

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

THE CONCEPT OF MAN
IN
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S
NOVELS

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's four finished novels and the fragment of the fifth, he gradually worked out a distinctive concept of man. He found three basic types: the Nietzschean, firmly convinced of the rectitude of a project; the "stupid" (without the usual perjorative connotations), who never consider the possibility or desirability of a set goal; and the Tolstoian, searching for some satisfactory way to be, discovering possible ways by watching other people. The Tolstoians adopt provisional ways to be -- "poses" --, changing whenever they recognize a better. Fitzgerald develops three basic problems facing the Tolstoians, investigates the possibilities for love, and discovers some implications of time and death.

INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of the concept of man has extremely important implications for our whole understanding of the world. Each of us participates in mankind, so our understanding of the basic concept modifies everything we understand about ourselves; and it is on the basis of my understanding of the concept that I decide which other people are "like" myself and to what degree -- this is how I find my place in the world in terms of other people.

Given the importance the understanding of this concept carries, then, I find much of the whole business of life dedicated to thinking about it, discussing it, and trying to gain fuller understanding of it. I am particularly interested in the opinions of other people whose sensitivity and insight I admire and whose ability to express themselves is considerable. One such is F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald was not a philosopher; he did not write his conclusions down in abstract terms; but throughout his life and work he was trying to understand what sort of a world of men he was in. He wanted to discover on what terms people could deal with other people. He wanted to know how it was possible for people to fall in love, and what it meant. He tried to discover to what extent men are classifiable, and how essentially different they could be. He recorded his

investigation and conclusions in the form of literature, using for material the only elements whose authenticity he could really depend on -- the things that had happened to himself.

He even went beyond a fictionalized study of events in his life to an inward examination of his own psyche, in print, which damaged his standing in the estimation of some fellow artists. Hemingway and Dos Passos, for instance, disapproved of Fitzgerald's frank public analysis of himself in the "Crack-Up" series, apparently because they thought it was vaguely indecent. Art did not mean so much to them that merciless exposure of the self was permissible. Fitzgerald put the ends of art above his own right to privacy, and to some extent above his own dignity. His fellow artists censured him for being willing to make the sacrifice.

"Often I think writing is a sheer paring away of oneself leaving always something thinner, barer, more meager," Fitzgerald wrote his daughter in 1940;¹ yet he kept at it until the day he died.

I would rather impress my image (even though an image the size of a nickel) upon the soul of a people than be known except insofar as I have my natural obligation to my family -- to provide for them. I would as soon be as anonymous as Rimbaud, if I could feel that I had accomplished that purpose -- and that is no sentimental yapping about being disinterested. It is simply that, having once found the intensity of

¹ Dated April 27, 1940, in The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Andrew Turnbull, ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 70.

art, nothing else that can happen ⁱⁿ life can ever again seem as important as the creative process.²

Fiction was the most efficient means Fitzgerald found for communicating with other people his insights into human nature. His collected letters make it plain that he took his work seriously:

I believe that the important thing about a work of fiction is that the essential reaction shall be profound and enduring. And if the ending of this one [Tender is the Night] is not effectual I should be gladder to think that the effect came back long afterwards, long after one had forgotten the name of the author.³

And again:

Almost everything I write in novels goes, for better or worse, into the subconscious of the reader.⁴

This was one of the attitudes for which he found himself indebted to Joseph Conrad. Nineteen times in his collected Letters we find acknowledgement of Conrad's influence, at least three times with specific reference to a point stemming from the preface to The Nigger of The Narcissus. To give one example, in a letter to Ernest Hemingway discussing the "dying fall" of Dick Diver (which Fitzgerald deliberately chose instead of a dramatic ending):

² To H.L.Mencken, April 23, 1934, Letters, p. 510.

³ To John Peale Bishop, April 2, 1934, Letters, p. 362.

⁴ To Margaret Case Harriman, August, 1936, Letters, p. 527.

The theory back of it I got from Conrad's preface to The Nigger, that the purpose of a work of fiction is to appeal to the lingering after-effects in the reader's mind as differing from, say, the purpose of oratory or philosophy which respectively leave people in a fighting or thoughtful mood.⁵

Conrad's words were:

... the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. His appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities -- like the vulnerable body within a steel armour. His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring -- and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures for ever. The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition -- and, therefore, more permanently enduring.⁶

The last of Conrad's sentences is particularly important, for he is referring to that which is the essential grounding of the "concept of man" we noted earlier as our central concern, and Fitzgerald's. Discovering it is the high purpose that for Fitzgerald justifies the pain of losing illusions -- illusions are by definition acquisitions, not essential facets of one's being; therefore, they must be ruthlessly done away with if one is to discover the essential qualities of one's nature.

⁵ June 1, 1934, Letters, p. 309.

⁶ Joseph Conrad, Conrad's Prefaces to His Works, Edward Garnet, ed. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1937), pp. 49-50.

Fitzgerald narrowed the scope of his investigation from that which Conrad proposed. As Conrad put it in the Nigger preface:

... art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter, and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential -- their one illuminating and convincing quality -- the very truth of their existence.⁷

Fitzgerald limited his search by undertaking only to discover the 'truth of the existence' of man instead of that of the whole visible universe; but he pursued the search with no less rigour than Conrad demands, and in a method of which Conrad would approve.

The basis of his method was worked out in the first novel. Here, in the search for what is repeatedly referred to as "the fundamental Amory"⁸, selected possible aspects of Amory are deliberately contrasted with proven aspects of other people, to see if they "fit" Fitzgerald's hero:

Kerry shook his head. ... "I'm just 'good old Kerry' and all that rot."

Amory smiled and tried to picture himself as "good old Amory." He failed completely.⁹

Therefore, we realize, Amory has discovered he is not that sort of person -- comfortable good fellowship is not

⁷ Conrad, Prefaces, p. 49.

⁸ F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York: Scribner's, 1960), pp. 32, 99.

⁹ This Side of Paradise, p. 49.

part of his own essential make-up.

To provide a wide range of possible ways to be, Amory is forever analyzing and making lists. He makes lists of people, developing individuals into a series of types. He makes chronological lists of stages in his own development. He makes lists of Princeton clubs and the characteristic attributes of their members. This is fine with some people -- Tom D'In-villiers, for example -- but others are not up to constant scrutiny.

Isabelle, for example:

"... Besides, I have to think all the time I'm talking to you -- you're so critical."

"I make you think, do I?" Amory repeated with a touch of vanity.

"You're a nervous strain" -- this emphatically -- "and when you analyze every little emotion and instinct I just don't have 'em."¹⁰

And with another girl:

"Why on earth are we here." he asked the girl with the green combs one night as they sat in some one's limousine, outside the Country Club in Louisville.

"I don't know. I'm just full of the devil."

"Let's be frank -- we'll never see each other again. I wanted to come out here with you because I thought you were the best-looking girl in sight. You really don't care whether you ever see me again, do you?"

"No -- but is this your line for every girl? What have I done to deserve it?"

"And you didn't feel tired dancing or want a cigarette or any of the things you said? You just wanted to be ---"

"Oh, let's go in," she interrupted, "if you want to analyze. Let's not talk about it."¹¹

¹⁰ TSOP, p. 93.

¹¹ TSOP, p. 60.

Amory realizes that it is necessary for him to try to find out the essential meaning of himself. Many other individuals do not feel such a necessity -- the girls speaking above, for example -- but the whole concept of the quest is based on the premise that each individual is like no other: it does not matter whether other people do not undertake similar quests -- he must, and that is all that can matter; and his method of searching involves a setting-up of the possible ways of being as he sees them appear in other people, then trying to discover which categories also belong to him.

Amory and Monsignor Darcy worked it out one evening:

"Why do I make lists?" Amory asked him one night. "Lists of all sorts of things?"

"Because you're a mediaevalist," Monsignor answered. "We both are. It's the passion for classifying and finding a type."

"It's the desire to get something definite." said Amory.¹²

Monsignor Darcy is also able to warn Amory against forgetting that though the method of proceeding by classification works well in the search for oneself, one is not justified in using it to make essential statements about other people:

"... beware of trying to classify people too definitely into types; you will find that all through their youth they will persist annoyingly in jumping from class to class, and by pasting a supercilious label on every one you meet you are merely packing a Jack-in-the-box that will spring up and leer at you when you begin to come into really antagonistic contact with the world."¹³

¹² TSOP, pp. 104-105.

¹³ TSOP, p. 106.

But if we were to keep this warning in mind, the system could be quite effective in distinguishing that in ourselves which is essential from that which is merely acquired, or purely illusion. Clear-headed observation of other people provides a series of possible quality-relations -- a series of ways in which it is possible for man in general to be. Then the self is referred to these possibilities, in reflection, to see which possibilities are realized in one's own make-up.

Interestingly enough, the method Fitzgerald implies closely parallels the scholarly system outlined by Edmund Husserl as the basis for any pure phenomenology. If one is to discover exactly what anything is, shorn of the distorting illusions we bring to the experiencing of it and minus any other incidental attributes it might carry, we must discover the layers of non-essential material by in some manner or other breaking down the whole experience qua experience; so that honest, careful examination proves only one homogeneous element to be the essential bit. Fitzgerald, almost certainly without reference to Husserl,¹⁴ applies a similar method to develop the concept of man. He assumes that the essence of man must be contained within oneself (since one is a man), and that by observing other people one can see the various non-essentials it is possible for a man to acquire. Then one can

¹⁴ Husserl's major work, Ideen zu einer reinen Phaenomenologie und phaenomenologischen Philosophie, was published in 1913 but had little effect on English and American thought until the English translation in 1931.

understand one's own make-up by comparison.

This particular use of phenomenology is, again, very similar to that made of it by Martin Heidegger. The main difference is simply that Fitzgerald arranged his data in the form of fictionalized characters while Heidegger, in Sein und Zeit, tried to put the investigation in rigorous, scholarly, abstract terms. This is not the place to go into an extended comparison of Fitzgerald's and Heidegger's conclusions but it might be noted that the two studies produce remarkably similar results.

Both, for example, make much of what Heidegger described as man's essential "thrownness" -- the result of our being here without having had anything to do with our arrival. This idea, which implies both absurdity in the present situation and the futility of protest, is assumed in all Fitzgerald's work. We spend our lives, Fitzgerald says, in the difficult, sometimes painful search for our fundamental selves. He anticipates a conclusion reached by Jean-Paul Sartre in suggesting that once we do understand our selves we discover a lurking blackness we had not suspected -- only then do we realize that that fundamental self is a given we can do nothing about, but must live with. When the complications of This Side of Paradise have all been run through, Amory makes the single statement that is at once a cry of success and of despair: "I know myself but that is all". Anthony Patch, in The Beautiful and Damned, can not admit that what he is includes something that

makes him hurt soft, helpless Dorothy Raycroft so, and he goes mad. Dick Diver can only fade away knowing he is a man who had to depend on an accidental -- charm -- for success with other people.¹⁵

The character of Monroe Stahr represents Fitzgerald's answer to the problem of thrownness. Fitzgerald establishes him as a man who already knows just what he is, who knows what he can not change, and is prepared to live with it. He and Kathleen in the fragment we have stand out like lonely giants: their knowledge and frank admission of their essential selves both makes them greater than the world of ordinary men and cuts them off from it. What Fitzgerald might ultimately have made of this, however, was left uncertain when he died before finishing the book.

As for Gatsby, there are two possibilities, depending on how he felt about illusion. He discovered early that his life was founded on a dream, and he would have to have admitted, at bottom, that dreams are essentially not real and that this one would always year by year recede before him. But did he believe in spite of this? Did he accept that his life was founded on unreality

¹⁵ To make this work Fitzgerald had to take some pains to make sure the reader was aware Dick's charm was essentially external to himself -- hence such passages as, on p. 245, "... for Dick, charm always had an independent existence"; and, on p. 314 as Dick is being pleasant with Mary North, a woman he detests:

His glance fell soft and kind upon hers,
suggesting an emotion underneath; their glances
married suddenly, beaded, strained together. Then,
as the laughter inside of him became so loud that
it seemed as if Mary must hear it, Dick switched off
the light and they went out in the Riviera sun.

-- that it was the pursuit of the dream, not the hope of success, that informed his existence? Perhaps he did accept that absurdity, as Nick suggested in the famous "green light" paragraph at the end of the book. But Nick also compellingly stated the other possibility -- that Gatsby, realizing that the dream was absurd, finally admitted to himself that his belief in it was also absurd; then, when his belief in his central dream failed, so did every notion that man had any control over the experienced world:

... I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it [in this case, a telephone call from Daisy the night he was murdered] would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about ... like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees.¹⁶

If Gatsby had ceased to care about his dream his whole universe shuddered, because he had accepted that illusion as part of his concept of himself. If he discovered that it was absurd -- that it did not matter -- he faced inescapable thrownness at a most basic level.

"Thrownness", as I have called it, is just one of the categories Fitzgerald examines in his investigation of man's essential nature. It appears to have been one of the most stable of the author's conceptions, partly because it is one of the

¹⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925), p. 162.

least explicit: he rarely, if ever, talks about it directly -- he does not cry about being "a stranger and afraid / In a world I never made"¹⁷, though the implications are there, as we have discovered. Most of his opinions, though, change progressively from novel to novel. This is hardly surprising, since the books were conceived and published over a span of years as the author matured from age twenty to forty-four.

We will examine some of the most important categories, then, as the author presents them in the novels. And it should be borne in mind that, though at many points Fitzgerald seems to anticipate closely the conclusions of the more formal existentialist thinkers, I will not take pains to point out such parallels. The object will be to deduce Fitzgerald's conclusions from the body of his own work. Comparisons with other people's conclusions will be, for the present investigation, irrelevant (except as they may serve to make Fitzgerald's opinions clearer).

The method will be that of the phenomenologists, who deduce from the facts of experience (which must be carefully shorn of distortions arising from prejudice) what is the nature of the world. The general purpose is to discover the nature of the world Fitzgerald presented in his novels, using for data the elements of the novels themselves. This is somewhat

¹⁷ A.E.Housman, "xii" in Last Poems (London, 1922), p. 28.

easier than the task of the philosophical phenomenologists since we have to worry less about the exact nature of the data -- they are concretely before us on the printed page. Fitzgerald began with blank sheets of paper and entirely created the world of his novels in which man is constituted in a certain way. Our particular object will be to describe that way.

In the process of the investigation and in the writing of the thesis I have been greatly helped by my supervisor and readers. I wish to thank Dr. F.N.Shrive of McMaster's Department of English, the thesis supervisor, for patient guidance; Mr. W.M.Newell of the Department of Philosophy, who went beyond the call of duty in his attention to the work; and Mr. G.E. Purnell of the Department of English, second reader, who read the complete draft and took time to make several valuable suggestions. Their kindness and interest in the project are appreciated.

CHAPTER ONE
THREE BASIC TYPES

Fitzgerald apparently began his investigation of man with little more than a determination to find what was essential, without much notion of how to proceed, or which categories of inquiry were most likely to prove fruitful. This Side of Paradise is clearly the work of a young author, still somewhat naive, but with certain aims and resolves already formulated. He had decided that it was necessary to dispense with the illusions that he and his class were particularly ridden with, and that their discovery and negation would be difficult. It is only in the course of this novel that he begins to work out specific attitudes.

Fitzgerald was able to discuss central problems, apparently, with Sigourney Fay in his own early life. In This Side of Paradise Amory has similar discussions with Monsignor Darcy. One occurs just after Amory has made rather a mess of his academic life at Princeton, failing mathematics and thereby making himself ineligible for the extracurricular activities on which he was counting for personal success:

"Kerry Holiday wants me to go over with him and join the Lafayette Esquadrille." [Amory says to Monsignor Darcy.]

"You know you wouldn't like to go."

"Sometimes I would -- tonight I'd go in a second."

"Well, you'd have to be very much more tired of life than I think you are. I know you."

"I'm afraid you do," agreed Amory reluctantly.

"It just seemed an easy way out of everything -- when I think of another useless, draggy year."

.....

"This has given you time to think and you're casting off a lot of your old luggage about success and the superman and all. People like us can't adopt whole theories, as you did. If we can do the next thing, and have an hour a day to think in, we can accomplish marvels, but as far as any high-handed scheme of blind dominance is concerned -- we'd just make asses of ourselves."¹

Monsignor Darcy goes on to explain to Amory that the two of them are "personages" as opposed to "personalities". The "personages" appear to be those individuals who are concerned with their own essential selves, while the "personalities" find their own expression in terms of one overriding idea or project: one of the "whole theories" Monsignor Darcy mentioned. The personage, being involved in the discovery of his own essential self, is likely to forget the appearance he is presenting in the world during the process, and commit actions other people condemn as mistakes. Yet these mistakes, along with all the personages' worldly appearances, are not radically important:

"He's [the personage is] a bar on which a thousand things have been hung -- glittering things sometimes, as ours are, but he uses those things with a cold mentality back of them."

"And several of my most glittering possessions have fallen off when I needed them." Amory continued the simile eagerly.²

¹ TSOP, pp. 102-105.

² TSOP, p. 104.

The "personalities", on the other hand, include such people as Burne and Kerry Holiday, whose meaning in the world is determined by the projects that take over their being. Burne became a pacifist in World War One, while Kerry joined the Lafayette Esquadrielle. Both pursued their courses with single-minded honesty; Amory respected both, and the sincerity with which they followed opposing courses affected him deeply. In some respects he envied the ease with which they handled the business of living; ". . . while a personality is active, it overrides 'the next thing'," Monsignor Darcy explained.³

But pat theories seldom stand long in Fitzgerald's world. If he could have found a simple formula his work would not have the tense, despairing quality that is often its most powerfully-expressed feature. Predictably, Amory finds the simple personality-personage distinction not adequate to cover the raw situations of life.

Monsignor Darcy's classes were all-embracing and very neat. One was either a member of one class or of the other. One had a vision of the meaning of one's life, or one did not. But the looming presence of the War gradually pressed harder and harder on Amory's consciousness until it became clear he had to adopt some attitude to it. He was not born into this attitude, as one was into Monsignor Darcy's categories; and, worse, the attitude he adopted could not be subtle -- it had to be either a flat "yes" or a "no" -- a decision to fight,

³ TSOP, p. 104.

or not to fight.

Fitzgerald developed the choice as that between being what he called a "Tolstoian" and a "Nietzschian". Amory had been given to understand that a man should fight for what is right, and "Germany stood for everything repugnant to him."⁴ Confident knowledge of what is right should be sufficient to carry a man through to battle his opponents without further consideration -- such would be the Nietzschian course. But on the other hand, when one is not gifted (or cursed) with the "particular duty"⁵ of the Holidays, if one is not so sure of the every-day existence of absolute goods and absolute evils, how can one justifiably attempt to force on other people what can therefore be only arbitrary choices of values? This is the essence of the Tolstoian position.

Amory was inclined to the Tolstoian position himself, partly because his one experiment with changing a person -- Tom D'Invilliers -- had not been an unqualified success (page 84 makes it clear that Amory had caused some of the glory to fade from the world in Tom's eyes, and Amory would regret having done so), and partly because Fitzgerald doubted that a sensitive, thinking man like himself ever could accept a "whole theory". With regard to the War, for example, the Nietzschian superman was identified in the common mind with the enemy as such -- with the Germans; that would have to imply that the superman was

⁴ TSOP, p. 150.

⁵ TSOP, p. 149.

necessarily evil: yet Fitzgerald probably knew from his Princeton studies that the true superman, by Nietzsche's definition, is beyond good and evil. Besides, as already pointed out, Fitzgerald knew that the Holiday brothers' positions contained something of the superman too -- absolute conviction of the rectitude of any attitude confers the absolute courage of that conviction.

Amory stated the problem in trying to explain his rejection of the pacifist movement:

"Well, I can't say anything else -- I get to the end of all the logic about non-resistance, and there, like an excluded middle, stands the huge spectre of man as he is and always will be. And this spectre stands right beside the one logical necessity of Tolstoj's, and the other logical necessity of Nietzsche's --"⁶

The term "excluded middle" is one from formal logic that Fitzgerald no doubt picked up in his undergraduate career. It expresses the impossibility of a third or middle term between two contradictories such as A and non-A.

"If we could only learn to look on evil as evil, whether it's clothed in filth or monotony or magnificence,"⁷ Amory mourns. But it never can be that simple, and never was for Fitzgerald. Perhaps it had been in the past, but the existence of the War was undeniable proof that the times were out of joint and they were likely to remain so. As a lecturer at Princeton discusses Swinburne's "A Song in the Time of Order", Amory mentally ex-

⁶ TSOP, p. 149.

⁷ TSOP, p. 153.

plodes:

"Time of Order" -- Good Lord! Everything crammed in the box and the Victorians sitting on the lid smiling serenely.... With Browning in his Italian villa crying bravely: "All's for the best."⁸

Fitzgerald apparently suspected but in This Side of Paradise did not much dwell on the possibility of a third way of being, in addition to the Tolstoian and the Nietzschean. The possibility of that third type is first met in the ghastly deserted alley surrounded by stark white walls and black fences, at the height of Amory's literal experience of the devil:

"I want someone stupid. Oh, send someone stupid!" This to the black fence opposite him, in whose shadows the devil's footsteps shuffled ... shuffled. He supposed "stupid" and "good" had become somehow intermingled through previous associations. When he called thus it was not an act of will at all -- will had turned him away from the moving figure in the street; it was almost instinct that called, just the pile on pile of inherent tradition or some wild prayer from way over the night.⁹

After the horrible experience Amory's strange desire is repeated:

He pitched onto the bed and rolled over on his face with a deadly fear that he was going mad. He wanted people, people, some one sane and stupid and good.¹⁰

"Stupid" is perhaps not the best possible label, in a philosophical sense, for this class of people, but Fitzgerald probably realized he was already in danger of slowing his narrative too much with semi-Socratic "discussions". He seems to have been using the term to refer to those people who do not

⁸ TSOP, p. 151.

⁹ TSOP, pp. 115-116.

¹⁰ TSOP, p. 117.

have a particular scheme of meaning in their lives (as the Holidays, for instance, did), not because they can not find one, but because it never occurred to them to look.

One example of such a "stupid" character is Garvin, the little yes-man Amory meets and castigates during a discussion of socialism near the end of the book. Garvin is simply unthinking, but feels important and capable of making pronouncements. He is clearly despised as much by his boss as by Amory.

But Garvin is not representative of the type of "stupid" people Amory thought would save him. Rather, the "stupidity" was a question of innocence, preferably innocence that had survived long enough that it could safely be assumed essential to the individual. "Experienced innocence" is an unlikely attribute, but Fitzgerald seems to have wanted us to believe that was the central characteristic of Clara, the next woman Amory fell in love with after the "devil" episode. Clara was a beautiful widow of Amory's age, had three children, entertained "housefuls" of men (discussing such topics as girls' boarding schools), was impoverished but gloriously good.

Amory asked her to marry him but she refused because "I'd never marry a clever man"¹¹ -- and that was that (though he went on loving her). Clara's portrait is full of slushy sentiment, but she is apparently the representative of woman as holy innocence that Fitzgerald always had lurking somewhere in his consciousness. "Sane and stupid and good" seems a fair

¹¹ T30P, p. 145.

description of what Fitzgerald evidently meant to portray by her. He evidently resigned himself to her unreality, though, and never wrote of such a woman again -- at least not as an attraction for one of his heroes.

This Side of Paradise, though clearly inferior as a novel to Fitzgerald's later work, is worth close study because understanding of the three essential categories of men is central to Fitzgerald's conception of man as investigated in the other novels. Everything important Fitzgerald says about the possible types of man rests on this three-fold division. There are always those people who are satisfied by a project, a meaning-system that is or becomes so interfused with the very fibres of their being that they do not question it (the Nietzscheans); there are those who can not really be said to have a value-system because it never occurs to them that meaning might be something they bring to empirical data rather than an intrinsic quality of the data themselves (the "stupid" ones); and there are those with whom Fitzgerald identified his heroes who saw their lives as a struggle, an unending quest for understanding of the world not as they fancied it to be, but as it is: these are the Tolstoians.

People of the first and last classes, clearly, are the most important: the first because they are likely to be the strongest and the last because their cause is the most noble -- at least, so Fitzgerald argues in his first four novels.

The main achievement of the hero in This Side of Para-

dise is that he discovered the problem and thereby forfeited membership in the mass of "stupid" people:

Amory was alone -- he had escaped from a small enclosure into a great labyrinth. He was where Goethe was when he began "Faust"; he was where Conrad was when he wrote "Almayer's Folly."

Amory said to himself that there were essentially two sorts of people who through natural clarity or disillusion left the enclosure and sought the labyrinth. There were men like Wells and Plato, who had, half unconsciously, a strange, hidden orthodoxy, who would accept for themselves only what could be accepted for all men -- incurable romanticists who never, for all their efforts, could enter the labyrinth as stark souls; there were on the other hand sword-like pioneering personalities, Samuel Butler, Renan, Voltaire, who progressed much slower, yet eventually much further, not in the direct pessimistic line of speculative philosophy but concerned in the eternal attempt to attach a positive value to life....¹²

And by the end of the book Amory has satisfied himself that he is one of the latter class.

It would be reasonable to wonder at this point what would have been the implications if Fitzgerald's hero had not been able to find himself a member of a class. Fitzgerald seems to have considered the possibility and to have found it horrible. The possibility impressed him in its least grim fashion after Amory's final interview with Eleanor. Because Eleanor and Amory both knew from the beginning that their love was too metaphysical to last in the world, they were reconciled to its dissolution. "Naked souls are poor things ever," is Fitzgerald's wry comment when the inevitable end finally came,

¹² TSCP, p. 264.

"and soon he turned homeward and let new light come in with the sun."¹³ But facing life with a 'naked soul' can be a frightening prospect, and Fitzgerald is usually less reconciled to the possibility. This is a meaningful problem only for the members of the Tolstoian class. It is precisely the sort of thing the "stupid" people do not worry about, and the Nietzscheans are protected by the courage of their convictions. People like Fitzgerald and his heroes (as opposed to his heroines), though, are unable to accept pat theories, simple projects, stable meaning-systems for their lives. Like Anthony Patch of The Beautiful and Damned they are cursed with "that old quality of understanding too well to blame -- that quality which was the best of him and had worked swiftly and ceaselessly toward his ruin."¹⁴

These people see that life is never simple, that there can be only one perfectly true way to face the world, if indeed that one exists at all. The only grounds for seeking that one true way rest mainly on the existence of the concept of absolute truth. It is essentially the mediaeval position that if there are many possible ways to exist, and some of these are "better" than others (in this case, that some attitudes to the world explain more facets of experience than others) there must by logical extension be one possible way that is absolutely right. One should, therefore, devote oneself to a search for that one

¹³ TSOP, p. 240.

¹⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned (New York, 1922), p. 416.

way to be. This search can touch only oneself -- one must enter the labyrinth alone -- and other people can serve only as observed possible modes of existence, in terms of this search. Consequently, since it is by regarding other people's lives as possibilities for oneself that one discovers better and better ways to be, one must not condemn out of hand another person's way of living; because if one does not understand the other's position one has deprived oneself of a possible guidepost to paradise.

Now, man can not be merely a disembodied intellect, observing the ways to be and weighing them against each other to determine the best. He must have some attitude to the world at every moment, even if he realizes this attitude is only one of many possible, and can be only a partial answer. Hence the Tolstoian proceeds by a series of "poses" -- provisional attitudes adopted and to be changed as his understanding of the world changes.

Again, Monsignor Darcy was the one to formulate it first:

"I was beginning to think I was growing eccentric till I came up here. It was a pose, I guess." [Said Amory,] "Don't worry about that; for you not posing may be the biggest pose of all. Pose -- " "Yes?" "But do the next thing."¹⁵

Fitzgerald saw three dangers in this approach: one might lose one's self, one might be at some time caught without

¹⁵ TSOP, p. 105. See also pp. 236 and 240.

a pose, or there might be no absolutely right way to be.

First, one might be so caught up in the series of poses, so bemused by the many-fact^eted complexity of the problem, that one might forget the essential "I" that undertook the effort in the first place. This is not to say that any particular constitution was assumed for this "I" -- that is exactly what is being sought: rather, Fitzgerald recognized the danger of forgetting that there was an essential I, an absolute soul, doing the searching. To make such a lapse would be to fall back into the ranks of the "stupid" people.

This perhaps explains Fitzgerald's repeated references to mirrors. Mirrors, again and again, function as things that bring oneself back to oneself. The action of the physical thing is used as a symbol of the metaphysical phenomenon.

For example, Amory Blaine had a series of love affairs, which on the surface seems a fine thing; but Fitzgerald, even in his first novel, was being bothered by the situation of love in general -- to what extent is one's being taken over by the loving partner? As Amory reaches the very crest of his first true love he almost unconsciously takes a quick look at himself lest he forget what he is:

He had arrived, abreast of the best in his generation at Princeton. He was in love and his love was returned. Turning on all the lights, he looked at himself in the mirror, trying to find in his own face the qualities that made him see more clearly than the great crowd of people, that made him decide firmly, and able to influence and follow his own will.

Amory is not the only one. Rosalind, who of all his loves was the most perfect, looks at herself in a mirror just before meeting Amory, in a way that is too searching for mere narcissism:

Rosalind finished her hair and rises, humming. She goes up to the mirror and starts to dance in front of it on the soft carpet. She watches not her feet, but her eyes -- never casually but always intently, even when she smiles.¹⁷

After Amory loses that girl, the girls themselves of his later and lesser loves function as mirrors, reaffirming his own self to himself:

He had later love-affairs, but of a different sort: in those he went back to that, perhaps, more typical frame of mind, in which the girl became the mirror of a mood in him.¹⁸

This was the basic reason for Anthony Patch's disastrous love affair with Dorothy Raycroft in The Beautiful and Damned.

"Unknowingly she saw her own tragedies mirrored in his face"¹⁹ and Anthony saw part of himself in her.

Love is not the only human relationship, Fitzgerald realizes, in which other people serve as indicators of the self:

. . . when Mrs. and Miss Hulme of Kansas City cut them dead in the Plaza one evening, it was only that Mrs. and Miss Hulme, like most people, abominated mirrors of their atavistic selves.²⁰

This sort of thing has a profoundly disturbing implication: just as I may use other people to reaffirm, as mirrors

¹⁷ TSOP, p. 173.

¹⁹ ESD, p. 328.

¹⁸ TSOP, p. 89.

²⁰ ESD, p. 405.

do, certain aspects of myself, other people no doubt use me, at least at times, as a mirror of certain aspects of their selves. I am, therefore, not essentially a man in that interaction but a thing under their scrutiny being used for a purpose that is essentially and radically of them and in no way of me. I have, as Sartre might cry, lost my self.

In a complex world of many other people I can not entirely trust the mirror as Nicole did in her innocent days of recovery and falling in love with Dick Diver:

He was enough older than Nicole to take pleasure in her youthful vanities and delights, the way she paused fractionally in front of the hall mirror on leaving the restaurant, so that the incorruptible quicksilver could give her back to herself.²¹

Now I must realize that as often as I look for reflections of myself, I am serving as a reflection for other people, and I have no control over those reflections. I am plunged into the frightening world of the future, as Fitzgerald describes it, where my humanity is entirely denied except as I can manage to impose it by force:

It was a house hewn from the frame of Cardinal de Retz's palace in the Rue Monsieur, but once inside the door there was nothing of the past, nor of any present that Rosemary knew. The outer shell, the masonry, seemed rather to enclose the future so that it was an electric-like shock, a definite nervous experience, perverted as a breakfast of oatmeal and hashish, to cross that threshold, if it could be so called, into the long hall of blue steel, silver-gilt,²² and the myriad facets of many oddly bevelled mirrors.

²¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender is the Night (New York, 1934), p. 137.

²² TIN, p. 71.

The essence of The Last Tycoon is that it assumes this frightening world, and tries to come to terms with it. Fitzgerald admits early in the novel that one can not escape the mirrors, the poses, the appearances-for other people: "It's like actors, who try so pathetically not to look in mirrors, who lean backward trying -- only to see their faces in the reflecting chandeliers."²³ But the whole romance, the poignancy of the novel, rests on Fitzgerald's belief that it was just possible for two people truly in love to transcend this world for brief periods:

When she came close, his several visions of her blurred; she was momentarily unreal. Usually a girl's skull made her real, but not this time -- Stahr continued to be dazzled as they danced out along the floor -- to the last edge, where they stepped through a mirror into another dance with new dancers whose faces were familiar but nothing more. In this new region he talked, fast and urgently.²⁴

These brief, wonderful periods exist, but they are necessarily circumscribed by the common world in which mirrors and reflections serve their largely menacing function.

Here we find the bases for Fitzgerald's insistence on eyes. By the use of our eyes we reaffirm our selves in mirrors, and by other people's eyes we may lose our selves to them. To look into another person's eyes, in Fitzgerald's novels, is to risk contact of the most direct sort -- one might find love in those eyes, or boredom, or annihilation, but whatever is

²³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon, edited by Edmund Wilson (Penguin, 1955), p. 16.

²⁴ LT, p. 89.

there will be sincere.

The most outstanding examples, of course, are the devastating eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. These eyes always destroy, never reveal, because there is no soul behind them:

The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic -- their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there . . . and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes . . . brood on

Also in Gatsby is the character identified only by his eyes -- the one called "Owl-eyes". Bland and a bit comic, this character stands out because we are continually reminded of his blank, unrevealing eyes. This is striking because it is so unnatural -- eyes, Fitzgerald well knew, are the direct routes to the soul; every real person has an essential soul, and the soul is revealed through the eyes.²⁶ Owl-eyes, then, is a bit of semi-whimsical experimentation by Fitzgerald -- a character apparently without an essential soul, whose eyes are unrevealing, unsearching blanks. Fitzgerald achieved this with some skill. He did not make Owl-eyes blind, for blindness carries connotations of helplessness, misfortune, etc., that would have made the character too complex, too interesting for its own story. Instead, the author managed to replace the eyes with prominent spectacles. Owl-eyes may come to represent the

²⁵ Gatsby, p. 23. For another interpretation of this passage, see Tom Burnam's "The Eyes of Dr. Eckleburg: A Re-evaluation of The Great Gatsby", in F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Mervyn D. Lee, Jr., Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1953, pp. 100-101.

²⁶ In Gatsby, p. 171, Fitzgerald expresses Nick's disillusion with the East: "I had a sense that this party was my eyes' power of correction." Nick could no longer see the East in terms of himself.

"stupid" people, perhaps, but it does not matter much: he seems mainly to represent a sort of experiment, and is not fully developed.

We almost never meet complete characters of any importance, on the other hand, without being told within a couple of sentences about his or her eyes. In The Beautiful and Damned Dorothy Raycroft's eyes are, oddly, violet, perhaps because she looks at the world as if through rose-coloured glasses. Her eyes are like those Anthony glimpsed in an instant much earlier in the book,²⁷ and which foreshadow her own.

Each character's eyes are described (rather baldly in this early novel) so as to suggest the essential quality of the person. "His blue eyes were charming, whether alert with intelligence or half closed in an expression of melancholy humour" (Anthony)²⁸; "His eyes are narrow and full of incessant, protracted blinks" (Maury Noble)²⁹; "He has yellowish eyes -- one of them startlingly clear, the other opaque as a muddy pool (Richard Caramel)³⁰; ". . . glancing around with eyes whose irises were of the most delicate and transparent bluish white" (Gloria)³¹.

²⁷ B&D, p. 25.

²⁸ B&D, p. 9.

²⁹ B&D, p. 19.

³⁰ B&D, p. 22, echoed by that other person of Fitzgerald as novelist, portrayed by himself -- the Count de M'Keefe. M'Keefe was "a little blind in one eye and almost near-blind in the other" (B&D, p. 89)

³¹ B&D, p. 57.

The physical nature of the eyes is used as a stylistic device to hint at the way the possessor is looking at the world and other people. But this whole concept of the significance of looking has a disturbing implication if we think it through. Anthony is one of those who realizes what it means to be one of the "other people" -- to be an object under someone's glance.

He saw, at length, that her eyes were gray, very level and cool, and when they rested on him he understood what Maury had meant by saying she was very young and very old.³²

In two weeks he would approach her much as he would have to now, without personality or confidence -- remaining still the man who had gone too far and then for a period that in time was but a moment but in fact an eternity, whined.³³

Nicole Diver expressed with almost unbearable clarity what it is like to know yourself the object of a glance: "You feel your own reflection sliding along the eyes of those who look at you,"³⁴ she said.

It is as if the other person snaps a photograph at that moment. One is preserved in the other's memory forever in that posture. Other aspects, facets of one's self, may subsequently be also imparted to the other person, but there is always that one to some degree.

Perhaps the most outstanding example of such a glance in The Beautiful and Damned is the one Anthony receives (p. 103)

³² B&D, p. 60.

³³ B&D, p. 120.

³⁴ T&N, p. 160.

from Bloeckman. The glance is unfathomable then, but it haunts Anthony years after, though he does not realize it. Fitzgerald reminds us of it in the depths of Anthony's failure.³⁵ Drunken, dissheveled and not in control of himself, Anthony confronts Bloeckman -- Bloeckman who is himself successful now, though he was not at their earlier meeting -- and we realize that Anthony, in the eyes of that man, is and has been since that first moment the very symbol of failure, weakness and all things despicable.

This brings us to the second of the dangers that, as noted above,³⁶ Fitzgerald saw facing the Tolstoian, the person searching for his place in the world. That is, that one might be caught without a pose and have to face a situation "unaccommodated", as Lear put it. This occasionally occurs in Fitzgerald's work, and the phenomenon is often accompanied in the narrative by expressions of concomitant nakedness in terms of clothes.

Unless Fitzgerald was being uncharacteristically vulgar, this concept is what prompted an odd remark early in his first novel. Thirteen-year-old Amory had just been left in Minneapolis with an aunt and uncle after spending most of his life in a cosmopolitan whirl with his high-society mother. But in Minneapolis "the crude, vulgar air of Western civilization first

³⁵ D&D, p. 437.

³⁶ pp. 11-12.

³⁷ King Lear, edited by Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), 111, iv, 109.

catches him -- in his underwear, so to speak."³⁸ "In his underwear" is almost certainly best explained as an early, perhaps only half-considered expression of being caught without a pose -- for certainly "underwear" never figures in the incident that follows the remark. Amory's faux pas had nothing to do with clothing or physical undress. He simply arrived "fashionably late" (as he thought) only to discover that in Minneapolis one is expected to arrive on time. The pose he thought would fit the situation would not fit at all:

Amory's shredded poise dropped from him. He pictured the happy party jingling along snowy streets, the appearance of the limousine, the horrible public descent of him and Myra before sixty reproachful eyes, his apology -- a real one this time. He sighed aloud.³⁹

Anthony and Gloria became involved in the same problem in another form when they made the mistake of believing, or attempting to believe, that their pose was not a pose at all, but a revelation of their essential selves. This was basically the same mistake Gatsby committed. The outcome in each case was an extension of the same truth: the encroaching presence of "others" makes self-delusion ultimately impossible, and sooner or later one will be forced to admit the pose one believed in is not "real". Anthony and Gloria had managed to agree tacitly on a pose that would enable them to face a world of little money and great extravagance:

³⁸ TSOP, p. 8.

³⁹ TSOP, p. 11.

Not to be sorry, not to loose one cry of regret, to live according to a clear code of honor toward each other, and to seek the moment's happiness as fervently and persistently as possible.⁴⁰

The statement has the ring of a religious creed: but the impossibility of the attitude was admitted by Gloria once as she lay without dress or petticoat on a bed upstairs in the Marietta house, drunk, while a wild party raged downstairs:

She became rigid. Some one had come to the door and was standing regarding her, very quiet except for a slight swaying motion. She could see the outline of his figure distinct against some indistinguishable light. There was no sound anywhere, only a great persuasive silence -- even the dripping had ceased ... only this figure, swaying, swaying in the doorway, an indiscernible and subtly menacing terror, a personality filthy under its varnish, like smallpox spots under a layer of powder. Yet her tired heart, beating until it shook her breasts, made her sure that there was still life in her, desperately shaken, threatened....⁴¹

At that moment, without defences, almost without clothes, she was unable to conceal anything from herself, which is an expression of the Patches' central problem. As long as they could maintain the pose without admitting they were posing, they could in some way carry on: but this is ultimately impossible in the presence of other people -- a glance will sooner or later occur that catches the poser unprepared, that reveals him as he essentially is. As Fitzgerald implies in The Great Gatsby, nothing finally escapes the eyes of Doctor Eckleburg; and Gatsby was bound to fail when he attempted to regain Daisy with an appeal in terms of his possessions -- the things he had collected

⁴⁰ F&E, p. 226.

