AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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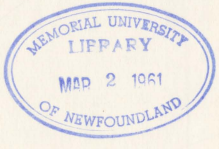

ABSTRACT

F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the most talented novelists that America has produced, although he was not the most careful or the most prudent. From Henry James he inherited a social perceptiveness that was often at an uneasy truce with his belief in The American Dream. Fitzgerald's art is divided between these extremes and only once, in The Great Gatsby (1925), did he succeed in welding them into a coherent whole. Of his other books, only The Last Tycoon (1941) shows the same understanding and objective grasp of material that makes The Great Gatsby so outstanding, but the novel is unfinished and it is impossible to say whether or not Fitzgerald could have succeeded a second time.

A concern with money is paramount in Fitzgerald; he saw it as a means of perfection, until intellectual honesty forced him to recognize its limitations. To some extent all his novels deal with the isolating power of money and its destructiveness of personality. Because he possessed a Jamesian social conscience Fitzgerald attempted to find certainty in a moneyed aristocracy. Tender Is The Night (1934) is, in part, an analysis of the uncertainty and instability of the American rich who formed, for Fitzgerald, an élite; to them he attributed the virtues he admired: honour, courage and inner security. The corrupting power of money forced him to modify his view of aristocracy until it became a moral rather than a material state.

Even his earlier novels, such as This Side of Paradise (1920) and The Beautiful and Damned (1922), contain in embryo the ideas he later developed into a personal and national myth. Acutely conscious of his

society, Fitzgerald was gifted with the satiric eye of a Jane Austen, but possessed neither her staying powers nor her social assurance. His works, The Vegetable (1923) excepted, are marked by a verbal brilliance, although marred by carelessness and illiteracies; he has an unfailing ear for language that makes his prose style the most vibrant in American fiction.

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by

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PREFACE

This thesis is an attempt to assess F. Scott Fitzgerald's merit as a writer and to determine his place in American Literature. His five novels and only play are discussed in detail, but the short stories only in so far as they elucidate his literary attitude, or are connected with the novels. Fitzgerald was a prolific writer, and it is beyond the scope of this treatise to include his one hundred and sixty short stories, thirty-odd essays and numerous poems.

Because Fitzgerald's life is so closely related with his art, I have used certain incidents to illustrate the nature of his character. From Arthur Mizener's biography I have drawn many of the details of Fitzgerald's life, but wherever possible have relied on the original notes, letters and autobiographical essays. In addition I have referred to certain letters of Fitzgerald's, published by Shane Leslie in 1959, and Beloved Infidel (1958), which includes an account of Fitzgerald's last years in Hollywood.

Fitzgerald's erratic spelling I have reproduced without indication; some examples are: "chrystaline," "Plantagonets," "Hiemer," "technic," "McKenzie," "Sigorney," "juvenalia" and "fortaccio" (for fortissimo).

I am indebted to the Canada Council for a Pre-Master's scholarship without which this thesis could not have been completed. Grateful acknowledgement is extended to the Library Staff of Memorial University for their assistance and co-operation.

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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was born September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota, the only son of Edward Fitzgerald, an impoverished descendant of an old distinguished Maryland family, and Mary McQuillan, eccentric daughter of a wealthy Immigrant. Edward Fitzgerald's southern manners marked him as a gentleman, but he had neither the means to keep up the appearances of it, nor the inclination or ability to make money. Fitzgerald loved his father and was deeply influenced by him; he said later in life: "deep in my subconscious I have referred judgments back to him, what he would have thought, or done".[1] Conscious of the family's economic uncertainty and dubious gentility because of their enforced moves from apartment to apartment, Fitzgerald became aware, at an early age, of the difference between himself and wealthy children. He developed, as a child, the social unease that troubled him all his life, and that was so effective in his novels because it forced him to view his material as an outsider, even when most involved with it.

Because the people who possessed it seemed safer than his family, money, acquired an almost magical significance for Fitzgerald; this, added to an essentially unacquisitive nature and an overpowering need to succeed, produced a subtle understanding of the nuances of class distinction, and developed the remarkable ability to associate himself so completely with someone he admired, that he assumed part of their character. But even in maturity his social uncertainty plagued him:

> I am half black Irish and half old American stock with the usual exaggerated ancestral pretentions. The black Irish half of the family had the money and looked down upon the Maryland side of the family who had, and really had, that...series of reticences and obligations that go under the poor shattered old word 'breeding'.... So being born in that atmosphere of crack, wise crack and counter-crack I developed a two cylinder inferiority complex. So if I were elected King of Scotland tomorrow after graduating from Eton, Magdelene the Guards, with an embryonic history which tied me to the Plantagonets, I would still be a parvenue. I spent my youth in alternately crawling in front of the kitchen maids and insulting the great.[2]

Fitzgerald felt most things keenly and always wrote about what was nearest him, as if by the act of verbalizing them, his emotions achieved added significance and increased self-understanding. He was unfailingly honest when he attempted to deal with personal failures. The short story series on Basil Duke Lee reveal his unpopularity as a youth: first at St. Paul Academy where as the school's most formidable debater he earned the unwelcome reputation of being the boy who knew "How to Run the School,"[3] and later at Newman, the Catholic boys' boarding school, where an aunt paid his tuition, and Fitzgerald was keenly aware of being the poorest boy in a rich boys' school, and to compensate he tried to become the school hero, foremost in all activities, but only succeeded in making himself the most unpopular boy in the school.

His capacity for hero-worship led him to imagine himself a football star; he tried to join the freshman team at Princeton when he first went there in 1913, but was of small stature and not heavy enough. This seemed a great privation and assumed such large proportions that most of his life he envied and admired football players. Wanting desperately to succeed socially he spent most of his time at Princeton, after realizing that his imagined sports career was over, writing lyrics

for the yearly musical comedy produced by The Triangle Club, a powerful force in undergraduate life. His academic work suffered as a result and in his second year he was placed on probation. In November 1916 illness saved his face and allowed him to withdraw gracefully from the University, but hurt pride and unwillingness to admit defeat made him persuade one of the Deans to write him an official statement to the effect that "Mr. F. Scott Fitzgerald withdrew from Princeton voluntarily... because of ill health and that he was fully at liberty, at that time to go on with his class, if his health had permitted".[4] He left with the unhappy conviction that his life up to that point was a series of failures.

Before leaving Princeton he brought Dean Christian Gauss the manuscript of a novel but instead of promising to recommend it to Scribner's as Fitzgerald had hoped, Gauss persuaded him that it was not ready for publication. When he joined the Army in late 1917 to become a lieutenant, he took the novel with him and at Officers' Training Camp, instead of studying, he began the task of rewriting, which he completed early in 1918. Shane Leslie, who Fitzgerald had met through his friend Father Cyril Fay, corrected the manuscript and forwarded it to Scribner's with the proposal that they hold it and allow Fitzgerald to proceed Overseas, hoping that the novel would be published. The novel, tentatively titled The Romantic Egotist, and exuberantly described by Fitzgerald as a "picaresque ramble" showing traces of "Tarkington, Chesterton, Chambers, Wells... Rupert Brooke" and containing "Compton-McKenzielike love-affairs and three psychic adventures including an encounter with the devil in a harlot's apartment,"[5] did not impress the publishers.

Scribner's rejected it after a resubmitted version failed to meet their requirements; only one of their Editors, Maxwell Perkins, thought the book had any merit and when he received the manuscript of This Side of Paradise the following year he enthusiastically wrote Fitzgerald:

> I am very glad, personally to be able to write you that we are all for publishing your book, 'This Side of Paradise.' Viewing it as the same book that was here before, which in a sense it is, though ... extended further, I think you have improved it enormously. As the first manuscript did, it abounds in energy and life....[6]

Fitzgerald was elated. The success he craved had come at last and with it the restoration of self-confidence and the money he needed to get married.

While stationed at an Army camp in Alabama he met Zelda Sayre, the beautiful, vivacious and unconventional daughter of a Judge. She was an irresponsible girl who wanted to enjoy all the pleasures that life had to offer without paying any of the penalties; like the heroine in her novel Save Me the Waltz, she was "two simple people at once," one who wanted to have a law to herself and the other who wanted "to keep all the nice old things and be loved and safe and protected".[7] When she realized that Fitzgerald could not offer her the luxury or the security she demanded, Zelda broke their engagement. Although he understood her attitude and sympathized with the desire for wealth, fame and popularity, Fitzgerald was in despair, and turned to alcohol, until three weeks later physical exhaustion and prohibition combined to suspend this solace. He returned to St. Paul more determined than ever to write a novel that would make him famous.

This Side of Paradise was published March 26, 1920, and Zelda and Fitzgerald were married eight days later in New York. They were deliriously

happy; he gave out an interview proclaiming himself a famous writer and none too reluctantly assumed the title of spokesman of The Jazz Age, while Zelda danced on people's dinner tables; they rode down Fifth Avenue on tops of taxis because it was hot and jumped fully clothed into public fountains to express sheer joy in living. But underneath the glamour and the brashness the Mid-Western boy was shocked, yet fascinated, by the extravagance of money and energy:

> The man with the jingle of money in his pocket who married the girl a year later would always cherish an abiding distrust, an anomosity, toward the leisure class - not the conviction of a revolutionist but the smoldering hatred of a 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 at one time a sort of droit de seigneur might have been exercised to give one of them my girl.[8]

This fear of poverty combined with an attraction to the grace and charm of the wealthy kept Fitzgerald writing short stories to meet the expensive demands of their lives. In spite of an acute consciousness of money he was hopelessly incompetent in dealing with his finances; ten months after the publication of his novel he was sixteen hundred dollars in debt. He borrowed from Scribner's, but the loan solved nothing because Fitzgerald and Zelda were incapable of living within an income; however, he was shocked by the largeness of the sum and into beginning work on another novel.

Anticipating the completion of The Beautiful and Damned, he sold the serial rights for seven thousand dollars, but parties and riotous living interfered with its writing. As always in his novels, he drew the material from personal experience, and the description of the Patches' life in the country gives some indication of the sort of life the Fitzgeralds were living. Their week-end parties drew people such as

H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, and upon the latter Fitzgerald modelled the character of Maury Noble. Gradually Fitzgerald's literary conscience asserted itself and he began to fear that he might lose his talent or debase it, but the constant need for money and Zelda's pregnancy drove him to neglect his novel and depend on his short stories. Many people, of whom Maxwell Perkins was one, blamed Zelda. "Scott was extravagant," Perkins told a friend, "but not like her; money went through her fingers like water; she wanted everything; she kept him writing for the magazines".[9] Fitzgerald himself also blamed Zelda, but he was not a strong willed man and she had little trouble convincing him that her love was more important than his art.

> When I was your age - he wrote his daughter - I lived with a great dream. The dream grew and I learned how to speak of it and to make people listen. Then the dream divided one day when I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me. I was sorry immediately I had married her, but being patient in those days, made the best of it and got to love her in another way. You came along and for a long while we made quite a lot of happiness out of our lives. But I was a man divided - she wanted me to work too much for her and not enough for my dream.[10]

As Arthur Mizener suggests in his biography, this is a slightly prejudiced view of Zelda; Fitzgerald was never a prudent man and the responsibility for his failure as an artist cannot be completely attributed to her.

Shortly after The Beautiful and Damned appeared in 1922, Fitzgerald published his second collection of short stories. Tales of the Jazz Age was not much better than its predecessor, Flappers and Philosophers (1920); both contain only one or two good stories, such as The Cut-Glass Bowl and The Ice Palace in the latter and May Day and The Diamond as Big as the Ritz in the former. Most of them are slight in idea and marred by

over-writing and an insufficient control over the subject-matter; as Fitzgerald himself observed, both collections are for "those who read as they run and run as they read".[11]

He turned, after The Beautiful and Damned, to work on a play he had conceived a year before and wrote to Maxwell Perkins to say that he was planning "an awfully funny play that is going to make me rich forever. It really is. I'm so damned tired of the feeling that I'm living up to my income".[12] The Vegetable did nothing of the sort. When it opened in Atlantic City in 1923, having been revised completely three times, it failed. Fitzgerald was badly disappointed; he was counting on a Broadway success and in anticipation threw lavish parties at which guests were advised in a set of rules "not to break down doors in search of liquor, even when authorized to do so by the host and hostess," and people inclined to become week-end guests were warned "that the invitations to stay over Monday, issued by the host and hostess during the small hours of Sunday morning, must not be taken seriously".[13] All of this combined to put him five thousand dollars in debt. To repair the damage to their budget he began writing short stories for popular magazines and when he was solvent he fled to the South of France in the hope of economizing. There he wrote an article entitled How to Live on $36,000 a Year (1924), in which he described the state of their finances with an air of tolerant amusement and appealing helplessness; but a letter to Edmund Wilson revealed the true state of his feelings: "I really worked hard as hell last winter - but it was all trash and it nearly broke my heart as well as my iron constitution".[14] It took him almost six months to recuperate from the enforced slavery of writing

eleven stories, for which he received seventeen thousand dollars, to him a small sum in return for debasing his art.

This drain on his talent worried Fitzgerald but he seemed incapable of correcting the situation. Going to Europe brought neither peace nor health, and by the time The Great Gatsby (1925) was ready for the publishers he was broke and forced to write a short story to pay immediate expenses. The novel, in spite of generally favourable reviews, did not have an inspiring sale and Fitzgerald was disturbed because he knew it to be his most outstanding work so far. The collected short stories, All the Sad Young Men, which followed a year later contained some of his best stories, such as The Rich Boy, with its sharp analysis of the isolating power of money; Winter Dreams, in which he explores the destructiveness of time and the class distinctions engendered by inherited wealth; Absolution, an examination of a young boy with a guilty conscience and a "spoiled priest" who cannot forget the "heat and the sweat" of life and is obsessed with Swedish "girls with yellow hair" who walk "sensuously along roads ... calling innocent, exciting things to ... young men".[15]

Fitzgerald's Roman Catholic youth left its mark on his character by giving him a deep sense of sin which he never succeeded in eradicating, although he often thought so; in 1920 he wrote Edmund Wilson: "I'm ashamed to say that my Catholicism is scarcely more than a memory - no that's wrong it's more than that; at any rate I go not to the church nor mumble stray nothings over chrystaline beads".[16] Fitzgerald was shocked by his own drinking and the escapades into which it led him, but he seemed to have a compulsion to scandalize himself. Even though

his debauchery alienated friends and helped to mar his art, and in spite of his ability to objectively view its consequences as well as write about it with astonishing honesty, he was incapable of rectifying the situation. The awareness of dissipation heightened his sense of guilt and produced such a cleavage between the artist and the man that they seemed to be totally different people; the artist maintained his standards by remaining aloof and taking notes on the proceedings with an avidity that was abnormal. "I do not tell myself lies that will be of value to myself," he wrote in his notebook, "and secondly, I do not lie to myself".[17] This ability to retain an impersonal and unbiased view of experience at a moment of complete involvement gives Fitzgerald's work a two-dimensional effect and allows him to get close to the reader without the latter being always aware of it.

It was not until almost ten years after The Great Gatsby that he published anything other than short stories, although he attempted to write an ambitious novel on matricide only to abandon it; his life on the Riviera was conducive neither to calm nor concentration. Letters written at the time reveal an agitation and a growing despair that he tried to hide behind a mask of amusing cynicism. One letter to John Peale Bishop was headed:

> I am quite drunk
> I am told that this is Capri
> though as I remember Capri was quieter.[18]

Zelda, too, began showing signs of strain by becoming more unpredictable; on one occasion she threw herself down a flight of stairs because Fitzgerald was paying attention to another woman, and on another, prostrated herself in front of their car and told Fitzgerald to run over her. He

angrily tried to start the motor, but it failed momentarily and friends intervened before anything else could happen.

The Fitzgeralds returned to America in 1926 with the hope of re-capturing health and love and saving themselves from further deterioration, but the attempt ended in failure, and they returned to France. Zelda was always jealous of Fitzgerald's success and wanted to be admired and popular. She decided to become a ballet dancer and began practising with such intensity that she suffered a physical and mental breakdown. Fitzgerald could not help her; he found it difficult to control himself and was fighting a losing battle with alcoholism. Impotent rage and despair filled his letters: "Excuse Christ-like tone of letter. Began tippling at page 2 and am now positively holy (like Dostoevsky's non-stinking monk)".[19] Their lives were disorganized and unhappy; Zelda's illness was diagnosed as schizophrenia with little chance of a complete recovery. When she was well enough to travel he took her back to America and they settled in a large house in Baltimore, ironically named "La Paix". There, Fitzgerald wrote most of Tender Is The Night in which he describes Zelda's fight for sanity and his own gradual collapse. He had great difficulty with the writing; his alcoholism was so serious that, by his own admission, he wrote part III of the novel entirely on gin. He feared that his readers had dwindled and hoped it would re-establish him as a serious novelist, but when the book appeared in April 1934 it was badly received. Even his book of collected short stories, Taps at Reveille (1935), which contained some of the delightful Basil and Josephine stories did not please the critics. The critical failure of Tender Is The Night destroyed his last hope. The blow was too much and Fitzgerald collapsed.

As always he was in debt; added to the fear that he had lost his talent, which he now regarded as his most precious possession, he was near complete despair. He tried to write but could not. Finally he managed to produce The Crack-Up (1936), a series of short essays in which he described his failure as a writer and his mental anguish. Some of his friends, especially Hemingway, were annoyed with him for revealing so much.

> ... there was not an "I" any more - he wrote - not a basis on which I could organize my self-respect - save my limitless capacity for toil that it seemed I possessed no more. It was strange to have no self - to be like a little boy left alone in a big house, who knew that now he could do anything he wanted to do, but found there was nothing he wanted to do - (...I have the feeling that someone, I'm not sure who, is sound asleep - someone who could have helped me to keep my shop open. It wasn't Lenin and it wasn't God).[20]

With the acknowledgement of defeat his "old dream of being an entire man in the Goethe-Byron-Shaw tradition, with an opulent American touch," shattered and was relegated to the "junk heap" along with the symbols of other broken dreams, "the shoulder pads worn for one day on the Princeton freshman football field and the overseas cap never worn overseas".[21]

In 1937 he went to Hollywood to write scripts for Metro-Goldwyn Mayer in the hope of paying off his debts. Hollywood fascinated him and he prepared to become a script-writer, but the shock of discovering that his work was being rewritten angered him so much that he turned to a novel. Shortly after his arrival in Los Angeles he met and fell in love with Sheilah Graham, a gossip columnist, from whose life he drew the outline for Kathleen Moore, the heroine of his unfinished novel. Miss Graham's autobiography, The Beloved Infidel (1958), in which she

describes her meeting with Fitzgerald and her life with him, supports the claim that she is the model for Kathleen:

> He never told me that he was writing about me - that Stahr, the central character of the book, would fall in love with an English girl who was based on me... She spoke like me. She used my phrases.... When Scott read to me, night after night, what he had written during the day, I began to realize that the love affair between Kathleen and Stahr - the very heart of the novel - was our love affair.[22]

Everything Fitzgerald wrote was transmuted biography, but it is extremely dangerous to assume that his characters are authentic portraits; his work was subject to his art and his feelings towards the characters were coloured by his ideas about society and money. Stahr's preoccupation with death is to some extent Fitzgerald's own, but the character of Stahr is the most objectively conceived of all his heroes. The Last Tycoon (1941) is a penetrating insight into Hollywood and proves that the fear for his talent was unfounded. The novel reveals a maturity of conception and a development of his power of observation, and portrayal of character, but the novel's incomplete state makes any final judgement of what he might have achieved, impossible.

Fitzgerald's artistic standards were high and consequently he always found himself lacking; he held such writers as Conrad and Joyce in awe, but was prepared to pit himself against them. To new writers he was kind and exceedingly generous; an example of this concern for fellow writers is his championship of Ring Lardner and Hemingway, whom he not only recommended to Scribner's but tried to enlist his friends aid in getting them recognized. Glenway Westcott recalled being approached by Fitzgerald on Hemingway's behalf: "What could I do to help launch Hemingway? Why didn't I write a laudatory essay on him?"[23] Fitzgerald's

respect for writing was such that he greatly lamented his misuse of his talent and his craft, and towards the end of his life wrote his daughter:

> What little I've accomplished has been by the most laborious and uphill work and I wish now I'd never relaxed or looked back - but said at the end of The Great Gatsby: I've found my line - from now on this comes first. This is my immediate duty - without this I am nothing.[24]

But it was too late. He was ill and tired and badly in debt. By material standards he was a successful man, but by his own, a failure. He was a terribly confused and "divided man" and his desire to be a great writer was often secondary to his need for money because with it he hoped to share the "mobility and grace" of the rich.[25]

The day after he wrote the beginning of chapter six of The Last Tycoon, Fitzgerald died of a heart attack; he was forty-four years old. Ironically his funeral was very like Gatsby's. He had pursued a dream and it had wrecked him until he became "a writer only,"[26] but unlike Gatsby he knew the taste of defeat and resolved to cut his losses:

> There was to be no more giving of myself - all giving was to be outlawed under a new name, and that name was Waste.[27]

The notes which appeared with Edmund Wilson's edition of The Last Tycoon indicate that Fitzgerald had recovered his interest in writing although he still never lost his preoccupation with death or his deep sense of guilt over Zelda's fate. A weak man but not a coward, his great talent made him all the more vulnerable to the pulp magazines who tempted him with generous offers to produce mediocre work; his life with Zelda reinforced the extravagant side of his nature until both of them were as damned as the heroes and heroines in his novels.

NOTES

1 Fitzgerald, "The Death of My Father," (unpublished). Cited by Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, ch. 1, p. 11. (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1951).

2 Fitzgerald to John O'Hara, 18 July 1933. Cited by Arthur Mizener, Ch. 1, p. 15.

3 Fitzgerald's Ledger. Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch. 1, p. 16.

4 Fitzgerald's Scrapbook. Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch. 3, p. 53.

5 Fitzgerald to John Peale Bishop, 1918. "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 252, Edmund Wilson, Ed. (New Directions, New York, 1945).

6 Maxwell Perkins to Fitzgerald, 16 Sept. 1919. Editor to Author: The Letters of Maxwell Perkins, p. 20, John Hall Wheelock, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1950).

7 Zelda Sayre, Save Me the Waltz. Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch.4, p. 75.

8 Fitzgerald, "Handle with Care," (Esquire, April 1936). The Crack-Up, p. 77.

9 Maxwell Perkins to H. D. Piper (n.d.). Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch. 6, p. 123.

10 Fitzgerald to his daughter, 7 July 1938. Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch. 6, p. 122.

11 Fitzgerald, (The Dial, Feb. 1923). Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch. 8, p. 146.

12 Fitzgerald to Maxwell Perkins, 1 Jan. 1922. Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch. 8, p. 148.

13 Ernest Boyd, Portraits: Real and Imaginary. Cited by Arthur Mizener, ch. 8, p. 152.

14 Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson, 7 Oct. 1924, "The Letters," The Crack-Up, pp. 264-265.

15 Fitzgerald, "Absolution," The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, pp. 171-172, Malcolm Cowley, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1951).

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17 Fitzgerald, "The Note-Books," The Crack-Up, p. 197.

18 Fitzgerald to John Peale Bishop, Winter 1924-25, "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 265.

19 ibid., 1929, p. 276.

20 Fitzgerald, "Handle with Care," (Esquire, Apr. 1936), The Crack-Up, p. 79.

21 Fitzgerald, "Pasting it Together," (Esquire, Mar. 1936), The Crack-Up, p. 84.

22 Sheilah Graham and Gerold Frank, Beloved Infidel: The Education of a Woman, ch. 27, p. 318. (Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1958).

23 Glenway Westcott, "The Moral of Scott Fitzgerald," (New Republic, 17 Feb. 1941), The Crack-Up, p. 324.

24 Fitzgerald to his daughter, 12 June 1940, "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 294.

25 Fitzgerald, "Handle with Care," (Esquire, Apr. 1936), The Crack-Up, p. 77.

[26] Fitzgerald, "Pasting it Together," (Esquire, Mar. 1936), The Crack-Up, p. 83.

[27] ibid., p. 82.

CHAPTER II

THIS SIDE OF PARADISE

> ...This Side of Paradise is one of the most illiterate books of any merit ever published....Not only is it ornamented with bogus ideas and faked literary references, but it is full of literary words tossed about with the most reckless inaccuracy. (Edmund Wilson, 1922).[1]

Fitzgerald was one of the most illiterate writers of his time; he was also one of the best. But what Edmund Wilson wrote in 1922 remains true of the novel today; age has not improved it. It does show in embryo, however, an originality which was to find a fuller expression in novels such as The Great Gatsby (1925) and Tender Is The Night (1934). But it has neither the technical precision and beauty of The Great Gatsby nor the scope and haunting quality of his far superior but less successful novel Tender Is The Night. This Side of Paradise (1920) is diverting but collegiate in its attempt to emulate H. G. Wells and Compton Mackenzie. It has no point of view despite its posing: the earnestness with which Amory Blaine, the hero of the novel, discusses Life, Literature and Politics is amusing rather than profound, and not to be taken seriously. But whatever its faults the novel has life, unexpected honesty and an acute sense of social distinctions; however, these merits are marred by Fitzgerald's erratic grammar and notorious bad spelling, academic deficiencies which, combined with over-writing, were to make This Side of Paradise an embarrassment to its author in later years.

The illiteracies of the novel, while not the sole basis for its weakness, are extremely disconcerting. The reader is left shaking his

head in bewilderment after reading such passages as this:

> He possessed infinite courage, an averagely good mind, and a sense of honor with a clear charm and noblesse oblige that varied it from righteousness.[2]

or this:

'Did you ever get that way?' he demanded confidentially fortaccio.[3]

Language and authors' names alike suffered from Fitzgerald's inaccurate eye- he even misspelled the name of the man to whom the book was dedicated-, but in spite of all these things the novel is important because it was a new departure in American fiction.

The novel is a forest of ideas and incidents drawn from life and novels such as Tono Bungay and Sinister Street, combined with the heartiness of Owen Johnson's Stover at Yale. In its published form it is a refurbished and extended version of a rejected book, The Romantic Egotist. Fitzgerald's description of the latter as "a somewhat edited history of me and my imagination"[4] can equally as well be applied to This Side of Paradise, which is a projection of its author. It traces the development of Amory Blaine, son of a wealthy but insignificant father and a fashionably incoherent mother, through an encounter with the bourgeoisie of the Middle West before going to an Eastern prep school, and then on to Princeton, where he matures to find "all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken".[5]

Amory and his imagination are the pegs on which the structure of the novel hangs, and both are subject to change without notice; this is what tempted one reviewer to call the book "The collected works of F. Scott Fitzgerald published in novel form".[6] One is left with the feeling that no distinction is made between the relevant and irrelevant.

Disorder reigns supreme. For his material Fitzgerald used his own reactions to experience; often they are coloured with attitudes adopted from Wells and Mackenzie. Amory is a mixture of Sinister Street's Michael Fane and Fitzgerald, but does not so readily convince us of his unreality as does Michael Fane; Amory is more than an abstraction. Not so his mother: Beatrice Blaine is remarkably like that phantom of graciousness, Mrs. Fane; if abstractions can be compared Mrs. Blaine is the more convincing. In a letter to Frances Newman, who he felt had been unfair to his book, Fitzgerald defended Mrs. Blaine and claimed that he had drawn her from an actual person. To prove the verisimilitude of his characters he went on to say that Monsignor Darcy, the priest in the novel who has such great influence over Amory, was:

> ...my best friend, the Monsignor Signorney Fay, to whom the book was dedicated. He was known to many Catholics as the most brilliant priest in America. The letters in the book are almost transcriptions of his own letters to me.7

The women in Amory's life are also sketches of real people, but Amory's first love, Isabelle Borge, has depth only within the intensity of Amory's feeling for her. Fitzgerald, with his ability to remember experienced emotion accurately and minutely, drew upon his own feelings towards his boyhood sweetheart, Ginevra King, for the portrayal of Isabelle, just as he drew upon his relationship with Zelda Sayre for the Amory-Rosalind romance. Such is Fitzgerald's talent for standing aside, and dispassionately taking notes on his own emotions, that it would be over-statement to claim that Amory is Fitzgerald or that Rosalind is Zelda; but it is impossible to dismiss the autobiographical element.

The lovers are so genuine that we cannot doubt their existence. Amory's letters to Isabelle are so realistic that we suspect Fitzgerald of using his own letters just as he used Father Fay's, while Amory's conversation with Rosalind gives us the uncomfortable feeling of eavesdropping. An author who can make language vivid is not to be dismissed casually. Yet his lovers seem mostly to be engaged in kissing, a performance which has little physical implication; it appears to conduct its participants to a higher plane. There is very little sex in any of Fitzgerald's novels; when he does write about it, he does so in a manner reminiscent of Henry James. Fitzgerald was incapable of writing a novel of 'raw experience' in the Caldwell-Faulkner tradition; essentially he is a novelist of manners.

The egocentricity of Amory in This Side of Paradise shows that the most intriguing person to Fitzgerald, at the time, was Fitzgerald. He explores his own problems and emotions to the point of obsession. His intellectual poses are mere gestures. The novels which influenced him had 'intellectual' heroes and he fancied himself as one of those graceful, aristocratic non-entities, which grace the pages of Wells and Mackenzie. From Wells's The Research Magnificent he learned how romantic it was to search for personal identity, and this quest was to be a major consideration in most of his novels. Fitzgerald is a far better novelist when he forgets Wells and Mackenzie and defines his own feeling for his material. If there is any thinking done in This Side of Paradise, it is in spite of Wells; it is in spite of Mackenzie that the novel lives.

Amory at Princeton performs much the same as any other undergraduate,

but he is perhaps more inattentive and more concerned with social success. Amory the lover is extremely sensitive to every change of mood, but there are occasions when we suspect Fitzgerald of doing a parody. His description of Amory's initial encounter with his first love verges on the ludicrous: an effect unintentionally produced by a curious mixture of naïveté and artistry. Their sophisticated guile holds our attention:

> Isabelle and Amory were distinctly not innocent, nor were they particularly brazen....She, on her part, was not impressed by his studied air of blasé sophistication. She had lived in a larger city and had slightly an advantage in range. But she accepted his pose - it was one of the dozen little conventions of this kind of affair. He was aware that he was getting this particular favor now because she had been coached; he knew that he stood for merely the best game in sight, and that he would have to improve his opportunity before he lost his advantage.[8]

This is like watching a fledgling Henry James testing his foil, but unfortunately the effect is not sustained. The scene in which Isabelle and Amory quarrel before separation is less subtly handled, although it loses none of its realism. A quarrel develops out of a trifling incident; Amory hurts Isabelle's neck with his shirt stud and during the ensuing spat he realizes that:

> ...he had not an ounce of real affection for Isabelle, but her coldness piqued him. He wanted to kiss her, kiss her a lot, because then he knew he could leave in the morning and not care. On the contrary, if he didn't kiss her, it would worry him.... It would interfere vaguely with his idea of himself as a conqueror. It wasn't dignified to come off second best, pleading, with a doughty warrier like Isabelle.[9]

Taken on its own merits this passage is good, but the loss of ironic detachment has impaired it. Fitzgerald has become so embroiled in Amory's feelings that he has ceased to be an observer.

Having been defeated by Isabelle, Amory turns momentarily to a

chorus girl, Axia Marlowe. Not content with analyzing Amory's every thought, Fitzgerald here implausibly introduces a psychic trauma: in Axia's flat, just as she is about to put her head on his shoulder, Amory is confronted with - of all creatures - the Devil. Just as he is about to accept the temptation of Axia and drink, Amory looks up and sees the object of his horror:

> There the man half sat, half leaned against a pile of pillows on the corner divan. His face was cast in ... yellow wax ... neither the dull, pasty color of a dead man - rather a sort of virile pallor - nor unhealthy.... Amory noticed his hands; they weren't fine at all, but they had versatility and a tenuous strength.... they were nervous hands that sat lightly along the cushions and moved constantly with little jerky openings and closings. Then, suddenly, Amory perceived the feet, and with a rush of blood to the head he realized that he was afraid. The feet were all wrong.... with a sort of wrongness that he felt rather than knew.... It was like weakness in a good woman, or blood on satin; one of those terrible incongruities that shake little things in the back of the brain. He wore no shoes, but, instead, a sort of half moccasin, pointed, though, like shoes they wore in the fourteenth century, and with the little ends curling up. They were a darkish brown and his toes seemed to fill them to the end.... They were unutterably terrible....[10]

But we are not horrified, instead we are amused; such things do not happen to undergraduates. We might have believed in it had the tone of the novel been different; however, this is not a Gothic novel. The incident seems to have been injected into the novel to make it daring. Amory's subsequent experience in the alley and his sense of evil is also quite out of place. Under different circumstances we might have accepted the idea that Amory is in danger of being damned, but he strikes us as an intelligent, imaginative young man, not a daring, mystical soul hovering over the brink of Hell.

An imagination which delights in dramatising itself runs riot in This Side of Paradise. Curiously enough Fitzgerald seems to have been

aware of this, but unable to do anything about it; his worst fault is unerringly revealed when Amory is told: "You're a slave, a bound helpless slave to one thing in the world, your imagination".[11] Such a display of critical insight leads us to expect greater things of Fitzgerald, and we are not disappointed. He improves, and then, suddenly matures by creating The Great Gatsby. His second novel The Beautiful and Damned (1922), although an improvement over This Side of Paradise is still far from the singleness of purpose and the quality of The Great Gatsby, just as in This Side of Paradise unity is sacrificed for the sake of indulgence.

This unwillingness to select reveals itself in the structure of the novel, which is divided into two books. Book one is entitled The Romantic Egotist (after a rejected novel), and most of its material is rewritten from it. Book two, The Education of a Personage, is new material and mostly concerned with the affair of Amory and Rosalind, which is drawn from Fitzgerald's feelings for Zelda Sayre. Even after The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald admitted his inability to cut his material for the sake of art:

> ...I'm afraid I haven't quite reached the ruthless artistry which would let me cut out an exquisite bit that had no place in the context. I can cut out the almost exquisite, the adequate, even the brilliant - but a true accuracy is ... still in the offing.[12]

Few passages could be deleted from The Great Gatsby without marring it; the same can not be said for This Side of Paradise.

Fitzgerald always writes best when he can respond emotionally to his subject; thus, some of his best prose is in book two. There is a parallel between Amory's losing Rosalind, because he has no money and

Fitzgerald's courtship of Zelda, who once broke off their engagement because Fitzgerald could not support her in the manner she desired. He did not question Zelda's belief that gracious luxury was her prerogative, nor does Amory love Rosalind less when she cries:

> I can't be shut away from the trees and flowers, cooped up in a little flat. You'd hate me in a narrow atmosphere.... I wouldn't be the Rosalind you love.... I like sunshine and pretty things and cheerfulness - and I dread responsibility. I don't want to think about pots and kitchens and brooms. I want to worry whether my legs will get slick and brown when I swim in the summer.[13]

Wealth is a necessary condition of Rosalind's love; without it she would not be the same person, nor would Gloria in The Beautiful and Damned, or Daisy in The Great Gatsby.

Rosalind Connage is a mixture of Zelda and Beatrice Normandy of Tono Bungay. The parting of Rosalind and Amory is very similar to that of Beatrice and Ponderevo, and the attitudes and expressions of Beatrice and Rosalind, while not identical, do have a resemblance. Rosalind exclaims, after Amory has asked her to marry him:

> Darling, I don't even do my own hair, usually.[14]

She goes on to insist that she is taking the hardest course just as does Beatrice, who refuses Ponderevo's offer of marriage with the same sort of statement:

> Think! I can't do my own hair! Do you mean you will get me a maid?[15]

Rosalind is not a copy of Beatrice, but we are quite justified in believing that Fitzgerald wrote this part of the novel with an eye to Tono Bungay, especially since we have Fitzgerald's own confession that the novel "derived itself from MacKenzie, Wells and Tarkington".[16]

Apart from experimenting with ideas, Fitzgerald was attempting

stylistic innovations. Most of chapter one, book two, is presented in dialogue form and the novel is dotted with incidental poems, some quite delightful, but most of them uninteresting. We are not likely to be impressed when we read A Lament for a Foster Son, and He going to the War Against the King of Foreign:

> Ochone
> He is gone from me the son of my mind
> And he in his golden youth like Angus Oge
> Angus of the bright birds
> And his mind strong and subtle like the mind of Cuchulin on Muirtheme
> Awirra sthrue
> His brow is as white as the milk of the cows of Maeve
> And his cheeks like the cherries of the tree
> And it bending down to Mary and she feeding the Son of God.[17]

This poem of Father Darcy's to Amory is intended to express the romantic attachment between the two, but its cloying sentimentality gets lost in verbiage and private Celtic rhetoric. The more intelligible poems in the novel lack this pseudo-mystical element; the miniature satire In a Lecture-Room is amusing:

> Good-morning, Fool...
> Three times a week
> You hold us helpless while you speak,
> Teasing our thirsty souls with the
> Sleek 'yeas' of your philosophy...
> Well, here we are, your hundred sheep,
> Tune up, play on, pour forth... we sleep...[18]

Facile and true to the undergraduate tone, this is at least unpretentious, which can hardly be said for the elegiac attempt. Fitzgerald's poetry never quite succeeds. The following poem is perhaps one of the best in the novel, but it can not be called original or deft:

> A fathom deep in sleep I lie
> With old desires, restrained before,
> To clamor lifeward with a cry,
> As dark flies out the greying door;

And so in quest of creeds to share
I seek assertive day again...
But old monotony is there:
Endless avenues of rain.

Oh, might I rise again! Might I
Throw off the heat of that old wine,
See the new morning mass the sky
With fairy towers, line on line;
Find each mirage in the high air
A symbol, not a dream again...
But old monotony is there:
Endless avenues of rain.[19]

It was written when Fitzgerald was twenty; he managed to sell it to a literary magazine, Poet Lore.

Although only a dabbler in verse, Fitzgerald's first novel established him as a budding novelist; it gave his imagination more scope and did not subject it to the more intensive discipline of poetry. There were critics who did not recognize Fitzgerald's talent; Heywood Broun was one of them:

> Fitzgerald has been hailed as among the most promising of our authors. And it may be so, but we dissent. We think he will go no great distance until he has grown much simpler in expression. It seems to us that his is a style larded with fine writing.[20]

Heywood Broun was possibly right when he stressed Fitzgerald's need to grow simpler in expression, but he failed to discern the occasionally trenchant quality of Fitzgerald's writing. The novel is overburdened with unnecessary fantasy, but even so, he displays a knack for using the right phrase and can create atmosphere with few words. The outrageously melodramatic encounter with the devil, if taken on its own, is well done. The evocative writing only loses its effect if we remember the context:

> Down the long street came the moon, and Amory turned his back on it and walked. Ten, fifteen steps away sounded the footsteps. They were like a slow dripping, with just the slightest insistence in their fall. Amory's shadow lay, perhaps, ten feet ahead of him,

> and soft shoes was presumably that far behind. With the instinct of a child Amory edged in under the blue darkness of the white buildings, cleaving the moonlight for haggard seconds.... When again the pale sheen skimmed the cornices, it was almost beside him, and Amory thought he heard a quiet breathing. Suddenly he realized that the footsteps were not behind... they were ahead and he was not eluding but following... following.[21]

Unfortunately Amory's turning to read Wells or Rupert Brooke destroys whatever effect Fitzgerald hoped to obtain and when he tries to revive the incident it fails:

> Half an hour passed. Outside the wind came up, and Amory started as the wet branches moved and clawed with their fingernails at the window-pane. Tom was deep in his work, and inside the room only the occasional scratch of a match or the rustle of leather as they shifted in their chairs broke the stillness. Then like the zigzag of lightning came the change. Amory sat bolt upright, frozen cold in his chair. Tom was looking at him with his mouth drooping, eyes fixed.
>
> 'God help us!' Amory cried.
>
> 'Oh, my heavens!' shouted Tom, 'look behind!' Quick as a flash Amory whirled around. He saw nothing at the window-pane.
>
> 'It's gone now,' came Tom's voice after a second in a still terror. 'Something was looking at you.'[22]

The phrasing and images are powerful, but the break in the episode emphasizes its absurdity; nevertheless, Fitzgerald has shown us what he can do with language. He has an unfailing ear for idiom, and his dialogue in book two is consistently convincing because it enacts perfectly the egocentricity of the lovers, Amory and Rosalind.

Generally speaking, the novel is well-written, but tends to be ornate; the characters 'assay' instead of try, and 'perceive' instead of see. Fitzgerald learned to avoid this, but it took him until The Great Gatsby to do so. His second novel The Beautiful and Damned, while not successful, is superior in design and conception to This Side of Paradise. The novel is chaotic but not dull, and is important because it heralded the awakening of a literary tradition which had been dormant since the time of Henry James.

NOTES

1 Edmund Wilson, "F. Scott Fitzgerald," The Shores of Light, p. 28. (Farrar, Straus and Young, Inc., New York, 1952).

2 Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, Book 1, ch. 2, p. 86. (Scribner's, New York, 1922).

3 ibid., Book 2, ch. 2, p. 218.

4 Fitzgerald, "Who's Who - and Why," (Saturday Evening Post, 18 Sept. 1920), Afternoon of an Author, p. 84, Arthur Mizener, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1957).

5 This Side of Paradise, Book 2, ch. 5, p. 304.

6 R. V. A. S., "This Side of Paradise," (The New Republic, 1920), F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work, p. 48, Alfred Kazin, Ed. (The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, New York, 1951).

7 Fitzgerald to Frances Newman, 26 Feb. 1921. Frances Newman's Letters, p. 41, Hansell Baugh, Ed. (Horace Liveright, New York, 1929).

8 This Side of Paradise, Book 1, ch. 2, p. 73.

9 ibid., ch. 3, p. 101.

10 ibid., pp. 122-123.

11 ibid., ch. 4, p. 155.

12 Fitzgerald to John Peale Bishop, 9 Aug. 1925. "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 271, Edmund Wilson, Ed. (New Directions, New York, 1945).

13 This Side of Paradise, Book 2, ch. 1, pp. 209-210.

14 ibid., p. 207.

15 H. G. Wells, Tono-Bungay, Book 4, ch. 2, p. 341. (W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., London, n.d.).

16 Fitzgerald to Frances Newman, 26 Feb. 1921, p. 42.

17 This Side of Paradise, Interlude, p. 173.

18 ibid., Book 1, ch. 3, pp. 117-118.

19 ibid., Book 2, ch. 5, p. 273.

20 Haywood Broun, "Paradise and Princeton," (N. Y. Herald Tribune, 1920). F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work, p. 51.

21 This Side of Paradise, Book 1, ch. 3, pp. 124-125.

22 ibid., pp. 129-130.

CHAPTER III

THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED

From the time he wrote This Side of Paradise (1920) to the conception of The Beautiful and Damned (1922), Fitzgerald went from a frantic searching after self-definition to a spirited cultivation of world-sadness. The literary world and the avant-garde accepted him and introduced him to new ideas, one of which was The Meaninglessness of Life. The Beautiful and Damned is an attempt to write a tragedy that is one hundred per cent meaningless; unfortunately Fitzgerald succeeds only too well in making his hero's fate pointless.

The novel is a study in the failure brought on by boredom and ennui. Anthony Patch, its hero, is a young man who expects great things of himself but never manages to do anything worthwhile. He and his young wife, Gloria, are heirs to thirty million dollars, but the strain of waiting for it proves too much, and they become spiritual and emotional wrecks, prey to self-indulgence and indecision. Ironically, they fail to recognize their emotional bankruptcy and believe firmly that everything will be all right once they receive their inheritance. Conceived as a "devastating satire"[1] on the wealthy unemployed of American Cabaret Society, the novel begins with a satirical portrait of Anthony Patch:

> ...he wonders frequently whether he is not without honor and slightly mad, a shameful and obscene thinness glistening on the surface of the world like a clean pond, these occasions being varied, of course, with those in which he thinks himself rather an exceptional young man, thoroughly sophisticated, well adjusted to his environment, and somewhat more significant than any one else he knows.[2]

But Fitzgerald soon forgets that he is writing satire and becomes

emotionally entangled in the love of Anthony and Gloria; the book suffers from this sort of confusion throughout. Because he is unable to decide what kind of novel he is writing, The Beautiful and Damned is an artistic failure.

Infinite pains are taken to satirize practically every aspect of the society Anthony comes into contact with, and he is made to do improbable things so that Fitzgerald can be fashionably witty. The Bond business and money-making are ridiculed when Anthony, the personification of graceful idleness, finds that he is temperamentally unsuited for the life:

> He ate in an employees' lunch-room up-stairs with an uneasy suspicion that he was being uplifted.... The conversation that interwove with the pattern of the day's work was all much of a piece. One discussed how Mr. Wilson had made his money, what method Mr. Hiemer had employed, and the means resorted to by Mr. Hardy. One related age-old but eternally breathless anecdotes of the fortunes stumbled on precipitously in the Street by a 'butcher' or a 'bartender,' or 'a darn messenger boy, by golly!' and then one talked of the current gambles, and whether it was best to go out for a hundred thousand a year or be content with twenty. During the preceding year one of the assistant secretaries had invested all his savings in Bethlehem Steel. The story of his spectacular magnificence, of his haughty resignation in January, and of the triumphal palace he was now building in California, was the favorite office subject. The man's very name had acquired a magic significance, symbolizing as he did the aspirations of all good Americans.[3]

More unbelievably, Anthony becomes a salesman so that salesmanship, the "rock bottom on which the country is founded,"[4] can be made a contemptible farce. He answers an advertisment which proclaims "You Can Sell!!!"[5] and listens to a prosperous, slick, go-getting executive telling assembled hopefuls:

> Now my job isn't to make a success of you, because every man is born a success, he makes himself a failure; it's not to teach you how to talk, because each man is a natural orator and only makes himself a

> clam; my business is to tell you one thing in a way that will make you know it - it's to tell you that you and you and you have the heritage of money and prosperity waiting for you to come and claim it.[6]

Anthony goes forth after this little pep talk to try his luck as a salesman, but the initial venture proves unsuccessful, so he bolsters his courage with two strong whiskies and tries again. Successive failures and additional encouragement for his flagging confidence ruin his short career, which ends when he finds himself being threatened with the police while drunkenly trying to sell his "Heart Talks"[7] in a delicatessen.

Gloria, too, provides a means of dabbling in social satire; her entrance is delayed so that her parents can be examined at length. When she does appear, and she and Anthony go to a cheap night-club, where quite out of character she evinces a feeling of kinship with its inhabitants, so that we can be made aware of the vulgarity and hypocrisy of the lower 'moral-classes':

> ...in the place knowingly mentioned, gather the lower moral-classes on Saturday and Sunday nights - the little troubled men who are pictured in the comics as 'the Consumer' or 'the public.' They have made sure that the place has three qualifications: it is cheap; it imitates with a sort of shoddy and mechanical wistfulness the glittering antics of the great cafés in the theatre district; and - this above all, important - it is a place where they can 'take a nice girl'.... There on Sunday nights gather the credulous, sentimental, underpaid, overworked people with hyphenated occupations: book-keepers, ticket-sellers.... With them are their giggling, over-gestured, pathetically pretentious women, who grow fat with them, bear them too many babies, and float helpless and uncontent in a colorless sea of drudgery and broken hopes.[8]

This is very good reportage. Fitzgerald's satire at its best is pungent and at the same time funny; he has the eye of a Jane Austen, but neither her staying power nor her material to work with. Instead, he has the

sensitivity of a Henry James which stands him in good stead and creates the illusion that he has something other than an amorphous society to depend on; an example is his description of a girl joining her friends in a night-club:

> By gesture she was pretending and by words and by the scarcely perceptible motionings of her eyelids that she belonged to a class a little superior to the class with which she now had to do, and that a while ago she had been and presently would again be, in a higher, rarer air. She was almost painfully refined - she wore a last year's hat covered with violets no more yearningly pretentious and palpably artificial than herself.[9]

It is with such people that Gloria would have us believe she belongs, but we are not convinced of her sincerity when she says, "I belong here ... I'm like these people".[10] We are quite ready to accept her vulgarity, but are unprepared for hypocrisy; her avowed kinship with the night-club clientele strikes a false note. Hers is the vulgarity of the rich, not of the poor; all the while she is proclaiming her kindred spirit with the girl in the last year's hat, she is in fact emphasizing her dissimilarity. Her words betray her:

> I've got a streak of what you'd call cheapness. I don't know where I get it but it's - oh, things like this and bright colors and gaudy vulgarity.[11]

As a pose it is not very successful for either Gloria or Fitzgerald; it is more in character for her to dismiss her acquaintances as "just people".[12]

Gloria and Anthony suffer from Fitzgerald's inability to stand aside and view them dispassionately; too often they become Fitzgerald and Zelda. The novel has undoubtedly autobiographical elements but the lives of the Patches are, however, not those of the Fitzgeralds, but rather what he feared they might become. He could see the need for

money driving him increasingly to write for the popular magazines, at the expense of his serious work. This fear stayed with Fitzgerald all his life and was responsible for the creation of Richard Caramel, a deluded novelist, who is a self-portrait and a realistic one. But he is more than a portrait; he is also a fearful prediction. Caramel, after his success with his first novel, The Demon Lover, goes steadily downhill because he has prostituted himself to public taste:

> In the two years since the publication of 'The Demon Lover,' Dick had made over twenty-five thousand dollars, most of it lately, when the reward of the author of fiction had begun to swell unprecedentedly as a result of the voracious hunger of the motion pictures for plots. He received seven hundred dollars for every story, at that time quite a large emolument for such a young man - he was not quite thirty - and for every one that contained enough 'action' (kissing, shooting, and sacrificing) for the movies, he obtained an additional thousand. His stories varied; there was a measure of vitality and a sort of instinctive technic in all of them, but none attained the personality of 'The Demon Lover,' and there were several that Anthony considered downright cheap. These, Dick explained severely, were to widen his audience. Wasn't it true that men who had attained real permanence from Shakespeare to Mark Twain had appealed to the many as well as the elect?[13]

But unlike Richard Caramel, Fitzgerald realized that most of his hack-writing had little to recommend it.

Fitzgerald was a fairly accurate judge of his own talents; the description of Caramel's shortcomings is a satirical portrayal of his own done with a mixture of detachment and exaggeration that is typical of Fitzgerald. The telling criticism of The Demon Lover: "a highly original, rather overwritten piece of sustained description,"[14] is such a precise judgement of This Side of Paradise that we are easily persuaded that Fitzgerald was referring to it. The anatomizing of Caramel confirms our suspicions:

> Dick doesn't necessarily see more than any one else. He merely can put down a larger proportion of what he sees.[15]

With penetrating insight Fitzgerald continues:

> So long as he sticks to people and not to ideas, and as long as his inspirations come from life and not from art, and always granting a normal growth, I believe he'll be a big man.[16]

He has put his finger on the major fault of The Beautiful and Damned. It is marred by too much art.

The novel is a self-conscious attempt to keep up with the fashionable avant-garde led by such people as H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan. It is larded with moralizing and lecturing about Life, vituperation on American manners and society, all in the Mencken manner, to which is added an abortive attempt to achieve the ironic superiority of Nathan. When we hear such pronouncements as "I shall go on shining as a brilliantly meaningless figure in a meaningless world,"[17] from Maury Noble, who is modelled on George Jean Nathan, we wonder what it means; but since it comes in book one, chapter one of the novel, we expect to be further enlightened. We are not. Instead, we get dicta: on literature ("a classic... is a successful book that has survived the reaction of the next period or generation");[18] on women ("a woman should be able to kiss a man beautifully and romantically without any desire to be either his wife or his mistress");[19] on husbands ("there are four general types of husbands");[20] and on Life ("there's only one lesson to be learned from life.... That there's no lesson to be learned from life").[21]

The lack of philosophical depth in Maury's thought is revealed when in book two he delivers an interrupted soliloquy on his education, in a railway station, just before dawn:

> ...I turned, canny for my years, from the professors to the poets, listening - to the lyric tenor of Swinburne and the tenor robusto of Shelley, to Shakespeare with his first bass and fine range, to Tennyson with his second bass and his occasional falsetto, to Milton and Marlow, bassos profundo. I gave ear to Browning chatting, Byron declaiming, and Wordsworth droning. This, at least, did me no harm. I learned a little of beauty - enough to know that it had nothing to do with truth - and I found, moreover, that there was no great literary tradition; there was only the tradition of the eventful death of every literary tradition....[22]

As one reviewer aptly put it, this sounds "like a resume of The Education of Henry Adams filtered through a particularly thick page of The Smart Set".[23] What it is supposed to prove, we can only guess. Fitzgerald's attempt to show us that life is meaningless fails; perhaps because he is not convinced of it himself. He only succeeds in demonstrating the futility of such a position for him. It impairs his art. The luminous quality of his work dies when he is forced to rid himself of hope.

The pervading sense of The Beautiful and Damned is one of failure; everyone in the novel is blighted: Richard Caramel unknowingly prostitutes his talent, but believes he is dealing with "strong themes";[24] Maury Noble who works "so as to forget that there was nothing worth working for,"[25] becomes a "tight-fisted aristocrat";[26] Anthony loses whatever artistic possibilities he had and drifts into an alcoholic limbo where his mind becomes "a bleak and disordered wreck";[27] Gloria, the young and brave who "was deeply herself; and immeasurably sincere,"[28] and could say of her many affairs, "I'm so sure that those kisses left no mark on me - no taint of promiscuity,"[29] becomes the frantic beauty who tries vainly to recapture her former freshness. She who would have "preferred to inflict misery upon every one around her rather than confess that she needed sympathy or assistance....was not above whining now; she was not above being sorry for herself".[30]

Why Anthony and Gloria become empty shells is not quite clear. It is easier to understand Gloria's downfall; her fading beauty, loss of both money and security are believable causes of her distress, but even at her most wretched she retains something of her aloofness and dignity. Her belief in the rights of her beauty and charm forces her to acquiesce in her losses. Anthony, the moral bankrupt who drifts into financial difficulties and an affair with Dorothy Raycroft because he is unable to make "definite judgements,"[31] is an acceptable creation; but the Anthony who does nothing, because there is nothing worth doing, strikes a false note. He is haunted by a sense of waste, just as Fitzgerald was when he was writing for the pulp magazines. Because Anthony is not entirely convinced of the value of his philosophy, we remain unmoved; he cannot rid himself of the idea that he is doing something morally wrong: "it seemed a tragedy to want nothing - and yet he wanted something".[32] Anthony is a puritan, so is Fitzgerald. We cannot help wondering if Fitzgerald shocked himself by writing The Beautiful and Damned.

The New England conscience comes through strongly in his treatment of sex. The courtship and marriage of Anthony and Gloria seem to consist chiefly in sexless kissing, but we cannot doubt the genuineness of Anthony's sentiment, which is portrayed with feeling and precision; he is aware of Gloria's every mood and feels each acutely. But we never get the blatant sexuality of, say, a Faulkner character; that part of life was much too private to be put directly into a novel. Both Anthony and Gloria are curiously egocentric lovers; she is interested in him because he reflects her image; the remainder of humanity she dismisses.

Anthony's love for her is bound up with her acceptance of his pose as a sophisticated young man who has in him the possibilities of a Lord Verulam or a Talleyrand. Their marriage seems to consist only in the union of two superior spirits.

Anthony's relationship with Geraldine Burke, before his marriage, is asexual and juvenile, but his post-marital affair with Dorothy Raycroft approaches the physical. We are told about it because it is of no importance to Anthony; Dorothy is soiled, used and beneath him, while Gloria is his equal, his beloved, and in the end no matter how hardened, his superior. His reactions to both Geraldine and Dorothy are bound up with his class-consciousness; Anthony goes to Geraldine because she is from the lower classes and because:

> She demanded so little that he liked her, for since a lamentable affair with a debutante the preceding summer, when he had discovered that after half a dozen kisses a proposal was expected, he had been wary of girls of his own class.... but a girl who was usher at Keith's was approached with a different attitude. One could tolerate qualities in an intimate valet that would be unforgiveable in a mere acquaintance on one's social level.[33]

Dorothy, too, is socially inferior:

> It was an advantage that her accent was different. He could not have determined the social status of a Southerner from her talk - in New York a girl of a lower class would have been raucous, unendurable - except through the rosy spectacles of intoxication.[34]

These passages apart from clarifying Anthony's character, indicate Fitzgerald's affinity with Henry James.

Unlike such of his contemporaries as Hemingway, Dos Passos and Wolfe, Fitzgerald was interested primarily in social man. The rich and the intruder among the wealthy fascinated him; all his novels deal with money and its effect on personality. The Great Gatsby is a fable about

the destructiveness and emptiness of wealth, while Tender Is The Night portrays the callousness and disregard of the rich for a man who has been broken in their behalf. Had Fitzgerald been living in an aristocratic society, he might well have produced the social satire of an Austen or a Trollope. Instead, he had to content himself with the American rich; he created values for them, and looked only to America, and not to England, for his standards. Fitzgerald's attitude to the wealthy is very much the same as that of Anthony who exclaims:

> I hate people who claim to be great aristocrats when they can't even keep up the appearances of it.[35]

and goes on to explain further that:

> Aristocracy's only an admission that certain traits which we call fine - courage and honor and beauty and all that sort of thing - can best be developed in a favorable environment, where you don't have the warpings of ignorance and necessity.[36]

The rich, for Fitzgerald, possessed an almost indefinable quality which set them apart from the populace; he attributed to them the qualities he admired - courage, beauty and inner security - and thought it essentially "cleaner" to be rich and corrupt, than innocent and poor.

The Beautiful and Damned is a more mature book than This Side of Paradise, although it too is marred by spelling errors as well as inept stylistic innovations. The structure of both novels is similar. Both are divided into books, and the chapters are sub-headed whenever a new idea is introduced; dialogue form is used successfully but without apparent reason. The novels are similar in another respect; they both contain serious artistic blunders. This Side of Paradise has its ludicrous encounter with the Devil; The Beautiful and Damned has "A Flash-Back in Paradise," in which we are treated to a conversation

between Beauty and The Voice in the manner of Blake's more incomprehensible Prophetic Books. This museum piece leaves us completely baffled. It has no connection with what goes before and only by the most far-fetched guessing can it be connected with what comes after. Yet for all its transgressions The Beautiful and Damned is an improvement. Despite its posing, lecturing, pseudo-cynicism and lack of a central point, the novel contains in embryo many of the ideas that Fitzgerald was to develop in later novels.

He was to say of this period of his life, in Early Successes, an article written in 1937:

> 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 Thomas Hardy's peasants.[37]

This is true except for one important point: Hardy's peasants are pursued by an inexorable fate while Fitzgerald's heroes are broken by a society to which they aspire, but are unable to conquer. There is little sense of Man confronted with the Cosmos in Fitzgerald's novels; instead, Man is pitted against Society, but only in so far as he attempts to become a member of the élite and moneyed class. His victims are just as helpless as Hardy's, especially in The Great Gatsby and Tender Is The Night, but the causes of their downfall are very different.

Fitzgerald anticipated The Beautiful and Damned in May Day, a short story published in 1920. Gordon Sterrett, its hero, goes to pieces from too much drink and dissipation, until finally in a state of drunken oblivion he marries the much inferior, vulgar, painted, Jewel Hudson. When he realizes what he has done, he commits suicide. Hardy's Jude

marries a woman who is little less than a beast. The similarity ends there. Jude is a helpless victim, bound by his own curious honor and unfriendly forces; Gordon becomes an outcast from his class through self-indulgence rather than circumstance. Jude The Obscure commands our pity even while it pitches us into depression; but neither Gordon Sterrett nor Anthony Patch excites our sympathy. Hardy's novel is a powerfully portrayed philosophical problem, but we are never quite sure what problem, if any, Fitzgerald is posing; beside Hardy, his novel is trivial. He had not yet learned to define his judgements and fit them into a larger scheme. Fitzgerald showed himself aware of this when he wrote John Peale Bishop asking for a detailed review:

> ...I devoted so much more care myself to the detail of the book than I did to thinking out the general scheme that I would appreciate a detailed review.[38]

The novel shows this attention to detail; it is full of acute observation and finally written sections. He demonstrated his ability to write in This Side of Paradise, but he still tends to over-write; however, there are passages which it would be hard to surpass: a drunken Anthony attempting to borrow money from Maury Noble; Anthony discovering he is in love with Gloria; the spiritually bankrupt Anthony who is worth thirty million dollars, but does not realize that none of it can restore his former awareness of life.

It was not until The Great Gatsby (1925) that Fitzgerald managed to subject his imagination to his material and his art, and in so doing to produce a novel outstanding in American Literature.

NOTES

1 Taken from the dust jacket of the first edition of The Beautiful and Damned (1922) and cited by Arthur Mizener in The Far Side of Paradise, ch. 7, p. 138, (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1951).

2 Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned, Book 1, ch. 1, p. 3, (Scribner's, New York, 1950).

3 ibid., Book 2, ch. 2, p. 230.

4 ibid., Book 3, ch. 2, p. 380.

5 ibid., p. 377.

6 ibid., p. 379.

7 ibid.

8 ibid., Book 1, ch. 2, pp. 69-70.

9 ibid., p. 70.

10 ibid., p. 72.

11 ibid., p. 73.

12 ibid., Book 2, ch. 1, p. 134.

13 ibid., ch. 2, p. 222.

14 ibid., ch. 1, p. 141.

[15] ibid., Book 1, ch. 1, p. 20.

[16] ibid., ch. 2, p. 46.

[17] ibid., ch. 1, p. 23.

[18] ibid., ch. 2, p. 47.

[19] ibid., ch. 3, p. 113.

[20] ibid., Book 2, ch. 1, p. 146.

[21] ibid., ch. 2, p. 255.

[22] ibid., pp. 252-53.

[23] Vivian Shaw, a review, (The Dial, Apr. 1922). Cited by Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, ch. 7, p. 139.

[24] The Beautiful and Damned, Book 2, ch. 3, p. 301.

[25] ibid., Book 3, ch. 3, p. 410.

[26] ibid., p. 419.

[27] ibid., p. 406.

[28] ibid., Book 1, ch. 3, p. 104.

[29] ibid., Book 2, ch. 1, pp. 181-82.

[30] ibid., Book 3, ch. 3, p. 416.

[31] ibid., ch. 1, p. 325.

[32] ibid., Book 1, ch. 2, p. 55.

