This collection brings together five essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald by the biographer and critic Scott Donaldson (1928–2020). The first two essays in the collection—“Tender Is the Night: The War Between the Sexes” and “Gatsby and the American Dream”—are previously unpublished. “A Fitzgerald Autobiography” (2002) and “Scott and Dottie” (2016) are previously uncollected. “Summer of ’24: Zelda’s Affair” is reprinted from Scott’s book The Impossible Craft (2015).

Scott devoted a substantial portion of his career to the study of Fitzgerald’s life and works. His fourth book, Fool for Love (1983), is one of the best biographies we have of the author; two other books, Hemingway vs. Fitzgerald (1999) and Fitzgerald and Hemingway: Works and Days (2009), examine the contentious friendship between the two writers and bring together Scott’s essays on their lives and careers. He continued to think and write about Fitzgerald’s works until the end, taking fresh approaches to the novels and stories and drawing on his knowledge of Fitzgerald’s life and writing habits for new insights.

The first and longest of the essays here, “Tender Is the Night: The War Between the Sexes,” is in effect a short book about one of the central issues in Fitzgerald’s last completed novel—the contest between men and women for dominance in a marriage or a relationship. The second piece, “Gatsby and the American Dream,” is a perceptive essay about the themes in Fitzgerald’s most widely read novel, with special attention to the importance of money and status in American society. The third essay, “Summer of ’24: Zelda’s Affair,” examines Zelda Fitzgerald’s romance with Edouard Jozan, the French aviator she met on the Riviera while her husband was composing The Great Gatsby. The fourth piece, “Scott and Dottie,” tells the story of the friendship and (perhaps) brief affair between Fitzgerald and the writer Dorothy Parker. And the final essay, “A Fitzgerald Autobiography,” sets forth suggestions for assembling the memoir that Fitzgerald thought of writing in the late 1930s, in the years shortly before his death.

The pieces in this collection demonstrate Scott’s many talents. The essay on Tender Is the Night is the best close reading of the novel that I have seen. The
interpretation of *The Great Gatsby* is an expansive and illuminating overview of the characters and themes in that novel. The two pieces that follow—on Zelda Fitzgerald and Edouard Jozan, and on Fitzgerald and Dorothy Parker—show Scott as a biographer, marshalling evidence and testimony, assessing their value, and fashioning a narrative from what he has discovered. The fifth essay, on Fitzgerald’s never-written autobiography, is speculative and stimulating; it prompts the reader to think about the book we might have today, had Fitzgerald lived long enough to put that book into print.

Scott was an excellent scholar and a good man, generous with his time and knowledge. (See the obituaries in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 6 December 2020, and the *New York Times*, 29 December 2020.) He brought a newspaperman’s curiosity to his work and an open, accessible style to his writing. One always felt in good hands when reading a book or an essay by Scott. His prose was clear and direct, with personal touches throughout. He brought the reader along with him in each investigation, following the leads and weighing the evidence. Of his many books, the two I liked best were his biographies of John Cheever and Edwin Arlington Robinson. In writing Cheever’s life, Scott overcame obstacles placed in his path by the author’s heirs. In the Robinson biography he dealt with a man who lived an unusually quiet life, an artist to whom not very much happened. Scott brought both writers to life, blending their careers with interpretations of their writings, not just of the best-known pieces but of the entire oeuvre of each author.

I admired Scott’s commitment to his work after retirement. He took time for bridge and tennis but continued to devote his primary energies to his writing. He was open to new ideas about the authors who interested him. He liked to encourage young scholars who, he knew, would benefit from his example and continue his work. He will be greatly missed in the Fitzgerald field and in American literary scholarship. He was a perceptive critic, an excellent close reader, and a first-rate biographer. He leaves behind a substantial body of work that will continue to inform and influence students, teachers, and scholars.

JAMES L. W. WEST III
SPARKS PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, EMERITUS
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY