STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN
THE NOVELS OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North
Texas State Teachers College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Sidney L. Burks, B.A.

158376
San Angelo, Texas
August, 1948


## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION AND METHOD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>THIS SIDE OF PARADISE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Structure of This Side of Paradise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Emergence of Fitzgerald's Early</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Emergence of the Fitzgerald Hero</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Socio-historical Value of This Side of Paradise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in This Side of Paradise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Structure of The Beautiful and Damned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development in Theme and Characterization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from This Side of Paradise to The Beautiful and Damned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in The Beautiful and Damned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>THE GREAT GATSBY</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Structure of The Great Gatsby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Thematic Aspect of The Great Gatsby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of Themes and Characterization from The Beautiful and Damned to The Great Gatsby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>TENDER IS THE NIGHT</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Structure of Tender Is the Night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in Tender Is the Night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

Given a proper understanding of Fitzgerald's themes, the structure of his novels is available to anyone with sufficient interest, industry, and critical equipment to understand it. But because there is always an interaction between the structure of a novel and its meaning, they have to be studied together for either to be understood. I have attempted to examine the structure of Fitzgerald's four novels, and the fragment of a novel which was published after his death as The Last Tycoon, with sufficient care to discover the meaning of the individual works and also the large implications of Fitzgerald's work as a whole, the element which Henry James called "the figure in the carpet."

In analyzing the novels, I have paid particular attention to Fitzgerald's development in artistry, making extensive use of his note-books and certain of his autobiographical writings, and of a number of the short stories which are directly connected with the novels.

Since Fitzgerald's work is uneven in quality, critical labor upon it should be directed largely toward elucidating such themes and other aspects of his work as seem to be of
most enduring value and importance; but before this can be attempted, a number of obstacles, of greater or lesser importance, must be removed. Fitzgerald lived and wrote at that particular time during the twentieth century in which a remarkable change in American manners and moral attitudes was taking place; and Fitzgerald was acutely aware of the change. It had a direct and penetrating influence upon his writing, and it well may be that it wrecked his life and talent. The times were turbulent, and they are still fascinating to those interested in social growth and development. Although it would be disastrous to attempt to divorce criticism from the society with which it deals, yet the literary critic who is preoccupied with the social fabric tends irresistibly to move rather away from than towards the work of art which occasions his criticism. However interesting social developments may be, we must not allow those of the third decade of the century to obscure our understanding of one of the most perplexing, and at his best one of the finest, of its writers.

It is an ordinary procedure in literary criticism to explain the failings of a writer by ascribing them to the age in which he lived rather than to some flaw in his own artistic vision. In just such a manner Pope explains Shakespeare's failures and vulgarity. It is true, we believe, that no writer can disregard his own time; and certainly the greatest writers have been profoundly "of their times"; but we will attempt,
in the present study, to understand whatever phenomena we may find, whether they be of permanent or momentary interest, in terms of Fitzgerald's own development and artistry.

One of the most annoying difficulties in attempting to arrive at an intelligible interpretation of Fitzgerald's work is that he has been known by a number of tags which grew out of limited and special truths and later came to be understood as sufficient generalizations. Thus Fitzgerald has been tagged "the laureate of the Jazz Age." The phrase, if it means anything, means that in some way Fitzgerald expressed certain ideas and attitudes which his generation thought important. And in the phrase, there is perhaps an oblique recognition of one of the important qualities of his best work: his historical objectivity.

This tag, although it is the most common, is by no means the only one of its kind. H. L. Halsey has dubbed Fitzgerald the "god-father of the highball school of fiction"; but his summary dismissal of Fitzgerald as a serious author is weakened by his perfunctory misreading of This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned, and his apparent ignorance of the rest of Fitzgerald's work. Such epithets, damning themselves by their very aphoristic cleverness, betray a serious critical confusion: that of mistaking the social matrix which an author employs or describes for his

---

1 H. L. Halsey, Contemporary American Literature and Religion, pp. 143-145.
ideas. A novelist cannot be evaluated in accordance merely with the social element he describes. Fitzgerald, with his attachment to the social development of his time, his almost morbid dwelling upon glamour in its various manifestations and consequences, his lists of popular dance tunes, is often dismissed as unworthy of serious treatment. But, as Lionel Trilling has said, quoting the title of one of Yeats' books, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, "The phrase from Yeats, the connection of the 'dreams' with the 'responsibility' reminds us that we must guard against dismissing, with easy words about immaturity, Fitzgerald's preoccupation with the bright charm of his youth; for Yeats himself, a wiser man and wholly fulfilled, kept to the last of his old age his connection with his vanity of youth. A writer's days must be 'bound each to each' by his sense of life, and Fitzgerald the undergraduate was the father of the best in the man and the novelist." And, further, "The novelist of a certain kind, if he is to write about social life, must always risk a certain ambiguity in his social attitudes. The novel took its rise from a sense of a disrupted society and from the inter-penetration of classes, and the novelist must still live by his sense of class differences, and must be absorbed by them, as Fitzgerald was, even though he despise them, as Fitzgerald did." 

The same contemptuous view is held by Oscar Cargill,  

---

who, again, fails to support his remarks with evidence from Fitzgerald's work; and his remarks about Fitzgerald's literary relationships are unintelligible. In his chapter entitled "The Primitivists," Cargill states that Fitzgerald was influenced by Joyce. Even the most superficial examination of Fitzgerald's work reveals that his influences were all of a traditional sort; and his only similarity to Joyce is to be found in a single short story, "Absolution," which, it is true, has a number of things in common with Joyce's profound story "The Sisters." But as for an influence, there is no evidence, either in Fitzgerald's private papers or in his work, that one exists. Cargill makes no pretense of supporting his statement; it is made presumably because he wishes to consider Joyce in the following paragraph and thinks the remark an interesting transition.

These two critics are only representative; most of what has been written about Fitzgerald is of the same quality. Recently, it is true, Fitzgerald's work has had the benefit of examination by competent and thorough scholars and critics, John Berryman, Arthur Mizener, and Lionel Trilling among them. Even as early as 1925, certain critics, such as Edmund Wilson, T. S. Eliot, and Gilbert Seldes, understood and accurately described his work. But the overwhelming proportion of careless and unjustifiable description and generalization about his work to the competent criticism of it justifies

---

3Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America, p. 346.
careful analysis of his important works. The fact that, as John Dos Passos has said, Fitzgerald wrote not for highbrows or for lowbrows, but "for whoever had enough elementary knowledge of English to read through a page of a novel" has probably prevented his work from receiving the serious attention it deserves. 4

Method

One of the well-known shortcomings of modern criticism is the paucity of work in the field of the structure of the novel; it goes without saying that the definitive work on the subject has yet to be written. It has been necessary, therefore, to derive most of the methods of analysis for the present study from the small number of important works obtainable. Two central criteria in my analyses are point-of-view, for the concept of which I am indebted to Percy Lubbock; and the proportion and relationship of generalized to dramatic narrative in the novel for which I am indebted to E.G. Ballard's studies of the structure and criticism of prose fiction. 5 I have attempted to outline these two factors in each novel with the greatest precision possible. My method in the treatment of theme has not been formulated in a single volume, to my knowledge; I have


used elements from the Prefaces of Henry James, from E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, from Ford Madox Ford's *The English Novel*, from Edwin Muir's *Structure of the Novel*, and from a number of books and essays on structure, both of prose and verse, including those of T. S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks, William Empson, Norman MacClean, Kenneth Burke, and others.

In dealing with the individual works, I have attempted to analyze the structural elements first, and then to deduce the novel's meaning, or theme, making use, wherever it is possible, of the results of the analysis of structure. In addition, I have attempted to reveal the development of certain themes from one novel to another, and certain developments in characterization and general design. I have attempted to reveal the relationship of the structure and thematic aspects of the individual works to Fitzgerald's work as a whole. Finally, I have attempted to demonstrate Fitzgerald's relationships with certain of his peers and forebears in the American novel.

A biographical introduction is unnecessary, the principal subject matter of the study being an examination of elements intrinsic in Fitzgerald's fiction. But, for reasons I have endeavored to make clear, Fitzgerald's talent, temperament, and achievement are of such a nature that reference to certain facts of his life and times are occasionally illuminating.
I have attempted, therefore, to admit only a minimum of biography, and to introduce such material only when its relation to the actual work under scrutiny is direct and useful.
CHAPTER II

THIS SIDE OF PARADISE

Historical Background

During the time he was at Princeton, Fitzgerald wrote many stories of proms and debutantes which he collected into a "novel." Nothing came of the book, but it was the first version of This Side of Paradise. Little is known about it, but one of the few people who has seen it has remarked that "it was actually flat, something Scott's work almost never was."\(^1\) Fitzgerald left Princeton in November of his junior year, and although he returned to repeat this year, he remained only a few months, leaving in November of 1916 to join the army. While he was stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and later, at Camp Sheridan, Alabama, Fitzgerald reworked the material of his novel, and, with the assistance of Shane Leslie, submitted it to a publisher as The Romantic Egotist. It was rejected.

\(^1\)Quoted by Arthur Mizener, "F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Imaginative Possession of American Life," Sewanee Review, LIX (1946), 70. Mizener, who is now at work on the official biography of Fitzgerald, remarks: "This\(^{\text{the first/}}\) version appears to have contained almost nothing of what was in the final version except the early scenes of Amory's arrival at Princeton."
Of this, the second draft of the novel, Fitzgerald remarked in a letter to Edmund Wilson,

There are twenty-three chapters, all but five are written, and it is poetry, prose, vers libre, and every mood of temperamental temperature. It purports to be the picaresque ramble of one Stephen Palms from the San Francisco fire thru school, Princeton, to the end where at twenty-one he writes his autobiography at the Princeton aviation school. It shows traces of Tarkington, Chesterton, Chambers, Wells, Benson, (Robert Hugh), Rupert Brooke and includes Compton MacKenzielike love-affairs /sic/ and three psychic adventures including an encounter with the devil in a harlot's apartment."

It is possible to deduce, therefore, that The Romantic Egotist, the second of the three versions, was incorporated with very little alteration into This Side of Paradise, the principal alteration being, probably, the addition of Fitzgerald's experiences in New York immediately after he was discharged from the army.

While he was stationed at Camp Sheridan, however, Fitzgerald had met Zelda Sayre at the Governor's ball, and had fallen in love with her. Presumably the account of Amory Blaine's romance with Rosalind in This Side of Paradise is based upon Fitzgerald's own experiences with Zelda. She accepted his proposal of marriage, at any rate; but before Fitzgerald could be sent overseas, the war ended and he was discharged. He returned to New York and got a job as a copy writer in an advertising agency. His income at the time was ninety dollars a month. The occasional stories which he sold brought him very little. The love affair rocked along until

Zelda decided that, Fitzgerald being poor and New York being far from Montgomery, the whole affair had been a mistake. Behaving characteristically, Fitzgerald quit his job, went on a drunken spree, and left New York. During the following summer he repaired street cars in St. Paul and worked over his novel again. It was then that he changed its name to *This Side of Paradise*. Near the end of the summer, it was accepted by Charles Scribner's Sons, and, the nightmare of grief over, Fitzgerald immediately went to Alabama and married The Girl.

But the experience left a permanent mark upon Fitzgerald, and a great deal of his future writing is colored by it.³ He had always been fascinated by the rich, and he always had a suspicion that there was a certain moral looseness about them. And from this time on, his fascination and his suspicion grew.

Years later he was to write:

> The man with the jingle of money in his pocket who married the girl a year later would always cherish an abiding distrust, an animosity, toward the leisure class—not the conviction of a revolutionary, but the smoldering hatred of the peasant. In the years since then, I have never been able to stop wondering where my friends' money came from, nor to stop thinking that

³Amory Blaine's love affair with Rosalind is terminated because of his financial situation, and pressure is brought to bear upon the couple by Rosalind's parents. See "Five Weeks Later," a section of *This Side of Paradise*, pp. 203-211. The short story entitled "The Sensible Thing" recounts the same situation. *The Great Gatsby* reflects the experience in Gatsby's love affair with Daisy during the first World War; Daisy married Tom Buchanan, and Gatsby's attempt to recapture the past is the attempt to recapture Daisy.
at one time a sort of *droit de seigneur* might have been exercised to give one of them my girl.\(^4\)

It is only a step from this attitude to the conception of the theme of *The Great Gatsby*.

---

The Structure of *This Side of Paradise*

*This Side of Paradise* is ill-plotted, if it is plotted at all. An example of lack of direction is found in the chapter called "Narcissus Off Duty," in which an undergraduate literary conversation (which does nothing to reveal theme, plot, or character) is followed by Amory's writing of a poem, a conversation about handling ghosts, Amory's encounter with a distant cousin, and his half-hearted flirtation with her. These representative incidents are thrown one upon another pell-mell, unconnected by historical or generalized narrative. Based entirely upon unassimilated autobiographical material, *i.e.*, experiences of Fitzgerald the significance of which he had not the intellectual capacity to understand nor the technical capacity to represent, the novel is needlessly subjective and sentimental: it imposes upon the characters and demands of the reader emotions which are not evoked by the material presented. It is filled with fake literary references and with pseudo-intellectualism. For instance, such things as the following indicate Fitzgerald's ignorance of the books which he has his characters allude to:

Economics had interested him and he was turning socialist. Pacifism played in the back of his mind, and he read the Masses and Lyoff Tolstoi faithfully. 5

"Whitman is the man that attracts me."
"Whitman?"
"Yes; he's a definite ethical force. . . He's tremendous,--like Tolstoi. They both look things in the face, and, somehow, different as they are, stand for somewhat the same things." 6

It contains not only common English words misspelled, but also English words wildly misunderstood and misused. These could be documented at great length, and some of them have been. Franklin P. Adams filled several columns in listing misspellings. 7 As for misusages, it is scarcely possible to read ten consecutive pages in the book without becoming aware of them. And, finally, it is almost unbelievable now that a novel written by a man so completely innocent of the conditions and demands of the craft could ever have been published. The letter cited above mentions the verse which the novel contains, and the reader is convinced that the verse is there for no better reason than that Fitzgerald, as an undergraduate, wrote verse for his college literary magazine. There are dialogues which are obviously and embarrassingly derived from Shaw. The novel is a phantasmagoric chaos of incident and imitation; Fitzgerald's list of his influences may be taken literally and seriously. He seems to have been unaware, even instinctively, that a difference exists between historical, generalized narrative and immediate,

5 F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, p. 134.
6 Ibid., p. 135.
7 See Arthur Mizener, op. cit., p. 70.
dramatic narrative in the novel. These distinct blemishes--
the word seems too mild for such catastrophic and incredible
injustices to the form of the novel--have been praised by
even so eminent a critic as Carl Van Doren; but they make
very nearly impossible the task of analyzing the novel in-
telligibly. 8

Fitzgerald always depended upon his own experience
for his subject matter, and in his early work he was much
too close to that experience, with almost no equipment for
handling it. He commented upon this aspect in his later years,
although he could have hardly understood it at the time he
was writing This Side of Paradise:

So many writers, Conrad for instance, have been aided
by being brought up in a metier unrelated to literature. It
gives an abundance of material, and, more important,
an attitude from which to view the world. So much
writing nowadays suffers from lack of an attitude and
from sheer lack of any material, save what is accumu-
lated in a purely social life. The world, as a rule,
does not live on beaches and in country clubs. 9

This closeness accounts, in part at least, for the dis-
organization of a great deal of Fitzgerald's first novel.
It also accounts for the relative superiority of the first
part of the book over the last.

This Side of Paradise is divided into two books, and
the first of these two retains the earlier title, The
Romantic Egotist. The first forty pages of Book I contain

8Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, p. 173.

9F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, undated letter to
his daughter, p. 301.
a sketch of Amory Blaine's early youth and background. This section is written in fairly generalized and consecutive narrative, and, perhaps because Fitzgerald was far enough away from his material to be able to see it more clearly and judge it, it is the most mature portion of the novel. It is consistent in its point of view, and the characterization of Amory's mother, although inadequate, is clever and consistent. The section contains much that is trivial and merely clever, but nothing that is positively bad.

At the beginning of the chapter entitled "Spires and Gargoyles" the reader is introduced to a series of incidents which constitute the remainder of the book. The subject matter of these incidents seems to have been taken from the ordinary occurrences of Princeton life; and although they are sometimes interesting for sociological reasons, they have at best a doubtful connection with the ostensible theme of the novel. Actually, it is doubtful if This Side of Paradise has a theme. The individual incidents are ushered in and out, and are unconnected with one another. They are not ordered by any central intention. There is, it is true, a certain psychological consistency which will be considered in the following pages, and which carries over to a much more intelligible handling in The Beautiful and Damned. But the chain of incidents which makes up the greater portion of the earlier book has no direction or order, and, as a result, it is pointless to give it the benefit of structural examination.
Of course, it might be postulated that Fitzgerald intended to express the chaotic and formless quality of modern individual experience; there are many such notions touched upon in the conversations of the book.

The plot of *This Side of Paradise* is of relatively simple construction. Amory Blaine, the precocious, snobbish, and rich young man who is the central character, is taken through his childhood, his school days at St. Regis, and his college days at Princeton, to the short interruption of the war. Here we see clearly the limitations of Fitzgerald's dependency upon autobiographical material: Amory in the book is said to have got overseas; but, since Fitzgerald had not done so himself, this period is represented by a static interlude in the form of letters. After this interlude, we are introduced to a brief period in Amory's life in New York after the war. This portion of the novel is taken up largely by his two love affairs and his two periods of recuperation from them. Amory has expected all his life to inherit an immense fortune; actually, the fortune has been dissipated by the time his parents are dead. At the end of the book, Amory is penniless, and with a facile argument for socialism ostensibly brought about by his reduced circumstances, he goes out to meet his fate in the world. The book ends melodramatically; there is no real conclusion:

He stretched out his arms to the crystalline, radiant sky.
'\textit{I know myself,}' he cried, 'but that is all.}'

---

\textsuperscript{10} F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, p. 305.
Amory's education, presumably the principal subject matter of the book, consists for the most part in his dabbling in literature, writing sentimental verse, abundant examples of which are incorporated into the text, and in his dabbling in life, carrying on verbal love affairs with two debutantes.

The Emergence of Fitzgerald's Early Themes

There are, however, intimations of the themes to appear in the later novels. The obsession with the moral and physical aspects of the life of the rich has already appeared in at least two ways: Amory is heir to an immense American industrial fortune, and is placed, in the book, among the rich. There is no particular reason, other than that Fitzgerald was obsessed with the rich as a class, for the portrayal of Amory as a millionaire. One suspects, from time to time, that Amory's situation is a sort of rationalization of Fitzgerald's own situation. Fitzgerald would have liked to consider himself one of the rich, or to feel that his own poverty was, like Amory's, the result of similar circumstances.

The other indication of the obsession, however, is the more interesting. In the novel, after Amory's disillusionment has taken place, he is meditating on various aspects of life in general, and in particular upon New York.

'I detest poor people,' thought Amory suddenly. 'I hate them for being poor. Poverty may have been
beautiful once, but it's rotten now. It's the ugliest thing in the world. It's essentially cleaner to be corrupt and rich than it is to be innocent and poor.\textsuperscript{11}

This problem is to become for Fitzgerald a central moral issue, and is to find, in the last pages of \textit{The Great Gatsby}, its full and final statement. But it is much easier to trace the reappearance of the theme as a theme than to explain why Nick Carraway's conception of it was the exact reverse of Amory Blaine's.

One of the strongest of Fitzgerald's moral concepts—and by strongest I mean its possession of his mind, for it well may have weakened one of his best novels—was his idea of a spiritual bank account. Perhaps the earliest evidence of this idea appears in the last pages of \textit{This Side of Paradise}, in the interrogation which one half of Amory Blaine conducts against the other:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Q.--Have you no interests left?
  \item A.--None. I've no more virtue to lose. Just as a cooling pot gives off heat, so all through youth and adolescence we give off calories of virtue. That's what's called ingenuousness.
  \item Q.--An interesting idea.
  \item A.--That's why a 'good man going wrong' attracts people. They stand around and literally warm themselves at the calories of virtue he gives off. Sarah makes an unsophisticated remark and the faces simper in delight--'How innocent the poor child is!' They're warming themselves at her virtue. But Sarah sees the simper and never makes that remark again. Only she feels a little colder after that.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{itemize}

It is this conception which basically underlies the whole

\textsuperscript{11}F. Scott Fitzgerald, \textit{This Side of Paradise}, p. 275.
\textsuperscript{12}F. Scott Fitzgerald, \textit{This Side of Paradise}, p. 277.
of Tender is the Night; and we see variants of it throughout Fitzgerald's mature work.

There is one final characteristic to be found in This Side of Paradise which should be mentioned in connection with the other two, although it can hardly be considered a thematic element. This characteristic is the romantic conception and awareness of time. Fitzgerald's characters are always obsessed with time. They are acutely aware of its passing, and not only do they look back to an idealized past, but also to a romantic future in which they will be able to impose their own wills upon the prevailing will or the world or situation in which they exist. Fitzgerald wrote, as Malcolm Cowley has said, "as though in a room full of clocks and calendars." He was always obsessed with time, always peculiarly aware of its passing from the time of This Side of Paradise, where we see it combined with a perception of the feelings of the whole generation, to the entries made in his note-books in his later years, where he seemed to have come to a full understanding of it. Meanwhile, it is an integral part of the theme of The Great Gatsby, important in Tender is the Night, and noticeable, at least, in most of his other serious work.

It is interesting to place the following passages together, and to note the difference in interpretation of the

---

13. See below, Chapter IV, pp. 55-62.

conception from one to the other. In the first, we see Fitzgerald's sense of the place of his generation in the twentieth century; in the second, we see the clear understanding of the dramatic value of the given moment in time:

... I'm restless. My whole generation is restless. I'm sick of a system where the richest man gets the most beautiful girl if he wants her, where the artist without an income has to sell his talents to a button manufacturer. Even if I had no talents I'd not be content to work ten years, condemned either to celibacy or a furtive indulgence, to give some man's son an automobile.15

After all, any given moment has its value; it can be questioned in the light of after-events, but the moment remains. The young prince in velvet amid the hush of rich draperies may presently grow up to be Pedro the Cruel or Charles the Mad, but the moment of beauty was there.16

Both of these conceptions, however, will be fully discussed in connection with the later novels. Here, it suffices merely to notice their half-formulated existence.

The Emergence of the Fitzgerald Hero

There is also a psychological situation in This Side of Paradise which is worth noting, for through it, together with the itinerary of Fitzgerald's heroes, we can perceive a great deal about the growth of Fitzgerald's moral ideas. The Fitzgerald hero is always the same man, although he undergoes, with Fitzgerald, a certain maturity from one novel to the next. He is the same man, generally speaking, and his attitudes toward life develop very gradually. Fitzgerald

15 F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, p. 299.
16 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, the Note-books, p. 198.
himself recognized that his hero is always much the same. "Books," he jotted in his note-books, "are like brothers. I am an only child. Gatsby my imaginary eldest brother, Anory my younger, Anthony my worry, Dick my comparatively good brother, but all of them far from home. When I have the courage to put the old white light on the home of my heart, then..."\textsuperscript{17} And again, writing of \textit{The Great Gatsby}, in a letter to John Peale Bishop, "I never at any one time saw him (Gatsby) clear myself--for he started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself--the amalgam was never complete in my mind."\textsuperscript{18}

Fitzgerald's first hero started from St. Paul, Minnesota, and moved, in his search for the surroundings he desired (those will be discussed in connection with \textit{Tender Is the Night}) to Princeton. From Princeton, the hero moved to New York, then to Long Island, West Egg, and on to Europe and the French Riviera, and then back into the American West. The last novel, or the fragment which we have of the novel, is set in Hollywood. The list of place names appears to be of little importance by itself; when it is viewed as a whole, however, a pattern which admits of intelligible interpretation appears. Fitzgerald's orientation

\textsuperscript{17}J. Scott Fitzgerald, \textit{The Crack-Up}, "Note-Books," p. 176.

during the various phases of his career as it is reflected in the novels will become clear as we proceed.\textsuperscript{19}

Amory Blaine's earliest emotional connection is with his mother, the glittering, glamorous, and utterly superficial Beatrice. Significantly, the book opens simply with the words, "Amory Blaine inherited from his mother every trait except the stray inexpressible few that made him worth while."\textsuperscript{20} Amory feels a close kinship with his mother, even though she is perfectly transparent to him from the very beginning. Amory's father, Stephen Blaine, is described as a wealthy and ineffectual industrial magnate who made a fortune at thirty and accomplished nothing thereafter. Amory regards his father not with particular loathing, but with boredom and a lack of concern. His father was a source of his money, nothing more. And when his father died, "quietly and inconspicuously" at Thanksgiving, Amory had no particular emotions at all. Instead, Amory watched the burial and settlement with amusement and detachment, being "diverted" by "the incongruity of death with either the beauties of Geneva or with his mother's

\textsuperscript{19} Maxwell Geismar has discussed Fitzgerald's geographical movements with great insight and clarity in The Last of the Provincials. The subtitle of Geismar's essay is "Orestes at the Ritz," and the myth is used for a parallel in the tracing of Fitzgerald's development: "The Furies seized upon Orestes and drove him frantic from land to land." p. (292)

Geismar, also, is the first of Fitzgerald's critics to give importance to the peculiar psychological dilemmas of Fitzgerald's heroes and heroines.

\textsuperscript{20} F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, p. 3.
dignified reticent attitude."21 Amory was interested in the extent of his father's fortune, however, and here we see another glimpse of Fitzgerald's infatuation with wealth. But soon after his father's death, Amory is visited with a "vision of horror"—and from this time on he is haunted by half-articulated psychological spectres in the dim background. The images employed to describe his feelings are violent in the extreme: he feels the scene of the death of a college friend in an automobile accident with horror: he remembers it "like blood on satin." And, as Geismar has noted,22 he feels a strong revulsion from sexual experience.

We can make little of such things in This Side of Paradise, but they are to be brought into much clearer view in the next novel, which was written two years later.

The Socio-historical Value of This Side of Paradise

And, finally, there is a sense in which This Side of Paradise is a valuable book. The faked ideas, the false and dishonest erudition have often been noticed and commented upon. Fitzgerald's own statements about it, however, have almost always been ignored. In his Note-books he once called it "A Romance and a Reading List."23

21 F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, p. 109.
22 See above, Geismar, p. 297., and This Side of Paradise.
And, toward the end of his creative life he wrote, "A lot of people thought it was a fake, and perhaps it was, and a lot of others thought it was a lie, which it was not." On the surface, the statement perhaps sounds facile; but it has a genuine meaning, which Fitzgerald of 1938 thoroughly understood. Fitzgerald had an extremely sensitive eye and ear; and he was in love with his youth, his age, and his disillusion. And he wrote This Side of Paradise not from, but of and in, the generation of which he was a part. His experience and interests were small, and his ability to understand them was smaller. But the book reflects in a real and essential way the feelings, the habits, and the events of the young at that particular time, and as Maxwell Geismar has said, "this is the revolt of some very odd angels. . . . But to summarize the post-war revolt in This Side of Paradise is to omit all the virtue of the novel." However, a novel must be judged as a novel, and as a novel, This Side of Paradise must be condemned; but it is true that from the beginning there was a vitality and a glow, a curious reality, in Fitzgerald's writing. And it is also true that "Nobody who would know what it was like to be young and privileged and self-centered in that bizarre epoch can afford to neglect it."