[33] ibid., ch. 3, p. 86.

[34] ibid., Book 3, ch. 1, p. 323.

[35] ibid., ch. 3, p. 407.

[36] ibid.

[37] Fitzgerald, "Early Successes," (American Cavalcade, Oct. 1937). The Crack-Up, p. 87, Edmund Wilson, Ed. (New Directions, New York, 1945).

[38] Fitzgerald to John Peale Bishop, 1922. "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 285.

CHAPTER IV

THE VEGETABLE

Fitzgerald's only play, The Vegetable (1923), met with financial failure and public rejection on its opening night in Atlantic City and smashed his hopes of a Broadway success. Its failure was not due to hasty writing; by the time it went into rehearsal he had revised it three times. In an article for The Saturday Evening Post almost a year later, entitled How to Live on $36,000 a Year, Fitzgerald described the play's reception:

> It was a colossal frost. People left their seats and walked out, people rustled their programs and talked audibly in bored impatient whispers. After the second act I wanted to stop the show and say it was all a mistake.... There was a week of patching and revising, and then we gave up....[1]

The Vegetable is a three-act comedy subtitled from President to postman which deals in a light satirical vein with The American Dream. The inscription on the title-page, supposedly a quotation from "a Current Magazine,"[2] gives the play its name and tells us what to expect:

> Any man who doesn't want to get on in the world, to make a million dollars, and maybe even park his toothbrush in the White House, hasn't got as much to him as a good dog has - he's nothing more or less than a vegetable.[3]

The hero is Jerry Frost, a hen-pecked, $3,000 a-year railway clerk who is harried by a stupid, "shapeless, slack-cheeked, but still defiant" wife who "talks in a pessimistic whine and, with a sort of dowdy egotism, considers herself generally in the right".[4] Before his marriage and inevitable subjection, Jerry has two vague but divergent

ambitions: he wanted to be President or in the event of his missing the Presidency, he wanted to be a postman. He confides this to his wife 'Charlit', in a moment of annoyance and is immediately sorry. When we first meet Jerry, his wife has rescued him from a postman's undistinguished fate.

During the second act Jerry falls into a drunken reverie which is brought on by the home-made gin of Mr. Snooks, his bootlegger, and sees himself as President, his doting father 'Dada' as Secretary of the Treasury and Mr. Snooks as Irish-Poland's Ambassador to the United States. This act is the most important of the play because it is here that Fitzgerald's political satire is concentrated; the other two acts are relatively uninteresting. Act One is an exposition of character and upon it Act Two depends for its contrast and comedy; Act Three is an anticlimax in which we find Jerry happily working as a postman, having been impeached as an "enemy of mankind".[5] Confused and gin-befuddled he has wandered off, freeing himself momentarily from the overwhelming presence of his wife who now realizes how wrong she was to nag him. The play ends with the suggestion that Jerry Frost has at last found his true role and that the unappreciative Charlotte, conscious of her own faults, will be less demanding in the future.

Such a resumé does not do justice to the inventiveness of the second act, nor does it give any indication of the generally appalling dialogue or the diffuseness of the satire. The Vegetable is a bad play, although it is more original than things of its kind tend to be, but even this is no great accomplishment. It is never more than faintly

amusing and it is marred by its attempts to be both fashionable and commercial. Because it has only one point to make, which expresses the popular 1920s' attitude that everything about politics is absurd, the play has little chance to succeed. Satire, to be effective, must surely have more to say. It is unfortunate that Fitzgerald chose such a subject; he was out of his depth because he was not at this stage interested in, or informed about, politics. He tends to draw upon his own reactions to his subject to give it depth and convincingness; his treatment of politics is superficial because he could feel nothing for his subject. His talent for light comedy and fantasy is not enough to save the play; but an indication of his ability to handle fantasy is his short-story, Diamond as Big as The Ritz (1922), in which he charges the narrative with feeling that weaves a spell for the reader, and makes the fantastic believable for a moment. The Vegetable is at no time so compelling or so successful; it barely manages to keep the reader's interest, although the latter has a decided advantage over the spectator, because Fitzgerald's stage directions are no mere instructions, but wonderful little descriptive commentaries, full of life and comedy. He seems to have thoroughly enjoyed writing them.

Jerry and Charlotte Frost are presented in all their seediness and stupidity in Act One, where we are treated to a domestic comedy that is neither funny nor interesting. For sheer dullness it is hard to beat the Frosts' conversation; although Fitzgerald's well-drawn picture of them shows how incredibly dense they are, we cannot help blaming him for their tedious dialogue. The character and dialogue

of Mr. Snooks are also consistent but in this case it is quite acceptable because he is a different kind of character. He is a grotesque figure, and we expect his conversation to be in keeping with his looks. When he appears at the Frost door with his liquor-making equipment in "a great gunny-sack slung over his shoulder,"[6] he looks like:

> ...a race-track sport who has fallen in a pool of mud.... His face and hands are encrusted with dirt. He lacks one prominent tooth, lacks it with a vulgar and somehow awful conspicuousness. His most ingratiating smile is a criminal leer, his eyes shift here and there upon the carpet, as he speaks in a villainous whine.[7]

He announces to the startled Charlotte when she opens the door, that he is "Sandy claus";[8] he confides to Jerry that he is "an Irish-Pole by rights" and got his name "off a can of tomatoes".[9] Mr. Snooks is a stock comic figure of American slap-stick; he has no depth; he does not develop; nor does he hold our interest for long. As the Honourable Snooks in Act Two, he is slightly more amusing, but the humour lies in the situation not in the character. The play depends entirely on the ludicrous for its effect: persons who are unqualified and uncultivated are placed in positions of importance.

'Dada' and Doris are lively enough in the stage directions, but degenerate into comic-strip stereotypes once they are left to their own devices. Fitzgerald tried to make Doris an individual as well as a representative of a class, but succeeded in neither; he was content to use 'Dada' as a ploy and was slightly more successful, although 'Dada' is only passably comic in spite of his odd appearance:

> In person he is a small, shrivelled man with the unmistakable resemblance to a French poodle. The fact that he is almost blind and even more nearly deaf contributes to his aloof, judicial pose and to the prevailing impression that something grave and thoughtful and important is going on back of those faded, vacant eyes.

> This conception is entirely erroneous. Half the time his mind is in a vacuum, in which confused clots of information and misinformation drift and stir - the rest of the time he broods upon the minute details of his daily existence.[10]

This is good portraiture, but unfortunately the dialogue is far below its standard. One expects more from Fitzgerald. It is perhaps unfair to judge The Vegetable by strict dramatic convention, but it is justifiable to expect to be amused, and it is also quite legitimate to ask whether or not the play captures our imaginations and forces us to believe in it. Certainly, we cannot help but recognize the talent and inventiveness of the author, but we are not impressed.

There is confusion of purpose in the play: is it to be farce, fantasy or satiric comedy? It has all three elements, but they are never effectively combined and the burden of amusing us falls for the most part on the farcical characters. Fitzgerald has an eye for detail and social observation but he never seems to be able to put his full vision of each character into the dialogue; Doris is the best example of this:

> She's nice and slender and dressed in an astonishingly close burlesque of the current fashions. She's a member of that portion of the middle-class whose girls are just a little bit too proud to work and just a little bit too needy not to.... she knows a few girls who know a few girls who are 'social leaders', and through this connection considers herself a member of the local aristocracy. In her mind, morals, and manners she is a fairly capable imitation of the current moving-picture girl, with overtones of some of the year's debutantes.... She speaks always in a bored voice, raising her eyebrows at the important words of each sentence.[11]

This is not the Doris we meet in the dialogue. Instead, a coarser, incredibly vulgar and pretentious woman unfolds until the dullness becomes unbearable. Her blasé entrance with the announcement, "Well,

I'm engaged again,"[12] holds our attention for the moment, but the faintly amusing discussion on the latest Hollywood styles, which ensues, quickly begins to pall. The remainder of her conversation has nothing to recommend it. She rises to the height of supreme vulgarity when "under the influence of cosmetics"[13] she comes out onto the lawn of the White House, in the second act, and meets her finance, the Honourable Joseph Fish, Senator from Idaho:

> Fish (jealously). Where were you all day yesterday?
> Doris (languidly). An old beau of mine came to see me and kept hanging around.
> Fish (in wild alarm). Good God! What'd he say?
> Doris. He said I was stuck up because my brother-in-law was President, and I said: 'Well, what if I am? I'd hate to say what your brother-in-law is.'
> Fish (fascinated). What is he?
> Doris. He owns a garbage disposal unit.
> Fish (even more fascinated). Is that right? Can you notice it on his brother-in-law? Something awful. I wouldn't of let him come into the house. Imagine if somebody came in to see you and said: 'Sniff. Sniff. Who's been sitting on these chairs?' And you said: 'Oh, just my brother-in-law, the garbage disposal man.'[14]

There are numerous other examples of the tastelessness and failure of the humour. The language of the play often appears quaint, but this in itself is not a fault. The slightly amused attitude to liquor belongs to time when it was fashionable to have one's own bootlegger. Because the play depends almost entirely on its topical appeal, it has little to offer another age.

The second act is the strongest, despite Arthur Mizener's claim in his biography of Fitzgerald, The Far Side of Paradise (1949), that this honour goes to the first:

> Between the tendency of his fantasy to overreach itself and the vagueness of the satire's assertion about politics, The Vegetable's

> second act is never more than mildly amusing.... /The/ first act is the strongest in the play; it contains a good deal of sharp observation of Jerry and 'Charlit' Frost's domestic life.[15]

Quite true. The first act does contain sharp observation, but it tends to be confined to the elaborate stage directions, with which an audience would not be acquainted. No matter how clever the staging it would be hard to create the atmosphere Fitzgerald weaves in the opening directions to the play. His running commentary encourages the reader to carry on, but an audience has no such crutch. Mr. Mizener is right when he says the second act is only mildly amusing; however, it might be added that the insipidity of the first act is only made bearable by the ingenuity of the second, which belongs to the world of Alice in Wonderland. But again it is the stage directions that create the feeling that meeting a March Hare would be quite in order:

> The lawn, bounded by a white brick wall, is no less attractive. Not only are there white vines and flowers, a beautiful white tree, and a white table cloth and chairs, but, also, a large sign over the gate, which bears the President's name picked out in electric bulbs. Two white kittens are strolling along the wall.... A blond parrot swings in a cage... and one of the chairs is at present occupied by a white fox-terrier.... Look! Here comes somebody out. It's Mr. Jones, the well-known politician, now secretary to the President. He has a white broom in his hands, and, after delighting the puppy with an absolutely white bone, he begins to sweep off the White House steps. At this point the gate swings open and Charlotte Frost comes in. As befits the First Lady of the Land, she is elaborately dressed - in the height of many fashions. She's evidently been shopping - her arms are full of packages - but she has nevertheless seen fit to array herself in a gorgeous evening dress, with an interminable train. From her wide picture hat a plume dangles almost to the ground.[16]

Her first words do nothing to shake off the feeling that a White Rabbitt in evening dress should appear at any moment:

> Charlotte (abruptly). Good morning, Mr. Jones. Has everything gone to pieces?[17]

Unfortunately the spell breaks almost immediately and the dialogue returns to its former flatness.

Every character in the second act is a parody -- from General Pushing, who has waited forty years for the opportunity of having a war, to the representative from Irish-Poland, whose country is "one of the new European countries"[18] born out of international squabbling:

> They took a sort of job lot of territories that nobody could use and made a country of them. It's got three or four acres of Russia and a couple of mines in Austria and a few lots in Bulgaria and Turkey.[19]

General Pushing's decision to declare war on the Buzzard Islands, a possession of Irish-Poland's, upsets Jerry Frost's plan to trade Idaho for the Buzzard Islands because the people of Idaho through their representative, Senator Joseph Fish, have been demanding his resignation from the Presidency. When he refuses, Chief Justice Fossile and a number of Senators march to the White House to impeach him. During the ceremony the Chief Justice is frequently forced to stand to attention because of intermittent blasts of music which he takes to be the national anthem, but which is in reality the cacophony of Stutz-Mozart's Orang-Outang Jazz Band. The latter, engaged for that afternoon to play at the wedding of Doris and Senator Fish, from Fish, Idaho, is annoyed because his plans have been upset. The marriage, for political reasons, is now impossible, but Stutz-Mozart disregards the Chief Justice and Jerry, who is attempting to defend his actions, and proceeds to play noisily. Jerry's speech to the assembled delegation during this farrago sounds as if it might be an attempted parody of the trial of the Knave of Hearts.

Fitzgerald's fantasy is nowhere near as brilliant or as subtle

as Carroll's, yet both writers use the same techniques to achieve the same purpose. In Carroll's hands fantasy becomes a foil; in Fitzgerald's, a hammer. Both use association as a means of poking fun at the orthodox, but Carroll is the more artful. Although both works have the madness of a dream, Fitzgerald is hampered in his fantasy by his medium, whereas Carroll is not. Fitzgerald is a much better novelist; he does not seem to be able to put the spirit of his characters into dialogue, yet the quality of the dialogue in the novels is surprisingly good. This is perhaps because the characters have already been minutely drawn, thus we recognize their conversation as being in-character.

Vulgarity is not one of Fitzgerald's faults, indeed he usually has the refinement of a Henry James, but in this play he is at his most tasteless and he seems to be aware of it:

> Any one who felt that the First Act was perhaps a little vulgar, will be glad to learn that we're now on the lawn of the White House.[20]

This change of locale does not alter the situation, nor does the shift back to the Frost house in the last act improve either the taste or the quality of the play; if anything the last act, with its cloying sentiment, is the worst of the three. Doris has long since become unbearable; 'Dada' merely repeats himself; 'Charlit', although chastened by her husband's disappearance, is still uninteresting; and Jerry, happy, has even less to recommend him than Jerry, miserable — either way he is a nonentity.

It is impossible to see how one could gain anything other than a false impression of Fitzgerald's talent from watching a performance

of this play; it has nothing to say that has not been said more effectively by less talented wooers of Broadway success. Its ridicule of the naïveté in The American Dream, of the self-made man rising from poverty and ignorance to become President is half-hearted, and the treatment of the subject is superficial, perhaps because Fitzgerald, in spite of himself, believed in it. For a full appreciation of the man, his novels must be read; even his worst are far superior to The Vegetable.

NOTES

1 Fitzgerald, "How to Live on $36,000 a Year," (Saturday Evening Post, 5 Apr. 1924). Afternoon of an Author, pp. 93-94. Arthur Mizener, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1957).

2 Fitzgerald, The Vegetable, title-page. (Scribner's, New York, 1923). 1 ed.

3 ibid.

4 ibid., act 1, p. 11.

5 ibid., act 2, p. 109.

6 ibid., act 1, pp. 32-33.

7 ibid., p. 33.

8 ibid.

9 ibid.

10 ibid., act 1, p. 18.

11 ibid., p. 22.

12 ibid., p. 23.

13 ibid., act 2, p. 61.

14 ibid., p. 62.

15 Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, ch. 8, p. 155. (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1951).

16 The Vegetable, act 2, pp. 56-57.

17 ibid., p. 57.

18 ibid., p. 79.

19 ibid.

20 ibid., p. 56.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT GATSBY

More than any other of Fitzgerald's novels, The Great Gatsby (1925) has held critical attention, and rightly so. Yet, as Fitzgerald complained in a letter to Edmund Wilson, shortly after its publication: "off all the reviews, even the most enthusiastic, not one had the slightest idea what the book was about".[1] H. L. Mencken conceded that it had "a careful and brilliant finish," but found it "no more than a glorified anecdote, and not too probable at that".[2] Since its first publication however, the novel has grown in stature, until Lionel Trilling, writing with full authority behind him could say of it:

> The Great Gatsby, ... after a quarter century is still as fresh as when it first appeared; it has even gained weight and relevance, which can be said of very few American books of its time.[3]

The Fitzgerald who wrote This Side of Paradise is far behind the artist who conceived and executed The Great Gatsby. There is an intensity and imaginative control in the novel which sets it apart from his other works; not only is it his masterpiece, it is one of the chefs-d'oeuvre of American Literature. Its nine short chapters combine the subtlety of a Flaubert with the intensity of a Dostoievsky. This is no outrageous comparison, Fitzgerald himself in defence of his novel wrote Edmund Wilson:

> Without making any invidious comparisons... if my novel is an anecdote so is The Brothers Karamazoff. From one angle the latter could be reduced into a detective story.[4]

Fitzgerald was an ambitious writer, his standards were high, but he was no fool when it came to his talent. Had his next book, Tender Is The

Night (1934) lived up to his expectations, it might well have rivalled Crime and Punishment in depth, intensity and appeal.

The Great Gatsby is a fable about money. Jay Gatsby, a wealthy bootlegger, has been in love with Daisy Buchanan, wife of a rich and corrupt man, since their first meeting five years before, when he was a poor but ambitious lieutenant on his way overseas. While he is away Daisy marries Tom Buchanan. Now enormously rich, Gatsby seeks out Daisy in the hope of winning her back, but she has become tainted by her husband's money and her life of selfishness and irresponsibility. Gatsby tries to take up where they left off, but finds he cannot efface their years apart. The extent of her corruption is revealed when she lets Gatsby take the blame for a crime she has committed. Driving Gatsby's car back to Long Island from New York one afternoon, Daisy hits and kills Myrtle Wilson, the wife of a garage-keeper who is Buchanan's mistress. Daisy drives on. Wilson, the dead woman's grief-crazed husband, suspecting that his wife was killed by her lover, sets out to avenge her death; he goes to Buchanan who leads him to believe that Gatsby has killed his wife. Wilson searches out Gatsby, kills him and then commits suicide. The story of Gatsby and Daisy is related by Nick Carraway, a cousin of Daisy's, who happens to take a house next to Gatsby's mansion, which is across the bay of Long Island Sound from the Buchanan house. Carraway is a Mid-Westerner who has come East to be successful; he meets the Buchanans and a friend of Daisy's, Jordan Baker, a dishonest professional Golfer, with whom he almost falls in love. He is the conscience of the novel, judging and condemning the actions of its characters in accordance with Fitzgerald's code of

personal responsibility and consideration for one's fellow man.

None other than an American could have written The Great Gatsby. Its hero, while sharing overt characteristics with Julien Sorel and Trimalchio, is unlike them in his most heroic aspect, which is the core of his Americanism. Gatsby is the spirit of the Frontier; he has an "incorruptible dream" which sets him apart from the other characters of the novel. It, and not mere acquisitiveness, is the impetus behind his social climbing and accumulation of wealth. It is a misunderstanding of what is involved in the difference between himself and Daisy, and not ostentation, that forces him to show her his house, ("a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy,")[5] and his shirts, ("with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue").[6] Daisy's sudden collapse into harsh tears at the sight of the soft rich multi-coloured mountain is basically the same impulse that forces Tom Buchanan, upon being told that Gatsby is "an Oxford man," to exclaim incredulously, "He wears a pink suit".[7] Tom and Daisy belong to a world from which Gatsby is excluded. Charm and a graceful arrogance engendered by generations of wealth are the prerequisites for entrance into their select circle. To them Gatsby is vulgar and socially unacceptable; his huge riotous parties and uninhibited display of wealth reveal a lack of taste and smack of the arriviste. He is a slightly sinister figure about whom fantastic stories are told, yet, not even the people who attend his parties know who he is, or would recognize him if they saw him. Buchanan views

Gatsby as a dangerous intruder but Daisy mistakenly believes, in spite of his apparent ostentation, that he belongs to "much the same strata as herself".[8] At their first meeting Gatsby "had deliberately given Daisy a sense of security; he let her believe...that he was fully able to take care of her".[9] She goes on believing this until her illusions are shattered and Jay Gatsby breaks "up like glass against Tom's hard malice".[10] Money alone will not secure Daisy's love.

Gatsby's unwavering faithfulness to Daisy in the face of betrayal, his magnanimity in refusing to reveal what he knows about Buchanan, and his belief in himself make him a tragic figure. Through all his nefarious dealings with the underworld Gatsby has kept his innocence, but Daisy has become corrupted by Tom's wealth to such an extent that, every time she is forced to face responsibility, she retreats into her world of ease and leaves someone else to take care of the problem. It is she who is responsible for Gatsby's death, through her refusal to recognize his existence after she discovers who he is. We first suspect Daisy's standards when she tells Nick Carraway of her marital unhappiness:

> The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me feel uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributary emotion from me. I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face, as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged.[11]

Everyone in Daisy's world is tainted, and those who come into contact with it are likely to be maimed or destroyed. Tom Buchanan, with his undisguised contempt for Gatsby's underworld connections is himself

vicious and corrupt. He sends the raging Wilson to Gatsby without any qualms, knowing full well that Wilson, believing Gatsby to be his wife's lover, will commit murder. Buchanan's debasement is so complete that he believes his action entirely justified.