⁴¹ B&D, p. 243.

around himself -- the elements of his pose. He showed her the house with its noble silhouette, the impressive postern, the dresser set of pure gold, then made his climactic appeal in terms of the most personal of possessions, clothing:

He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one, before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel, which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many-colored disarray. While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher . . . Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily.

"They're such beautiful shirts," she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. "It makes me sad because I've never seen such -- such beautiful shirts before."⁴²

But when his pose was shattered, Gatsby was left dead in only a bathing suit -- Tom Buchanan stripped away the illusions Gatsby had come to believe in himself after establishing them for Daisy. That Daisy loved him was no illusion, that was real; but Gatsby depended too much on the facade of social status he built for Daisy's benefit in his attempt to win her permanently. When Tom crushed that in the Plaza Hotel suite Gatsby was left without anything but the bald fact that the love he and Daisy had before he went to the War was only a memory. Gatsby had to realize that to develop that love into the present would require the establishment of some new pose (since the love had been based on one of his poses from the beginning)⁴³ and in the total ruin

⁴² Gatsby, pp. 93-94.

⁴³ Gatsby, p. 119, as Fitzgerald's looks back to Gatsby's courtship of Daisy before the war:

... the party was broken up in Daisy's house by a colossal accident. ...

of the one he had worked on for so long, it just couldn't be.

Poses as such are less important in Tender is the Night. The only true Tolstoians are Dick Diver and Abe North, and Abe decides early in the book that the business of life is a farce (Fitzgerald indicates his antipathy to this dismissal of life's importance by having Abe beaten to death). Dick constructs poses, but is almost never deceived by them himself. The one exception might be with respect to his attitude to Nicole.

He seems to have begun loving her "with his eyes open". Franz warned him of the problems involved ("What! And devote half your life to being doctor and nurse and all -- never!")⁴⁴ and Dohmler practically forbade it, but Dick went ahead with what he thought was an honest love affair that proceeded from nothing but mutual attraction and affection between himself and Nicole. But Fitzgerald made it clear that in a subtle way this, too, was really a pose. We hardly realize the source of our indistinct disquiet with Dick's affair, but Fitzgerald builds it up from the beginning of the novel. Something seems vaguely wrong from the beginning. Then Violet McKisco sees that mysterious incident involving Nicole in the bathroom at the end of

as Jay Gatsby, he was at present a penniless young man without a past, and at any moment the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders . . . eventually he took Daisy one still October night, took her because he had no real right to touch her hand.

⁴⁴ TIN, p. 140.

the party in Section vii. As Book One continues through the abortive duel and the episode in the stainless-steel apartment, mentioned earlier, the conviction that something is wrong becomes certain. Dick explains it, at least as it touches himself and Nicole: "Nicole and I have got to go on together. In a way that's more important than just wanting to go on".⁴⁵ Their love, then, is something other than a true personal relationship. In Book Two (relating events before those of Book One in time) we discover why. The central point is that Nicole is never simply herself, but always somehow a symbol of America that Dick is trying to rehabilitate, to set right. Before meeting her Dick left America and found in Europe intellectual leadership and "the fine quiet of the scholar which is the nearest of all things to heavenly peace".⁴⁶ Essentially, though, he could never escape being American, even when he did not think about it.⁴⁷ Fitzgerald perhaps does not make this as clear as he might have, but it seems the only explanation for (to give one

⁴⁵ TIN, p. 75.

⁴⁶ TIN, p. 116.

⁴⁷ The interview with the man seeking to fleece other Americans, and the following paragraph of Fitzgerald's, (TIN, p. 91) indicate that Dick necessarily represents American man, at least in the situation with Rosemary:

Dick's necessity of behaving as he did was a projection of some submerged reality: he was compelled to walk there, or stand there, his shirt-sleeve flapping his wrist and his coat sleeve sweeping his shirt-sleeve like a sleeve valve, his collar noise, pleated, to his neck, his red hair cut exactly, and his small briefcase like a lamp -- that is and that was what found it necessary to stand, to be there, to be there, in sackcloth and ashes. Dick was paying some tribute to things unforgotten, unshriven, unexpurgated.

example) the two paragraphs that culminate with the sentence: "He knew . . . that the price of his intactness was incompleteness."⁴⁸ Dick can not be his own essential self if he is not American -- he is deluding himself if he thinks otherwise -- but to be American, Fitzgerald unquestionably implies through Nicole, is to be sick; to have some scarcely-admitted evil deep in the centre of one's consciousness. Dick had the problem without realizing it, for he did not know he had inherited so much of America:

. . . the illusions of eternal strength and health, and of the essential goodness of people; illusions of a nation, the lies of generations of frontier mothers who had to croon falsely, that there were no wolves outside the cabin door.⁴⁹

Even when he felt within himself in Zurich that "The Alpine lands . . . were not a being here",⁵⁰ he did not recognize that it was because he did not essentially belong there. It was, as Franz remarked, "very good -- and very American"⁵¹ to set the limitless sky as one's goal (in Dick's case "to be a good psychologist -- maybe to be the greatest one that ever lived")⁵²; but because one must necessarily fall short of an infinite goal, failure is a central truth of America -- even, or perhaps especially, in the case of the very wealthy Americans such as the Warrens. In their case the American capacity for total involvement and infinite ambition was coupled

⁴⁸ TIN, p. 117.

⁴⁹ TIN, p. 117.

⁵⁰ TIN, p. 118.

⁵¹ TIN, p. 132.

⁵² TIN, p. 132.

with a virtually unlimited amount of money -- they still fail, though in Fitzgerald's world their failures take on universal significance. Nicole had "a moving childish smile that was like all the lost youth in the world"⁵³ and "there was that excitement about her that seemed to reflect all the excitement of the world".⁵⁴ When Dick and Nicole are together they are inevitably in America, or create it between them, and he can not help seeing her as "this scarcely saved waif of disaster bringing him the essence of a continent".⁵⁵ Thus the nature of their love is in large part a matter of nationality.

As soon as Dick allowed himself to be attracted to Nicole he lost control of the situation. From the first time he kissed her it was really out of his hands:

There were now no more plans than if Dick had arbitrarily made some indissoluble mixture, with atoms joined and inseparable; you could throw it all out but never again could they fit back into atomic scale. As he held her and tasted her, and as she curved in further and further toward him, with her own lips, new to herself, drowned and engulfed in love, yet solaced and triumphant, he was thankful to have an existence at all, if only as a reflection in her wet eyes.⁵⁶

So Dick found himself submerged in her personality. He was caught by one of his poses, and was no longer his own man. Nicole, also, was a Warren; the Warren family quickly becomes identified with the Warren money, and that itself in

⁵³ TIN, p. 134.

⁵⁴ TIN, p. 135.

⁵⁵ TIN, p. 136.

⁵⁶ TIN, p. 135.

this novel is an active symbol of America.⁵⁷ All of them take charge of Dick to such an extent that it is apparent that Dick is not only, or even primarily, involved in a true love affair with Nicole, but in some sort of crusade against and on behalf of America. Thus when his love for her wanes (or at least, as he becomes convinced of its impossibility against the background of the Warren money) it becomes a pose, an insulation from reality and from the fact that he is a failure.

When Tommy Barban comes to him for the confrontation (by which time Dick already knows Nicole has been unfaithful and he has lost her) it is appropriate that Fitzgerald put Dick in the rather ridiculous position of being half-shaven and Nicole, whose love for Dick had been even more a pose (during the time immediately preceding the "showdown") faces the situation with her hair half-cut, feeling "messy and unadorned".⁵⁸ Again, as the pose is shattered, Fitzgerald has his characters appear in a state of physical and mental vulnerability, only semi-dressed.

⁵⁷ TIN, p. 55, the paragraph on Nicole's spending, which begins: "For her sake the trains began their run at Chicago . . ." and ends: "She illustrated very simple principles, containing in herself her own doom, but illustrated them so accurately there was grace in the procedure."

⁵⁸ TIN, p. 307.

CHAPTER TWO

A BREATH OF NOTHINGNESS

In The Last Tycoon, the final novel, the problem of being caught without a pose, or of becoming convinced that one's pose is truth, hardly exists because there are no Tolstoians. Fitzgerald appears to have become convinced that there was no real point in searching for an ultimate meaning, because there was none. This is the basis for that third unpleasant possibility facing the Tolstoian¹ -- that his system rests on nothing. Monroe Stahr is made to embody both the most complete realization of the fact and the best possible reaction to it:

Like many brilliant men, he had grown up dead cold. Beginning at about twelve, probably, with the total rejection common to those of extraordinary mental powers, the 'See here: this is all wrong -- a mess -- all a lie -- and a sham --', he swept it all away, everything, as men of his type do; and then instead of being a son-of-a-bitch as most of them are, he looked around at the barrenness that was left and said to himself, 'This will never do.' And so he had learned tolerance, kindness, forbearance, and even affection like lessons.²

From the first novel Fitzgerald had his heroes learning about the various ways to be, and more or less consciously adopting one way, or certain aspects of various ways; this passage from The Last Tycoon is the first time the process was so easily assumed and neatly set down. Fitzgerald can assume the learning is over because he has so thoroughly investigated

¹ Supra, pp. 11-12.

² Id., pp. 11-12.

it in his earlier novels as the heroes, suggestively enough, more or less kept pace in age with their creator. By the last novel he can (and must) admit there is no absolutely perfect way to be, and proceed from there.