Interest in This Side of Paradise

However, the book lacks interest in the technical sense of the word. Fitzgerald's method of characterization—giving a brief, general sketch and then placing the character in action—is ineffective because the character's actions are not coherent; their actions do not reveal them with clarity. As has been noted, the individual incidents of the plot do not progress logically in terms of the novel's theme. The total result is that This Side of Paradise fails to hold our interest and attention.
CHAPTER III

THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED

Historical Background

After the publication of This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald quickly became notorious. The book, for one thing, was a manifesto; it expressed the feelings of a generation, and justified the extreme changes in American manners which were then taking place to thousands of young people. Fitzgerald has described the period in one of his most moving autobiographical pieces:

"...with the end of the winter set in another pleasant dry period, and, while I took a little time off, a fresh picture of life in America began to form before my very eyes. The uncertainties of 1919 were over—there seemed little doubt about what was going to happen—America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history and there was going to be plenty to tell about it. The whole golden boom was in the air—its splendid generosities, its outrageous corruptions and the tortuous death struggle of the old America in prohibition."

Fitzgerald has described also the situation in which the publication of the first book placed him; he had just become "an author," and he was merely exuberant. And he

---

demonstrated his exuberance in the manner of the twenties, by attempting to disrobe in George White's *Scandals*, by taking a dive in the civic fountain, by riding down Fifth Avenue on the roof of a taxi-cab, and in a dozen other ways. And he was as confused about the situation before him as anyone else:

For just a moment, before it was demonstrated that I was unable to play the role, I, who knew less of New York than any reporter of six months standing and less of its society than any hall-room boy in a Ritz stag line, was pushed into the position not only of spokesman for the time but of the typical product of that same moment. I, or rather it was 'we' now, did not know exactly what New York expected of us and found it rather confusing.

It was all, as he was later to judge it, very careless and confused; but, perhaps as a sign of the carelessness, Fitzgerald was paid for telling people, as he said, that he felt exactly as they did.

The Fitzgeralds, at any rate, became famous personalities. They moved to Westport and later to Great Neck, and the lavish parties, which gave Fitzgerald material for the parties of *The Great Gatsby*, became famous with them. Fitzgerald was now paid a thousand dollars for one short story, and he stayed up long after the parties were over writing to pay the bills. But his intuitions--Arthur Mizener has remarked that he had an almost animal instinct for disaster--told him that all was not not

---

All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them—the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Hardy’s peasants. In life these things hadn’t happened yet, but I was pretty sure living wasn’t the reckless, careless business these people thought—this generation just younger than me.  

Out of the carelessness and confusion came Fitzgerald’s second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*. It is, all in all, a novel superior in every way to *This Side of Paradise*; the short stories which Fitzgerald had written so feverishly had taught him a great deal about the craft of fiction. The theme of the novel is not clear-cut, as we shall see, and there are still violations of the form which Fitzgerald was apparently unable to resist; but there is a central intention which directed the writing of *The Beautiful and Damned*, and there is a great advance in power which came from Fitzgerald’s honest attempt to understand the material with which he dealt.

**The Structure of *The Beautiful and Damned***

Structurally, the novel is for the most part competently put together. Fitzgerald had come to understand the difference between generalized narrative and dramatic

---

narrative; and the result is that the dramatic portions of the novel are better prepared for and are, as a result, much clearer and sharper, much more powerful dramatically. The novel opens with a sketch of Anthony Patch’s background and character, the section occupying the first ten pages. Then there is a transition, and a very skillful one, reminiscent, perhaps, of Balzac’s method in *Pere Goriot*, in which Fitzgerald gives a description of the section of New York in which his hero lives and of the ordinary business of life in which the story takes its beginnings. Anthony’s daily life is given over, for the most part, to “diverting” himself; he goes to see his broker at least once a week—the visits to his broker varied from semi-social chats to discussions of the safety of eight per cent investments, and Anthony always enjoyed them—and to his tailor. And he spent a great deal of time in his bathtub.

The gradual transition—between pages ten and fourteen—has brought the point of view somewhat closer to the material; but before the actual action of the novel begins to unroll, Fitzgerald gives a sketch of Anthony’s venerable grandfather, from whom Anthony expects to inherit his fortune. The eccentric grandfather, Adam Patch, is a social reformer of sorts, and he detests idleness; so Anthony, who actually intends to “divert” himself until he inherits the fortune, informs him during an interview that he is writing a "history
of the Middle Ages." The decision had been made hastily during the inquisition, but Anthony was faintly interested in writing of the popes of the Renaissance. But, during the year following the interview with his grandfather, Anthony actually did nothing but experiment with chapter titles "and the division of his work into periods, but not one line of actual writing existed at present, or seemed likely ever to exist. He did nothing--and contrary to the most accredited copybook logic, he managed to divert himself with more than average content."\(^5\)

Immediately after this introductory sketch, we are given a synopsis of Anthony's idle life, in what is one of the two weakest sections of the book. For no apparent structural reason, Fitzgerald inserts a dialogue which contains several clever lines and numerous Shavian mannerisms. This dialogue serves to introduce us to the other two characters important to the book's theme: Maury Noble, who represents compromise and cynicism; and Dick Caramel, the author who is fatuous enough not to recognize either compromise or integrity.

The next episode of importance is the other section of the book in which Fitzgerald's sense of form failed him. As an introduction to the central woman character in the book, whom Anthony Patch is to marry, Fitzgerald gives us another Shavian dialogue (the section is significantly entitled "A

\(^5\) Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned, p. 16.
Flash-Back in Paradise"—and the pun was probably intentional) between Beauty and The Voice. The dialogue has a certain supernatural intention, presumably; The Voice tells Beauty where she is to go and what she is to do, that she "will be known during your fifteen years as a rag-time kid, a flapper, a jazz-baby, and a baby-vamp." But, whatever Fitzgerald's intention may have been, the dialogue serves as a weak introduction to Gloria Gilbert, who has been aptly called Fitzgerald's full length flapper, and ends the first chapter.

The exposition of the situation and preliminary sketching in of the characters continues in Chapter II, which is given over mainly to Gloria Gilbert. The point of view remains distantly objective, and at the same time near enough and mobile enough to bring the narrative into the dramatic present whenever Fitzgerald feels that the dramatic present will better serve his purposes. And in this section, the first in which Fitzgerald has successfully manipulated indirect methods, we see Fitzgerald's first mature writing, aside from that of two or three short stories which will be considered in a separate chapter. Fitzgerald managed to do several things at once: while he is sketching the character of Gloria's mother and giving the reader Gloria's background

6 Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned, p. 29.
7 Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials, p. 300.
in general, he manages to develop Richard Caramel's character considerably, and manages to intimate the several seeds of disaster in the total situation. The section also mentions Anthony's philandering with Geraldine, a "little usher at Keith's," and the beginning of Anthony's attachment to Gloria. The point of view during the chapter has moved gradually closer to the scene, and has imperceptibly shifted so that we view the material through the sensibilities of Anthony Patch: and it is at the very end of this chapter, the second, that the point of view becomes relatively stable:

Out of the deep sophistication of Anthony an understanding formed, nothing atavistic or obscure, indeed scarcely physical at all, an understanding remembered from the romancings of many generations of minds that as she talked and caught his eyes and turned her lovely head, she moved him as he had never been moved before. The sheath that held her soul had assumed significance—that was all. She was a sun, radiant, growing, gathering light and storing it—then after an eternity pouring it forth in a glance, the fragment of a sentence, to that part of him that cherished all beauty and all illusion.

From this point, approximately one-sixth of the way through the novel, Fitzgerald's technique and handling are for the most part competent and conventional. The book is episodic, and sometimes the relationship of the individual episodes to the theme and direction of the novel is imperfectly clear; the use of the generalized historical narrative is not that of a master craftsman. But the remaining portions of the book follow conventional use: the

---

8 Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned, p. 73.
dramatic portions of the novel occur with increasing frequency toward the climax and catastrophe, and then decrease somewhat at the very end of the novel. The structural fault of the book is probably the attempt to include too much; and this was, to Fitzgerald, always a problem. Even in his mature work, certainly in Tender Is the Night, we find episodes included apparently only because they actually happened. But it is certain that, in the last five-sixths of The Beautiful and Damned, we are dealing with a writer of maturity and increasing technical understanding of the form in which he works.

Developments in Theme and Characterization
From This Side of Paradise
To The Beautiful and Damned

Before discussing the themes of The Beautiful and Damned, it is well to examine several of the characters of the novel. The most striking, and, probably, the most important character in the book, is Gloria Gilbert, one of the most completely feminine of Fitzgerald's characters. Gloria's mind works almost entirely in terms of material things: she is interested in herself, Anthony, glamour, beauty, and money, in approximately that order. In the midst of the happiness which immediately follows their marriage, Anthony's education begins; he comes to realize that she is "curiously and definitely limited"; and "it maddened
him to find she had no sense of justice."

Emotionally, Gloria is a child. Her temper is uncontrollable, and "The management of Gloria's temper, whether it was aroused by a lack of hot water for her bath or by a skirmish with her husband, became almost the primary duty of Anthony's day."

In addition, Gloria's attachment to herself held a certain amount of cruelty: "It was in her angers with their attendant cruelties that her inordinate egotism chiefly displayed itself. Because she was brave, because she was 'spoiled,' because of her outrageous and commendable independence of judgment, and finally because of her arrogant consciousness that she had never seen a girl as beautiful as herself, Gloria had developed into a consistent, practising Nietzschean."

Further, there is in Gloria an explicit element of gangsterism:

She said to Anthony one day:

'How I feel is that if I wanted anything I'd take it. That's what I've always thought all my life.'

Gloria is faithful to Anthony, consequently, simply because she wants him and has taken him; yet she frankly tells him that if she had the impulse, she would find unfaithfulness easy:

'. . . I don't feel that way, Anthony, I can't be bothered resisting things I want. My way is not to want them--to want nobody but you."

'Yet when I think that if you just happened to take a fancy to someone--'

---

11 Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned, p. 192.
'Oh, don't be an idiot! she exclaimed. "There'd be nothing casual about it. And I can't even imagine the possibility.'

The narcissism is almost complete. As Anthony comes gradually to know her, he learns that her "independence" is not a simple thing, nor a wholly admirable one. And, "once brought to her attention by Anthony's fascinated discovery of it, it [her independence] assumed more nearly the proportions of a formal code... it might be assumed that all her energy and vitality went into a violent affirmation of the negative principle "Never give a damn."

'Not for anything or anybody,' she said, 'except myself, and, by implication, for Anthony. That's the rule of all life and if it weren't I'd be that way anyhow.'

Yet, for all her feminine vanity and her lack of a proper capacity for understanding human values, Gloria is, in a sense, very masculine. She wishes to dominate; and it is often Gloria who takes the initiative in love making. She does not want children; and her reason is facile and feminine: she does not want to spoil her figure. Ultimately, the reason is to be found in her unwillingness to assume any responsibility for anything. Fitzgerald had a deep-seated conviction that freedom and power imply responsibility; and his portrait of "The full length flapper" is principally a negation of this principle. Maxwell Geismar has called the relationship of Anthony and Gloria "the marriage of the now

---

13 Geismar, The Last of the Provincials, p. 300.
anguished egoist with the now distraught narcissist." And, calling Gloria Fitzgerald's typical heroine, Geismar summarizes her characteristics very succinctly: "her impatience with men and her vanity 'that was almost masculine,' her beautiful and immaculate body that is incapable of passion and can hardly tolerate physical contact; the gum drops, indeed, that she must chew to avoid chewing her nails; and by contrast, the cool perfection of her brow." 

Against Gloria, Fitzgerald sets one of his most carefully drawn heroes, Anthony Patch. Anthony is a good man, and a sensitive one; he does nothing constructive, but we are shown that this is the result of his circumstances rather than of any innate laziness. He is intelligent, yet he is cursed; he cannot fight a materialistic world because of "that old quality of understanding too well to blame—that quality which was the best of him and had worked swiftly and ceaselessly toward his ruin." Yet Anthony is a coward, and not only did his understanding work toward his ruin, but also did his cowardice:

Gloria knew within a month that her husband was an utter coward toward any one of a million phantasms created by his imagination. Her perception was intermittent, for this cowardice sprang out, became almost obscenely evident, then faded and vanished as though it had been only the creation of her own mind. Her reactions to it were not those attributed

---

14 Geismar, *The Last of the Provincial*, p. 300.
to her sex—it aroused her neither to disgust nor to a premature feeling of motherhood. Herself almost completely without physical fear, she was unable to understand, and so she made the most . . . of his fear's redeeming feature. . . though he was a coward under shock and a coward under a strain—when his imagination was given play—he had yet a sort of dashing recklessness that moved her . . . almost to admiration.17

Yet his cowardice is perceptible; and as these two children grow to know each other, the irresponsibility of the one and the cowardice of the other take on much greater significance. At the beginning of the novel, Anthony is a vital, healthy man; and, as he becomes enchanted with Gloria, he gradually loses his vitality, and, eventually, his identity.

It is here that we intercept the first mature and recurrent theme in Fitzgerald's fiction: the romantic ideal with which the hero seeks to identify himself, and the tragic loss of identity which sometimes accompanies the failure to achieve the romantic ideal, and sometimes is the result of that failure. This conception might be called, for want of a better name, a Lear-complex. In King Lear, after Lear gives up the reality of his importance, but retains the illusion, symbolized by his knights, by parcelling out his kingdom so as to "crawl quietly toward the grave," the first dominant note of horror is sounded in his tragedy by his complex reaction to the gradual symbolic loss of his identity. It is not merely the loss of a few knights which impels him, nor even the realization that his daughters have brought about

that loss; it is something much more significant. "Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself," Regan remarks to Goneril in that shocking little scene. It is difficult authoritatively to assign any single meaning to Shakespeare; but if a consistent case may not be made out for a reading of Lear as a tragedy of identity, then it may at least be considered for purposes of definition.

Anthony is caught up in the illusion of Gloria's perfection and beauty; she symbolizes something more to him than merely a beautiful girl; and the intensity of his attachment takes on a symbolic overtone. Anthony is not merely interested in possessing Gloria; he wishes "to possess her triumphant soul," and to humble her and break her spirit. And this desire, with its frenzied intensity, produces one of the most remarkable scenes in the book, in which a trivial quarrel becomes a struggle for sexual domination. As Anthony Patch comes gradually to comprehend the true nature of his wife, the conviction that he will go mad takes root in his mind. Yet he is temporarily safe: for he can shield his own temperament from himself by his image of Gloria as an absolute ideal to which he can dedicate himself.

The precise nature of this concept and its ramifications will be considered in connection with The Great Gatsby, where it may be seen in its most powerful and highly reified form. Here, it is enough to notice that Anthony Patch projects into the image of his wife a certain ideality, and that his moral

---

18 William Shakespeare, King Lear, Act I, Scene I, ll. 296-297.
value seems to derive from his struggle to possess her as an ideal.

The theme of the novel, then, is in the larger view the damnation of the careless and confused rich, who want money not for the mobility and grace it can bring into their lives, but rather for luxury in its most vulgar form. And the theme emerges through the gradual mutual revelation of character between Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert.

As the love affair and the marriage of these two decline, we notice a shift in value; the attitude of Fitzgerald toward the United States in general, and the lower classes and the Jews in particular, has been, from This Side of Paradise, a rather extreme prejudice and even hatred. Fitzgerald dispensed with the young Jew at Princeton perfunctorily in This Side of Paradise, and Anthony Patch also displays a hatred of Jews in the earlier parts of The Beautiful and Damned. Blockman, the Jew who is an old admirer of Gloria Gilbert, is drawn bitterly by Fitzgerald. Anthony Patch's feelings toward him at the beginning of the novel might be explained in terms of sexual jealousy; yet after there has ceased to be any reason for any such a thing, Anthony's bitterness increases. Blockman undergoes a change from a rather vulgar adventurer to a respectable, well-mannered, successful movie magnate, changes his name to Black; yet to Anthony, he stands for the whole social group, and earns in a final drunken scene, the epithet "you Goddam Jew" from
Anthony.\textsuperscript{19}

We have seen the Fitzgerald hero move from Minnesota to Princeton, and from Princeton to New York. At the end of The Beautiful and Damned, after the contrived irony of the ending, in which Anthony does, after all, inherit his fortune after he has broken his health and life, we see the hero and heroine setting out for Europe, still travelling east. In terms of the second novel, the United States is almost completely repudiated.

The characters of Maury Noble and Dick Caramel were obviously intended by Fitzgerald to symbolize two possible attitudes to life quite different from Anthony Patch's. Maury Noble, at the beginning of the book, sets out to become as immensely rich as possible as quickly as possible. This is precisely what he does; but in doing so, he realizes with complete cynicism that nothing of value can be gained by it. He is an intelligent man; and he is not developed in the course of the book simply because he is damned by his intentions from the beginning, and because he is perfectly aware

\textsuperscript{19}The development of Fitzgerald's social thinking has been excellently discussed by Geismar in his book The Last of the Provincials. Geismar also notices the search for illusion on the part of the Fitzgerald characters: see page 307. "In the dialectic of Fitzgerald's evolution," Geismar remarks, "the 'thesis' of glamour has its antithesis in the accompanying sense of horror that is always in the background of his work."
of his damnation. Lick Caramel, on the other hand, is representative of compromise. As an author who, like Fitzgerald, achieves early success, Lick Caramel turns to writing for money, accepting third-rate standards and dancing to the editorial whip. Yet he is either furtive enough not to know that he is compromising, or dishonest enough not to admit it, even to himself. He, too, is damned; and Fitzgerald draws one of his bitterest satirical portraits in tracing his decline. He becomes an optimist, and writes of the "greatness of America." His optimism is, of course, facile and meaninglessness; but he is praised for it and achieves success, that is, money, because of it.

Interest in The Beautiful and Damned

It will be seen that Fitzgerald has used in The Beautiful and Damned the same elements with which he dealt in This Side of Paradise, and that he has come to understand them to a much greater degree in the second novel. Again, The Beautiful and Damned is not a first-rate novel. Although, as a whole, it is much better than This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald can describe the emotions which accompany humiliation, and he can evoke the horrors which accompany disaster, but he has not yet learned to construct adequate reasons either for humiliation or disaster.

Because of the insufficient motivation, Fitzgerald's characterization is imperfect. The characters develop from
part to part, but the changes which take place in them are by no means completely understandable. Fitzgerald's use of the descriptive sketch in the early parts of the book is somewhat redeemed by his dynamic development after the opening pages. But his failure to understand the use of the several methods prevents the characters from holding our continuous interest.

The plot, likewise, fails to be interesting in the technical sense. Not only does it require the characters to move in ways which do not advance either theme or character, but it also contains whole incidents which are digressive, which direct our attention away from the central line of action. The parts of the book are never fused into a complete whole.

Finally, Fitzgerald's intention is obviously tragic, and his satiric method, although it prevents, to a large extent, sentimentality, interferes with the tragic impact of the book. Although they have great pathos, the characters have neither the dignity nor the sense of morality which are necessary to tragic emotions.
far in excess of the external facts of his life.

The social milieux which Fitzgerald evokes in *The Great Gatsby* are not perceptibly different from those of *The Beautiful and Damned*. The Long Island drinking life, the wild parties at which, as Edmund Wilson has remarked, Fitzgerald's people go off like fireworks, and which are likely to leave them in pieces the next morning, are the same as the parties of the second novel. The difference is that in *The Great Gatsby* the large scenes are rendered impressionistically with a much more precise selection of detail. In almost every way, the two books derive from the same historical background.

The Structure of *The Great Gatsby*

An immediate difference of structure is noticeable between *The Beautiful and Damned* and *The Great Gatsby*. Whereas the earlier novel follows a conventional European pattern, *The Great Gatsby* is conceived as a series of dramatic scenes, after the manner of Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Fitzgerald's precise debt to Conrad has never been studied in detail, and without a great deal of exemplification and comparison, cannot be accurately estimated. Fitzgerald had been acquainted with Conrad from the time of the writing of *This Side of Paradise*, and testified, in the Note-Books, in entries which are, unfortunately, undated, to his belief that Conrad was a major

---

2 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon*, Foreword by Edmund Wilson, p. 4.
technician and a supreme literary craftsman. Fitzgerald had been reading Conrad in the period immediately preceding that in which The Great Gatsby was written, however, and the similarity of technique is striking. For the first time, Fitzgerald employs the modified first-person point of view, and the theme of the novel is ultimately to be found in the progressive reaction of the narrator's sensibilities to the action of the book, as in Conrad's short story "The Heart of Darkness" and in Lord Jim.

The Great Gatsby may be thought of, with regard to the major pattern of the book, as a series of curves. Gilbert Seldes has described the book in such terms: "There is a brief curve before Gatsby enters; a longer one in which he begins his movement toward Daisy; then a succession of carefully spaced shorter and longer movements until the climax is reached. The plot works out not like a puzzle with odd

---

3 Conrad is mentioned in This Side of Paradise on page 284. For allusions to Conrad in the Note-books, see pages 179, 288, and 301.

4 Fitzgerald's critics agree on few aspects of his work, but it is a commonplace to ascribe to Fitzgerald a debt to Conrad, no doubt justly so. See Mizener, op. cit., p. 77; William Troy, "Scott Fitzgerald--the Authority of Failure," Accent, Autumn, 1945, p. 57. Maxwell Geismar's account of the structure of The Great Gatsby is one of the least satisfactory aspects of his study. "What Fitzgerald has done technically in The Great Gatsby" Geismar notes, "is to bring over the tight, well-knit, and sometimes trick patterns of his short stories to the irregular and broken novel form which he has been using in This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned. So every symbol and almost every detail here is meticulously plotted, and usually balanced off later on in the
bits falling into place, but like a tragedy, with every part functioning in the completed organism.\textsuperscript{5} The curves refer, of course, to the spacing and treatment of the generalized and dramatic portions of the book. We are given the background and moral attitudes of the narrator at the very beginning, for it is upon these that the judgments of the book are to be based; then we are given the several character groups, by means of dramatic scenes, whose conflict the major theme of the book dramatizes. There are six major dramatic scenes in the book. The first of these introduces Tom and Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker, who come to stand for the East. The second, which is brought into focus by generalized narrative and interpreted to the reader by the progressive mental and physical revulsion toward nausea on the part of the narrator, introduces Tom Buchanan's mistress, her sister, and her husband. This

group, as a whole, comes to stand for the lower middle classes, or perhaps even the proletariat in the novel. The third dramatic scene is given over to one of Gatsby's parties, and performs several complex functions. The ease and grace with which the scene is written tend to conceal these functions, but they reveal themselves under scrutiny. Gatsby's character and reputation are skillfully exposed; Jordan Baker's relationship with the narrator, Nick Carraway, is brought forward; the careless drinking life is painted with extraordinary skill; and the first hint of Gatsby's obsession is quietly brought to our attention. The fourth chapter of the book, revealing further Gatsby's character and motives, is not a simple, continuous dramatic scene. The next major scene, the fourth, brings Gatsby and Daisy together. The fifth brings the other elements of the social milieu from which Daisy comes into contact with the milieu of Gatsby, and the setting is another of Gatsby's fantastic parties. The sixth, and final, major dramatic scene is given over to the struggle between Tom Buchanan and Gatsby, and, as a sort of epilogue, contains the catastrophe. The last pages of the book form a meditation, in which Nick Carraway reviews the summer and makes his final judgments about the entire action.

Interspersed with the large scenes are numerous small ones which perform minor functions. And all of the scenes, major and minor, are connected and introduced by generalized narrative, over which Fitzgerald now had full mastery, so that
the dramatic scenes are always in focus, with their meaning easily available to the reader; and now, for the first time in Fitzgerald's longer works, the whole seems to be greater than the sum of its parts.

It has often been remarked about The Great Gatsby that its effect is more "poetic" than is ordinary with the novel. This is partly the result of the prose, and Fitzgerald's conception of prose (see below); but there is also another, and perhaps a more important, reason. The novel is built like a metaphysical poem around a central structural metaphor. The terms of the metaphor are geographical: the East is balanced against the West, and every character upon whom any judgment whatsoever is passed is firmly rooted in one or the other. The implications of this structural metaphor will be considered in relation to the theme of the novel, and need only be mentioned here.

The Thematic Aspect of
The Great Gatsby

It has been noted that The Great Gatsby contains the same social elements as The Beautiful and Damned; but in The Great Gatsby, they are re-grouped, and are handled very differently from those of the earlier novel. This is made possible by the introduction of the first person narrator.

Nick Carraway is from the West, and the book opens with his explanation of his connection with the West and with its morality. There is a certain ambiguity here: for although Nick Carraway is a Westerner, he is a cousin of Daisy,
CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT GATSBY

Historical Background

In a letter to Edmund Wilson postmarked October 7, 1924, Fitzgerald casually mentioned a new novel: "My new book," he wrote, "is wonderful, so is the air and sea." In 1925, just four years after the beginning of his career as a novelist, The Great Gatsby was published; and Fitzgerald had produced a masterpiece. The word need not invoke ill-considered comparisons with Shakespeare or Dostoieffski; The Great Gatsby is a very small work of art. But in it, Fitzgerald has given us a tiny segment of our culture which he has thoroughly understood and judiciously created, in such a way that it contains a minimum of drama, beauty, and the power of sustaining interest throughout its complete course.

Fitzgerald had developed greatly in the time between the publication of This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned; and with the publication of The Great Gatsby, his talent could be recognized as containing the elements of genius. The rapidity of Fitzgerald's maturing can only amaze; and several critics have noticed that this maturing is

---

who has been (the perfect tense is important) a Westerner, but has moved"permanently" to the East. Her transformation into an Easterner is not complete in the early parts of the novel; she still remembers certain things about the West with regret, and her sensibility in general is, in the novel's terms, Western. But from Nick Carraway's ambiguous viewpoint, he is able to see into the life of both social groups without distortion. Fitzgerald later in his life remarked that "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." This is precisely what Nick Carraway manages to do. He holds in his mind the two opposed ideas of conduct of the East and the West, and "reserves" judgments about them. From this ambivalence arises an intellectual tension which is resolved only in the closing pages of the novel:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

'Whenever you feel like criticising any one,' he said, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.'

He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments... Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I

---

snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth.

Yet there is more to Nick Carraway's attitude than mere tolerance: he has a well founded moral basis from which his ideas on conduct proceed:

And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on. When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions.

