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Who Wrote The The Great Gatsby

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795582414897500

Introduction: Unmasking the Author of a Masterpiece

When readers first encounter the shimmering, tragic world of East Egg and West Egg, they often ask: **Who wrote The Great Gatsby?** The answer is F. Scott Fitzgerald, a name that has become synonymous with the Jazz Age and American literary modernism. But knowing the author's name is only the beginning. Fitzgerald's life, his creative process, and the turbulent era that shaped him are all woven into the fabric of this novel. Understanding who wrote The Great Gatsby means delving into the mind of a man who captured the glittering promise and the crushing disillusionment of the American Dream. This article will explore the author's biography, the writing of the novel, its reception, and its enduring legacy, all while answering the central question: who wrote The Great Gatsby, and what makes the answer so significant?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man Behind the Myth

Early Life and Literary Ambitions

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896, in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Named after his distant relative, the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner," Fitzgerald grew up in a middle-class family that often felt the pinch of financial insecurity. His father's business failures and his mother's eccentricities instilled in him a lifelong obsession with wealth and status—themes that would dominate his writing. He attended Princeton University, where he focused on writing for the campus literary magazine and the Princeton Triangle Club. Though he never graduated, his time at Princeton gave him material for his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920).

The Rise to Fame

With the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald became an instant celebrity. He married the glamorous Zelda Sayre, and the couple became icons of the Roaring Twenties, living extravagantly in New York, Paris, and the French Riviera. Fitzgerald wrote short stories prolifically to fund their lavish lifestyle, but his true ambition lay in crafting a serious literary work. That ambition culminated in **The Great Gatsby**, a novel he began writing in 1922, determined to capture the spirit of his age.

The Writing of The Great Gatsby

A Deliberate and Painstaking Process

Fitzgerald referred to the writing of **The Great Gatsby** as "a creative agony." He started with a false start, discarding an early version titled *Trimalchio in West Egg*. The title referenced a character from Petronius's *Satyricon*, a lavish party host whose wealth proves fleeting—a direct parallel to Jay Gatsby. Over the course of nine months, Fitzgerald revised the manuscript extensively, cutting scenes, sharpening dialogue, and refining the novel's poetic prose. He wrote most of the novel in 1924 while living in the French Riviera, often sending drafts to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, whose suggestions shaped the final version.

Inspirations and Influences

The question “who wrote The Great Gatsby” is inseparable from the question “what inspired him?” Fitzgerald drew heavily from his own experiences. The character of Jay Gatsby is partly based on a real bootlegger and party host Fitzgerald met on Long Island, but also on Fitzgerald himself—a man who reinvented his identity to win the love of a woman from a higher social class. The Buchanan family mirrored the wealthy, old-money elite Fitzgerald encountered through Zelda. The novel’s setting, the fictional West Egg and East Egg, was drawn from the real communities of Great Neck and Sands Point on Long Island, where the Fitzgeralds lived briefly.

The Novel's Structure and Style

Fitzgerald chose Nick Carraway as the narrator, a technique that allowed him to both participate in and observe the drama. The novel’s tight structure—only nine chapters, each advancing the plot with economy—was a deliberate departure from the longer, looser novels of the era. Fitzgerald’s prose, with its famous concluding lines about beating on “boats against the current,” achieved a lyrical quality that elevated the story beyond a simple tale of love and loss.

Initial Reception and the Struggle for Recognition

A Commercial Disappointment

When **The Great Gatsby**was published in April 1925, it received mixed reviews. Some critics praised its style and originality, while others found it superficial and lacking in moral substance. The novel sold fewer than 25,000 copies in its first year—far below Fitzgerald’s previous works. This commercial failure devastated Fitzgerald, who had hoped the novel would cement his reputation as a serious artist. He blamed the public’s taste for fluff, the book’s flat cover, and even the title. Financially, he was forced to return to writing short stories for magazines, a grind he despised.

The Critical Turnaround

Despite its initial lackluster reception, a small but influential group of writers and critics recognized the novel’s brilliance. T.S. Eliot called it “the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James.” John Peale Bishop praised its “extraordinary vitality.” But widespread acclaim would take decades. Fitzgerald died in 1940, believing himself a failure. He never saw the novel’s rise to canonical status.