It is an admission that is not pleasant to make. Denying the possibility of absolute truth implies, in addition to a denial of any possibility of God, the affirmation of a real world without metaphysical meaning, inevitably ruled by things as much as by people. People themselves are robbed of any real souls, possessing only as much as they can make themselves believe they have, or as much as they decide to act as if they had. They tremble always on the brink of being merely other things in a thing-filled world, if you deny only the spark of individuality each one shows by the sheer exertion of his own will. As early as This Side of Paradise the attractive Dick Humbird, dead, was frighteningly un-human:

All that remained of the charm and personality of the Dick Humbird he had known -- oh, it was all so horrible and unaristocratic and close to the earth. All tragedy has that strain of the grotesque and squalid -- so useless, futile... the way animals die.... Amory was reminded of a cat that had lain horribly mangled in some alley of his childhood.³

If all humanity is, then, is a collection of human things, crowds are frightening, being entirely composed of people who are all more or less "reasonable by courtesy only".⁴ We

³ TSOP, p. 87.

⁴ B&D, p. 315.

have the first glimpse of this on page 117 of This Side of Paradise where in a flash, Amory divests one of his friends of personality and realizes that if that goes, the friend is only "one of the evil faces whirled along the turbid stream". Near the end of the book, Amory experiences a vision of the city that could have come straight from La Peste:

. . . where the patterns of blistered wall-papers were heavy reiterated sunflowers on green and yellow backgrounds, where there were tin bathtubs and gloomy hallways . . . where even love dressed as seduction . . . nightmares of perspiration between sticky enveloping walls . . . dirty restaurants where careless, tired people helped themselves to sugar with their own used coffee-spoons, leaving hard brown deposits in the bowl.⁵

He concludes on this occasion that the horror stems from the fact that these people are poor; but that idea becomes untenable in The Beautiful and Damned. Just before Anthony is married, when his happiness is at its height, he scents what Fitzgerald refers to in the section-heading as "A Breath of the Cave". Something in the wild, almost hysterical laughter of an anonymous woman in the city night impresses him as "at first annoying, then strangely terrible". There is "some animal quality" in it that arouses:

. . . his old aversion and horror toward all the business of life. The room had grown smothery. He wanted to be out in some cool and bitter breeze, miles above the cities, and to live serene and detached back in the corners of his mind. Life was that sound out there, that ghastly reiterated female sound.⁶

⁵ TSOP, pp. 255-256.

⁶ TSOP, pp. 149-150.

Anthony and Gloria, after their marriage, make a trip to Arlington, historic home of General Lee. But the trip is spoiled, spoiled by mobs of people that swarm over the place, looking at it merely as a place to be visited, obviously without feeling for it as a place where significant human action took place. The Patch⁷ went there after a trip to a zoo, and Fitzgerald draws the comparison with a heavy hand between the monkeys (which Gloria, especially, thinks are repulsive) and the peanut-cracking, banana-eating people. Fitzgerald reminds us so often⁷ that Gloria considered the mass of people soul-less and unpleasant that we can not help being impressed. At one point Gloria has a vision of the city that in some ways parallels Anthony's in which he experienced that horrifying laughter. Gloria, however, does not see it as horrible; she has less sympathy with the mass, and refuses to see herself as in any way a member of it. Thus she finds the scene absurd rather than frightening:

The street was quiet now; the children had gone in -- over the way she could see a family at dinner. Pointlessly, ridiculously, they rose and walked about the table; seen thus, all that they did appeared incongruous -- it was as though they were being juggled carelessly and to no purpose by invisible overhead wires.⁸

The terms in which Fitzgerald has her set her observation are interesting: the reference to marionettes is paralleled on two occasions by similar references to Anthony and Gloria --

⁷ B&D, pp. 360 and 394, for example.

⁸ B&D, p. 412.

to an observer, Anthony and Gloria are directed by forces beyond themselves as much as is anybody else.⁹

There are, on the other hand, things that assume some aspects of personality. The house at Marietta is a major example in The Beautiful and Damned, and forecasts the much more emphasized house in The Great Gatsby. Gatsby's house is in direct contrast to the Buchanans', as much as he personally is to them. Buchanan's house as described on page 8, belongs there -- it is practically a natural object. Gatsby's, however, stands out by its garishness, its Oriental splendour, especially against the modest home Carraway lived in.

As The Great Gatsby develops we find Fitzgerald giving more personality to some things than he does to some characters -- even characters who are not just part of the mob, but identifiable people. An oculist's sign has a great deal more force and importance in the novel than the man called Owl-eyes. The sinister valley of ashes is given as being almost as intrinsically evil as Meyer Wolfsheim.

It might be argued that these are merely examples of literary symbolism. But these are very powerful symbols, all pointing to the same vague but frightening emptiness, so that the total effect is that the things themselves have been given a function in the novel in the same way that characters have. The key to their force lies precisely in that they are symbols of nothing -- it is impossible to say conclusively what

⁹ B&D, pp. 175, 282, contain the examples referred to.

the valley of ashes symbolizes, but it is equally undeniable that it means something, and that its meaning is unpleasant.

Gatsby may have realized the menace implied in things; it was described in that statement of Carraway's:

He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how the raw sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real . . .¹⁰

The implication is that whether we adopt a series of poses (as the Tolstoians do), whether we adopt an attitude without ever thinking about it (as the "stupid" do), or whether we carefully work out the best goal and then pursue it single-mindedly (as the Nietzscheans do), we must have some meaning-system which we impose on the world. We must assign each element of the world a place in terms of our goal. The lurking horror resides in our discovering that the meaning, whatever it was, and therefore our neat system of values, was forced onto essentially meaningless data.

Gatsby had built a whole life on his dream of Daisy -- the house, the car, every facet of his existence, every element of his world as assumed by him to be part of the ultimate reality, that dream he was bringing true. But when he came to the moment of truth, there was no truth. He was forced to admit that everything was accidental, that roses and leaves and grass had just as much significance as men. And these things, then,

¹⁰ Gatsby, p. 162.

are frightening because, as Gatsby realizes for the first time just before he dies, they have nothing whatever to do with the worlds of men. Gatsby, like most people, had always thought they existed for him.

The line between people and things, then, is shown to be only an arbitrary one invented and maintained by man. Fitzgerald emphasizes Gatsby's thing-ness after he is dead:

A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb the mattress' accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of a transit, a thin red circle in the water.¹¹

In Tender is the Night we find this discovery of Fitzgerald's even more emphasized. Dick admits to himself that he treats people as things -- as a clinician he must treat his patients that way -- but Dick knows within himself that part of his own nature demands that he dissect his experience of all aspects of humanity, including those manifested in himself:

. . . for Dick, charm always had an independent existence . . . Dick tried to dissect it into pieces small enough to store away -- realizing that the totality of a life may be different in quality from its segments, and also that life during the forties seemed capable of being observed only in segments.¹²

As Fitzgerald noted elsewhere, Dick "cared only about people; he was scarcely conscious of places except for their weather, until they had been invested with color by tangible events".¹³

¹¹ Gatsby, p. 163.

¹² TIN, p. 215.

¹³ TIN, p. 220.

Dick's whole career is a searching for the meaning of his life, and he continually uses the people he meets as raw material in his investigation. For instance, as he approaches a strange girl in Innsbruck, trying to decide whether to strike up a conversation:

He moved closer, the shadow moved sideways . . .
His heart beat loud in contact with the unprobed, un-
dissected, unaccounted for.¹⁴

Again it is the process we noticed in the Introduction -- Dick tries to objectify each person, understand the person, so he can be used as a referent in Dick's own understanding of himself. Dick talked about it to the suffering woman wrapped in bandages:

". . . it's only by meeting the problems of every day, no matter how trifling and boring they seem, that you can make things drop back into place again. After that -- perhaps you'll be able again to examine ---"

He had slowed up to avoid the inevitable end of his thought: "-- the frontiers of consciousness." The frontiers that artists must explore were not for her, ever. She was fine-spun, inbred -- eventually she might find rest in some quiet mysticism. Exploration was for those with a measure of peasant blood, those with big thighs and thick ankles who could take punishment as they took bread and salt, on every inch of flesh and spirit.¹⁵

The end of that statement probably represents a moment of self-pity by either Dick or Fitzgerald: clearly, they were making that exploration.

Nicole, with her delicately-balanced mind, lives out Dick's theories at a more basic level of existence. Fitzgerald

¹⁴ TIN, p. 202.

¹⁵ TIN, p. 185.

shows her mind at work, and we can see her carefully, consciously ordering the things of experience into a meaningful world:

. . . Dress stay crisp for him, button stay put, bloom narcissus -- air stay still and sweet.¹⁶

And as she gets better:

It is not necessarily poverty of spirit that makes a woman surround herself with life -- it can be a super-abundance of interest, and, except during her flashes of illness, Nicole was capable of being curator of it all. . . . [A long list of the Divers' baggage follows, and Nicole's intricate system for keeping track of it]. It was equivalent to the system of a regimental supply officer who must think of the bellies and equipment of three thousand men.¹⁷

She leaned over her children's breakfast table and told off instructions to the governess . . . Nicole went on through her garden routine. She left the flowers she cut in designated spots to be brought to the house later by the gardener.¹⁸

The major difference between her method and Dick's is that he is thinking, planning, trying to work out a metaphysical understanding; while she is fighting to understand enough of the world to survive. She gradually does gain in understanding and near the end of the book as she is leaving Dick for Tommy, she realizes she fears this intelligence of Dick's, this ability of his to function on a higher level. For as long as she had been with Dick, her life had come within the compass of his planning -- he had always taken care of the future, so that as the moment approached for leaping from his world to Tommy's:

¹⁶ TIN, p. 243.

¹⁷ TIN, p. 258.

¹⁸ TIN, p. 276.