It is in terms of this simple geographical metaphor that Fitzgerald is able to lay back the tissues of the civilization which obsessed him, and to probe deeply into its illness.

With this basic morality, Nick Carraway leaves the West, because he is "restless" after the World War, and because "the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe." This, it will be noticed, is precisely

---

7 Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon, "The Great Gatsby," p. 167. This and all other quotations from The Great Gatsby are taken from the volume entitled The Last Tycoon, which contains the fragment which Fitzgerald left unfinished at his death in 1940. Because of the similarity of intention and structure of The Great Gatsby and The Last Tycoon, Edmund Wilson, who edited the volume, has reprinted them together, along with five short stories. This text is the best that we have; there are numerous minor errors, of several kinds, in all of the others. For instance, in the first edition of The Great Gatsby, Wolfsheim's name was Hildesheim, and was misspelled Hildeshiem. In later editions, Wolfsheim's name is misspelled Wolfshiem.

8 Ibid., p. 167.

9 Ibid., p. 168.
the attitude of Fitzgerald's early heroes: of Amory Blaine and Anthony Patch. He settled on Long Island, quite by chance; but, although he has left the West, he retains a symbolic identity with it, taking a house in West Egg. There are two villages, the other being East Egg. Fitzgerald makes the difference between them explicit:

I lived at West Egg, the--well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them... Across the bay, the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water... 10

Soon after his arrival, Nick Carraway goes across the bay to have dinner with the Buchanans, Daisy Buchanan being his cousin. The initial characterization of the Buchanans strikes a note that is also "bizarre and not a little sinister." Nick Carraway walks through acres of roses as he arrives at the Buchanan house, and sees Tom Buchanan standing on the front porch:

He had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a rather supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face... Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body--he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage--a cruel body. 11

10 Ibid., p. 170.
11 Ibid., p. 172.
In the initial scene, Fitzgerald reveals the two women in what is almost a tableau. The two, Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker, are seated on an enormous couch; "they were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house." Both of them are cool and perfectly self-possessed. The younger of them is a stranger to Nick Carraway, and he is struck by her immediately:

She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall... At any rate, Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly, and then quickly tipped her head back again--the object she was balancing had obviously tottered a little and given her something of a fright. Again a sort of apology arose to my lips. Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me.12

Almost immediately, Nick Carraway turns to his cousin: and he notices, in particular, her voice:

She began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion...13

Over and over again, Fitzgerald returns to Daisy's voice as

12Ibid., p. 173.
her chief attribute.\textsuperscript{14}

Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker are the immediate successors of Gloria Gilbert, of Rosalind and Eleanor. They are cool, and whatever passion they have centers around their mouths; they are, like Gloria Gilbert, immaculate and untouchable, and their eyes are impersonal, "in the absence of all desire."\textsuperscript{15}

As the scene moves forward, the differences between the Eastern sophistication and Western provinciality are carefully underlined. At one point, Nick Carraway is brought to stress it.

'You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy,' I confessed on my second glass of corky but rather impressive claret. 'Can't you talk about crops or something?'\textsuperscript{16}

We see Tom Buchanan's unintelligent racial prejudice, his crude assertion that "civilization is going to pieces," together with his declaration that his facts in the matter are "scientific." Gatsby's name is hesitantly introduced,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{14}Here, again, we have evidence of Fitzgerald's being influenced by Henry James. James, in his later novels, used a recurrent metaphor for purposes of characterization. The technique had been used in the novel, doubtlessly, before Henry James; yet he seems to have been the first to employ it consciously. There is not a complete study of James' practice: but F. O. Matthiessen has provided a summary in the "Appendix" to his volume Henry James: the Major Phase, pp. 152-186.

What is certain is that Fitzgerald had not made use of the technique before the writing of The Great Gatsby.

\textsuperscript{15}Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon, "The Great Gatsby," p. 175.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p.
\end{quote}
and Daisy, surprised, responds to it: but before she learns anything about Gatsby, the conversation is interrupted by a call from Tom Buchanan's mistress. While the others are out of the room, Nick Carraway learns something about this affair from Jordan Baker.

Daisy, however, has not completely oriented herself in this immoral East. She regrets her marriage, and she tells Nick Carraway that she hopes her daughter will be a fool, i.e., that she will marry the man she loves, whatever his social position. She has grown "cynical," and Nick Carraway notes that she has certainly had reason to. But, in the midst of her rather genuine regret, there is also a false note:

'You see I think everything's terrible anyhow,' she went on in a convinced way. 'Everybody thinks so--the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything.' Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way... and she laughed with thrilling scorn.

'Sophisticated--God, I'm sophisticated!'

The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said... I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face... 17

Nick Carraway, then, has become slightly involved with them; but he sees them clearly, Tom Buchanan with his egotism and cruelty and his moronic nibbling "at the edge of stale ideas"; Daisy with her golden voice, her superficial and rather pitiful dislike for her surroundings; and Jordan Baker, with her cold self-sufficiency, her

17Ibid., p. 179.
precarious balance, and, as we are to learn, her basic dishonesty. And as Nick Carraway leaves after dinner, his reaction has begun; "Their interest rather touched me and made them less remotely rich—nevertheless, I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away."18

Returning home, Nick Carraway glimpses Gatsby for a moment on the lawn, and there is already a strange intensity about him:

I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness.19

To explicate this intensity is to reveal the theme of the novel, and the central obsession of Fitzgerald's mature work. Gatsby, who is from the West, is opposed to the Buchanans, who are of the East. Gatsby has been engaged to Daisy during the war, but Daisy's parents interfered, and she was married to Tom Buchanan. After the war, Gatsby acquires a fortune, by very dubious means, and the plot of the novel is his struggle to recapture Daisy. But Daisy, to Gatsby, is not merely a girl he has loved and lost; she has become a symbol of the past and of the future, an absolute ideal to which he can

18 Ibid., p. 181.
19 Ibid., p. 182.
dedicate himself.

From the beginning, Nick Carraway says, "there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life." He had a responsiveness which was "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again." Nick Carraway is perfectly aware of the hopelessness of Gatsby's dream; but he is nevertheless overwhelmed by the "colossal vitality of his illusion."

It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart.20

At one point, soon after the reunion of Gatsby and Daisy, Nick Carraway attempts to communicate the hopelessness of the affair to Gatsby. Gatsby's reply further illuminates the nature of his obsession:

'I wouldn't ask too much of her,' I ventured.
'You can't repeat the past.'
'Can't repeat the past?' he cried incredulously.
'Why of course you can!'

And a moment later:

'I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before,' he said, nodding determinedly. . .21

The final revelation of Gatsby's intensity is made

20 Ibid., p. 237.
21 Ibid., p. 248.
57

in a conversation with Carraway concerning Daisy's love for Tom Buchanan:

Suddenly he came out with a curious remark. 'In any case,' he said, 'it was just personal.'

What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured?22

These passages isolate for us the central obsession in Fitzgerald's work. It is not precisely a metaphysical idealism, though it is very close to idealism; and it leads, not to optimism, as similar concepts in Hart Crane and in Whitman do, but to a distinctive sort of realism. Briefly, the concept is this: that a character is morally valuable when he perceives value and beauty in an absolute form. Obviously such a perception is of a highly religious nature; and such an experience could not take place in time. It takes place, therefore, either in the past, as in The Great Gatsby, or in a world the laws of which are fixed by the creator, as in certain of Fitzgerald's fantasies, which will be considered below. Fitzgerald insists that the struggle to achieve the ideal must be impersonal and selfless, and the odds against the protagonist are generally hopeless. Sometimes the character is driven toward an ideal which the creator knows to be evil, as in The Beautiful and Damned; or, though in a somewhat attenuated form, in The Great Gatsby. Yet his moral value derives from his struggle, and the irony which evolves out of the inevitability of the failure is the

22Ibid., P. 280.
element which makes Fitzgerald's best writing so indefinably powerful and that of his closest imitators so limp and meaningless.

Gatsby's rapt contemplation of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock is obviously of a religious sort: And it is inevitable that irony should arise out of the fact that Daisy, after the reunion, should somewhat diminish Gatsby's vision. Yet his vision is not destroyed; Gatsby has had a prior revelation and is hopelessly committed to his pursuit. It is to Nick Carraway that the actual moral constitution of the rich, of Daisy in particular, can be revealed. And the corruption to which Nick Carraway penetrates is a pure corruption, a meretricious beauty, and an utter moral cowardice.

Nick Carraway's affair with Jordan Baker is a careful parallel to the affair between Gatsby and Daisy. But the grossness of this affair gradually becomes obvious to Carraway, and he comes to see Jordan Baker as she actually is:

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.23

Just as Gatsby has come so close to his dream "that he could hardly fail to grasp it," Tom Buchanan senses the

---

23 Ibid., p. 209.
precarious position in which the order of his own life is placed; like Jordan Baker, whatever it was that he was balancing had nearly fallen, and had given him something of a fright. He and Gatsby are brought into conflict, and on the way home from New York, after a scene in which this conflict is fully dramatized, Daisy runs over and kills Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress. Until this time, Daisy has retained something of her Western morality; but, in danger, her betrayal is complete and natural. While he is waiting for a taxi to come to take him home, Nick Carraway encounters Gatsby in the driveway, watching for a signal from Daisy. But Carraway finds Tom and Daisy sitting at the kitchen table, talking, and "there was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said they were conspiring together." Going back to report to Gatsby, Carraway hears his taxi:

'Is it all quiet up there?' he asked anxiously.
'Yes, it's all quiet,' I hesitated. 'You'd better come home and get some sleep.'

He shook his head.
'I want to wait here till Daisy goes to bed. Good night, old sport.'

He put his hands in his coat pockets and turned back eagerly to his scrutiny of the house, as though my presence marred the sacredness of the vigil. So I walked away and left him standing there in the moonlight—watching over nothing.24

The following day, the half-crazed Wilson comes with a gun to the Buchanan household, and Tom informs him that it was

24 Ibid., p. 275.
Gatsby's car that ran over Myrtle. Wilson shoots first Gatsby and then himself.

Nick Carraway's education, as well as the holocaust, is complete. On the morning of his last conversation with Gatsby, he has made his first final judgment of the summer:

We shook hands and I started away. Just before I reached the hedge I remembered something and turned around.

'They're a rotten crowd,' I shouted across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together.'

I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. First he nodded politely, and then his face broke into that radiant smile, as if we'd been in ecstatic cahoots on that fact all the time.25

Just before Nick Carraway leaves the East, he happens to meet Tom Buchanan in front of a jewelry store. The conversation confirms his suspicions of what had happened, and he makes his final judgment of the East:

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. . . .

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace--or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons--rid of my provincial squeamishness forever.26

In the conclusion, the juxtaposition of the East and the West is reiterated once more:

25 Ibid., p. 261.
26 Ibid., p. 300.
That's my Middle West--not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all--Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.27

It will be seen that the novel is a complex paradox, or perhaps a set of paradoxes. The dream of Gatsby is a vital thing, yet, being the thing which makes him "worth the whole damn bunch of them," it leads him to his death. Gatsby is made admirable by his obsession which Carraway knows to be wrong and evil; yet his obsession, impersonal and selfless, makes him valuable. And Carraway knows that Gatsby cannot recapture the illusion, that Gatsby's chances for having Daisy have already receded into the past; but Carraway can only watch Gatsby pursue the illusion and thereby his own doom, with admiration. As the theme develops, so does the irony. And it is an irony close akin to that of certain Greek dramas, in which the chorus, and through the chorus, the audience, have a superior knowledge of the imminent and inescapable failure of the hero, while the hero places his entire faculties in the means, the struggle. This aspect of

27Ibid., p. 298.
the theme is clear enough: it is what Fitzgerald in another place calls the "futility of effort and the necessity of struggle."\textsuperscript{28}

The book portrays the attempt of a single individual to impose his own will upon the prevailing will, not only of the world in which he lives, but upon time itself, one of the conditions of his own existence. And the emotions which result are unadulterated by any of the false trappings which ordinarily accompany them. It is true that there is an ecstatic nostalgia in the closing pages of \textit{The Great Gatsby}; but this is the result of the irony inherent in the mounting of the theme rather than its romantic aspects. But the primary decorations of romanticism are missing: there is no graveyardism, none of the noble tone for which Arnold, for instance, praises Gray, and no attempt to invoke nature in any form, nor to impose the author's own emotions upon the natural scene.

The realistic quality of the book may be explained in two ways. In the first place, the theme of the book is the romantic obsession; the romanticism, that is, is a primary object rather than a by-product. In the second place, the introduction and placing of the narrator allows close examination of opposed moral principles, so that at the same time the theme is developed, it is criticized.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 70.
Development of Themes and Characterization from The Beautiful and Damned to The Great Gatsby

We have noted the close relationship between the women in The Great Gatsby and The Beautiful and Damned. Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker are more mature portrayals of Gloria Gilbert and the earlier heroines. Their principal characteristics are the same, however. They are intensely feminine; they are women who are undoubtedly intelligent, but who deliberately attempt to escape reality, denying intelligence and following the directions of their emotions. They are, finally, completely selfish. At times the women of The Great Gatsby seem almost entirely decorative; this aspect has been explained by Gilbert Seldes in part. He says, "The concentration of the book is so intense that the principal characters exist almost as essences, as biting acids... in the same golden cup [which] have no choice but to act upon each other." 29

The same quality is to be noted of the male characters. The greater part of our attention is focused upon Gatsby and Carraway; and we are able to view them with much greater clarity because the various elements of their personalities have been divided. The same elements are here, that is, as are found in the characters of the earlier novels. Both Anthony Patch and Morry Blaine have the same background that Gatsby and Carraway do. Both are Western outsiders and both

enter the extreme upper classes. All four are men of great intelligence, sensitivity, and moral goodness, despite the irony with which Gatsby is drawn. All of them have recognized and turned away from the pursuit of "a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty." And all have dedicated themselves to an absolute ideal.

