain of debt and a wife who was constantly institutionalized for her emotional instability. Scott believed he had deteriorated over the last several years. If he'd spent his time traveling, reading or doing anything, even staying healthy, it would have been different, but he spent it only in drinking and raising hell. With his wife in mental wards, Scott slipped into depression and solitude. "When you once get to the point where you don't care whether you live or die- as I did- it's hard to come back to life...it's hard to believe in yourself again-you have a slain part of yourself."

In 1934 he published "Tender is The Night", a deeply personal novel where he attempts to understand why his wife went mad, how this ruined his life, and to what extent he was responsible for their tragedy. However, the book was largely unpopular, and its lack of success sent Fitzgerald over the edge and into his own mental breakdown, and he was never able to recover until his death by heart attack at age 44.

This biography nicely explains how Fitzgerald was both a failure as a success and a failure as a failure who probably suffered much more than he deserved. I enjoyed learning of his personal relationships, particularly with Ernest Hemingway, and view this biography as a perfect primer for reading his novels, which I plan to do.

Lisa deGraffenried says

This book is a cross between a biography and a history textbook. It takes each chapter and focuses on his life and its comparison with a book he wrote. All his characters in his books are taken from people he personally knew. It makes you want to read his other books and then go back and reread the chapter in the biography that talks about it. A college could use this book as a course topic. Very interesting and sad life Fitzgerald had.

Amy Beth says

Well, I think it's generally helpful if a biographer likes or at least has sympathy for his subject. A sort of mean-spirited biography. I mean, Fitzgerald was no angel but geez.

Katherine says

"A most surprising thing is the death of a parent is not how little it affects you, but how much. When your Father or Mother has been morbidly perched on the edge of life, when they are gone, even though you have long ceased to have any dependence on them, there is a sense of being deserted" (276).

"People who live entirely by the fertility of their imagination are fascinating, brilliant, and often charming but they should be sat next to at dinner parties, not lived with" (319).

Charlotte says

I wish I could give the book a higher rating for the writing, but the content was so depressing, it is hard to say I did more than like the book!

I had no idea how depraved the lives of Fitzgerald and his wife were. Simply stated, they were not nice people. I always thought the Great Gatsby was a cautionary tale about being a better person, but after reading his biography, I think Fitzgerald was writing about the only kind of people he knew. I really felt sorry for him and had to remind myself that there is goodness in humanity.

Djrmel says

F. Scott Fitzgerald packed a lot of life into his 44 years, most of it unhappy. With his need to be loved, appreciated, or simply liked, coupled with alcoholism, a devotion to a fantasy marriage, and his hero worship of other authors (Hemingway especially), there was no way out of his personal hell. If it weren't for Fitzgerald's hunger for validation, I'd feel guilty about reading his stories after reading this biography. Meyers' presents Fitzgerald in a very bright light that shows every flaw.

Angela says

Fitzgerald is one of my fave altme authors. He has a classic, gentle descriptive voice. It is elegant words and pictures of a time and place. So this look into his life was interesting to me/

Jeff Swystun says

Author Meyers calls this work more “analytic and interpretive” than other examinations of Fitzgerald’s life. Yet, there is an honesty throughout that appears to betray a deeper empathy for the subject. Perhaps that came from the research and the fact that Fitzgerald maintained a month-by-month account of his life over seventeen years. In those pages would be both the public and private man.

So much of his life was public. He and wife Zelda were given to outrageous displays of drama that centered around money, power, sex, and glamour. Such superficiality does a disservice to what he tried to accomplish in his writing. Instead of being a witness to ostentatious times, the two became the poster children by jumping into city fountains and by being perpetually sloshed. In this is a ‘nature or nurture’ or ‘chicken and egg’ argument.

Meyers’ examination of the formative years is fascinating and may be summed up with this quote, “Fitzgerald inherited his elegance and propensity to failure from his father, his social insecurity and absurd behavior from his mother.” The future writer was wildly unpopular as a youth, a fan of liquor over study in University (causing him never to graduate), an “unusually dispensable” junior officer in the army, and a rather ungifted advertising copywriter. All of which helped become one of the most celebrated authors of all

time.