She was afraid of what was in Dick's mind; again she felt that a play underlay his current actions and she was afraid of his plans -- they worked well and they had an all-inclusive logic about them which Nicole was not able to command. She had somehow given over the thinking to him . . . ¹⁹

Both Nicole and Dick are plodding step by step toward what they hope is a final understanding. The unspoken fear hounding both is of the nothingness that [^]must exist if there is no final understanding possible. If in fact there is nothingness at the centre of the world, then all activity, even the most earnestly undertaken, is activity ultimately for its own sake; merely a pose, with no possibility of eventual fulfillment. That would be an admission of the world Fitzgerald thought he had rejected when he brought Amory Blaine past it. It would be a world where:

There were no more wise men; there were no more heroes . . . The mystical reveries of saints that had once filled him with awe in the still hours of night, now vaguely repelled him. The Byrons and Brookes who had defied life from mountain tops were in the end but flaneurs and poseurs, at best mistaking the shadow of courage for the substance of wisdom. The pageantry of his disillusion took shape in a world-old procession of Prophets, Athenians . . . like costumed alumni at a college reunion they streamed before him as their dreams, personalities, and creeds had in turn thrown colored lights on his soul; each had tried to express the glory of life and the tremendous significance of man; each had boasted of synchronizing what had gone before into his own rickety generalities; each had depended after all on the set stage and the convention of the theatre, which is that man in his hunger for faith will feed his mind with the nearest and most convenient food. ²⁰

¹⁹ FIN, p. 289.

²⁰ TSOP, pp. 262-263.

Perhaps this is what lay behind Fitzgerald's introducing the movie actress into Tender is the Night. By means of the movie industry he could examine a world where acting is everything, where people create situations in which they act as if the situations were real but know all the time they are false. Dick seems to personify Fitzgerald's instinctive rejection of such a world. He repeatedly rejects Rosemary's offer of a screen test -- he finds it ludicrous and out of the question:

Dick closed the subject with a somewhat tart discussion of actors: "The strongest guard is placed at the gateway to nothing," he said. "Maybe because the condition of emptiness is too shameful to be divulged."²¹

Fitzgerald has Dick phrase his rejection in significant terms: it is not so much the idea of acting as the concept of nothingness it implies that disturbs Dick. His first demurral was merely light-hearted, but when pressed, he indicated the deep set reason.

As early as The Beautiful and Damned Fitzgerald was thinking about what the movie industry implies. Bloeckman, the inexorably-rising Jew,²² was identified with the films. Nothing much is made of the point in that novel, though. Bloeckman's appeal to Gloria on behalf of the industry was mainly in terms of her pretty face, and the failure of her beauty in the screen test bothers Gloria much more than the implications

²¹ TIN, p. 70.

²² ESQ, p. 283: "the slow, upward creep of this people [Jews]".

of acting. In The Last Tycoon, of course, the idea is accepted with all that it implies. It is assumed that everybody is in some way or another an actor, and the investigation proceeds from there. But it is in Tender is the Night that the question is most carefully worked out: acting implies nothingness and if there is nothingness at the heart of the universe then we must all be lost -- "damned", if you will. The worlds we construct rest on no absolute certainty at all -- they are forever in danger of crashing down.

Nicole's did when Dick played the hearty, "brassy" professional man to her. We read that: "Nicole's world had fallen to pieces, but it was only a flimsy and scarcely created world; beneath it her emotions and instincts fought on,"²³ and we think Fitzgerald is talking only about the way the mentally ill fight to bring some order into the chaos. That is suggested also by the way Dick talked to the woman swathed in bandages -- that only by meeting the "problems of every day" can one escape the "confusion and chaos" that surround us.²⁴ But as the point is repeated and repeated we realize that nothingness is haunting Dick at least as much as anyone else. He is terribly afraid and at last is undeniably convinced that there is no real meaning in the world: the nothingness has more reality than anything else. Dick is forced to see it everywhere: as he rides the funicular at Glion, for instance:

²³ TIN, p. 143.

²⁴ TIN, p. 135.

On the centre of the lake, cooled by the piercing current of the Rhone lay the true centre of the Western World. Upon it floated swans like boats and boats like swans, both lost in the nothingness of the heartless beauty.²⁵

The beauty is "heartless" for the same reason the leaves above Gatsby were "frightening" just before he died -- because the things involved are merely things, with existences of their own and absolutely no involvement in human affairs. If we say a lake is "beautiful" we make a statement about ourselves -- that the lake, to our way of thinking, is beautiful -- not one about the lake. The boundaries of our systems of meaning suddenly shrink to our own existence alone.

This is what Dick had to protect Nicole from as he loved her, and he lost himself in the process. He so much wanted to insulate her from the nothingness of reality that he would sacrifice his own well-being; for if that is the greatest, most horrible truth about existence, and one person can be protected from it at the sacrifice of a bit -- not all -- of one's own happiness, does not logic indicate that the sacrifice should be made?

Many times he had tried unsuccessfully to let go his hold on her. They had many fine times together, fine talks between the loves of the white nights, but always when he turned away from her into himself he left her holding Nothing in her hands and staring at it, calling it many names, but knowing it was only the hope that he would come back soon.²⁶

²⁵ TIN, p. 147.

²⁶ TIN, p. 180.

The irony of Dick's losing Nicole after making the sacrifice is biting, but perfectly in accordance with the principle Dick acknowledged in making it. Because he knew there were no absolute values he decided it would be best to protect Nicole from that reality: he made a value of the sacrifice and inevitably the sacrifice was negated. This is what Nicole was when she went into his room after it was clear to Dick that he would lose her to Tommy: "she looked into his room -- the blue eyes, like searchlights, played on a dark sky"²⁷; and again, after Dick desperately tried and failed to re-establish himself even in the weakest of all terms, the physical: "Dick sat panting and looking at nothing".²⁸

On this point rests the final comment of the whole book. Dick, after all his efforts, his sacrifices and with all his understanding, is still reduced at the end to the nothing he so feared. He doesn't even lose Nicole's love, for that matter. He is finally just a separate, equal, independent existence like anybody else:

So it had happened -- and with a minimum of drama; . . . But she also felt happy and excited, and the odd little wish that she could tell Dick all about it faded quickly. But her eyes followed his figure until it became a dot and mingled with the other dots in the summer crowd.²⁹

Fitzgerald was a great admirer of Eliot,³⁰ and was quite pos-

²⁷ TIN, p. 279.

²⁸ TIN, p. 285.

²⁹ TIN, p. 311.

³⁰ "I think he's the greatest living poet in any language," WINTER, p. 199. See also WINTER, p. 199.

sibly deeply affected by the now-famous lines:

This is the way the world ends
 This is the way the world ends
 This is the way the world ends
 Not with a bang but a whimper.

It is also possible Fitzgerald read Melville. This might account for the almost obsessive importance of whiteness in the later novels. In his chapter in Moby-Dick on "The Whiteness of the Whale", Melville painstakingly analyzes the meaning of pure whiteness, and concludes that its peculiar effect is a horror relating to its implication of the "heartless voids and immensities" and the deathly, absolute uninvolvedness of the universe.³¹ Whether he was familiar with Melville's work or not, Fitzgerald's use of whiteness seems covered by the earlier writer's analysis. In Gatsby, white is generally the colour of innocence, purity and so on, as it is in most authors' work -- Daisy's dresses are white more often than not; her car, which figures largely in Gatsby's memory of the early days of their affair, is white; and Gatsby's front steps are white in symbolism of the nobility of his dream.

But the whiteness is defiled by the end of the book. An obscene word is scrawled on Gatsby's steps by some boy with a piece of brick. And there is that lasting impression of the whole milieu Carraway carries on his conscience:

³¹ Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or, The Whale, edited by Alfred Kazin (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 107.

I see it as a night scene by El Greco: . . . In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles with cold jewels.³²

Ashes are also white, and the colour of ashes fairly permeates George Wilson: "A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity -- except his wife"³³-- Wilson, who is finally "that ashen, fantastic figure".³⁴ Part of the absurdity of the visit to Tom and Myrtle's love-nest lies in the stark whiteness of the accents Nick notices -- the startling whiteness of the dog's feet, the flock of white sheep Nick imagines, the blank white facade of the apartment-houses, the blob of lather on McKee's cheekbone and Catherine's milky white, unnatural complexion.

There are literally dozens of such white accents in Tender is the Night. Rosemary is at the very beginning "suddenly conscious of the raw whiteness of her body"³⁵ and notices that the group with bodies as white as her own are the unpleasant people. When Rosemary goes to visit Brady, the director, on the set of a movie, we find a perhaps deliberate echo of Gatsby:

Here and there figures spotted the twilight, turning up ashen faces to her like souls in purgatory watching the passage of a mortal through.³⁶

³² Gatsby, p. 178.

³⁵ FN, p. 5.

³³ Gatsby, p. 26.

³⁶ FN, p. 23.

³⁴ Gatsby, p. 162.

True, Nicole's innocence is represented more than once by whiteness:

All that saved it this time was Nicole finding their table and glowing away, white and fresh and new in the September afternoon.³⁷

but we have attempted to show that that innocence can equally be defined as the complete and blithe dependence that eventually saps Dick and ruins him. Nearly every time Dick kisses a girl, either Rosemary or Nicole, Fitzgerald mentions that Dick notices the "white face" coming up to his. The effect is something of blankness, something of an ominous undertone. Also, the emptiness, the nothingness at the heart of the barely-realistic description of the beach that last morning Dick is ever seen is unmistakable: "A white sun, chivied of outline by a white sky, boomed over a cloudless day".³⁸

On at least two occasions Fitzgerald disregards entirely the natural meaning of the concept of "whiteness" in exploiting its symbolic and connotative content:

In the dead white hours in Zurich staring into a stranger's pantry across the up-shine of a street-lamp, he used to think that he wanted to be good, he wanted to be kind, he wanted to be brave and wise, but it was all pretty difficult.³⁹

They had many fine times together, fine talks between the loves of the white nights, but always when he turned away from her into himself he left her holding Nothing . . .⁴⁰

³⁷ TIN, p. 159.

³⁸ TIN, pp. 311-312.

³⁹ TIN, p. 133.

⁴⁰ TIN, p. 180.

On a third occasion, Fitzgerald tells us that Tommy shocked Nicole by telling her she had "white crook's eyes".⁴¹ Just what Fitzgerald meant by the phrase is obscure but the implication is certainly sinister, with the sinister quality deriving as much from the idea of thus juxtaposing the concepts of "white" and "eyes" as from the reference to criminals.

With Tender is the Night, then, Fitzgerald makes quite clear his conviction that the world is indeed founded on nothingness, and hence we are all either actors or shams or fools if we think we can ever find any one right way to be -- any attitude to the world that will prove ultimately satisfying and good.