In *The Great Gatsby*, however, the romanticist is separated from the realist, and criticized by him. Gatsby is as beautiful and damned as Anthony Patch; but we see clearly into the causes of his disaster, and into his motives. It is this failure properly to motivate the disaster which prevents Fitzgerald from achieving successful formal order in the earlier novel.

The themes of *The Great Gatsby*, like the characters, are a development from those of the earlier novels. And they have been brought into clearer focus for the same reasons. The pursuit of wealth is separated from the pursuit of ideal forms, and the moral fibre of the Western outsider is carefully differentiated from that of the Eastern insider.

The Element of Interest in *The Great Gatsby*

*The Great Gatsby* was damned upon its publication for reasons which had little to do with literary merit. At the time, a great many of the more sensitive critics were enlisted in causes and schools, and *The Great Gatsby* did not represent
the principles of any particular group. It is a sharply critical book, but the completeness of its criticism prevented it from being accepted by either the Marxist critics or the Humanists—or any other group. Yet it was recognized as a great novel by certain individuals who were primarily interested in craftsmanship, and who were able to see that it represented a distinct advance over Fitzgerald's earlier work. Obviously the critic who could conscientiously dismiss Fitzgerald as the "godfather of the highball school of fiction" had either failed to make this distinction, or had failed to read The Great Gatsby with sufficient care.

Edith Wharton, in a letter to Fitzgerald, called certain aspects of the book "masterly." Gertrude Stein, in her somewhat whimsical fashion, said that it was "a good book," and that Fitzgerald was "creating the contemporary world much as Thackeray did his in Pendennis and Vanity Fair and this isn't a bad compliment." Gilbert Seldes called it "one of the finest of contemporary novels." And T.S.

30 Halford E. Luccock, Contemporary American Literature and Religion, p. 5.
32 Ibid., p. 308.
33 Gilbert Seldes, op. cit., p. 162.
Eliot said that it seemed to him "to be the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James."34

Fitzgerald's earlier novels had not received such praise as this, and the reasons are fairly easy to understand. For in the technical sense, The Great Gatsby is an interesting book. There is a relationship between its parts, and there is a continuous development of the themes of the book. Gatsby's progress toward Daisy is a continuous thing; and the various elements of the book make that continuous progress intelligible and suspenseful.

Fitzgerald had attempted in The Beautiful and Damned a much wider portrayal of character; and his technique in that book was, in a sense, naturalistic. The characters are developed by the accumulation of details. In The Great Gatsby, the actual space given over to description and delineation of character is much smaller than in The Beautiful and Damned. But in The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald portrays character through action, and through the interaction of the characters. The result is that, given a certain knowledge of the characters from the beginning of the book, we watch their movements with interest and with a constantly increasing understanding of their motives.

CHAPTER V

TENDER IS THE NIGHT

Historical Background

After the publication of The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald wrote on two novels, but published only short stories for almost ten years. The first project was to have been a story of matricide, and although a great deal of work seems to have been done on the book, only the first chapter was published, as a short story entitled "Absolution." In the Note-Books, we find evidence of an historical novel which was to deal with the medieval period; but it, like the other project, was never published. It is not possible to determine the exact nature of this novel; four episodes were published in magazine form, and there are a number of entries in the Note-Books relating to the book. Edmund Wilson, in his introduction to the Note-Books, tells us that "the requirements of the fiction market" forced Fitzgerald to depart from his original conception, and that he eventually lost interest in it.¹

The Fitzgeralds had gone to France in 1922, and with the exception of short visits home, they remained abroad from 1924 to 1931. Fitzgerald has described the period and the life of

¹Most of the information in this paragraph has been taken from Arthur Mizener's article "T.S.W. and the L.P. of Am. Life," Sewanee Review, Winter, 1946, pp. 80-83, and from the Note-Books in general. Wilson's remark is to be found in the Crack-Up, "Introduction to the Note-Books," pp. 91 and 98.
group of American expatriates in France, not only in his fiction, but also in his autobiographical writings. The short story "Babylon Revisited" reveals the background, and also certain tragic aspects of it after the beginning of the depression. "From 1926 to 1929," he wrote years afterward, "the great years of the Cap d'Antibes, this corner of France was dominated by a group quite distinct from that American society which is dominated by Europeans. Pretty much of anything went at Antibes..." And, again, "One could get away with more on the summer Riviera, and whatever happened seemed to have something to do with art." The inflationary elements in America were somewhat in advance of those in France, so that Americans were a great deal more prosperous than they otherwise should have been. The result was what Fitzgerald called "the most expensive orgy in history." Money seemed to be all-powerful. In "Babylon Revisited" Fitzgerald sums up the situation aptly: "The snow of 1929 wasn't real snow. If you didn't want it to be real snow, you just paid some money."4

It was a varied and interesting existence and Fitzgerald,


3Ibid., p. 21.

4Fitzgerald, The Portable F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Babylon Revisited," p. 834. Most of the quotations in this chapter are taken from this collection, which was edited by Dorothy Parker and introduced by John O'Hara. The volume contains The Great Gatsby, Tender Is the Night, and ten short stories. Tender Is the Night is not available in any other edition at present.
although he realized that it was a period largely wasted, remembered it with nostalgia, and his reconstruction of it in *Tender Is the Night* is remarkably clear and sensitive. Yet all the while, his sense of morality was at work. He had as Arthur Mizener has remarked, almost an animal sensitivity to disaster; and throughout the lush days of the boom, he foresaw the tragedy ahead:

By 1927 a wide-spread neurosis began to be evident, faintly signalled, like a nervous beating of the feet, by the popularity of cross-word puzzles. I remember a fellow expatriate opening a letter from a mutual friend of ours, urging him to come home and be revitalized by the hardy, bracing qualities of the native soil. It was a strong letter, and it affected us both deeply, until we noticed that it was headed from a nerve sanitarium in Pennsylvania.5

Nor were Fitzgerald's moral sensibilities asleep. He had no contempt for Americans; he admired and loved many aspects of American life. He judged them severely, however:

...Americans were wandering ever more widely—friends seemed eternally bound for Russia, Persia, Abyssinia and Central Africa. And by 1928 Paris had grown suffocating. With each new shipment of Americans spewed up by the boom the quality fell off, until toward the end there was something sinister about the crazy boatloads. They were no longer the simple ma and pa and son and daughter, infinitely superior in their qualities of kindness and curiosity to the corresponding class in Europe, but fantastic neanderthals who believed something, something vague, that you remembered from a very cheap novel...There were citizens travelling in luxury in 1928 and 1929 who, in the distortion of their new condition, had the human value of Pekinese, bivalves, cretins, goats.6

*Tender Is the Night* begins and ends its action on the beach.

---


6Ibid., pp. 20-21.
at Antibes, a place which Fitzgerald had "discovered" and which he had particularly enjoyed before it was taken over by tourists. Fitzgerald had observed certain aspects of moral disease during the period, and the result, in *Tender Is the Night*, is neither wholly good nor bad. The book resembles the first novels in the odd shifting of points of view so that the material is never quite in focus; it is as though Fitzgerald were too close, again, to his material to be able to judge it. But the precision with which certain sections are created is remarkable, and is to be accounted for in Fitzgerald's experience and observation. We know that certain incidents in the book—the visit to the battlefield and the soldiers' graves, the nose-dive of the young musician, Abe North, the affair of the beating in Rome by the police—actually happened to Fitzgerald. The closeness of the novel, the result of the utilization of such material, is obvious, and it is unimportant to determine just how much of it is autobiographical.

The Structure of *Tender Is the Night*

The structure of *Tender Is the Night* is much less coherent than that of *The Great Gatsby* and, insofar as we can judge, that of *The Last Tycoon*. I have suggested Fitzgerald's return to autobiographical material as a partial reason for this. The fact that *Tender Is the Night* was finished hurriedly, in a manner not unlike Balzac's, for serial publication, may be another reason. It is evident that Fitzgerald was not
satisfied with the book, either in the serial version or in the final form as it was published in 1934:

Any attempt by an author to explain away a partial failure in a work is of course doomed to absurdity—yet I could wish that you, and others, had read the book version rather than the mag. version (sic) which in spots was hastily put together. The last half for example has a much more polished facade now. Oddly enough several people have felt that the surface of the first chapters was too ornate... Such irrelevancies as * * * *’s nosedive and Wick’s affair in Ohmsbruck are cut, together with the scene of calling on the retired bootlegger at Beaulieu, & innumerable minor details. (sic) I have driven the Scribner proofreaders half nuts but I think I’ve made it incomparably smoother.

Arthur Mizener states that there is in existence “a copy of the book with further revisions in which Fitzgerald wrote: ‘This is the final version of the book as I would like it.’”

The book opens on the beach at the Cap d’Antibes, and the various elements which are to make up the social situation are placed before us as seen through the eyes of Rosemary Hoyt, a young, beautiful, and successful American film actress. Her position in the novel, the ambiguity of which will be discussed in connection with the novel’s theme, may account, in part, for the structural failure of the book. Like the “central intelligence” of Henry James’ later novels, her reactions and judgments of the social world before her are important in interpreting the meaning of the book; but unlike such people in James’ work, she is not an integral part of the central narrative, and before the


8 Mizener, op. cit., p. 80.
end of the book fades out almost completely. We may be certain that Fitzgerald was conscious of the amount of material presented through her eyes, actually more than a fifth of the entire book, for in the Note-books we find the following entry:

Analysis of Tender:
I Case history 151-212: 61 pp. (change moon, p. 212)  

It was Fitzgerald's intention, apparently, to present the gentle, cultured, and leisurely life of the Divers, and undoubtedly there is an advantage in presenting such material through the eyes of an unsophisticated, hard-working, and healthy American girl, for such presentation allows a maximum contrast. The European elements of the social milieu of the book come through with particular lucidity, and the contrast between the American elements--such people as Rosemary Hoyt and her mother on the one hand, and as the Divers, the Norths, and others, on the other--is sharp. But when, a hundred pages further on, the point of view is suddenly shifted to Dick Diver, the power of the early pages is almost wholly lost.

After the group leave the Riviera for the trip to Paris, the point of view shifts back and forth between Rosemary and Dick Diver, until, at the beginning of Chapter XX, it remains with Dick Diver for the remainder of the book. Thus, in the

---

Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, Note-books, pp. 180-181. The pages referred to in the entry do not correspond with the pages of the current edition of the book; but the proportion of the various sections may be seen.
Viking edition, pages 169 through 271 are seen from the point of view of Rosemary; and thereafter, the point of view remains with Dick Diver. The movement, from the point of view of the outsider to that of the central insider is, of course, a logical one; but the half-allegorical significances which Fitzgerald assigns to the various figures are obscured by the shifting.

Not only is the novel weakened by the shifting of the point of view after the presentation of the social milieu, but also by the handling of the element of time. The particular disintegration in which Fitzgerald is interested and which forms the basic theme of the novel takes place in a period immediately succeeding the first World War to some time in the late twenties; but it is necessary for the reader to know the earlier development of the character of Dick Diver's wife, Nicole, in order for him to understand the reasons for the moral disintegration which Dick Diver experiences. In the presentation of this material, Fitzgerald again shifts his point of view and the tone of the book. Nicole's basic former experiences are presented as a case history and involve the incestuous relationship between Nicole and her father. Before the war Dick Diver became interested in Nicole, clinically at first, and later personally. Fitzgerald's tone and also the point of view are acutely clinical in this portion of the book. Even within the section, however, the narrative surface is
broken and the transitions are weak. The beginning of Nicole's relationship with Dr. Diver (and it is important to emphasize the professional aspect) is presented skillfully, but her gradual emotional attachment to him is revealed in the form of letters which possibly have a certain scientific or psychological interest but which disrupt the narrative.

The shifts in time within the section are also distracting. In the opening of Book Two we are given a general sketch of Dr. Diver's early life and education. This section occupies pages 305 to 308. Then we are taken to a period succeeding the war in which Dr. Diver returns to the psychologist Donnler's clinic in Zurich. This section occupies pages 303 through 312. Hereafter the chronological sequence is somewhat confused. In chapter three of Book Two, pages 317 to 323, we are given a dramatic presentation of Dr. Donnler's interview with Mr. Warren, Nicole's father. This interview took place "about a year and a half ago."\(^\text{10}\) At the beginning of chapter four of Book Two the time is shifted back to the general time of chapter two, Book Two. Throughout the chapters immediately following, it is impossible to know the exact sequence. In general, however, the book moves forward with fair chronological regularity, revealing the relationship between Diver and Nicole.

Further confusion in point of view results from the presentation of the disintegration of the other characters besides Nick Diver. Fitzgerald's theme is a large one: actually the moral and intellectual deterioration of a whole

\(^{10}\) Fitzgerald, Tender Is the Night, p. 317.
group of cultivated people. Many aspects of his handling are brilliant. The dramatic foreshadowing of Dick Diver's disintegration by the sudden collapse of the young musician, Abe North, for instance, is skillful. But the display of the individual members of the group in their various states of moral bankruptcy directs the point of view away from the central character, Dick Diver, and as a result, the novel constantly tends to be diffuse, and the lack of coherence in the point of view deprives the individual parts of the power which would result from a single dominating narrative.

