



## Flappers and Philosophers

*F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896 - 1940)*

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Throughout his career F. Scott Fitzgerald excelled at the short form, the short story. Indeed when his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, failed to garner the audience, sales or interest, his earlier novels had achieved with their almost effortless ascent up the best seller list, Fitzgerald was thrown back on his talents as a short story writer and the significant market for such writing in the weekly magazines that were a staple of life in America in the 1920's. As Fitzgerald said, he labored over his novels, but the short stories came whole and complete and only required a kind of automatic transcription with one or, at the most, two revisions. *The Saturday Evening Post* paid mightily for Fitzgerald's output, and this income kept him and Zelda solvent on their high profile march through the Roaring 20's. ***Flappers and Philosophers*** is Fitzgerald's first collection

of short stories, written during the years before and concurrent with his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, and the stories deal with many of the same themes of that bright era, complete with its darker shadows born of that generation's overt, even rebellious pursuit of pleasure, not without the bad seeds of greed and the hyper-consciousness of one's social status in a stratified post-war America.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1896, **F. Scott Fitzgerald** is the archetype of the youthful, handsome, tragic, Romantic American writer burdened with the heat of genius and the sting of excessive appetite. Fitzgerald was America's first pop-star writer. He ushered in the Jazz Age with his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* and a collection of short stories, *Flappers and Philosophers*. Fitzgerald attended Princeton, where he wrote and drank incessantly, did poorly, and made friends with the literary critic, Edmund Wilson, the man Fitzgerald called his aesthetic conscience. He did not graduate, but entered the Army in 1917 as World War I came to its close. Assigned to Camp Sheridan outside Montgomery, Alabama, he met and pursued Zelda Sayre (1900-1948), the golden girl from Alabama who possessed Fitzgerald from first sight. He courted her, and they were engaged until she broke it off, concerned that the writer and ad man would not be able to provide for her. Fitzgerald returned to his Minnesota home where he rewrote his first novel, which Scribner & Sons accepted for publication in 1919. With the success of *Paradise* Zelda agreed to marry the young writer. Fitzgerald and Zelda moved to Paris where he became friends with Hemingway and other ex-patriots. He wrote five novels in all. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is considered his masterpiece and *The Last Tycoon* was published posthumously. Fitzgerald had been alcoholic since his college days, and during the 20's his legendary drinking damaged his health. In his mid-forties he suffered two severe heart attacks, the second taking his life at the home of Sheila Graham on December 21, 1940. His influence on writers is felt to this day. Despite all the press and stories and legends, F. Scott Fitzgerald was "all that" and more. In effect Fitzgerald was better than Fitzgerald.