Jordan Baker, although less vicious, is still a member of the circle. Carraway is attracted by her haughty grace and tolerant cynicism, but he finds that she is "incurably dishonest"[12] even about little things, and is even suspected of unfairly winning her first Golf championship:

> 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.[13]

However, Carraway's acknowledged "provincial squeamishness"[14] is not so restrictive as to condemn this and equate it with Daisy's failing:

> It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply - I was casually sorry, and then I forgot.[15]

Carraway understands Daisy's world, but he is not a member of it, although he is related to Daisy and comes from a comfortably situated family in the West. When he visits his cousin he senses their difference and says to her:

> You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy.... Can't you talk about crops or something?[16]

The spirit of wealth confronts Carraway and shows him his inadequacies, but it does not blind him; he has no desire to be like Tom and Daisy. It enthralls Gatsby and destroys him because he admires Daisy without understanding her.

This sense of destructiveness pervades the novel; even Myrtle Wilson,

Buchanan's mistress does not escape. She is from the underprivileged classes and appeals to him because she has an animal vitality which Daisy lacks, but, in his eyes, this does not entitle her to forget who or what she is. Once, when slightly drunk, Mrs. Wilson and Buchanan passionately discuss whether she has "any right to mention Daisy's name";[17] she insists, whereupon he deftly breaks her nose. It is significant that Daisy should be the one to kill Mrs. Wilson and then be protected by Buchanan, who is always ready to defend his position, of which Daisy is a part. Buchanan is brutal and boorish and uses his wealth as a club and a refuge, but in spite of our dislike and disapproval, we are forced to accept him as he is. We are repelled by his total lack of conscience, yet we are forced to agree with Carraway:

> 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.[18]

The inhumanity and insensitivity of the very rich troubled Fitzgerald; he thought they had every possibility to be aristocrats; their wealth gave them immunity from the cruel and the barbarous in life and made them like princes; but, unlike genuine aristocrats, or Fitzgerald's ideal humans, they felt no personal obligation to anyone, not even to each other. They used people and discarded them at will; such lack of a sense of individual responsibility Fitzgerald found most culpable. Carraway comes nearest to being a 'moral' aristocrat; he feels an

obligation to Gatsby, but finds himself:

> ...on Gatsby's side, and alone... At first I was surprised and confused; then, as he lay in his house and didn't move or breathe or speak, hour upon hour, it grew upon me that I was responsible, because no one else was interested - interested, I mean, with that intense personal interest to which every one has some vague right....[19]

Gatsby dies for Daisy and she does not even notice; her sin, if it can be called that, is in shirking the responsibility that goes with personal interest. She is more to blame than Buchanan, because she led Gatsby to believe she cared; with this ignominious act her surrender to Tom's world is complete. Until she allows Gatsby to die, Daisy is Buchanan's spiritual and moral superior.

Gatsby, although a bootlegger and a law-breaker is essentially innocent, as innocent as Henry James's Daisy Miller who unwittingly breaks the social taboos of the American colony in Rome. He does not understand Daisy's world any more than Daisy Miller understands Winterbourne or his "exclusive" aunt. To Gatsby, Daisy is the embodiment of everything he desires; she is cultivated, charming and civilized; he does not guess at her underlying corruption. He has lived so long with his dream that it has become more important and more real than Daisy herself: "it has gone beyond her, beyond everything".[20] Firmly believing that he can re-create the past, he thinks Daisy can obliterate her life with Buchanan by going to him and declaring her love for Gatsby. When Daisy realizes this, only then does she understand how much Gatsby wants of her and how little she is prepared to give:

> Oh, you want too much! ... I love you now - isn't that enough? I can't help what's past....I did love him once - but I loved you too.[21]

But this is not enough for Gatsby. Even when his dream begins to crumble about him, he remains true to it. After the car accident, Carraway leaves him keeping a lonely vigil outside of Daisy's house, prepared to defend her from Buchanan, unaware that he has been betrayed and is "watching over nothing".[22] Gatsby dies still refusing to believe that Daisy has deserted him. We get some indication of the intensity of Gatsby's commitment to his dream when, attempting to explain Daisy's claim that she has loved Tom, he says: "In any case ...it was just personal".[23]

This extraordinary capacity for hope with its implied innocence is very American. Henry James exploits it in Daisy Miller, and in the character of Milly Theale, dying heroine of The Wings of the Dove, as well as in Isabel Archer (The Portrait of a Lady) who is so strongly committed to an idea of herself that it influences her life just as much as Gatsby's dream influences his. Although very close to James in The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald is doing something slightly different; his material is completely American and it forces him to consider two divergent elements, the Frontier and the East, which he attempts to weld into a coherent whole. James's Americans, without exception, are New Englanders; he takes no account of the West or the spirit of the Frontier, although he gives his Americans a naïveté that Fitzgerald almost invariably sees as Western.

In The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald juxtaposes the effete, sophisticated East and the vital, wholesome West; the older more civilized East assumes a cloak of aristocracy which attracts Gatsby, who realizes that being "an Oxford man" is part of the bargain of winning Daisy. But he

is recognized as a fraud and refused admittance to their society. Gatsby belongs to that floating population in American society which knows only its own rules; he has repudiated the West and is in turn rejected by the East, so he has created a new identity for himself out of his own dreams. In his devotion to this conception of himself lies his true greatness. The irony of it all is Gatsby's failure to realize his magnificence; he is "a son of God"[24] who sprung "from his Platonic conception of himself,"[25] but for him Daisy's world is the true and the great one. The West is the only world Gatsby understands, and in spite of his conscious rejection of it, his roots are still there. Daisy and Tom are Westerners who have defected to the East, and they have paid a high price for entrance into its aristocratic circle. Carraway, although excited by the East and "keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio,"[26] is an acknowledged Westerner at heart. All of the leading characters in the novel are from the West and none of them really fit into Eastern life. Looking back on Gatsby's tragedy, Carraway sees their inadequacy:

> 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]

Fitzgerald tries to explain the difference between the East and the West in terms of their respective attitudes to wealth; Westerners are presented as more vulnerable to money; instead of giving them strength it kills some vital part and dulls their response to others. Because they have no family tradition or sense of the past they rely on others of their kind for stability. In the East, money ensures a family's

position and the maintenance of tradition and tends to make families into feudal clans. Against this stability Fitzgerald measures Western society; the East is to him what Europe is to Henry James. Although interested primarily in Western society, Fitzgerald set his novels, with the exception of Tender Is The Night and The Last Tycoon, in or around New York, in order to achieve contrast. His West is not without its class distinctions; in his Note-Books he analyzes the class structure of a "three generation Western city":

> There were the two or three enormously rich, nationally known families - outside of them rather than below them the hierarchy began. At the top came those whose grandparents had brought something with them from the East, a vestige of money and culture; then came the families of the big self-made merchants, the 'old settlers' of the sixties and seventies, American-English-Scotch, or German or Irish, looking down somewhat in the order named - upon the Irish less from religious difference - French Catholics were considered rather distinguished - than from their taint of political corruption in the East. After this came certain well-to-do 'new people' - mysterious, out of a cloudy past, possibly unsound. Like so many structures, this one did not survive the cataract of money that came tumbling down upon it with the war.[28]

It was always with an awareness of this formidable structure that he wrote his novels, never forgetting that he was from "straight 1850 potato famine Irish,"[29] and very different from the rich, whose grace, breeding and power he admired. Yet, this admiration was not servile; he clearly saw their inadequacies, but held to the view expressed in This Side of Paradise that it is essentially "cleaner" to be rich and corrupt than poor and innocent, an idea which pervades all his novels. He found in Gatsby's life more meaning and tragedy than in the life of James Gatz, the unrealized dreamer, because Gatsby committed himself to a dream. People only interested Fitzgerald when they had something to lose, be it an idea of themselves, or their souls. The rich presented

the greatest possibilities; he was not interested in money as such, but in its effect on personality. In his conception of tragedy and the dramatic situation, Fitzgerald is essentially Aristotelian. The much-quoted verbal encounter between Fitzgerald and Hemingway is generally taken as a Hemingway victory, because Fitzgerald's claim that "The rich are different from us," is supposedly exposed as hero-worship by the stinging retort, "Yes, they have more money".[30] Fitzgerald's novels reveal that such an unqualified assumption is unjust; his attitude to the rich certainly does have an element of hero-worship in it, but it has more far-reaching implications and is bound up with his search for an ideal. No American novelist concerned with society can dismiss the very rich or the power of money, which is, as Lionel Trilling points out, "the great generator of illusion".[31] The Great Gatsby pierces that illusion.

The force and beauty of this novel lie in its total lack of obviousness. No words are wasted. The physical descriptions of the characters, with the exception of Gatsby, are such an integral part of our conception of them that much of the force of the novel would be lost without them. We become fully aware of Buchanan's selfishness at first meeting:

> ...he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. 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.... It was a body capable of enormous leverage - a cruel body.[32]

Daisy, with her "low thrilling voice" and her face "sad and lovely with bright things in it,"[33] unfolds more slowly. Carraway is nowhere

described, but his personality is an integral part of the novel. The minor characters are very good miniatures. Mrs. Wilson's sister Catherine is one example:

> ...a slender, worldly girl of about thirty, with a solid, sticky bob of red hair, and a complexion powdered milky white. Her eyebrows had been plucked and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle, but the efforts of nature towards the restoration of the old alignment gave a blurred air to her face.[34]

Meyer Wolfshiem, the "flat-nosed Jew"[35] who fixed the World Series in 1919, adds to the mystery of Gatsby by his very clarity. Every character fits into the novel and directs our attention towards Gatsby and his dream.

Jay Gatsby never comes sharply into focus; we are given no physical description, yet we feel sure that we would recognize him. His appearance at the end of the first chapter, silhouetted in the moonlight, assures us he is no myth; and as he stretches his arms towards a green light across the bay we are as intrigued as the guests at his raucous parties. This element of mystery is maintained and we are only gradually told Gatsby's history. We learn of the elaborate stories circulating about him until we are prepared to believe anything; when we finally do meet him we are as surprised as Carraway to see and hear an "elegant young rough-neck... whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd".[36] A precariously constructed background begins to fall into place; it wavers and totters, but compells our belief until it is finally shattered by Tom Buchanan. Fitzgerald has us in his palm; we think and feel what he wants us to. The suspicion is sown early that, despite Gatsby's wealth, he is a "regular tough underneath it all".[37] Yet the magnificence of the man

is forcibly presented; when we learn that he has bought a mansion in West Egg so that he can be across the bay from Daisy, we cannot but admire him:

> If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promise of life.... it 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.[38]

In retrospect this is Carraway's tribute to Gatsby; the only one he receives.

The elusiveness of Gatsby troubled Fitzgerald. Writing to John Peale Bishop after the latter had complained that Gatsby was blurred and patchy, Fitzgerald confessed "I never at any one time saw him clearly".[39] One wonders if Gatsby's magnificence would be greater if he had been clearer; his lack of detail gives him a touch of grandeur which familiarity might destroy. Without his "incorruptible dream" Gatsby could easily degenerate into a Trimalchio; but he stands for something larger, for a particularly American quality and because of it, he looms larger than life. A gangster with social ambitions would have defeated Fitzgerald's purpose. Although, he is the symbol of uninitiated innocence at attempting to brave and overcome the established social taboos, Gatsby is no Julien Sorel; he has too much of the Frontier in him. It is this blend of the drawing-room and the uncivilized that gives Gatsby and the novel its particular American touch.

The novel's only fault loomed large to Fitzgerald:

> The worst fault in it, I think is a BIG FAULT: I gave no account (and had no feeling about or knowledge of) the emotional relations between Gatsby and Daisy from the time of their reunion to the catastrophe. However the lack is so astutely concealed by the retrospect of Gatsby's past and by blankets of excellent prose that

> no one has noticed it - though everyone has felt the lack and called it by another name.[40]

This says practically all there is to say about the subject. To conclude that Daisy was Gatsby's mistress is to misunderstand Gatsby. In spite of the lawless side of his life, he is something of a prig; he is always terribly concerned about doing everything right; it is not in keeping with his plans to want Daisy only for his mistress. He wants legal possession as well. But we suspect that Daisy would not be troubled by such a point; in fact it appears to be all she intended in the first place. Gatsby forces the issue and Daisy finds she has gone too far:

> Gatsby walked over and stood beside her.
> 'Daisy, that's all over now,' he said earnestly.... 'Just tell him the truth - that you never loved him - and it's all wiped out forever.'
> She looked at him blindly. 'Why - how could I love him - possibly?'
> 'You never loved him.'
> She hesitated. Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing - and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late.
> 'I never loved him,' she said, with perceptible reluctance.[41]

Structurally the novel has nothing to condemn it. It has neither the diffuseness nor the confusion found in The Beautiful and Damned, and is unmarred by stylistic innovations; it is written with a balance and restraint that delight the reader. Gertrude Stein once said that "Fitzgerald was the only one of the younger writers who wrote naturally in sentences,"[42] which if it means anything, it means that Fitzgerald's style is unobtrusive. Writing to his daughter while she was in college, he said, "all fine prose is based on the verbs carrying the sentences. They make the sentences move".[43] This novel moves very fast, and is aided by economy of words and precise images that make it one of the

best-written books in American Literature.

The use of a narrator Fitzgerald learned from James and Conrad, and it enabled him for the first time to stand sufficiently apart from his novel. Carraway sets the tone because it is through his eyes that we view most of the action. He has enough vitality of his own for us to be satisfied that he is not a mere mouthpiece, as the narrator in a Conrad novel often tends to be. Nor has Carraway the all-seeing power of a Conradian creation; instead he is caught up in the action personally, in a way that resembles Winterbourne in James's Daisy Miller. Carraway's love affair with Jordan Baker which carefully balances Gatsby's and Daisy's, makes him a member of the inner circle for a time. We can accept his opinions without feeling that we are being told what to think; yet the force of his moral judgements is such that we concur:

> Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men.[44]

This is Carraway's explanation for his momentary loss of sympathy with his fellows. Fitzgerald has made his point.

The deceptive simplicity of the novel leads one to believe at first glance, that Fitzgerald is writing a fable about money. He is. But he is also telling the story of America itself, where "anything can happen ... even Gatsby".[45] America has held out the hope of adventure and untold wealth to those willing to seize it from the time when the first Dutch sailor:

> ...for a transitory enchanted moment ... must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic

> contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.[46]

Gatsby has seized the chance and has seemingly won, but is unaware that he might come plunging down even faster than he has climbed. He aspires to the "king's daughter, the golden girl," whose voice rings with the jingle of money, and believes, in the true spirit of the Frontier, that once he has proved himself he will receive his reward. He asks too much; the established order breaks him, sweeps him aside; even the open society has its entrenched social arbiters. Their standards may not be the same as those of Jane Austen's country squires, but they are just as exclusive. Money alone will not suffice, although it is definitely needed. A certain carelessness and selfishness which can be bred by not less than three generations of inherited wealth, are the real badges of eligibility. Henry James despaired that America had no quasi-European tradition; Fitzgerald made a myth out of what existed. He turned to the wealthy manufacturing class in the hope of finding stability and grandeur; but they did not live up to either his dreams or his expectations. As early as 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville, on a visit to America, noticed that an aristocracy was being created by Manufacturers, but saw that "although there are rich men, the class of rich men does not exist; for these rich individuals have no feelings or purposes, no traditions or hopes in common".[48] This was the problem Fitzgerald sought to solve by making his rich individuals representatives of a class, but the impermanency of their position troubled him. He ignored the possibility of their losing their wealth, because with it would go their precarious claim to aristocracy.

Fitzgerald's awareness of the instability of the very rich forced him to give his aristocrats a special significance; to him they are the farthest evolution of a class, morally and spiritually superior, because money has allowed them to develop the most agreeable and charming aspects of human nature. When Fitzgerald looked beyond his ideal he saw that the rich in no way were the perfect beings he thought they ought to be. Instead, he was forced to concur with Tocqueville that "the manufacturing aristocracy ... is one of the harshest that ever existed in the world".[49] But he clings stubbornly to the idea that wealth is necessary to perfection; Gatsby's wealth leads him to expect great things; without it, he would not be a tragic figure. Fitzgerald's honesty will not allow him to ignore the brutality of Daisy's world, and because he can not ignore it, he knows Gatsby is doomed from the start. The giant eyes of Doctor Eckleburg looking out over his valley of ashes seems to be waiting to add Gatsby's dream to the ruins. It is significant that George Wilson, a dweller in the valley of ashes, should be the one to kill Gatsby, upon the instigation of Buchanan. Although the distance from Buchanan's house to Gatsby's is not very far, socially it is immeasurable; too far for Buchanan to deal with Gatsby himself, or for Daisy to notice his fate. To them Gatsby does not exist. The only world they believe in is their own and they dismiss anyone who attempts to intrude. Fitzgerald's rich are far more brutal and degraded than James's are.

The Great Gatsby is a brilliant study of American society. It is Fitzgerald's most articulate statement of his ideas about money and its attendant responsibilities. His later novels, Tender Is the Night

and The Last Tycoon, are not so successfully finished, but each has a greatness of conception which shows the subtlety of Fitzgerald's mind and its discernment, even in its increasing inability to make a coherent and satisfying myth out of the incongruities and absurdities of American life.

NOTES

1 Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson, 1925. "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 270. Edmund Wilson, Ed. (New Directions, New York, 1945).

2 H. L. Mencken, "The Great Gatsby," 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work, p. 90, Alfred Kazin, Ed. (The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, New York, 1951).

3 Lionel Trilling, "F. Scott Fitzgerald," The Liberal Imagination, p. 243. (Doubleday, New York, 1957).

4 Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson, 1925. "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 270.

5 Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, ch. 1, p. 6.

6 ibid., ch. 5, p. 112.

7 ibid., ch. 7, p. 146.

8 ibid., ch. 8, p. 178.

9 ibid.

10 ibid., p. 177.

11 ibid., ch. 1, pp. 21-22.

12 ibid., ch. 3, p. 71.

13 ibid.

14 ibid., ch. 9, p. 216.

15 ibid., ch. 3, p. 71.

16 ibid., ch. 1, p. 15.

17 ibid., ch. 2, p. 44.

18 ibid., ch. 9, p. 216.

19 ibid., ch. 9, p. 197.

20 ibid., ch. 5, p. 116.

21 ibid., ch. 7, p. 159.

22 ibid., p. 175.

23 ibid., ch. 8, p. 182.

24 ibid., ch. 6, p. 118.

25 ibid.

26 ibid., ch. 9, p. 212.

27 ibid.

28 Fitzgerald, "The Note-Books," The Crack-Up, p. 233.

29 Cited by Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, ch. 1, p. 2. (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1951).

30 Fitzgerald, "The Note-Books," The Crack-Up," p. 125.

31 Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and The Novel," The Liberal Imagination, p. 203.

32 The Great Gatsby, ch. 1, p. 8.

33 ibid., p. 11.

34 ibid., ch. 2, p. 35.

35 ibid., ch. 4, p. 83.

36 ibid., ch. 3, p. 59.

37 ibid., ch. 4, p. 95.

38 ibid., ch. 1, pp. 2-3.

39 Fitzgerald to John Peale Bishop, 9 Aug. 1925. "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 271.

40 Fitzgerald to Edmund Wilson, 1925, "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 270.

41 The Great Gatsby, ch. 7, p. 158-59.

42 Gertrude Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, ch. 7, p. 234. (Bodley Head, London, 1933).

43 Fitzgerald to his daughter, 1940, "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 303.

44 The Great Gatsby, ch. 1, p. 3.

45 ibid., ch. 4, p. 83.

46 ibid., ch. 9, p. 217-218.

47 ibid., ch. 7, p. 144.

[48] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. 2, ch. 20, p. 170. (Vintage Books, New York, 1957).

[49] ibid., p. 170.

CHAPTER VI

TENDER IS THE NIGHT

Although Tender Is The Night (1934) is technically inferior to The Great Gatsby, it is more compelling and nearer life; had its forcefulness been combined with the mastery of the other novel, Fitzgerald might well have achieved his aim and produced the best American novel of his time. Its theme is emotional and moral disintegration. Dick Diver, a brilliant American psychiatrist studying in Switzerland marries, against his better judgement, the beautiful, wealthy and schizoid Nicole Warren, a mental patient in a Zurich clinic. In his attempt to cure her, Dick loses perspective and confuses his roles as husband and physician; as her doctor he realizes she can only regain complete sanity by rejecting him, yet he loves her deeply. The resulting confusion and strain is too much; not only must he fight Nicole's battles, but he has to struggle to retain his integrity as a man and a doctor in the face of her overpowering wealth. A scrupulous attempt to remain autonomous fails and Dick discovers he has been devitalized and rendered incapable of defending himself.

