



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.4.,2016 (Oct.-Dec. )



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

THREE BIOGRAPHIES AND THREE PERCEPTIONS OF ONE AUTHOR

SUMAN SWATI<sup>1</sup>, Dr. SHUCHI SRIVASTAVA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Associate Professor

MANIT (Department of HSS)



ABSTRACT

It has been noticed that the observation, understanding and analysis of the authors change the representation of the life history of the same person.

F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered to be a great chronicler of the Modern Era of English Literature. There was always something fabulous about F. Scott Fitzgerald. He experienced swift rise to fame with the publication of "This Side of Paradise" (1920). Ironically, the most fabulous happening of all is the fame that has come to him after his death. After a revival of interest in his works during the 1950s, his books have sold over 8 million copies. "The Great Gatsby" still sells 300, 000 copies a year. Apart from his own works, there have been three important biographies on him. The first one is 'The Far Side of Paradise' by Arthur Mizener, the second is 'Scott Fitzgerald' by Andrew Turnbull and the third one is 'Some Sort of Epic Grandeur' by Mathew J. Bruccoli.

All the three biographies are very different in their approach and depiction of the author's life due to the perceptual differences of the biographers. The reader can very clearly notice the difference between the representations of the life history of the same person in all the three biographies.

This paper will try to highlight the perceptual differences of all the three biographies, 'The Far Side of Paradise', 'Scott Fitzgerald' and 'Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald'.

Keywords: Biography, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Mizener, Turnbull, Bruccoli, Perceptions.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

A biography is a detailed description of a person's life. It involves more than just the basic facts like education, work, relationships, and death, but also portrays a subject's experience of these life events. A biography presents a subject's life story, highlighting various aspects of his or her life, including intimate details of experience and may include an analysis of the subject's personality. It depends on the writer, how she/he perceives a subject's life.

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald is considered to be a great chronicler of the modern era of English literature. He was born on September 24, 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was married to Zelda Sayre. He is famous for his depictions of the Jazz Age (the 1920's) and his classic novel 'The Great Gatsby'. His private life also became almost as celebrated as his novels. There was always something fabulous about Fitzgerald. He

experienced swift rise to fame with the publication of his first novel in 1920 'This Side of Paradise'. Ironically, the most famous happening of all, is the fame that has come to him after his death. After a revival of interest in his works during the 1950's, his books have sold over 8 million copies. 'The Great Gatsby' still sells 300,000 copies a year.

Fitzgerald died of a heart attack in 1940, at the age of 44. Apart from his own works, there have been three important biographies on him. The first one is 'The Far Side of Paradise' by Arthur Mizener, the second is 'Scott Fitzgerald' by Andrew Turnbull and the third is 'This Sort of Epic Grandeur' by Matthew J. Bruccoli.

All the three biographies are very different in their approaches to reveal and depict the author's life due to the perceptual differences of the biographers. The reader can very clearly notice the difference between the representations of the life history of the same person in all the three biographies.

#### **The Far Side of Paradise**

It was written by Arthur Mizener in 1951. It was the first biography on F. Scott Fitzgerald to be published and is credited with renewing public interest in the subject. It deals very openly with Scott's literary works, his alcoholism and Zelda's Schizophrenia. In 'The Far Side of Paradise', Mizener very convincingly points out the situations where Fitzgerald had his emotions and events of his own life and also where he pursues fears and uncertainties beyond his actual experience.

This biography wavers at the border between criticism and biography. As criticism, it is inadequate, for its standards are too biographical; as biography it suffers equally, for its focus is too literary. Mizener treats Fitzgerald's writing too much as behavior and too little as literature. The dialogue and minute personal details necessary to produce a well compiled biography are too often replaced by detailed analysis of the novelist's literary production and correspondence.

**Scott Fitzgerald** is written by Andrew Turnbull and was first published in 1962. This biography comes close to being an ideal literary biography, though it isn't the perfect. At times Turnbull quotes lengthy documents that are less revealing than he believes. Turnbull's biography has grace, compassion and exceptional feel for Fitzgerald and the complex of human relationships in which he was enmeshed.

Turnbull had a very close acquaintance with Fitzgerald, he recalls that when he was 11 years old Fitzgerald rented La Paix, an old house on the Turnbull's country place north of Baltimore. He stayed there for a year and a half. Turnbull's idol worship is evident in his positive portrayal of Fitzgerald who became a consultive presence in Turnbull's life. Turnbull, in his biography, shows powerful empathy for the dark periods through which Fitzgerald passed. Precious few biographies have had personal knowledge of their subjects, and Turnbull was one of the precious few. He turns his own friendship with Fitzgerald to his advantage over and over again.

