

Context: F. Scott Fitzgerald

his life, work & place
American Literature



F. Scott Fitzgerald occupies a central place within the canon of twentieth century American Literature; texts like *The Great Gatsby* and *The Damned and the Beautiful* are seminal moments in the emergence of a powerful and tragic body of work.

Fitzgerald was born on September 24th 1896 at the turn of the twentieth century. His early life witnessed a broad array of major historical events that came to encapsulate the sense of history that underpins many of his novels; the sinking of The Titanic, The First World War, and later, The Wall Street Crash all came to shape a view of life that is explored both viscerally and painfully in Fitzgerald's writing.

Of the five novels that Fitzgerald wrote, all of them, to one degree or another, are informed by arguably the greatest influence on Fitzgerald's development as an author: the Jazz Age. This period in Fitzgerald's life – that marked the collapse of old, traditional morality and values in favour of an obsession with free market capitalism – was central to the crafting of his characters and the events of his narratives.

Fitzgerald's life was marked by excess and tragedy: he was an alcoholic for much of his life and his wife, Zelda, suffered from schizophrenia. However, this hides a life lived in celebrity during the 1920s in New York; Fitzgerald and his wife were major players in New York society, thanks, in part, to the cultural elite's reception of his novel.

However, Fitzgerald also spent much of his time in financial difficulty having to fund his alcoholism and his wife's medical care. In turn, Fitzgerald had to borrow money from his literary agent who eventually refused to help him, leaving the author to abandon his long-time friend. Arguably, this points to one of the many complex themes of his novels: the idea that money is itself an evil that pervades much that is good; certainly in *Gatsby* it brings the characters little by way of happiness,

Fitzgerald died on December 21st 1940.