The placing of the dramatic scenes is another aspect of the lack of centrality in the structure of the book. There are an infinite number of possible arrangements of the dramatic and historical parts of a novel, but there is generally an order in their placing and relationship; in Tender Is the Night, however, the narrative suddenly flares into the dramatic present and shifts back into the relatively distant historical present. We have seen in The Great Gatsby that the book may be analysed in terms of rising curves; there is no such thing in Tender Is the Night. The initial pages of the book including Dick Diver's dinner party are interesting and fairly dramatic. The duel between Tommy Barban and McKisco is dramatic. A great deal of the succeeding material, however, is undramatic, and the various other elements contributing to the failure prevent the dramatic sections of the later pages of the book from being brought into focus.
Again there is the difficulty of the motivation of the disaster: as in The Beautiful and Damned we are made to see and feel the disaster itself, but we are not allowed sufficiently to understand it. This difficulty, however, must be discussed in connection with the book's themes and with Fitzgerald's moral concepts.

**Thematic Development in Tender Is the Night**

The geographical metaphor which was noticed in the discussion of The Great Gatsby is not employed explicitly in Tender Is the Night. It is, however, implied in the moral interpretations in the book. In tracing the development of Fitzgerald's themes through the novels, it is interesting to notice the itinerary, the actual geographical movement of his heroes.

Dick Diver's origins are obscurely American, and his development and education have brought him eastward, farther east than Jay Gatsby. And like Jay Gatsby, Dick Diver's moral superiority and moral integrity seem to be connected with his western origin. He was "given" his basic and natural virtues by his father, the qualities of kindness, honesty, social presence, tolerance, goodness in general.

---

11 Maxwell Geismar has discussed this aspect in some detail in his consideration of Fitzgerald in The Last of the Provincials. It is possible that the psychological inferences which Geismar makes are of less importance than he gives them; it is usually dangerous to attempt to make an author fit a pattern. The geographical movement of Fitzgerald's heroes, however, is traced with great accuracy and clarity.
A further appearance of the geographical implications is given in Rosemary's state of mind when she encounters the Divers at Antibes:

Rosemary...had a conviction of homecoming, of a return from the derisive and salacious improvisations of the frontier...12

A contrast is to be drawn, however, between the apparently gentle culture which she has found in Europe and the moral independence and integrity which she possesses in America and as an American. And in terms of the geographical metaphor, irony develops out of the fact that the end of Dick Diver's career is a homecoming of quite another sort when he returns to America, to the West from which he came.

Rosemary gradually discovers the group of which Dick Diver is the center. Dick's position in the group is central, and even his name is symbolic. He is the driving force which organizes the social elements with which he comes in contact. His strength and generosity, in short, his social genius, provide a basis for the life of the group at Antibes. Dick's social brilliance is described as giving—giving of a particular sort: "Their own party was overwhelmingly American and sometimes scarcely American at all. It was themselves he gave back to them, blurred by the compromises of how many years."13

Again we encounter Fitzgerald's concepts of spiritual values as bank accounts that are "parceled out unequally at birth." The fact of their amount is stressed. They can be

12 Fitzgerald, Tender Is the Night, p. 207.
13 Ibid., p. 230.
spent, they can be diminished, and they can be replenished. They can be transferred from one person to another. The moral worth of any given individual is directly connected with the sort of idealism defined in connection with the theme of The Great Gatsby. But a character, in being turned away from the pursuit of the ideal, may lose his moral value, his significance, and, eventually, his identity. Thus the tragedy of Dick Diver is, in a sense, a tragedy of the loss of identity.

Dick Diver is turned away from his proper life and work by his marriage with Nicole Warren. Here again it is difficult to determine the exact intentions and meanings of Tender Is the Night because of the lack of structural focus and because of the ambiguous placings and relationships of the various elements treated in the book. Nicole is the daughter of a Chicago millionaire, and she, her sister, and her father are symbolic of the moral corruption and bankruptcy of the extremely wealthy classes of America. The particular social position of Nicole is given clearly:

Nicole was the product of much ingenuity and toil. For her sake the trains began their run at Chicago and traversed the round belly of the continent to California; chicle factories fumed and link belts grew link by link in factories; men mixed toothpaste in vats and drew mouthwash out of copper hogsheads; girls canned tomatoes quickly in August or worked rudely in the Five-and-Tens on Christmas Eve; half-breed Indians toiled on Brazilian coffee plantations and dreamers were muscled out of patent rights in new tractors—these were some of the people who gave tithe to Nicole, and as the whole system swayed and thundered onward, it lent a feverish bloom to such processes or hers as wholesale buying. . .She illustrated very simple principles, containing in herself her own doom. . .

14 Ibid., p. 233.
In so far as the book has a central emphasis, it is upon Nicole and Dick; there are, however, representations of other social elements which must be noted. Abe North is a young American musician of great early achievement, but after a brilliant beginning his work has been largely abortive. Mary North, Abe's wife, is in a position analogous to that of Dick Diver. She is morally strong, supporting a weak husband; yet her position is different:

She was a brave, hopeful woman and she was following her husband somewhere, changing herself to this kind of person or that, without being able to lead him a step out of his path, and sometimes realizing with discouragement how deep in him the guarded secret of her direction lay.\textsuperscript{15}

Baby Warren, Nicole's sister, is not supported by such a morality as Nicole and is therefore much more vicious morally than Nicole. The other Americans are sketched without emphasis, and they enrich the complexity of the social situation rather than develop the theme. Collis Gray, the fatuous undergraduate who is found drunk and naked on his bed by Baby Warren, is the most savagely portrayed of the lesser characters.

Fitzgerald does not attempt to handle the European culture in any great detail; he is interested in America. He does, however, establish the relationship between Nicole's class and a similar European class through the character of the nihilistic and morally corrupt Tommy Barban.

Nicole has been brought out of the insanity caused by the incestuous relationship with her father by Dick Diver; yet her independence is never wholly established: she has periodic

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 243.
reversions to insanity throughout the book. The images used to describe the relationship are significant. Nicole is seen as a parasite, and the strength which she derives from her husband is described as "a dry suckling at his breast." It is through his attempt to hold Nicole together that Dick Diver is ruined, for eventually his own strength is undermined. It is obvious that there is some value in the situation as social and historical myth, the corrupt upper classes being supported by the healthy middle and lower classes.

It is important, however, to notice Fitzgerald’s attention to the European elements in the story. For the most part, then, the Europeans in the book are of the upper classes, and all of them are seen as corrupt: the English woman, Lady Caroline, who is sexually inverted and who eventually entangles Mary North in her corruption after the death of Mary’s husband; the young Spaniard who is likewise hopelessly committed to a sexual inversion through his simple refusal to do anything about it; and the various inmates of Dick Diver’s clinic. Caroline Sibley-Piers is judged finally by Ceusse, who is an old friend of Dick’s and the successful manager of the hotel at Antibes around which much of the action centers.

I have never seen a woman like this sort of woman; I have known many of the great courtesans of the world and for them I have much respect often, but women like this woman I have never seen before.16

To sum up briefly the movement of the story, then, Dick Diver, already in his career as a psychologist, encounters

16 Ibid., p. 535.
Nicole Warren as a patient and marries her. Bringing her back to strength through his own strength, he builds a sort of life. In the end, however, Nicole drains Diver of his strength and leaves him a broken man.

'We can't go on like this,' Nicole suggested. 'Or can we?—what do you think?' Startled that for the moment Dick did not deny it, she continued, 'Some of the time I think it's my fault—-I've ruined you.'

'So I'm ruined, am I?' he inquired pleasantly.

'I didn't mean that. But you used to want to create things—now you seem to want to smash them up.'17

In the end, however, only Diver feels the ruin, for Nicole is without the successful morality which would allow her to understand. After Dick has set Nicole free and has established her psychological independence, arrangements are made for the separation. It is understood that Nicole is now in love with the European, Tommy Harban. As Dick stands surveying the summer resort which he has built, he speaks a kind word or two to Mary North. In leaving,

He raised his right hand and with a papal cross he blessed the beach from the high terrace. Faces turned upward from several umbrellas.

'I'm going to him.' Nicole got to her knees.

'No, you're not,' said Tommy, pulling her down firmly.

'Let well enough alone.'18

But the point of view of the Warrens is seen most clearly when Nicole finally realizes something of her loss.

'Dick was a good husband to me for six years,' Nicole said. 'All that time I never suffered a minute's pain because of him, and he always did his best never to let anything hurt me.'

Baby's lower jaw projected slightly as she said:

'That's what he was educated for.'19

17 Ibid., p. 486.
18 Ibid., p. 544.
19 Ibid., p. 542.
Diver returns to America a broken man, and we are given some insight into Fitzgerald's conception of him by a remark of Fitzgerald's to Edmund Wilson.

...by the way, your notion that Dick should have faded out as a shyster alienist was in my original design, but I thought of him, in reconsideration, as an 'homme epuise,' not only an 'homme manque.' I thought that since his choice of profession had accidentally wrecked him, he might pleasibly have walked out of the profession itself. 20

Finally, it may be said that the various forms of disintegration and deterioration which are seen in the novel are accurate and real, but there is an insistence upon them which seems almost unhealthy, and Fitzgerald's reasons for the general disease which the novel treats are not sufficient to sustain the book.

Interest in Tender Is the Night

A remarkable number of Fitzgerald's critics have noticed the disorganization of Tender Is the Night. As Berryman has said, "it is hard to believe that anyone ever found it as a story anything but a failure." 21 Maxwell Geismar has remarked that "...the novel, filled as it is with fascinating insight, written often with all of Fitzgerald's grace, still seems curiously off center." 22

20 Fitzgerald, The Crack-up, "Letters to friends," (to Edmund Wilson, postmarked March 12, 1934), p. 278.


22 Maxwell Geismar, op. cit., p. 278.
Edmund Wilson's remark is that "...the parts of this fascinating novel do not always quite hang together..." 23

The fault is real enough; *Tender Is the Night* fails ultimately to be an interesting novel. The reasons are similar to those for the failure of Fitzgerald's first novels; yet there is a difference in the characters of *Tender Is the Night*. They are in part developed skillfully; yet only two of them, Dick Diver and Nicole, develop consistently throughout the whole, and the development of Nicole is marred by the handling of chronological sequence. In the early pages of the book, we see Nicole is an adult and come to expect a certain kind of behavior from her. Later her motivation is given, and it is consistent with her character; yet the mystery which surrounds her in the early pages of the book is the result of Fitzgerald's structural difficulties; it is not interesting in itself. Dick Diver is the most carefully and successfully handled character, developing consistently from one part of the novel to the next, holding our interest as our understanding increases. Certain of the characters, however, are inconsistent. Mary North's reversal is inadequately prepared. 24 Rosemary Hoyt's development is so inconsistent as to suggest that Fitzgerald's original

23 Edmund Wilson, The Foreword to *The Last Tycoon*, p. xi.

24 Intentional inconsistency in characterization, where it is a part of the plan of the book, is not necessarily a structural defect, of course. Walter L. Myers has considered this problem in his volume *The Later Realism, A Study of Characterization in the British Novel*. One of the developments in realistic characterization, Myers remarks, is a "disregard of artistic, traditional, or conventional consistency, or
conception changed during the course of the writing of the book so that we are left actually with two different characters who have little connection with each other but who have the same name. That is, the Rosemary in the opening pages of the novel is not the same person who reappears 200 pages later.

The plot of the novel finally is not an intelligible structure. It is rather a series of episodes, almost, as Geismar has said, "... the diary of a collapse," rather than a novel about a collapse. The episodic nature of the story accounts for two other elements which tend to disperse interest: the unnecessary changes in pace and in tone.

To sum up, then, Tender Is the Night is neither a total failure nor a total success. It contains a great deal of excellent technical handling of individual scenes and situations; yet it does not develop as an organic, interesting whole.

unity which creates... often an effect that may be called incongruity." It is not likely, however, that Tender Is the Night should be included in such a development. We have evidence that Fitzgerald was aware of, and dissatisfied with, the incongruities of the book, and that his final work was that of removing as many of them as was possible. But even disregarding the intentional aspect completely, the incongruity of characterization in the book is at odds with the largely traditional handling of the other elements.

Geismar, op. cit., p. 332.
CHAPTER VI

THE LAST TYCOON

Historical Background

The Fitzgeralds came back to American early in 1931. Mrs. Fitzgerald, who had attempted seriously to become a ballet dancer for several years previous to their return, had broken her health, and Fitzgerald himself was in much the same position as Richard Diver. *Tender Is the Night* was published in 1933 and 1934, and not long after, Fitzgerald underwent a nearly complete breakdown in morale and in health. He wrote a series of articles describing this breakdown which were published in *Esquire* in February, March, and April of 1936. He described himself as a cracked plate which "has to be retained in the pantry, has to be kept in service as a household necessity. It can never again be warned on the stove nor shuffled with the other plates in the dishpan; it will not be brought out for company, but it will do to hold crackers late at night or go into the ice box under left-overs."¹ The articles painstakingly describe the minutiae of his humiliation; and although they do not provide an adequate interpretation of Fitzgerald's state of mind, they have in them a quality of relentless honesty. It may well

be that publication involved problems which could not be solved except by simplification, a problem that Fitzgerald met with throughout his literary career. At any rate, the ascription of his weaknesses to certain superficial childhood disappointments is not a satisfactory one. Yet there is no reason to doubt that he has described accurately the effects, if not the cause, of his collapse.