**Some Sort of Epic Grandeur:** "I am not great man, but sometimes I think the impersonal and objective quality of my talent, and the sacrifices of it, in pieces to preserve its essential value has some sort of epic grandeur".

This biography, written by Matthew J Bruccoli, was first published in 1981. Bruccoli has spent much of his time in researching and writing on Fitzgerald. He has some sort of passion for Fitzgerald and he feels that he has written the "definitive" biography. According to him, his biography contains 'more facts'. It brings in new evidence by research on Fitzgerald over the past twenty years. His primary aim in writing this biography is to set the record straight, to de-mythify the man in order to refocus attention on his writings.

**Fitzgerald as a moralist:** Fitzgerald's nature was divided, partly he was an enthusiastic, romantic young man and partly he was a "spoiled priest". This division of nature shows itself in nearly every aspect of his life. The 'spoiled priest' struggled throughout his life to understand. When he was young, this struggle sometimes gave Fitzgerald an almost priggish air. Once, for instance, when he was an undergraduate, he watched a friend leave a group of classmates on Nassau Street to pursue a young lady. After a long silence one of his friend said, "That's one thing, Fitzgerald had never done!" At the end of his life, Fitzgerald himself wrote to his daughter: "Sometimes I wish I had gone along with [Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hart and that gang], but I guess I am too much a moralist at heart, and really want to preach at people in some acceptable form, rather than to entertain." (TFSOP, 66)

Fitzgerald wanted to become a priest. Brucoli mentions this in his biography. Under the influence of Father Fay and Leslie, Scott sporadically talked about entering priesthood to become an American equivalent of the English priest-novelist Robert Hugh Benson. Fitzgerald once wrote to Wilson, "I am ashamed to say that my Catholicism is scarcely more than a memory- no that's wrong it's more than that; at any rate I go not to church, not mumble stray nothings over chrystalline beads." (TFSOP, 92, 93)

Mizener closely observes that this aspect of Fitzgerald is also reflected in his novels. ".....A chorus girl named Axia, laid her blond head on Amory's shoulder and the youth immediately rushed away in a frenzy of terror and suffered from hallucinations for forty-eight hours." (TFSOP, 65)

Turnbull also mentions this dilemma of Fitzgerald when he wrote letters to Ginevra, his first love, he talked of becoming a priest. Whereas, Brucoli says, "whether or not Fitzgerald ever seriously considered entering the priesthood, he was searching for some ideal, a concept of perfection, to which he could dedicate himself." (SSOEG,55)

#### **Fitzgerald, a man divided**

After the marriage of Fitzgerald and Zelda, the first few months in New York were heady. Fitzgerald 23 and Zelda 19, were celebrities- young, handsome, rich, with no authority over them. Gradually, the division in Fitzgerald's nature was being reinforced by the life they were living. Max Perkins, his publisher, once said, 'Scott was extravagant, but not like her; money went through her fingers like water; she wanted everything; she kept him writing for the magazines'. (TFSOP, 134) But for Fitzgerald Brucoli says, "money, he realized early, brought prestige and power; it was the sign of success and signified that the man who had it, had "made it"".

Mizener tried to show this division in Fitzgerald by citing examples from the characters in his works, whereas Turnbull uses his research and provides proofs to what Mizener says in his biography. Fitzgerald once wrote to his daughter in 1938-"When I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me. I was sorry immediately I had married her. But I was a man divided-she wanted me to work too much for her and not enough for my dream". (TFSOP, 134/SF,116)

Fitzgerald realized that Zelda was not a good housekeeper. She was bored when he was writing and would go off by herself to seek amusement; which made Fitzgerald worried about what she was doing and hence he couldn't write. They never had a permanent home. They kept travelling from one place to the other. This life made the proper operation of a household difficult at best. They spent money recklessly and led an extravagant life. Yet, at the centre of all this confusion, there persisted in Fitzgerald the hard core of his dead earnestness about being a good writer. When he was not working, he was depressed, however not simply because of his failure to write serious fiction, or indeed to write at all; he also felt that he was steadily deteriorating. "I wish I were twenty-two again," he said, "with only my dramatic and feverishly enjoyed miseries. My work is the only thing that makes me happy". Turnbull tries to portray a different aspect of Zelda and her attitude towards Fitzgerald's work. In the words of Fitzgerald, "A strange thing was I could never convince her that I was a first-rate writer. She knew I wrote well but she didn't recognize how well." (SF, 261) She never ever tried to understand or support him when he was trying to change himself into a serious writer from a popular one. Brucoli too, supports Turnbull in this respect. Writing stories provided Fitzgerald with no satisfaction and generated guilt because he knew that his chance for greatness depended on novels. Even if Zelda understood her husband's potential, she did not share his contempt for his short stories and was pleased that they brought in so much money. The cycle of extravagance kept Fitzgerald in bondage to the magazines and blocked his literary success.