Fitzgerald is attempting tragedy, but despite a disastrous fate, Dick Diver does not attain the stature of a tragic hero; instead, he is a pathetic figure who has to contend with the inordinate demands of destiny. Once he is married to Nicole, doom pursues him as surely as it does Oedipus; caught in society's trap, he struggles ineffectually, overwhelmed by a desperate need to please and a desire for death. Although a victim of society, Dick gladly embraces his fate, and the

process initiated by his wife's money unwinds as if preordained. The first indication that Dick has changed is his attraction to, and seduction by Rosemary Hoyt, an eighteen year old actress vacationing on the Riviera; she precipitates his collapse and emphasizes his spiritual impoverishment. Yet Dick Diver is not a weak man; if anything he is too munificent with emotion and consideration—a moral and spiritual colossus, who has no one to whom he can turn for solace. His fate is harrowing rather than tragic. Knowing the penalty, he goes to the Warrens, yet is surprised when the reckoning arrives; prompted by an overestimation of his strength and lured by a genuine love for Nicole, Dick accepts the role of saviour. He has all the possibilities of a tragic figure, but his flaws are admirable and understandable rather than reprehensible; such confusion in presentation misleads the reader and perverts Fitzgerald's conception.

The novel is as depressing as Hardy's Return of The Native; it offers no solution, no respite in the horror attendant upon Dick's fortune; both novels want catharsis. Hardy and Fitzgerald are poles apart in their view of life in spite of Clym's and Dick's similar fate: Clym offers himself as the first victim to improve and uplift a lower class; Dick attempts to save a dying clan and rejuvenate a corrupt society. Alive amid the dead and the dying, Dick, glorying in life and stability, unselfishly pours forth his vitality. But we are never quite sure why; at times his bounty appears masochistic. Unlike Hardy's philosophical pessimism, Fitzgerald's morbidity is rooted in personal conviction. Because he is relating a private ordeal and projecting his fears for the future, Fitzgerald displays a compassion

for his creations that Hardy does not. If Hardy is perhaps too far removed from his characters, Fitzgerald is too near to them.

During the composition of Tender Is The Night Fitzgerald suffered from despair and guilt, complicated to such an extent by alcohol that almost two years later he experienced mental collapse; Zelda had become schizophrenic, and he held himself partly responsible. Six hectic years in Europe had pushed her too far and almost cost Fitzgerald his sanity. The Divers are very different from the Fitzgeralds, but into their lives Fitzgerald poured his personal tragedy; from Zelda's doctors he learned about mental illness and used it to give uncomfortable reality to Nicole Warren's battle for sanity. The force of his narrative rests not on medical information however, but on the sympathy and understanding of the writing. Unfortunately, he used Dick as a means to release emotion -- to the detriment of art. But neither Dick nor Nicole are completely autobiographical; they are semi-detached even when the material is obviously personal.

On the literal level, Nicole and Zelda have nothing in common except mental illness; Nicole is the spirit of American wealth crippled by its mixture of puritanism and corruption (her illness is the result of incestuous relations with her father). Helpless in the face of disaster, the Warrens try to shelve their responsibility by buying a doctor, and when Dick Diver marries Nicole they believe that they have succeeded. But he refuses to submit and resists until he is broken by the power of Nicole's money. Susceptible to beauty and charm, Dick falls victim to a façade he must help maintain:

> Nicole was the product of much ingenuity and toil. For her sake 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... these were some of the people who gave a tithe to Nicole and, as the whole system swayed and thundered onward, it lent a feverish bloom to... processes of hers.... She illustrated very simple principles, containing in herself her own doom, but illustrated them so accurately that there was grace in the procedure....[1]

She is the totality of what he loves; attracted by her grace and helplessness, he is betrayed even more basically by a need for love: "wanting above all to be brave and kind, he had wanted, even more than that, to be loved".[2] Predestined by their wealth to an endless pursuit of self-definition, the Warrens' callousness and disregard for the fate of others, is culpable yet irrecusable. Dick's self-abnegation detracts from his intended heroic stature; it almost seems as if Fitzgerald is expressing a personal wish for punishment and death to atone for the part he played in Zelda's illness.

Like Nicole, Dick carries within himself the seeds of his own destruction; he is too ready to please, too sensitive to the demands of others to notice the depletion of his arsenal. He not only creates his wife's world, but makes it inhabitable for the wealthy derelicts who surround him; because he is stronger than they, sycophantic expatriates attach themselves to Dick and rely on his strength as a means of presenting a graceful face to the world. This is the situation in the first edition when the novel opens. The Divers are first presented through the eyes of Rosemary Hoyt, a young actress with "the dew... still on her,"[3] who visits their beach on the Riviera. Innocent and unsophisticated, she is attracted by the charm and consideration of a corrupt

world; to her they are the quintessence of good manners and an exemplar of the good life:

> Her naïveté responded whole-heartedly to the expensive simplicity of the Divers, unaware of its complexity and its lack of innocence, unaware that it was all a selection of quality rather than quantity from the run of the world's bazaar; and that the simplicity of behaviour also, the nursery-like peace and the good will, the emphasis on the simpler virtues, was part of a desperate bargain with the gods and had been attained through struggles she could not have guessed at....the Divers represented externally the exact furthermost evolution of a class, so that most people seemed awkward beside them - in reality a qualitative change had already set in that was not at all apparent to Rosemary.[4]

By presenting the Divers through Rosemary's guileless eyes, Fitzgerald achieves an ironic effect, maintains an element of mystery and suspense, and subtly conveys a feeling of impending disaster through the minor characters who people the Divers' beach. Abe North, a once promising composer, is drinking himself to death because he is "tired of friends"[5] and life; another member of the super-civilized world, the effeminate Royal Dumphry, is not only petty but sometimes "too ghastly for words".[6] None of these things has any significance to Rosemary, and Fitzgerald uses her naïveté to good effect. He could see himself in her position and could feel with her the magnetism of the charm and cultivated grace of the corrupt society. This enabled him to view the Divers objectively, while at the same time seeing society from Dick Diver's vantage point on the inside. His dual vision allowed Fitzgerald greater scope and gave Tender Is The Night social as well as psychological significance.

Nicole's ailment is that of a class in love with its own image; Dick only temporarily changes the situation when he attracts her outraged emotions. The novel's European setting gave Fitzgerald greater freedom and allowed him to isolate the Warrens, so that their assumed cloak of

aristocracy ("they were an American ducal family without a title"),[7] could be observed at closer range. A yearning towards an older more established society, typified by Baby Warren's admiration for the English ("I don't think there's any higher type in the world than a first-rate Englishman"),[8] quite naturally forced them to be expatriates. They were the nearest thing to aristocracy that America had to offer Fitzgerald, and they fulfilled his purpose temporarily, while their equivocal position gave added fascination. Unlike Henry James, Fitzgerald neither admired, nor was interested in English society; he was solely concerned with American life and manners, exploring them through the Warrens, a family whose wealth generated such a potent illusion of grandeur that they believe in it themselves. They reject America because it has no tradition, and become a countryless clan forced to make their own rules, until they are compelled by loneliness and weakness to join the pleasure hunting international set whose ephemeral beauty draws the uninitiated to a destructive fate. The Warrens are sure they are aristocrats, but have no title or any acceptable country:

> ...the very name written in a hotel register, signed to an introduction, used in a difficult situation, caused a psychological metamorphosis in people, and in return this change had crystallized /Baby Warren's/ sense of position. She knew these facts from the English, who had known them for more than two hundred years.[9]

The English have everything the Warrens desire: a history and a clearly defined identity, assets Fitzgerald used as a measure of stability against which to gauge the weaknesses, the deceptions and the hardness of the Warrens in their attempt to emulate an older society.

Into this world of uncertainty and equivocation Dick Diver is plunged when he marries Nicole; he is acceptable because of his moral

and emotional strength, which love for Nicole begins to overwhelm:

> .../they/ had become one and equal, not opposite and complementary; she was Dick too, the drought in the marrow of his bones. He could not watch her disintegrations without participating in them.[10]

When this happens, Dick loses part of his spiritual superiority, and with each battle he fights for Nicole or for one of his friends, forfeits part of his emotional reserve until he is almost paralyzed spiritually, and is left to struggle feebly with his own problems. Unable to survive the onslaught of Nicole's money and her vampire-like dependence, he discovers with dismay that he has been swallowed by the Warren millions:

> He had lost himself - he could not tell the hour when, or the day or the week, the month or the year.... Between the time he found Nicole flowering under a stone on the Zürichsee and the moment of his meeting with Rosemary the spear had been blunted. Watching his father's struggles in poor parishes had wedded a desire for money to any essentially unacquisitive nature. It was not a healthy necessity for security - he had never felt more sure of himself, more thoroughly his own man, than at the time of his marriage to Nicole. Yet he had been swallowed up like a gigolo and had somehow permitted his arsenal to be locked up in the Warren safety-deposit vaults.[11]

Fitzgerald goes to some length to show Dick's gradual destruction; it is a terrifying and slightly horrific process so closely resembling his own breakdown, which he describes with clinical detachment in The Crack-Up (1936), that the novel has in places a distressing element of confession. Obsessed with the idea of emotional bankruptcy, Fitzgerald tended to see vitality as a bank balance which dwindled with each expenditure of feeling; viewing his prostration from an Olympian height he saw: "that for two years my life had been a drawing on resources that I did not possess, that I had been mortgaging myself physically and spiritually up to the hilt".[12] Such is the fear and the direful prediction

that Fitzgerald put into Tender Is The Night. It is remarkable how accurately he describes an experience he was not to recognize until two years after the conception of Dick Diver, who manages in spite of everything to have a limited life of his own.

Dick is a sacrifical victim on the altar of wealth, powerless in the face of his "old fatal pleasingness, the old forceful charm... with the cry of 'Use me!'"[13] and the civilized brutality of the Warrens; he is drawn by a blind Nemesis to a predetermined lot: "like Grant, lolling in his general store in Galena, ... ready to be called to an intricate destiny".[14] This sense of the inevitable makes Dick's fate all the more terrible; however, he is not the only victim. The Warrens, too, are prey to wealth: it ruins Nicole until she needs a borrowed vitality to support her slowly healing ego; her sister, Baby Warren, with "her cold rich insolence"[15] becomes so insensitive that "her emotions had their truest existence in the telling of them";[16] Devereux Warren, their father, wanders over Europe suffering from guilt and cirrhosis of the liver, waiting for death. In spite of all of this, they have learned nothing. Dick's attempt to teach "the rich the ABC's of human decency" has failed. They want only his support, his vitality, and when he is of no further use they discard him with the epitaph: "That's what he was educated for".[17]

Fitzgerald expected Tender Is The Night to be well received and hoped it would re-establish him as a serious novelist, but he was disappointed. The reviewers tended to dismiss it as a relic from another age. Puzzled by the novel's reception, but convinced that his material was not at fault, he turned to the presentation and structure with a

critical eye and in 1938 wrote his editor, Maxwell Perkins, declaring:

> It's great fault is that the true beginning - the young psychiatrist in Switzerland - is tucked away in the middle of the book. If pages 151-212 were taken from their present place and put at the start the improvement in appeal would be enormous.[18]

Ready to sacrifice an extremely effective opening to unity, Fitzgerald prepared a plan for the reorganization of the book in chronological order, but died before he could make all the necessary corrections; from this plan Malcolm Cowley prepared his edition of the novel, correcting the spelling errors and remedying the more blatant inconsistencies and repetitions. But the inherent defects remained. Dick Diver at no time appears as an integrated personality, instead, we tend to see fragments; his personality is a series of gestures. His collapse is quite believable; the details are magnificiently portrayed, but the whole man is not entirely convincing. Fitzgerald feared closeness to his material had impaired the novel and wrote to Maxwell Perkins in 1935 with characteristic honesty:

> ...for a novel you need mental speed that enables you to keep the whole pattern in your head and ruthlessly sacrifice the sideshows.... If a mind is slowed up ever so little it lives in the individual part of a book rather than in a book as a whole; memory is dulled. I would give anything if I hadn't had to write Part III of 'Tender Is The Night' entirely on stimulant. If I had /had/ one more crack at it cold sober I believe it might have made a great difference....[19]

Had Fitzgerald been given this opportunity he would undoubtedly have improved the novel, but it is difficult to see how anything short of rewriting could have allowed him to remove its inherent faults; granted the ability to view Dick as objectively as he conceived Stahr in The Last Tycoon (1941), Dick would have had a well founded claim to stand with Raskolnikov of Dostoievsky's Crime and Punishment, despite

their great differences. A concern with society led Fitzgerald to place as much emphasis on the reasons for Dick's collapse as on the actual experience itself. When reduced to impotent rage and morally castrated, he can only give vent to sudden and uncontrollable surges of invective and sardonic amusement, but this torment is presented through Nicole's eyes, and wisely so. An analysis of Dick's blighted soul fighting for existence would have been too horrific in addition to his ineffectual straining against the inexorable laws of society.

The impact of Tender Is The Night is unforgettable. In the light of the whole novel, its faults appear minute—even the unfortunate mistake of giving Rosemary a significance far out of proportion to her role is excusable—Dick's lack of cohesion is only noticeable because the force of the prose is such that we live in the book, and if the uneasy suspicion that an emotional trick is being played on us would disappear, his defects would be even less apparent. Perhaps this uneasiness is due to the directness of the novel's appeal and our acute sense of the Fitzgerald barely concealed beneath the surface. The belief that Fitzgerald had revealed too much prompted the following advice from Hemingway:

> Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start.... But when you get the damned hurt use it - don't cheat with it.... You see, Bo, you're not a tragic character. Neither am I. All we are is writers....[20]

But Fitzgerald writes best about his own feelings: "I must start out with an emotion - one that's close to me and that I can understand,"[21] he wrote in a 1933 essay. This element of the personal pervades his novels, but it is only in The Great Gatsby that he manages to retain

a completely objective grasp of his subject and to view it as a whole.

If Tender Is The Night can be said to be like any of his other books, it is nearest, though far superior to The Beautiful and Damned, in which Fitzgerald vacillated between a Hardyesque pessimism and an emotional involvement with his characters. Both novels have the elements of tragedy, but differ in conviction. The forces that wreck Anthony Patch in The Beautiful and Damned are never clearly defined; in Tender Is The Night, however, the full weight of Fitzgerald's personal conviction is behind Dick Diver's downfall. Dick is more fully explored and, although in some ways a projection of Fitzgerald's emotions, he has greater independence. Anthony's ruin appears contrived, Dick's seems inevitable. The theme of all Fitzgerald's novels, with the possible exception of The Last Tycoon, is the destructiveness of money. The Great Gatsby is his most accomplished work, as well as his most economical statement about American society, but beside Tender Is The Night, it appears neat, deceptively simple and somewhat cold. Gatsby is an abstraction and we are never deeply moved by abstractions, despite the beauty of language and form with which they are presented. The labyrinthine structure of the Warren's world leaves more to the imagination than the relatively clearly defined position of the Buchanans. The more intricate pattern in Tender Is The Night allowed Fitzgerald greater freedom in his analysis of American society. The Warrens are aristocrats, but Dick, although expensively educated, is from the middle-class just as Rosemary Hoyt is. Fitzgerald goes to considerable pains to show the difference between Nicole and Rosemary; their social disparity is subtly illustrated by their respective

attitudes to money:

> ...Rosemary admired Nicole's method of spending. Nicole was sure that the money she spent was hers - Rosemary still thought her money was miraculously lent her and she must consequently be very careful of it.[22]

But Fitzgerald is doing more than mere social dissection in Tender Is The Night; he is attempting to give values and mores to a hitherto unrecognized strata of American society. In this he is original because he is the first American novelist to accept his society on its own merits.

The first edition of Tender Is The Night had unfortunate defects, some of which Malcolm Cowley remedied in his edition of the novel--no editor could do more--but in spite of its incongruities, the novel has maturity, sureness of language and sharp social satire. Even when he is most deeply involved with his characters, Fitzgerald does not lose his eye for the ridiculous, but his humour has lost its good natured quality and become sardonic. The passage describing Baby Warren's attempt to arouse the American Consul on Dick's behalf, after he has been beaten and jailed by the Roman police, is mordant:

> ...the American Woman aroused, stood over him; the clean-sweeping irrational temper that had broken the moral back of a race and made a nursery out of a continent, was too much for him. He rang for the vice-consul - Baby had won.[23]

For all the novel's bitterness there is no explicit moralizing; the strong sense of waste and impotence is broken only occasionally by anger; one instance is when Dick recalls how his individuality and humanity were ignored in Rome: "I like France, where everybody thinks he's Napoleon - down here everybody thinks he's Christ".[24] Dick cares "only about people,"[25] and this has been his special talent and his ruin.

Fitzgerald's concern with society never overshadows his interest in the individual; instead, it is the matrix in which the characters develop. Tragedy is always presented in social terms. Evil has no existence outside of society; despite the sense of inevitability, the forces at work in Fitzgerald's universe are non-moral and irremediable, but can be dominated if one is any good.

Although he accepts the rules of life, Fitzgerald is a moralist at heart, but it is so astutely concealed by intensity of feeling and flowing prose that the reader believes the moral judgements to be his own. Condemnation of the inhumanity and the desperate frivolity of the rich is explicit in One Trip Abroad (1930), and a short-story preview of Tender Is The Night. Its central figures are sketches of the Divers, but neither their relation to American society nor the intricate personal relationship on which the novel hinges, is worked out; the emphasis is on dissipation and the Kellys growing awareness of emotional and mental fatigue. But unlike the Divers, Nelson and Nicole Kelly are innocents deceived by glamour, and convinced that they are experiencing the best life has to offer. The first seed of doubt is planted in Nicole's mind by the contempt and derision expressed by the parasitic Oscar Dane, who resembles Tommy Barban, Nicole Diver's anarchic lover:

> Do you call that crowd of drunks you run with amusing people? Why, they're not even very swell. They're so hard that they've shifted down through Europe like nails in a sack of wheat, till they stick out of it a little into the Mediterranean Sea.[26]

Four years of association with such people sends the Kellys to a Swiss sanatorium to recuperate from loss of "peace and love and health";[27] there, they see a couple who has crossed their path several times: the

woman has lost her beauty and become hard and unwholesome, and the man has "the kind of face that needs half a dozen drinks really to open the eyes and stiffen the mouth up to normal".[28] With a shock of recognition the Kellys realize that the couple is, in reality, themselves. Where One Trip Abroad ends, Tender Is The Night begins, and goes on to portray the dread of spiritual nonentity and the allure of death.

Fitzgerald "dismantled" this story, and others, of interesting phrases, and descriptions and ideas for use in his novel. Babylon Revisited (1931), another short story not directly connected with the novel, could be a sequel in mood; its theme is regeneration and a coming to grips with reality. Charles Wales returns to Paris some years after his collapse from too much alcohol, indulgence and irresponsibility, to see his daughter who is in the custody of his sister-in-law. The child has become his sole interest in life, and he struggles to regain the legal guardianship he lost following his breakdown. When Fitzgerald wrote Tender Is The Night he gave Dick Diver no hope of regeneration; his pessimism was such that he held Dick up as an empty shell, no longer a man and only half a doctor, convinced that once you were "worn away inside"[29] nothing was ever the same:

> One writes of scars healed, a loose parallel to the pathology of the skin, but there is no such thing in the life of an individual. There are open wounds, shrunk sometimes to the size of a pin-prick, but wounds still. The marks of suffering are more comparable to the loss of a finger, or the sight of an eye. We may not miss them, either, for one minute in a year, but if we should there is nothing to be done about it.[30]

Charles Wales's recovery is then only partial; the death of his wife and the loss of his child have left their mark, and he has lost part

of himself:

> Family quarrels are bitter things. They don't go according to any rules. They're not like aches or wounds; they're more like splits in the skin that won't heal because there's not enough material.[31]

It was this belief that led Fitzgerald to compare himself to a cracked plate in The Crack-Up and prompted the presentation of Dick Diver's fate as an irrevocable change in personality.

Tender Is The Night is the culmination of Fitzgerald's ideas about American society, money and emotional exhaustion, as well as the clearest exposition of his code for life, with its concern for individuality and personal responsibility. None of his other novels, including The Great Gatsby, so cogently explores the basis of his literary attitude. His themes are always presented in social terms; even his unfinished novel, The Last Tycoon, despite its concern with Stahr's personality and the fate of the Hollywood motion picture industry, is essentially a social novel.

NOTES

[1] Fitzgerald, Tender Is The Night, Book 2, ch. 13, pp. 113-114. Malcolm Cowley, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1953).

[2] ibid., Book 5, ch. 10, p. 321.

[3] ibid., Book 2, ch. 2, p. 59.

[4] ibid., ch. 5, p. 77.

[5] ibid., Book 3, ch. 7, p. 144.

[6] ibid., Book 2, ch. 3, p. 63.

[7] ibid., ch. 1, p. 53.

[8] ibid., Book 4, ch. 9, p. 234.

[9] ibid., Book 2, ch. 1, pp. 53-54.

[10] ibid., Book 4, ch. 3, p. 207.

[11] ibid., ch. 6, pp. 218-219.

[12] Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, p. 72. Edmund Wilson, Ed. (New Directions, New York, 1945).

[13] Tender Is The Night, Book 5, ch. 10, p. 321.