The Resurrection of The Great Gatsby

World War II and the Rise of the Novel

During World War II, the U.S. government distributed millions of paperback books to servicemen through the Armed Services Editions. **The Great Gatsby**was one of these titles. Soldiers read it in barracks and foxholes, and many connected with its themes of longing and loss. After the war, a new generation of readers embraced the novel. By the 1950s, it was being taught in universities. Scholars began to analyze its symbolism—the green light, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, the valley of ashes—and to appreciate its critique of the American Dream.

Modernism and Legacy

Today, **The Great Gatsby**is considered a masterpiece of American modernist literature. It is required reading in most high schools and colleges. The question “who wrote The Great Gatsby” is no longer asked out of ignorance but as an entry point into a discussion of Fitzgerald’s life and art. The novel has been adapted into several films, an opera, and countless stage productions. Its phrases have entered the cultural lexicon: “old sport,” “the green light,” “borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

The Author's Influence and Enduring Fascination

Fitzgerald's Voice in Context

Understanding who wrote The Great Gatsby also requires understanding the literary context of the 1920s. Fitzgerald was part of the "Lost Generation," a group of expatriate writers including Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound. Yet Fitzgerald's voice remained uniquely American. He captured the rhythm of Jazz Age speech, the restlessness of the newly wealthy, and the emptiness behind the party lights. His own life—the alcoholism, the strained marriage, the financial ruin—mirrored the tragic arc of his fictional hero.

The Biographical Lens

Readers often see Gatsby as a version of Fitzgerald himself: a man from humble origins who reinvents himself to win a woman symbolizing the upper class (Zelda). But Fitzgerald was also Nick Carraway—the observer, the moral conscience. This duality enriches the novel. When we ask "who wrote The Great Gatsby," we acknowledge that the author poured his own contradictions into the story, creating a work that feels both intimately personal and universally relevant.

Key Themes That Reflect the Author's Concerns

The American Dream

Central to the novel is the critique of the American Dream. Gatsby's belief that he can repeat the past and transcend his origins leads to his downfall. Fitzgerald, who had achieved success only to watch it evaporate, understood the dream's fragility. His novel argues that class barriers are insurmountable and that the pursuit of wealth often corrupts the pursuer.

Love and Obsession

Gatsby's love for Daisy Buchanan is less about Daisy herself than about an idealized past. Fitzgerald's own relationship with Zelda was similarly complicated—rooted in obsession and mutual destruction. The novel explores how love can become a destructive force when it is tied to social status and nostalgia.

Wealth and Morality

The Buchanans represent the old money elite, careless and destructive. Gatsby, despite his illegal wealth, possesses a moral innocence that the old guard lacks. Fitzgerald's treatment of wealth is nuanced; he was simultaneously attracted to and repelled by the rich. This ambivalence gives the novel its moral complexity.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Author

- Did F. Scott Fitzgerald write any other novels? Yes, he wrote four completed novels: This Side of Paradise (1920), The Beautiful and Damned (1922), The Great Gatsby (1925), and Tender Is the Night (1934). A fifth, The Last Tycoon, was unfinished at his death.
- Why is The Great Gatsby often called the "Great American Novel"? Its exploration of the American Dream, its lyrical prose, and its encapsulation of the Jazz Age have led many critics to award it that title.
- How long did it take Fitzgerald to write The Great Gatsby? He worked on it for about two and a half years, from mid-1922 to early 1925, with intensive drafting in 1924.
- Did Fitzgerald see The Great Gatsby as a success? No, he was disappointed by its sales and initial critical reception, though he defended the novel's quality privately.

Conclusion: The Author and His Enduring Novel

The answer to the question **who wrote The Great Gatsby** is F. Scott Fitzgerald—a man who lived the high life and low life of the 1920s and transformed both into art. His novel, overlooked in its time, now stands as a towering achievement of American literature. Fitzgerald's story is one of genius, struggle, and eventual vindication. The Great Gatsby remains not only a compelling narrative but also a timeless meditation on hope,

wealth, and the human capacity for self-deception. When readers pick up the slim green-covered book, they are holding a piece of Fitzgerald's soul—a testament to the power of a writer who dared to dream and to warn against the dangers of dreaming too extravagantly. In understanding who wrote The Great Gatsby, we understand a great deal about America itself.

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