As we know Zelda holds equal fascination. The beautiful, unconventional and promiscuous wife came from a long line of insane and suicidal family members. Early on there were hints at her fate that were displayed through “rudeness, selfishness and lack of restraint.” Several times in the book it is mentioned how much the couple could have passed for brother and sister. No doubt they were painfully enmeshed and completely co-dependent.

There is the suggestion that he could have had greater impact if he focused on more intelligent output. However, he spent money lavishly, if not, stupidly and for much of his career had to pump out so-so short stories to pay the bills, “The difference in quality between Fitzgerald’s best and worst work is exceptionally wide.”

Fitzgerald’s time in advertising taught him how to cultivate a personal brand by leveraging his “good looks, wit and charm.” Unfortunately with drink, the mask would drop and his behavior quickly became vulgar and aggressive. At one dinner party he unexpectedly pulled the tablecloth off sending the elaborate setting crashing to the floor. At too many others, his bawdy references and insinuations found unreceptive audiences. Sheilah Graham noted, “When he was drunk he would have sex with a tree.”

Sufficient attention is given to The Great Gatsby and here Meyers provides a laudatory review of how the book has held up. Amazingly, it was not well received at the time of publish which shocked Fitzgerald. According to a Scribner, “more than 25 million copies of the book have been sold worldwide since the original publication in 1925, while more than 15 million copies have been sold in North America alone.” Scribner typically sells more than 500,000 copies of every year

The novelist Louis Bromfield observed that, “the Fitzgeralds were camping between two worlds.” Both battled desired personae or aspiration with absolute reality. This rent troubled them individually and as a couple. It now seems preordained that they would die tragically and in relative youth. In death they left an intriguing equation made up of the written works, their public lives, and the times they lived ensuring we will always have a fascination with Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald.

Tammie says

This was a well-written biography. Fitzgerald led such a tragic life but yet he was such a great writer. I enjoyed reading about his interaction with Hemingway. It was so sad about Zelda but I truly believed they loved each other very much.

Erin says

As an ardent fan of F. Scott Fitzgerald, it was a treat for me to read this. Before reading this biography I had a much different idea of what Fitzgerald was like in my head from reading The Great Gatsby, I almost thought that he was like Nick Carraway in a sense. After reading this that image of him was totally shattered. I had no idea that he was so reckless, awkward, condescending, sensitive, and so many other things. The only reason I would not give this book five stars is because I found the repetition of dates in certain sections

somewhat tedious and I also found it very easy to get names confused.

Paul Gleason says

This is a messy, gossipy biography of FSF. Meyers assumes that all the novels are autobiographical. He also puts down FSF every chance he gets. I know that FSF was no saint, but come on! People are more complex than this. What amazes me most is his presentation of FSF as a intellectual child in a man's body - one who lucked out into writing *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night* (two of the greatest novels of the twentieth century) because he had raw talent to burn and the ability to re-create life in art. In other words, Meyers doesn't present the mind behind the books (for example, a probing analysis of FSF's use of Keats in *Tender*) but insists on telling the gossip that (in his mind) led to the creation of the books. I think the clue is that Meyers also wrote a biography of Hemingway, who appears a lot in this book and whom Meyers obviously thinks is, in his words, "strong" in comparison to the "weak" FSF. In Spock's word, "fascinating."

Mark says

I do not expect, nor do I want, hagiography when I read someone's life story--but I will never understand why anyone would write a book about someone they clearly loathe. This book is a hatchet job, and I had to quit about halfway through because I just couldn't take it anymore.

D.A. Nelson says

Really well written, well researched book about the crazy and sad life of Scott and Zelda. I finished it feeling really sad that both of them finished their lives in such sad circumstances. Two talents snuffed out too young.

I liked the warts and all way this book is written, Meyers does not hold back describing the extremely bad behaviour of the Fitzgeralds and the impact it had on their friends, family and themselves. As a result, I came away still enjoying Fitzgerald's books, but not really liking either the man or his wife. Would recommend this book if you are a Fitzgerald fan though