[14] ibid., Book 1, ch. 1, p. 6.

[15] ibid., Book 4, ch. 1, p. 193.

16 ibid., Book 5, ch. 12, p. 331.

17 ibid.

18 Cited by Arthur Mizener in The Far Side of Paradise, p. 343, note 10. (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1951).

19 Fitzgerald to Maxwell Perkins, 11 March 1935. Cited by Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, ch. 12, pp. 231-232.

20 Hemingway to Fitzgerald, 28 May 1934. Cited in The Far Side of Paradise, ch. 13, pp. 238-239.

21 Fitzgerald, "One Hundred False Starts," (Saturday Evening Post, 4 March 1933), Afternoon of An Author, p. 132. Arthur Mizener, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1957).

22 Tender Is The Night, Book 3, ch. 10, p. 158.

23 ibid., Book 4, ch. 11, pp. 250-251.

24 ibid., ch. 10, p. 239.

25 ibid.

26 Fitzgerald, "One Trip Abroad," (Saturday Evening Post, 11 Oct. 1930), Afternoon of An Author, p. 151.

27 ibid., p. 164.

28 ibid.

29 ibid., p. 143.

30 Tender Is The Night, Book 3, ch. 14, p. 181.

31 Fitzgerald, "Babylon Revisited," (Saturday Evening Post, 21 Feb. 1931, reprinted in Taps at Reveille, 1935), The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 399. Malcolm Cowley, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1951).

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST TYCOON

Fitzgerald's unfinished novel, The Last Tycoon (1941), has received almost equal amounts of praise and condemnation. Its reviewers, divided as to its merit, either sought to establish it as his most mature work or roundly prophesied that it would be second-rate. Both positions have something to be said for them, but the six chapters which make up the published fragment are in such early stages of composition that outright condemnation is unjust while unqualified praise is misleading. Fitzgerald died the day after he wrote the first episode of chapter six; from notes, Edmund Wilson pieced together an outline of the remaining chapters for his edition of the novel, but Fitzgerald had not worked out the details nor had he decided how the novel was to end.

In choice of subject-matter and conception of character, The Last Tycoon is very different from anything he had attempted hitherto. It is an effort to write understandingly and honestly about Hollywood in terms of one of its creators, Monroe Stahr, at a time when the talented individual was being replaced by the committee man. As a record of Hollywood's morals, pandering and circumlocutory utterances, it is superb; the inner workings of the movie industry are revealed, not in the sensational manner of the gossip columnist but with the touch of an artist. The action is presented through the eyes of Cecilia Brady, daughter of the unscrupulous movie magnate against whom Stahr battles in his attempt to make worthwhile motion pictures. Fitzgerald explains his choice of narrator in a letter to his publishers:

> Cecilia is the narrator because I think I know exactly how such a person would react to my story. She is of the movies but not in them.... So she is, all at once, intelligent, cynical, but understanding and kindly toward the people, great or small, who are of Hollywood.[1]

He goes on to say:

> ...by making Cecilia, at the moment of her telling the story, an intelligent and observant woman, I shall grant myself the privilege, as Conrad did, of letting her imagine the actions of the characters. Thus, I hope to get the verisimilitude of a first person narrative, combined with a Godlike knowledge of all events....[2]

But unlike her Conradian counterpart, Cecilia has more life and is more intimately involved in the action; because of this Fitzgerald encounters difficulties.

In some respects, his choice of one so young is unfortunate; the added complication of creating a believable young girl who is at once, honest, sophisticated, coy and wise beyond her years, is very nearly disastrous, and Cecilia is only saved by Fitzgerald's excellent prose. On the whole she is not an acceptable creation because both her moods and her personality are manipulated with little regard for her unity, but she is convincing in individual poses because of good dialogue; however, it is not sufficient to conceal her defects. Nevertheless, the selection of Cecilia as narrator is sound. She is advantageously placed in relation to the other characters: as daughter of Stahr's monopolistic partner, she is in a position to know the extent and content of Stahr's work and because she loves him, her interest extends to his private life. Cecilia is an informed inhabitant of Hollywood and not overcome by the glamour and glitter of big names ("At worst I accepted Hollywood with the resignation of a ghost assigned to a haunted house.... I was obstinately unhorrified");[3] and, as "a veritable flower of the fine old cost-and-gross aristocracy,"[4] she is an accurate

judge of social classes and morals. Expensively educated and brought up like a princess, she tends to be a snob, but has a discerning and understanding eye for what goes on around her. With such resources at her command, Cecilia's suitability can not be questioned nor can her information be suspected.

What can be queried is her success as an individual. Although twenty-five at the time she relates the story, the events described take place when she is twenty, while she is still attending college; naturally in retrospect, things appear in a different light, but the girl of twenty is not sufficiently differentiated from the woman of twenty-five and the resulting mixture of coyness, naïveté, spontaneity, cynicism and blasé sophistication is unbelievable. The girl who throws herself at Stahr and turns to another man because he rejects her is not the cynic who explains:

> One doesn't mix motives in Hollywood--it is confusing. Everybody understands, and the climate wears you down. A mixed motive is conspicuous waste.[5]

Had he been able to finish the novel, Fitzgerald might have integrated Cecilia's diverse qualities and given her, a rounded personality such as he gave Stahr. In spite of incongruities, she is a delightfully lively narrator and shares a slightly ironic but good-natured humour with the well-drawn minor characters.

Stahr is the most successful character in The Last Tycoon, but, what is more important, he is Fitzgerald's most mature conception of character. Even though the novel is incomplete, Stahr's personality in which greatness and weakness exist without disruption, is fully integrated. He has a life of his own apart from his creator, and in this respect differs

from Fitzgerald's other heroes, who are often projections of their author's moods. Stahr's strength is such that he dwarfs the other characters in the novel, and it is around him that the action flows. He is the titan of the movie industry:

> He was a marker in industry like Edison and Lumière and Griffith and Chaplin. He led pictures way up past the range and power of the theatre, reaching a sort of golden age, before the censorship.[6]

But Stahr is suffering from a heart condition which is complicated by over-work; his once enormous vitality has almost disappeared and his acute mind has been blunted by contact with mediocrity. He is a craftsman who delights in his work, feels a genuine responsibility to his public and is not afraid to risk money on good pictures. When he encounters an unknown Negro who considers motion pictures a waste of time, Stahr is shaken and frustrated, but with the dedication of an artist sets about to prove the Negro wrong:

> He had said that he did not allow his children to listen to Stahr's story. He was prejudiced and wrong, and he must be shown somehow, some way. A picture, many pictures, a decade of pictures, must be made to show him he was wrong. Since he had spoken, Stahr had thrown four pictures out of his plans--one that was going into production this week. They were borderline pictures in point of interest, but at least he submitted the borderline pictures to the negro and found them trash. And he put back on his list a difficult picture that he had tossed to the wolves.... He rescued it for the negro man.[7]

Apart from his creativity, Stahr is an astute business man and a worthy opponent for Brady, whose interest in films is negligible compared to his concern with money and power. In spite of ill health Stahr refuses to relinquish control of the company to the commercial interests; he has an artist's joy in the giant industry he has created and attempts to shield it from perversion.

He differs from Brady in another important respect; Stahr is a "paternalistic employer"[8] while Brady is "the monopolist at his worst"[9] and has neither creative talent nor any knowledge of film-making techniques. Although Stahr brooks no interference in his plans, and is a hard task master when faced with inefficiency or stupidity, he is never deliberately callous. The only business relationship he understands is one based on personal loyalty and because of this he takes an interest in those who work for him, inspiring them to great effort. In spite of apparent invincibility, he is a divided man "carrying on a losing battle with his instinct toward schizophrenia,"[10] unable to lift his heart from the grave of his dead wife. Stahr "has had everything in life except the privilege of giving himself unselfishly to another human being,"[11] but when he meets Kathleen Moore, the girl who can save him, who can renew his interest in life, he is so much "in love with Minna and death together"[12] that he allows her to marry another man. He is attracted to Kathleen because of her startling likeness to his former wife, Minna. But fear that the girl has been made to look like Minna, in order to further some nefarious plan, prevents him from believing in her. Later, when he finds that she is genuine, some perverse tendency to keep himself inviolable holds him back:

> ...It is your chance, Stahr. Better take it now. This is your girl. She can save you, she can worry you back to life. She will take looking after and you will grow strong to do it. But take her now - tell her and take her away.[13]

With Kathleen go Stahr's last hopes, although he does not realize it.

Fitzgerald considered the love affair between Stahr and Kathleen

so important that he intended to make it "the meat of the book".[14] However, such is not the case in the completed chapters: Stahr seems to run away with Fitzgerald and establishes prior claim to our attention, while Kathleen is minor in comparison. She is not clearly drawn and the inconsistencies of her presentation lead us to suspect that a final decision on her character has not been made, in spite of Stahr's dogmatic evaluation:

> She was not trash, she was not confused but clear - in his special meaning of the word, which implied balance, delicacy and proportion, she was 'nice'.[15]

But none of these characteristics is evident in Kathleen's presentation; she is neither convincing nor subtle; her plight is not helped by her exotic background, which sounds bogus and makes unequal demands upon her. She is a "nobody," whose "father was shot by the Black-and-Tans;"[16] but she manages to be presented at Buckingham Palace, through the endeavour of an ambitious step-mother: "The day her step-mother presented her at Court they had one shilling to eat with so as not to feel faint".[17] After her step-mother dies of starvation, Kathleen is alone and miserable until she becomes the mistress of a deposed king, whose zeal for education gives her a speaking acquaintance with art and literature. She runs away from the king when he goes "to seed, drinking and sleeping with the housemaids and trying to force her off on his friends,"[18] and reaches Hollywood with the help of an American.

With such a formidable past, Kathleen should at least be interesting, but she is not; presumably, she is supposed to be a daring, charming, intelligent and graceful woman, but she is convincing as none of these. In spite of an extensive social training, she is Stahr's inferior

and at times borders on the vulgar, while her references to art sound forced and contrived. Fitzgerald is never at his best when writing about Europeans; he does not understand Kathleen or her society, and his attempt to write about her in American terms is strained and unnatural. Nor is the description of Stahr's seduction of Kathleen up to the Fitzgerald standard; he wanted to emphasize Kathleen's warmth and responsiveness without losing the Hollywood touch:

> ...I want a seduction - very Californian, yet new - very Hollywood, say. If he has no illusion, he has at least great pity and excitement, friendliness, stimulus, fascination. Where will the warmth come from in this? Why does he think she's warm? Warmer than the voice in Farewell to Arms. My girls were all so warm and full of promise. What can I do to make it honest and different?[19]

But instead of being warm and living, she is little more than a puppet and appears neither to believe in what she says nor to feel anything other than an idle emotion for Stahr. Her lack of cohesion is all the more evident because she can only be viewed in relation to Stahr, who has an inner vitality from which his emotions and life emanate.

She is hampered as well by Fitzgerald's puritanism; he is attracted yet repelled by the sensual and appears faintly shocked at himself for daring to write about a love affair that is "immediate, dynamic, unusual, physical,"[20] but which comes through as none but the latter. Fitzgerald can write charmingly and feelingly around such a subject, but affects a Jamesian gentility when dealing directly with the physical; his embarrassment communicates itself and leaves the reader uneasy. Had he finished The Last Tycoon Fitzgerald might have mastered his qualms and made Kathleen's and Stahr's love affair the central theme of the book as he intended. However, it is more probable that Stahr would have

dwarfed everything and everyone as he does in the completed chapters, forcing Kathleen to play an important but definitely secondary role. To focus attention on the love affair, the emphasis of the written chapters would have to be shifted away from Stahr and Hollywood, or Kathleen made to rival Stahr for the spotlight; but neither seems likely because Stahr is, even in the novel's incomplete form, an entirely satisfactory creation and because Kathleen is essentially an enigma to Fitzgerald.

Although Fitzgerald fails in his creation of Kathleen, he succeeds in capturing the atmosphere and life of Hollywood. The facade is pierced and we are shown the inside of the film world: through the sardonic humour of a script writer, Wylie White, who is "an intellectual of the second order";[21] the vicissitudes in the life of Reinmund the supervisor, who is "forced by his anomalous position into devious ways of acting and thinking";[22] the mental sterility of Broaca, a director and "an ignoramus";[23] the steel-trap-like mind of old Marcus, the power and the money behind motion pictures, whose "never-atrophying instinct warned him of danger";[24] the moral turpitude of Fleishacker, the company lawyer, who prides himself on his "big words from N[ew] Y[ork] U[niversity]";[25] the fears of Roderiguez, the male star whose last picture "broke all records"[26] but who fears the loss of his virility; the bewilderment of a semi-faced actress, Martha Dodd, "an agricultural girl, who had never quite understood what had happened to her and had nothing to show for it except a washed-out look about the eyes,"[27] but who reminisces about her former grandeur:

I had a beautiful place in 1928... thirty acres, with a miniature

> golf course and a pool and a gorgeous view. All spring I was up to my ass in daisies.[28]

Out of these varied characters, so vividly drawn, comes a sense of life and turbulence that is usually associated with Vanity Fair. In the six short chapters of The Last Tycoon there is more life, vitality and humour than is often found in novels many times its size.

Fitzgerald was aiming at the polish and concentration he achieved in The Great Gatsby; he was proposing a novel of five acts or books of about 51,000 words with the main emphasis falling on Stahr and Kathleen. When he died he had finished the first draft of acts one and two and the opening episode of act three, which is part of chapter six. Up to this point Stahr has not had to fight directly for control of the studio, but in chapter six, he is about to be plunged into a dispute between the employees and the controllers of the movie industry. He is caught between the employees who distrust him and Brady who hates him. Fitzgerald had not fully developed this idea and the manuscript stops after Stahr's encounter with Brimmer, a Communist organizer, who has been stirring up the writers and other employees. The following sketch is taken from Edmund Wilson's synopsis and the last outline made by the author. Following the meeting with Brimmer, Stahr goes on a trip East to discuss a threatened wage cut at the Studio with shareholders; while he is away, Brady proceeds to cut all wages in spite of his promise not to reduce the lower-paid employees. During his stay in the East, Stahr visits Washington where he falls dangerously ill and begins to wonder whether or not he should quit, but cannot bring himself to submit to Brady. So, he returns to Hollywood. The hostility between

the two men breaks into the open and they threaten each other ineffectively with blackmail. As a result of this, Stahr breaks off his relationship with Cecilia and stops making motion pictures. Fitzgerald intended to emphasize the change in Stahr's status and attitude from the time we first meet him as the efficient ruler of Studio production, to his precarious position in the Studio, when he is caught between Brady and the Unions, and accepted by neither, by giving a last view of him at work. He has a last fling with Kathleen, but Brady hears about it and uses it as a means to inveigle her husband, Bronson Smith, into murder of Stahr. When Stahr hears about the plan he retaliates and arranges Brady's murder with the Underworld, planning to be absent on a trip to New York when it takes place. During the flight he realizes that he has allowed himself to descend to Brady's level and decides to wire orders at the next airport cancelling the murder, but the plane crashes and everyone is killed.

Fitzgerald did not finally decide how to end the novel; he considered closing with a forecast of Hollywood's immediate future as it falls under the domination of uncreative and unprincipled men, such as Fleishacker, and a description of Stahr's funeral as:

> ...an orgy of Hollywood servility and hypocrisy. Everyone is weeping copiously or conspicuously stifling emotion with an eye on the right people. Cecilia imagines Stahr present and can hear him saying 'Trash!' The old cowboy actor, Johnny Swanson... has been invited to the funeral by mistake - through the confusion of his name with someone else's, - and asked to officiate as pall-bearer along with the most intimate and important of the dead producer's friends. Johnny goes through with the ceremony, rather dazed; and then finds out, to his astonishment, that his fortunes have been gloriously restored. From this time on, he is deluged with offers of jobs.[29]

Another passage was to have informed us that the whole story was put

together by Cecilia in a tuberculosis sanatorium, where she has been living since her breakdown following the death of Stahr and the murder of her father. Fitzgerald had written part of this episode with the intention of using it as an introduction to the novel, but changed his mind.

A second ending which appealed to Fitzgerald was to have the bodies of Stahr and his fellow passengers rifled by three children. He outlined this plan in a letter to his publishers:

> Of the three children, two boys and a girl, who find the bodies, one boy /Jim/ rifles Stahr's possessions; another /Dan/ the body of a ruined ex-producer; and the girl /Frances/, those of a moving picture actress. The possessions which the children find, symbolically determine their attitude toward their act of theft. The possessions of the moving picture actress tend the young girl to a selfish possessiveness; those of the unsuccessful producer sway one of the boys toward an irresolute attitude; while the boy who finds Stahr's briefcase is the one who, after a week, saves and redeems all three by going to a local judge and making a full confession.[30]

Aware of the difficulties involved in this episode, Fitzgerald wrote in his sketch of the incident:

> Give the impression that Jim is all right - that Frances is faintly corrupted and may possibly go off in a year or so in search of adventure and may turn into anything from a gold digger to a prostitute, and that Dan has been completely corrupted and will spend the rest of his life looking for a chance to get something for nothing. I cannot be too careful not to rub this in or give it the substance or feeling of a moral tale. I should /show/ very pointedly that Jim is all right and end perhaps with Frances and let the readers hope that Frances is going to be all right and then take away that hope by showing the last glimpse of Frances with that lingering conviction that luxury is over the next valley, therefore giving a bitter and acrid finish to the incident to take away any possible sentimental and moral stuff that may have crept into it. Certainly end the incident with Frances.[31]

Following this episode, he proposed to switch the story "once more back to Hollywood for its finale".[32] He intended in this plan to end the

novel with Thalia /Kathleen/ standing outside "in front of the great plant which he created.... She knows only that he loved her and that he was a great man and that he died for what he believed in...."[33]

Whether or not Fitzgerald could have fulfilled the promise of the first chapters and the hope in his sketches, as well as resolved his difficulties with Cecilia and Kathleen, it is really futile to discuss. Persuasive arguments are readily available to both sides. Fitzgerald thought he had mastered the material and confidently wrote his publishers:

> There's nothing that worries me in the novel, nothing that seems uncertain. Unlike Tender Is The Night, it is not the story of deterioration - it is not depressing and not morbid in spite of the tragic ending. If one book could ever be 'like' another, I should say it is more 'like' The Great Gatsby than any other of my books.... I hope it will be something new, arouse new emotions, perhaps even a new way of looking at certain phenomena. I have set it safely in a period of five years ago to obtain detachment.... It is an escape into a lavish, romantic past that perhaps will not come again into our time.[34]

This last statement has unfortunate overtones. His novels, with the exception of The Great Gatsby, are marred by an uncontrolled romanticism and lavishness. But, presumably, he hoped to weld the romance of money and power to the personal magnetism and Napoleon-like qualities of Stahr, in such a way as to have all the romantic possibilities of a Gatsby without the limitation of his innocence. Fitzgerald had not progressed far enough in the novel to develop both aspects of Stahr fully, so he tends to be more of a craftsman and a technician than an explicit symbol of The American Dream.

In The Last Tycoon, Fitzgerald attempts more than the creation of a self-made man; he endeavours to evaluate the place of Hollywood, the self-made industry, in American society and finds that it is "hated...

way down deep as a threat to... existence,"[35] or else dismissed "with the contempt we reserve for what we don't understand".[36] The refusal of the American mind to accept Hollywood as a genuine industry is symbolized by the failure of Cecilia Brady, Wylie White and Manny Schwartz former "head of some combine... First National? Paramount? United Artists?"[37] to gain admittance to the Hermitage, home of Andrew Jackson, America's tenth president, during their early morning visit between plane flights. Fitzgerald returns to this motif later in the novel, when Stahr goes to visit Washington in the hope of getting to know the city, but his illness prevents him. To most of America, Hollywood remains an enigma, "they never see the ventriloquist for the doll".[38] Even the inhabitants fear it and find "the only way to keep their self-respect is to be Hemingway characters".[39] Fitzgerald tries and succeeds in showing us the "private grammar"[40] of the motion pictures which are a direct result of The American Dream, although society refuses to accept them as such. No other American novel dissects the Hollywood façade or analyzes so acutely its relation to the different levels of American society.

The writing is in places excellent. The dialogue so convincing that it momentarily hides the inconsistencies of the characters; an example of it is the delightful repartee between Wylie White and Cecilia as she is on her way to throw herself at Stahr:

> 'Are you going to sing for Stahr?' Wylie said. 'If you do, get in a line about my being a good supervisor.'
> 'Oh, this'll be only Stahr and me,' I said. 'He's going to look at me and think, 'I've never really seen her before.'
> 'We don't use that line this year,' he said.
> '- Then he'll say 'Little Cecilia,' like he did the night of the earthquake. He'll say he never noticed I have become a woman.'