#### **Fitzgerald and alcohol**

By 1923-24, Fitzgerald had progressed from a party drinker to a steady drinker with increasingly erratic behavior. Although Fitzgerald has the reputation of being one of the heaviest drinkers among American writers, his tolerance for alcohol was low and he became drunk on relatively small amounts of alcohol. According to Turnbull, Fitzgerald described the pleasurable effects he felt at a certain stage of drunkenness: "The drink made past happy things contemporary with the present, as if they were still going on,

contemporary even with the future as if they were about to happen again.”. (SSOEG,181). Brucoli defends the author’s habit of drinking by saying that, there is evidently a connection between alcoholism and the creative personality; but it remains unclear whether writers drink because they are writers. Writing and drinking are both forms of exhibitionism and escapism. Fitzgerald was convinced that alcoholism was necessary for his creative process. He said to Laura, “ Drink heightens feeling. When I drink, it heightens my emotions and I put it in a story. But then it becomes hard to keep reason and emotion balanced. My stories written when sober are stupid- like the fortune-telling one. It was all reasoned out, not felt”. (SF, 259) Whereas Mizener shows a different side of the coin. He says that Fitzgerald became very difficult when he was drinking as he became more unhappy over his inability not to do so. The matter got worse when he was not drunk because then he could clearly see what was happening. Zelda’s mental breakdown and the suffering that he was going through, had their effect on Fitzgerald. His drinking increased and it made him subjects to fits of nervous temper and depression. His drinking affected his work too. He later admitted to Perkins that drinking had interfered with his work on ‘Tender is The Night’ and marred the pacing of the novel: “It has become increasingly plain to me that the very excellent organization of a long book or the finest perceptions and judgment in time of revision do not go well with liquor. A short story can be written on a bottle, but for a novel you need the mental speed that enables you to keep the whole pattern in your head and ruthlessly sacrifice the sideshows”. (SSOEG, 341) Fitzgerald was also suggested to undergo treatment for his drinking to which he declined, partly from pride and partly from the artist’s instinctive distrust of having his inner workings tampered with. He was afraid that psychiatric treatment might change him from an emotional person to an analytical one.

#### **Fitzgerald and Zelda**

Fitzgerald married Zelda in April 3, 1920, just after the publication of his first novel ‘This Side of Paradise’. However, they met first in June 1918. He had mentioned in his September 1918 ledger that it was not the love at first sight. He had decided to marry Zelda after two months of their first encounter. According to Brucoli, Zelda possessed the qualities that Fitzgerald required in a girl. She was beautiful, independent, socially secure and responsible to his ambitions. More than any girl he had ever known, Zelda shared his romantic egotism. She and Fitzgerald wanted the same things- metropolitan glamour, success and fame. Although, Fitzgerald later claimed that she was sexually reckless when he met her. Zelda was a person who never cared what people thought of her. Mizener says, because she attracted him enormously, because she was desired by many, because she seemed to feel exactly as he did, she had the courage to do what she felt. All these qualities made Fitzgerald find thrill in her company . Again in the words of Andrew Turnbull, Zelda was both an inspiration and a torment. Her pranks gave him much of his material. Her touch of fantasy, her shrewd strangeness added spice to his wonderful perceptiveness. All the three biographers have mentioned that Zelda’s short term affair with the French naval flyer, Edouard Josanne had shattered Fitzgerald momentarily. He really believed in love, in what two people can build against the world’s cheap skepticism. Fitzgerald had written in his notebooks: “That September 1924, I knew something had happened that would never be repaired”. (TFSOP, 178) On the other hand, Mathew J Brucoli, in his biography gives very minute details about Zelda. He mentions that Sara Mayfield, one of Zelda’s childhood friends, stated that Zelda had three abortions during her marriage. However, later on Zelda had undergone an operation to enable her to become pregnant, which resulted in a lingering infection. Brucoli also mentions that Zelda had attempted suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills, after the incident of Josanne. On Zelda’s mental illness, both Turnbull and Mizener have mentioned that Fitzgerald was very supportive during the bad phase. He was working on short stories to get instant money in order to support the bills of Zelda’s hospital, which delayed the publication of ‘Tender is The Night’. However Brucoli says that at a later stage of Zelda’s illness, Fitzgerald complained about her withdrawal from family life at ‘LA Paix’ In his memo, Fitzgerald writes “ As I got feeling worse, Zelda got mentally better, not it seemed to me as did she was also coming to the conclusion she had it on me, if I broke down it justified her whole life-not a very healthy thought to live with about your own wife. Finally, four days ago, I told her frankly+furiously that had got + was getting a rotten deal trading my health for her insanity and from now on I was going to Bedlam for all I cared”. (SSOEG, 342) Mizener mentions one