Fitzgerald was always, even during the period in which he prostituted himself shamelessly in the popular magazines, a conscientious and serious artist. He realized sharply the valuable aspects of his craft; and he knew that problems of integrity admit of one solution only. Even after most of his ability to write serious fiction seemed to be dissipated, he could say honestly that he "would not have chosen any other trade." His admission, therefore, that "I had done very little thinking, save within the problems of my craft. For twenty years a certain man had been my intellectual conscience" is only pitiful.

It is not difficult to see that Fitzgerald's life as a serious craftsman had ended. Under such conditions, he could hardly have been expected to produce anything else of value. And when he went to Hollywood, in 1937, smarting over the fact that literary writing had been subjected to "a grosser" power, but nevertheless willing to write for the movies for money, there was no reason to expect anything else of value from him.
There is something heroic, perhaps, in the fact that he managed to pull himself together and begin writing a book, not for money, or for any other ephemeral reason, but because he felt that it needed to be written. "I honestly hoped somebody else would write it, but nobody seems to be going to." He did not live to complete the novel; he died in December, 1940.

The fragment of the novel was in such a state that Edmund Wilson was able to edit the finished portions (probably slightly more than half of the book) and arrange Fitzgerald's notes so that we can see not only his intentions, but his method and achievement in fragmentary form. The Last Tycoon is in many ways Fitzgerald's most satisfactory book; for in it he is at last dealing with an adult and everyday world.

As Edmund Wilson has written in his Foreword to the book,

This draft of The Last Tycoon, then, represents that point in the artist's work where he has assembled and organized his material and acquired a firm grasp of his theme, but has not yet brought it finally into focus. It is remarkable that, under these circumstances, the story should have already so much power and the character of Stahr emerge with so much intensity and reality.

But we must discuss The Last Tycoon with these points in mind; for it has been customary to speak of the book, and to judge it, as though it were a finished work. If a judgement is to be

3 Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon, Foreword by Edmund Wilson, p. 4.
passed, it must be a tentative one. No one may doubt the book's importance; it deals with an aspect of our culture which has been handled only in the most superficial manner.

As Dos Passos has said,

Hollywood, the subject of The Last Tycoon, is probably the most important and most difficult of our time to deal with. Whether we like it or not it is in that great bargain sale of five and ten cent lusts and dreams that the new bottom level of our culture is being created.4

Dos Passos' remarks about The Last Tycoon are probably final; he recognizes the importance of the book, yet he does not judge it as a finished piece of work. He says:

Even as it stands I have an idea that it will turn out to be one of those literary fragments that from time to time appear in the stream of a culture and profoundly influence the course of future events. His unique achievement, in these beginnings of a great novel, is that here for the first time he has managed to establish that unshakable moral attitude towards the world we live in and towards its temporary standards that is the basic essential of any powerful work of the imagination.5

Structural and Thematic Aspects of The Last Tycoon

If it is impossible to pass final judgment upon The Last Tycoon, it is likewise impossible to subject it to rigorous analysis. We have only Fitzgerald's outlines and plans for the last half of the book; and we see from the portion which is finished (actually, what we have is an early and unrevised draft) that his conception had changed in small ways during the writing.

5 Ibid., p. 343.
What we may say with security is that Fitzgerald had created Hollywood with a true perspective; that he thoroughly understood the material he was dealing with; and that he had regained his grasp both of style and structure.

Considering the book from a purely structural viewpoint, the background of Hollywood is unimportant. The Hollywood background is interesting, and seems to have been written with conviction. It is handled with a near-perfect sense of proportion: Stahr's daily routine, the activities of the various contributors to the motion pictures, the dialogue, the production methods—all these are given with an amazing insight and surety; and the proportion of these elements, the placing of accents, the lighting of certain minute integers, the subduing of others, is masterful. Yet these things need not be considered in any detail here.

Structurally, The Last Tycoon is nearer to The Great Gatsby than to any other of Fitzgerald's works. The conception and handling of the dramatic portions, and the skillful handling of the generalized narrative, are directly related to the earliest book. Through them, The Last Tycoon achieves balance and formal order, as Tender Is the Night, with all its brilliance and virtuosity, does not.

The character of Stahr is the final development of the typical Fitzgerald hero. It is important, as Caisman has pointed out, that Stahr should be a Jew: and in this reversal
of Fitzgerald's values, a reversal, that is, from the values of *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald's hero achieves a genuine maturity. Stahr is the executive of a great motion picture company; and he is revealed as a far-sighted, honest, and thoughtful man. He is a man of high standards, so much so that he is willing to revise his production schedule when he is convinced, by a chance encounter with a Negro who had come down on the beach to read Emerson, that his schedule needed revision. His devotion to his work is complete; his office is his home. He is bringing about his own destruction through his devotion. Conscious of his need to rest, and of his failing health, he continues his struggle against the factions of Hollywood which prevent the production of significant works.

Fitzgerald's conviction of the necessity of struggle and the inevitability of defeat has been spoken of in connection with the other novels. Here we see it in an ultimate form, where the necessity of struggle lends moral value to Stahr but is the immediate cause of his destruction. Fitzgerald's other themes are brought into final focus, also: Stahr's battle against the elements of Hollywood who are attempting to undermine him provide a half-conscious horror that he may be losing his identity. Resources, physical and mental, are still seen to be quantitative; one may lose them, and lost, they cannot be regained. The itinerary of the hero is likewise complete: he has returned to the westernmost section of the United States.
Fitzgerald's conviction of the moral health and strength of the western provincial, as opposed to the corruption, the weakness and insufficiency of the eastern sophisticate, is likewise revealed in *The Last Tycoon*. In a casual conversation between Stahr and Kathleen, the English girl whom he loves, the notion is made clear.

"Don't start trusting Americans too implicitly," he said smiling. "They may be out in the open, but they change very fast."
She looked concerned.
"Do they?"
"Very fast and all at once," he said, "and nothing ever changes them back."
"You frighten me. I always had a great sense of security with Americans."

Yet, although all the elements of his earlier work permeate the book, his moral judgements are based upon a sounder basis than ever before. There is no neat division between East and West, although the opposition remains; there is only a consideration of each individual in terms of his own moral worth. And although the latter basis may not provide quite as convenient a classification, it is sounder, and more real, in the end.

In conclusion, it is well to repeat again that *The Last Tycoon* is only a promising fragment. It is the most interesting, interesting in the technical sense, of all Fitzgerald's works. As an organic whole, it develops intelligibly from part to part; and even the fragment in its

---

present, unrevised state reveals a more complete unity between the individual parts than many of Fitzgerald's complete works. It may well be that, even as it stands, it is the result of an unfulfilled but major phase of Fitzgerald's development.
CHAPTER VII

THE AUTHORITY OF FAILURE

There is on record a famous interchange between Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, in which Fitzgerald is said to have remarked, "The rich are different from us." Hemingway replied, "Yes, they have more money." The remark has been quoted by many of the people who have written about Fitzgerald, and ordinarily it is supposed that Hemingway came out the victor. As a wisecrack Hemingway's remark is clever enough; but as a serious observation, it is incredibly stupid. Yet Fitzgerald, it appears, had the last word. In his Note-Books we find the following entry:

I talk with the authority of failure--Ernest with the authority of success. We could never sit across the same table again.¹

Fitzgerald has never been noted for his objectivity; yet his honesty, and his self-knowledge, are remarkable. In many ways, the delayed maturity and the wisdom which Fitzgerald attained in his last years are astonishing, are, like his final effort in writing The Last Tycoon, heroic.

Fitzgerald's fiction from this period is a very small body of work indeed; but we have evidence of the remarkable change which he underwent in his Note-Books end in the series of letters to his daughter which accompany the Note-Books. Only Fitzgerald himself knew the extent of his authority; but we are given a further glimpse of his self-knowledge in another entry:

I can even live with a lie (even some else's lie--can always spot them because imaginative creation is my business and I am probably one of the most expert liars in the world and expect everybody to discount nine-tenths of what I say), but I have made two rules in attempting to be both an intellectual and a man of honor simultaneously--that I do not tell myself lies that will be of value to myself, and secondly, I do not lie to myself.

Whatever else may be said about him, Fitzgerald understood his own failure.

The preceding chapters outline the small number of tensions which underlie the whole of Fitzgerald's work. We have seen how certain relationships gradually shift, and how Fitzgerald's increasing technical command in his early years brought these relationships into a continual re-focus; how, as Fitzgerald's experience of the culture he wrote about increased, and his ability to judge it increased, certain of these key tensions in his work were brought to new significances. The whole result of his full

---

development is that the values which underlie his last novel are in exact opposition to those of his first.

His themes, his particular preoccupations, however, remained constant over the whole span--more than 20 years; and although at the end of his career, he realized that charm, social position, and physical beauty are considerably less important than certain other less material values, he was interested in them to the very end of his life, so that his last book contains a great deal of the former elements. It is true that they are seen, at last, in their true perspective; there is no morbid dwelling upon mere social grace, as there was in Tender Is the Night. But the particular point which needs to be emphasized here is that there is a constancy in Fitzgerald's matter; and there is a relationship between his technical command of his craft and his judgment of that matter.

Vaguely ambiguous dichotomies, cloudy symbolisms, incomplete allegories which underlie every novel which Fitzgerald wrote--they are partially resolved in The Great Gatsby, but not completely--are difficult problems in dealing with his work. Yet in spite of their irresolution and their lack of clarity, there can be no doubt that these elements have the power to interest, almost to tantalize. In seeking to explain these elements, we are reduced to
examining Fitzgerald the man; and such an examination is beyond the limits and intentions of the present study. Yet hints of the solution to the puzzle are to be found in the work itself.

Fitzgerald was fascinated by the rich; yet even when he felt himself closest to the rich, he felt himself at the same time an outsider. The ambivalence, to use an overworked word, carries over to his novels. The people of the novels are always from the upper tenth, economically, of the society.

It is possible that there is a reason for the connection between the social position and the morality of the rich. For the rich are the only people, in Fitzgerald's imagination, who were faced with a serious moral problem: they had the power to do as they wished. They were therefore evil in that they refused to recognize the possibility of moral choice. The notion is akin to the rationalistic conception of freedom of the will, which is made possible by the use of man's reason, his rational soul; and evil results from man's failure properly to use his reason. At any rate, the opposition between wealth and poverty is made parallel to moral disease and moral health.

The parallel is not an unreal one; nor is Fitzgerald's examination and judgement of the culture of America by any means worthless. Doubtless a great deal of Fitzgerald's power and value is in his critical realism. Yet it may be
fairly said, and for that matter substantiated by reference to his own statements, that he was not an intelligent man. Whether his failure in judgement is to be attributed to the failure of his education, or to his own particular vision, his failure to understand the significances of the cultural phenomena which he dealt with, and his failure to comprehend larger social patterns, prevents him from being a major critical realist. It is not that there is no truth in his judgement of the East and the West; it is that he did not see that the development of each is in the same direction. Nick Carraway feels that the East has nothing to do with the West; he wishes to return to the West and thereby to morality. He does not realize that he has intercepted two separate parts of the same culture, but that one has reached a further stage of development than the other.

Not unconnected with Fitzgerald's social criticism is his relationship to certain of his forebears in American literature, and with Conrad. Fitzgerald's conception of structure developed out of a number of disparate influences, the most important of which have been pointed out in preceding chapters. His mastery of point of view came through his study of Conrad and James, and his conception of the centrally placed narrator is closely parallel. Furthermore, his general impressionistic method derives from the great
European impressionists. From the impressionists, also, and more particularly from Conrad, come his conception of the abstract plan or pattern in the novel.

Aside from the matter of technique, Fitzgerald is related to Henry James in a number of ways. The comparison may seem astonishing, on the surface; James left an immense body of serious writing, and Fitzgerald left very little. James wrote in the grand manner, and Fitzgerald is always somewhat muted in tone. Yet both novelists were primarily interested in ambiguous social relationships. Both dealt with the same element of society. Fitzgerald's conception of the innocent West and the corrupt East, however, is very close to James' similar conception. Nick Carraway's introduction to eastern society is directly analogous to Christopher Newman's in The American, or even Lambert Strether's, in The Ambassadors. And Rosemary Hoyt, the young American girl of Tender Is the Night, is very close to Milly Theale, of The Wings of the Dove. It is not merely that the geographical origins of these characters are similar, although it is true that they are; the pairs of characters function, and contribute to the development of theme in their respective books, in precisely the same way. It is probably not an accident that the limitations of the social criticism of the one are likewise the limitations of the other.
But if Fitzgerald's social criticism is a limited criticism, his craftsmanship represents a major achievement in prose fiction of the period. His performance is not sustained; the absolute certainty of artistry of *The Great Gatsby* is not to be found in all of the work which followed it, even though the body of work is comparatively small. Yet Fitzgerald succeeded in perfecting a particular kind of fictional structure. It may be characterized as a "poetic" structure; his best works are built much like certain metaphysical poems, around a central structural metaphor, as in *The Great Gatsby*; or around a definition, as in "Babylon Revisited"; or around a symbol, as in *The Last Tycoon*. Within the limitations of the structure itself, the development is often nearly perfect.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Fitzgerald, F. Scott, This Side of Paradise, New York, Charles Scribner and Sons, 1920.


Fitzgerald, F. Scott, Tender Is the Night, New York, Charles Scribner and Sons, 1934.


Fitzgerald, F. Scott, Tales of the Jazz Age, New York, Charles Scribner and Sons, 1922.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott, All the Sad Young Men, New York, Charles Scribner and Sons, 1926.


Biography and Criticism

Books


100


Articles


Mayberry, George, "Love Among the Ruins," New Republic, Vol. 113 (1945) p. 82.


Shaw, Vivian, "This Side of Innocence," Dial, Vol. 72 (1922), 419.


Unpublished Material