'You won't have to do a thing.'
'I'll stand there and bloom. After he kisses me as you would a child --'
'That's all in my script,' compained Wylie, 'and I've got to show it to him tomorrow.'
'-- he'll sit down and put his face in his hands and say he never thought of me like that.'
'You mean you get in a little fast work during the kiss?'
'I bloom, I told you. How often do I have to tell you I bloom.'
'It's beginning to sound pretty randy to me,' said Wylie.
'How about laying off - I've got to work this morning.'
'Then he says it seems as if he was always meant to be this way.'
'Right in the industry, Producer's blood.' He pretended to shiver. 'I'd hate to have a transfusion of that.'
'Then he says--'
'I know all his lines,' said Wylie. 'What I want to know is what you say.'
'Somebody comes in,' I went on.
'And you jump up quickly off the casting couch, smoothing your skirts.'41

But not all of the dialogue or prose attains this standard: there is a repetition of phrases and a sudden and unwarranted use of the vernacular; but in general there is a quietness and finesse about the writing that distinguishes Fitzgerald's best prose.

Whether or not one believes in Fitzgerald's ability to create a masterpiece is beside the point. Taken on its own merits, the chapters drafted, have a distinctive style and the mark of an experienced social observer as well as a mixture of humour, bitterness and sympathy which precludes dullness. The novel is lively and interesting by any standard. Even granted the possibility of artistic failure, it would take its place beside the distinguished failures of American literature, along with Tender Is The Night.

NOTES

1 Fitzgerald to Scribner's, 29 Sept. 1939. Quoted by Edmund Wilson in his edition of The Last Tycoon, p. 138, (Modern Standard Authors, Scribner's, New York, 1953).

2 ibid., pp. 139-140.

3 Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon, ch. 1, p. 3, Edmund Wilson, Ed.

4 ibid., ch. 5, p. 102.

5 ibid., p. 101.

6 ibid., ch. 3, p. 28.

7 ibid., ch. 5, p. 95.

8 ibid., ch. 6, p. 125.

9 Fitzgerald to Scribner's, 29 Sept. 1939. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 140.

10 The Last Tycoon, ch. 6, p. 126.

11 Fitzgerald to Scribner's, 29 Sept. 1939. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 139.

12 The Last Tycoon, ch. 2, p. 96.

13 ibid., ch. 5, p. 115.

14 Fitzgerald to Scribner's, 29 Sept. 1939. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 139.

15 The Last Tycoon, ch. 5, p. 80.

16 ibid., ch. 5, p. 112.

17 ibid., p. 111.

18 ibid., p. 112.

19 Fitzgerald's notes, "Stahr and Kathleen," The Last Tycoon. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 151.

20 Fitzgerald to Scribner's, 29 Sept. 1939. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 139.

21 The Last Tycoon, ch. 3, p. 38.

22 ibid., p. 37.

23 ibid.

24 ibid., p. 45.

25 ibid., p. 48.

26 ibid., p. 35.

27 ibid., ch. 5, p. 101.

28 ibid.

29 Quoted from Edmund Wilson's synopsis of the story which was put together from Fitzgerald's notes and outlines and from the reports of persons with whom he discussed his work. The Last Tycoon, p. 132.

30 Fitzgerald to Scribner's, 29 Sept. 1939. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 141.

31
Fitzgerald's notes, "Crash of the Plane," The Last Tycoon. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 158.

32
Fitzgerald to Scribner's, 29 Sept. 1939. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, p. 141.

33
ibid.

34
ibid.

35
The Last Tycoon, ch. 1, p. 3.

36
ibid.

37
ibid., p. 11.

38
Fitzgerald's notes, "Hollywood," The Last Tycoon, p. 158.

39
The Last Tycoon, ch. 5, p. 72.

40
Fitzgerald's notes, "Hollywood," The Last Tycoon, p. 159.

41
The Last Tycoon, ch. 5, pp. 69-70.

CHAPTER VIII

FITZGERALD'S PLACE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

In dealing with Fitzgerald critics have tended to either overestimate his interest in money and on this basis dismiss him as a serious novelist, or they have labelled him as a secondrate novelist of manners fit only for the company of writers such as William Dean Howells, Ellen Glasgow and John O'Hara. Either approach underestimates his contribution to American Literature. Fitzgerald's interest in society springs from, and is subservient to, his interest in the individual; in his view man cannot be isolated from society. Yet, he is very American in his belief that Life must be dominated and that society's rules must not be permitted to bind the individual. To Fitzgerald, Life is a game and a loss must be suffered with dignity. He held sacred no established rules of behaviour except those of consideration for one's fellows and tended to sympathize with social climbers if they possessed intelligence and charm, seeing in their struggle a development of natural instincts. Fitzgerald agreed with Mark Twain in feeling that personal integrity and individuality must be preserved:

> Either you think - or else others have to think for you and take power from you, pervert and discipline natural tastes, civilize and sterilize you.[1]

Although he had an anarchic conception of personality and believed that "Life yielded easily to intelligence and effort,"[2] Fitzgerald was not a rebel or a reformer; perhaps because American society allowed such mobility. Despite an insistence on individuality, he longed for an absolute standard by which he could define himself, and view the world

safe from doubt. In an attempt to find certainty he attributed the virtues he admired to the wealthy, but the American rich did not always measure up to his standards; his aristocrats have more than money, they have a bigness of soul and the possibility of perfection, which he thought could only be cultivated in the atmosphere of wealth. Once he began a short story with:

> Let me tell you about the rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, and makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you are born rich, it is very difficult to understand. They think, deep in their hearts, that they are better than we are because we had to discover the compensations and refuges of life for ourselves. Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are. They are different.[3]

This exact difference Fitzgerald spent a great deal of his life trying to explain. His attitude to the wealthy was ambiguous; he saw in their lives the possibilities of grandeur and personal freedom, but at the same time realized the confining and isolating power of money. Tocqueville, perhaps, came nearest to explaining this contradiction when he said:

> Aristocratic nations are naturally too liable to narrow the scope of human perfectibility; democratic nations, to expand it beyond reason.[4]

Fitzgerald's search for perfection led him to couple his idea of an ethical aristocracy with money. To him wealth was never bad in itself although his established families are presented as corrupt, self-indulgent and callous. The Buchanans in The Great Gatsby are charming, but are damned by their carelessness and brutality to inferior status as human beings and Gatsby, in spite of his roughness and underworld connections, is the 'real' aristocrat. The Warrens in Tender Is The

Night are more profoundly explored, but they do not differ essentially from the Buchanans; both have a lack of moral fibre which makes them caricatures of humanity. Their instability apparently convinced Fitzgerald that he would not find the certainty he sought in the manufacturing families of America, but he retained the idea that money was a necessary prerequisite to his 'moral' aristocrat. It is ironical that the outsiders in his novels, Gatsby and Dick Diver, should without leaning on wealth, approximate his idea of an aristocrat; and it is significant that in The Last Tycoon, he turned from the wealthy unemployed to a self-made man whose virtues are creative and tangible. Towards the end of his life he was thoroughly disenchanted with the "cosmopolitan rich"; he wrote his daughter Scottie who was then in college:

> They are homeless people, ashamed of being American, unable to master the culture of another country; ashamed, usually of their husbands, wives, grandparents, and unable to bring up descendants of whom they could be proud, even if they had the nerve to bear them, ashamed of each other yet leaning on each other's weakness, a menace to the social order in which they live....[5]

The Warrens are all of these things, yet Fitzgerald, like Dick Diver, admired the grace and charm with which they faced disaster. The search for certainty led Fitzgerald to give the Warrens a significance comparable to English aristocrats, but he was forced by their lack of tradition and principle to create values for them, in the process of which, he succeeded in demonstrating to himself how lacking in humanity they were.

Whether or not we accept his evaluation of American society is beside the point; Fitzgerald's importance lies in his acceptance of, and attempt to deal with, society without recourse to non-American

standards. Henry James turned to Europe because he found American society unbearably dull, but it did not occur to Fitzgerald to ignore his society or turn elsewhere for his material. Although the life and manners of America were ill-equipped to offer him the stability he wanted, he set about examining it with Jamesian virtuosity. In part, Fitzgerald's works are novels of manners which, by the intensity of his committment to the ideal of a 'moral' aristocracy of wealth, escape being novels of economic status. Without this belief in the possibility of the Warrens' and the Buchanans' superiority, their distinction depends solely on the fact that they have more money.

The ambivalent nature of Fitzgerald's heritage -- a moral perceptiveness reminiscent of James together with a belief in The American Dream -- hampered his judgements and forced him to vascillate between a social view of life and a romantic attachment to the self. As Lionel Trilling points out:

> Fitzgerald was perhaps the last notable writer to affirm the Romantic fantasy, descended from the Renaissance, of personal ambition and heroism, of life committed to, or thrown away for, some ideal of self.[6]

Fitzgerald's most successful heroes, Stahr and Gatsby, are dedicated men following their own destiny, but their grandest plans and aspirations are presented within the framework of society, although they are allowed far greater latitude than any of James's characters. The absence of a recognized code forced Fitzgerald to formulate a personal interpretation of life and manners based on his ideals of courage, individual responsibility and the recognition of another's humanity. In his novels, this code takes the form of love, usually between a man and a woman,

although sometimes it is simply communication between two individuals. Although Dick Diver and Gatsby are ruined because they love too deeply and too freely, they are never presented as over-emotional, but as unwise. Love, for Fitzgerald is both destructive and healing; it is the only thing that will save Stahr's health and restore his will to live, but it deprives Dick Diver of his integrity. Both Dick's and Gatsby's greatness lie in their ability to surrender to a dream and their capacity for love; Gatsby's fate rises to tragedy and Tender Is The Night haunts the reader because Dick is a brilliant miscalculation, a near tragic figure who remains so commonplace that identification with him is as easy as it is uncomfortable.

Fitzgerald's sense of the past and association of Gatsby's "incorruptible dream" with the first Dutch sailors to see America lifts The Great Gatsby from the secondrate and places it with the best in literature. The attempt to relate Dick's fate with Grant waiting in his general store at Galena to be called upon by destiny is less successful. Fitzgerald has been accused of having no sense of the past, but this is misleading and unfair. In his unfinished novel, The Last Tycoon, he attempts to relate Hollywood and its inhabitants to American society as a whole, and the result is less forced and contrived than in Tender Is The Night. Fully aware of the complexities and incongruities of American life, Fitzgerald tried to understand and comprehend it as a whole, but he succeeded only in The Great Gatsby:

> France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea, was harder to utter - it was the graves at Shiloh and the tired, drawn, nervous faces of its great men, and the country boys dying in the Argonne for a phrase that was empty before their bodies withered, it was a willingness of the heart.[7]

This "willingness of the heart" is at the core of all Fitzgerald's major characters and causes their downfall. Although his heroes are very American, Fitzgerald never felt impelled to celebrate America with the mystic patriotism of Thomas Wolfe, indeed, Wolfe's histrionics led Fitzgerald to exclaim impatiently in a letter to his daughter: "The stuff about the GREAT VITAL HEART OF AMERICA is just simply corny".[8] Having no regard for mawkish sentiment for its own sake, he censured Wolfe for writing everything in the same emotional key.

Unlike his contemporaries, Fitzgerald makes little use of either violence or sexuality; love, in his novels is amazingly free of sex, and reality is not only what is "external and hard, gross, unpleasant,"[9] but is social and moral as well. The implications of this duality cannot be ignored, because he was the first American novelist to attempt to cope with both elements. Fitzgerald thought sham the self-appointed Christlike attitude of Wolfe, who proclaimed with Blakean intensity:

> ...Life - the only thing that matters. It is savage, cruel, kind, passionate, generous, stupid, ugly, beautiful, painful, joyous - it is all of these things and more - and it is all of these I want to know, and BY GOD I shall, though they crucify me for it....

Fitzgerald was willing to accept a different approach to art and writing provided it was honest; he admired Hemingway's "courage... Joseph Conrad's art... D. H. Lawrence's intense cohabitions," but he discounted Wolfe as "too 'smart'... in [the] most belittling and modern sense".[10] It was not that he feared Life, in fact, responsiveness is one of the Fitzgerald virtues despite his conviction that "life is essentially a cheat and its conditions ... those of defeat."[11] This admiration for Hemingway's art did not entail accepting the "dumb-ox" philosophy;

Fitzgerald differed radically from the early Hemingway and believed that "the redeeming things are not 'happiness and pleasure' but the deeper satisfactions that come out of struggle".[12] He was incapable of writing about sex with the lyricism of Lawrence, in fact, when he tried to give Kathleen Moore (The Last Tycoon) a healthy animal sensuality he failed because he could not divorce himself from the idea that sensual love was sacrosanct. Perhaps this explains why he changed his mind about making Nicole Warren "the legendary promiscuous woman"[13] and allowed her to be injured innocence in addition to being the symbol of a decadent society.

All of Fitzgerald's women of any importance are excessively pure, rather sexless, and love tends to become a union of spirits; the only notably different woman is Kathleen Moore, but she is confused and inconsistently drawn. Fitzgerald seems incapable of creating a sensual woman without making her into a tart. Neither Daisy or Nicole have much independence, although they differ in what little life they have. Daisy is a capricious flirt and Nicole is hard yet vulnerable, but both depend for their credulity and life on the intensity of a man's love; however, not even that is sufficient to make Kathleen credible. Fitzgerald did not possess Henry James's insight into the female mind, and his heroines tend to be a series of qualities activated by arrogance and egocentricity. His men are more convincing, but suffer from a lack of cohesion; Stahr is the most consistently convincing; the others tend generally to be personifications, abstractions or projections.

In spite of faults, Fitzgerald's novels do not commit the cardinal sin; they do not fail to live. He loses nothing by rejecting the

blatant sexuality of Faulkner or the unnecessary crudity of such minor novelists as John O'Hara who revel in revealing the seamy side of life for its own sake. Fitzgerald was an artist and painstakingly careful with his prose; his style is the most poetic, polished and unobtrusive in American Literature. Hemingway, Faulkner and James, to cite but a few, are extremely self-conscious stylists. Beside Fitzgerald, Hemingway's prose is spare to the point of miserliness and deceptively childlike in its simplicity, with limited vocabulary and omission of commas and semicolons in the manner of Gertrude Stein. Fitzgerald lacks the sophistication of James, but manages to discuss the nuances of class distinctions without descending into either obscurity or mannerisms. Fitzgerald's flowing prose often makes Faulkner appear turgid, Wolfe assumes the appearance of a clodhopper and O'Hara seems nondescript and hackneyed in comparison. The poetic purity of the language in The Great Gatsby is matched by Hemingway only in The Old Man and the Sea and by Faulkner in parts of As I Lay Dying and The Sound and The Fury. Even Fitzgerald's hack work, although often marred by carelessness, is marked by verbal brilliance; his facility with language is more English than American, perhaps because it was cultivated through an admiration for Keats and sustained by the conviction that no one "can write succinct prose unless they have at least tried and failed to write a good iambic pentameter sonnet, and read Browning's short dramatic poems".[14]

Fitzgerald has a curious position in American Literature. Although closer in spirit to Henry James, he is painfully aware of Mark Twain. Had he lived in an European society he would undoubtedly been a novelist of manners; his equivocal position in American society forced

him to create his own 'manners', partly because of this his characters transcend their society, although they never attain the objectivity of James's creations; Fitzgerald cannot be excused for his heroes lack of integration despite the dearth of material in American society for a social novelist. Other American writers solved the problem in various ways: James turned to England and contented himself with portraying Americans as innocents abroad or else as excessively civilized inhibited creatures such as Winterbourne in Daisy Miller; Edith Wharton invoked the standards of older New York and judged society by the manners and cultivated tastes of "Washington Square"; Hemingway escaped the quandry by setting his novels outside of America and dismissed class consciousness in favour of a personal and highly formalized code; Sinclair Lewis accepted the middle class but exposed their sterility and hypocrisy; O'Hara tackled the situation with the sledge hammer, but "He didn't bite off anything to chew on. He just began chewing with nothing in his mouth".[15] Faulkner was the most fortunate of the lot; he created Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi and endowed it with tradition and a history going back two hundred years. He was doubly fortunate in being a Southerner and understanding his society which has an aristocratic tradition of its own dating from the time of the early plantations.

No such tradition aided Fitzgerald. He had to be content with a belief in The American Dream and the Mid-Westerner's yearning toward New England, with its aristocratic and puritanical standards. He attempted to weld the two into a coherent whole, but only succeeded briefly in The Great Gatsby. The combination of perceptiveness and

sensibility of the Jamesian heritage and an innate distrust of civilization in the spirit of the Frontier and Mark Twain, produces an uneasy balance in Fitzgerald's work. Yet, he tends to lean more heavily towards James than any other American novelist and is unassailable when analyzing the nuances of American class differences, surpassing even Edith Wharton because his values are not imposed from without.

Fitzgerald's contribution to American Literature was first appreciated by T. S. Eliot who made the most relevant criticism of The Great Gatsby when he said that "it seems ... to be the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James".[16] Indeed The Great Gatsby is so similar to Daisy Miller that Fitzgerald seems to have used James's novel as a model. Both are studies of innocence confronted by a society that behaves according to a set of rules with which neither Gatsby nor Daisy are acquainted. They are considered vulgar by the society to which they aspire; Gatsby's chaotic parties elicit the same response from the Buchanans that Daisy's friendship with Giovanelli produces in the American colony in Rome. Winterbourne and Carraway are not only similar in spirit, their purpose is identical. They are the consciences of the novels and they judge the actions of the characters in accordance with a code that is derived from their society, although not entirely subject to it. Both are so super-civilized that when confronted with people such as Gatsby or Daisy they find it difficult to sympathize or understand, but they are prepared to try. Fitzgerald and James are so committed to Carraway and Winterbourne respectively, that the reader's judgement is swayed by the force of the prose to concur without question.

In no other novel did Fitzgerald succeed in achieving such an intellectual grasp of his material or comprehend it as a whole. He has not the ability to sustain what James called the Commanding Center. Although his debt to James is great, Fitzgerald's talent is essentially different; it is poetical where James is analytical. Even at his most perceptive James holds himself aloof from the reader, a feeling undoubtedly exaggerated by his style; Fitzgerald on the contrary has the ability to get close to the reader and create an intimate atmosphere and a sense of communion.

Despite his attraction to James, Fitzgerald's allegiance is divided; and his indebtedness to the tradition of Mark Twain cannot be ignored, but he brought the art of observing man in society to a new stage by making it American, whereas before him it tended to be regarded as European. He is a marker in American fiction. Had he ignored the Frontier, Fitzgerald would have limited himself to the restricted social observation of Howells, but because he attempted to fuse the divergent elements of his heritage he is of primary importance.

As a novelist he is extremely readable, and although barred from the ranks of the great by a lack of cohesion in his work and a tendency to confuse his emotions with his judgements, he is a major writer. His great talent did not realize its full potential, partly through personal weakness, but also because of the division in his art, which is the direct result of being American; his was the difficult task of assessing an amorphous society which possessed no sense of tradition and could only define itself in terms of wealth. As most writers, Fitzgerald had only one or two central ideas. The most forceful was a belief in the power

of money to create a 'moral' aristocracy that possessed all the virtues he admired; the second was a conception of vitality as a fixed sum that gradually declined with each emotional expenditure, until an individual reached a state of "emotional bankruptcy,"—an idea his own experience seemed to confirm—; but knowledge of his society and intellectual honesty forced him to modify his views on aristocracy until it assumed the proportions of a moral rather than a material state. Even if his novels themselves are considered questionable measures of fame, his place in American fiction is assured. In Fitzgerald the American novel took its first step toward the union of a social conscience with the Frontier.

NOTES

1 Fitzgerald, Tender Is The Night, Book 5, ch. 7, p. 308. Malcolm Cowley, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1953).

2 Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up," (Feb. 1936), The Crack-Up, p. 69, Edmund Wilson, Ed. (New Directions, New York, 1945).

3 Fitzgerald, "The Rich Boy," (All Sad Young Men 1926), The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 177, Malcolm Cowley, Ed. (Scribner's, New York, 1951).

4 Alex de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. 2, ch. 8, p. 35, Phillips Bradley, Ed., The Henry Reeve text, (Vintage Books, New York, 1956).

5 Fitzgerald to his daughter, Autumn, 1937, "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 288.

6 Lionel Trilling, "F. Scott Fitzgerald," The Liberal Imagination, p. 242. (Doubleday, New York, 1957).

7 Fitzgerald, "The Note-Book," The Crack-Up, p. 197.

8 Fitzgerald to his daughter, (n.d.) "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 305.

9 Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and The Novel," The Liberal Imagination, p. 209.

10 Fitzgerald to his daughter, (n.d.) "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 306.

11 ibid.

12 ibid.

13 Cited by Arthur Mizener in The Far Side of Paradise, Appendix B, p. 308. (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1951).

14 Fitzgerald to his daughter, (n.d.) "The Letters," The Crack-Up, p. 304.

15 Fitzgerald, "The Note-Books," The Crack-Up, p. 181.

16 T. S. Eliot to Fitzgerald, 31 Dec. 1925, "Three Letters about 'The Great Gatsby'," The Crack-Up, p. 310.

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