incident showing the other side of their relationship. When Fitzgerald went to meet Zelda and took her to the Flynn's, Mrs. Flynn saw that Zelda was looking old and ill and after walking for a while, she started to dance. "I shall never forget," she said, "the tragic, frightful look on [Scott's] face as he watched her.....They had loved each other. Now it was dead. But he still loved that love and hated to give up- that was what he continued to nurse and cherish". (TFSOP, 293)Whereas Turnbull says that Zelda had no conception of what Fitzgerald had sacrificed to be where he was-of his long, lonely struggle against other finely-gifted authors. Fitzgerald felt that she had swallowed him up, or more precisely, that he had allowed himself to be swallowed. He once told a friend in a moment's bitterness, "Can you imagine what it's like to be tied to a dead hand?" (SF, 254)

#### **Fitzgerald and Hemingway**

Fitzgerald met Hemingway in Paris in 1925. He had read Hemingway's stories in magazines and had referred his name to his publisher, Perkins. Brucoli mentions in his biography that the only record of their first encounter is in Hemingway's 'A Moveable Feast', where he describes Fitzgerald as a fool, a nuisance and a drunk. According to all the three biographers, they both were very different except that they shared the same Midwestern background and the passion for writing. Mizener and Turnbull mention that Hemingway was a complex individual who had adopted the stance of a simple one. He had used many instances of their meetings in his fictional works. Fitzgerald always had appreciated and helped Hemingway in his works. After reading 'The Sun Also Rises' Fitzgerald mentioned to Gerald Murphy, "Earnest's book of stories is so much better than mine". With the success of 'A Farewell to Arms', popularly as well artistically Hemingway began to feel himself eclipsed. As per Turnbull, Fitzgerald gave the impression that he thought Hemingway's talent was of a higher order. He was very proud of their friendship and obsessed by Hemingway being a man of action and prowess, who yet embodied the self-contradictions of the artist. Fitzgerald felt that "Hemingway was double-edged: on the one hand, warm, gentle, generous, humble, and kind; on the other, arrogant, cruel, *ruse*".

Their relationship was complicated by Hemingway's intense dislike of Zelda Fitzgerald, whom he described a "crazy" and a distraction to her husband's writing. The literary geniuses drifted apart during the late-1920s and Hemingway later bashed Fitzgerald in print on more than one occasion. On July 12 1937, they both met at the home of Fredric March and this was the last time Fitzgerald saw Hemingway because he had understood that their close friendship was over and it was as good as finished which is proved in the following lines by Fitzgerald: "I talk with the authority of failure,--Ernest with the authority of success. We could never sit across the table again." (SSOEG, 421)

#### **Conclusion**

All the three biographies have been written with different approaches and perspectives. All of them deal in detail with the life and works of Fitzgerald. Arthur Mizener was the first person to write his biography. He had gathered information through his own research and the materials to which he had access to. Whereas, Andrew Turnbull has written a very precise biography by covering the major events and incidents of Fitzgerald's life. His mother was a friend of Fitzgerald, who gave him firsthand information about his life. He had tried to focus on the personality of Fitzgerald, the Fitzgerald as he is remembered. According to Mathew J Brucoli, he has tried to rescue events from myth-making process that encapsulates Fitzgerald. He had access to materials not even mentioned by Mizener or Turnbull, like a forty two page letter, Zelda wrote to Fitzgerald from Prangins in July 1930. Perhaps the most fascinating and revealing new document, is the transcript of a joint session Scott and Zelda had with Zelda's psychiatrist Dr. Thomas Rennie. Fitzgerald's life was so fascinating and interesting that two more biographies have been written in recent times. 'Fool For Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald' by Scott Donaldson and the other 'F. Scott Fitzgerald' written by Andre Levot and they might showcase a very different aspect of Fitzgerald.

#### **Works cited**

Brucoli Matthew J., Some Sort Of Epic Grandeur, The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald (University of South Carolina Press, 2002)

Mizener Arthur, The Far Side of Paradise (The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1965)

Turnbull Andrew, Scott Fitzgerald (Grove Press, New York, 2001)

---