At this point it should be realized that Fitzgerald draws two important distinctions -- that between Americans and Europeans and that between men and women.

As for the latter distinction, one might consider the position of Mrs. Speers, who had decided to opt out of the struggle for meaning. Her position seems to represent an interesting possibility in the range of ways people can exist, but Fitzgerald finally made little of her in Tender is the Night and she has no cognate in The Last Tycoon. Why did Fitzgerald not show more interest in her? Possibly it was because Mrs. Speers' way would not answer any of the ultimate questions

⁴¹ TIN, p. 292.

Fitzgerald was struggling with. Mrs. Speers simply accepted the fact that there would be no final answers, but that every person had to discover through his or her own experience that fact for himself:

She had an air of seeming to wait, as if for a man to get through with something more important than herself, a battle or an operation, during which he must not be hurried or interfered with. When the man had finished she would be waiting, without fret or impatience, somewhere on a highstool, turning the pages of a newspaper.⁴²

Fitzgerald seems to be using her as an example of the proper way for a woman to be, as opposed to the proper way for a man. Fitzgerald himself certainly could not simply accept life that way but demanded action even in the face of his own conclusions that action and searching would lead ultimately to nothing. Mrs. Speers may have escaped only by her femininity one of the least unpleasant reactions awakened in Dick by Collis Clay: "that one should parade a casualness into his presence was a challenge to the key on which he lived".⁴³

Mrs. Speers appears to have realized herself something of this male-female distinction. She was tired of the meaningless struggle because she knew it could lead only to death. ("Mrs. Speers was fresh in appearance but she was tired; death beds make people tired indeed and she had watched beside a couple.")⁴⁴ Yet, far from trying to keep Rosemary from wasting

⁴² TIN, p. 165.

⁴³ TIN, p. 87.

⁴⁴ TIN, p. 25.

herself in the effort, she actually encouraged it, when the time came, after doing her best to make her daughter strong. She did so because she had coolly decided that Rosemary was in some respects to be regarded as masculine if she was to be the family source of income:

"You were brought up to work -- not especially to marry. Now you've found your first nut to crack and it's a good nut -- go ahead and put whatever happens down to experience. Wound yourself or him -- whatever happens it can't spoil you because economically you're a boy, not a girl"⁴⁵

Rosemary's affair with Dick ended unhappily, but with him hurt more than her. She would go on to Nicotera and probably to others of her own age with only a few regrets and a lot of memories. Mrs. Speers had not blindly handed her over into an adult affair, but had allowed her to go ahead on the basis of a well-founded confidence in her character. Dick was not the first lover Rosemary had had, and he would not be the last. Rosemary, then, had safely developed into a woman who would not have to bother about the ultimate questions that concerned Dick. She could have love affairs and enjoy them without worrying and analyzing all the time. This is as Mrs. Speers probably foresaw, and certainly as Fitzgerald thinks it should be. He saw it as evil and unnatural when women try to act like men and take the initiative. He drives that point home with Baby and Mary North when they become male impersonators near the end of the

⁴⁵ TIN, p. 40.

book and wind up in jail acting like fools. The patient wrapped in bandages is the simplest important statement of Fitzgerald's attitude. As she states the case: "I'm sharing the fate of the women of my time who challenged men to battle",⁴⁶ and Dick is forced to agree. Fitzgerald seems to think it right that men should bear the burden of the search for final answers: women only cause and get into trouble when they take the initiative. Women are and should be insulated by their beauty⁴⁷ from the metaphysical struggles men must undertake.

Fitzgerald also makes it quite clear that he sees a definite distinction between Americans and Europeans, and will talk mainly about American problems. Franz is the one European Fitzgerald deals with in enough depth to show what he felt to be the essence of the European character as opposed to the American. Franz dares much less than Dick, is more practical, more realistic. His only dreams of magnificence are recognized as "students' talk".⁴⁸ Because he is "continually confronted with a pantheon of heroes"⁴⁹ he does not dream of being one himself. That he has no dreams may make him a duller person than Dick, but he is much happier, reconciled to taking the world as he finds it. Fitzgerald approves of this attitude

⁴⁶ TIN, p. 184.

⁴⁷ Women are "merely consecrations to their own posterity" and "fall removed by their own beauty . . . from the possibility of contributing anything from a sick heart and a page of puzzled words to write". TIN, p. 184.

⁴⁸ TIN, p. 132.

⁴⁹ TIN, p. 132.

for Europeans (or rather, does not take time to pass judgement) but rejects it under the classification of Collis Clay as an attitude for Americans. America once had the purity of Dick's father and forefathers, and of the American gold-star mothers.⁵⁰ Whatever absolutely right way to be that might exist for Americans would have to include some satisfactory attitude to that at once both mature and virginal past. Europeans had to deal with no such difficult problem, or if they did, Fitzgerald did not take time to work through to it -- he had enough of a problem understanding the position of himself and his countrymen: essentially, he was not concerned with Europeans.

⁵⁰ TIN, pp. 100-101.

CHAPTER THREE
LOVE, TIME, AND DEATH

For all Fitzgerald tried he could not honestly -- and he always wrote honestly -- imagine a love that lasts. He found it very difficult to imagine the grounds on which one nature could to some degree enter another, in view of the fact that people are so distinctly individual.

Amory Blaine's loves scarcely deserve the name. They are boyish infatuations with various types of women -- perhaps a hint of something deeper with Rosalind. Certainly, Fitzgerald's presentation of Amory's case serves to demolish those "loves" which are merely the "mirror of a mood" in the man. This category includes, in subsequent novels, Anthony Patch's relationships with Geraldine Burke and Dorothy Raycroft (a relationship Anthony allowed to go too far, hurting both himself and her), Nick Carraway's with Jordan Baker and Dick Diver's with the telephone girl from Bar-sur-Aube¹, none of which affairs ever reached the stage of real love.

Amory's affair with Rosalind suggested more possibilities. This girl:

. . . had taken the first flush of his youth and brought from his unplumbed depths tenderness that had surprised him, gentleness and unselfishness that he had never given to another creature. . . Rosalind had

¹ *id.*, p. 126.

drawn out what was more than passionate admiration; he had a deep, undying affection for Rosalind.²

Perhaps that was the answer, then; that love could exist only between two very different people, who would each draw out of the partner the partner's own best qualities. That was the possibility investigated in the story of Anthony and Gloria. It didn't work, though, for the reason Rosalind indicated in breaking with Anthony: "Drifting hurts too much".³

Gloria and Anthony were certainly different -- she was a "consistent, practising Nietzschean"⁴ and he was the very essence of the Tolstoian, who always understood too well to blame. This inevitably meant that Gloria would have the upper hand in any personal relation, and Fitzgerald did not like this devolving of the initiative on the woman:

They were stars on this stage, each playing to an audience of two: the passion of their pretense created the actuality. Here, finally, was the quintessence of self-expression -- yet it was probable that for the most part their love expressed Gloria rather than Anthony. He often felt like a scarcely tolerated guest at a party she was giving.⁴

The consequences are never really in doubt. She comes to despise him for not leading, but she, as a woman, is incapable of leading; so they develop a tremendous inertia, action is impossible, and they can only watch their love decay and die:

. . . in spite of her adoration of him, her jealousy, her servitude, her pride, she fundamentally despised him -- and her contempt blended indistin-

² TSOP, p. 209.

³ TSOP, p. 196.

⁴ B&D, p. 132.

guishably with her other emotions . . .⁵

Gloria had lulled Anthony's mind to sleep. She, who seemed of all women the wisest and the finest, hung like a brilliant curtain across his doorways, shutting out the light of the sun. In those first years what he believed bore invariably the stamp of Gloria; he saw the sun through the pattern of the curtain.⁶

. . . she had no sense of justice . . . What he chiefly missed in her mind was the pedantic teleology -- the sense of order and accuracy, the sense of life as a mysteriously correlated piece of patchwork.⁷

In those three factors lie the reasons the type of love depicted in The Beautiful and Damned can not work.

But what if the man is the Nietzschean of the two? What if he unquestionably takes the lead in the affair?

This is the type of love examined in The Great Gatsby. But Fitzgerald seems to conclude that a man, with his greater mental power for constructing, will so develop the dream he has of the girl that she can ultimately never live up to it. By the time Gatsby was finally in a position to meet the real Daisy after dreaming of her for so many years, his dream had become more perfect than she could ever be. Perhaps, as some critics have suggested, she is to be thought of as having been corrupted by Tom Buchanan -- the essential point, though, is that for whatever reason, she is not equal to Gatsby's dream. She elects to stay with a man she does not love, apparently on

⁵ B&D, p. 277.

⁶ B&D, p. 191.

⁷ B&D, p. 168.

coldly logical grounds of self-preservation. Gatsby (and probably Fitzgerald) rejects that kind of "love" as "merely personal".⁸ Fitzgerald was seeking a more intense relationship than that.

In Tender is the Night he tried the only way left. He had already discovered that in their natures the partners had to be different, the male had to have the initiative, and he had to be of the Tolstoian type. This arrangement comes closer to producing a real, lasting love than any of the others, but still it fails. The man, cursed by his quality of understanding too well, allows his strength to be broken from him to bolster the woman:

He [Dick] had lost himself -- he could not tell the hour when, or the day or the week, the month or the year. Once he had cut through things, solving the most complicated equations as the simplest problems of his simplest patients. Between the time he found Nicole flowering under a stone on the Zurichsee and the moment of his meeting with Rosemary the spear had blunted. . . . he had somehow been swallowed up like a gigolo, and somehow permitted his arsenal to be locked up in the Warren safety-deposit vaults.⁹

It should be noted that Fitzgerald took pains to emphasize that Dick did not fall because he married Nicole for money, as is sometimes suggested. The reason their love could not last had to do with their deepest, most personal natures. They came very close to having that perfect love Fitzgerald sought. On one level they did have it, for as already pointed out,¹⁰ Nicole never stopped loving him, and he can hardly be said to have

⁸ Fansh, p. 152.

¹⁰ Suzanne, p. 11.

⁹ TIN, p. 201.

stopped loving her. Fitzgerald has Nicole state poignantly the essential love that never died, though it could not live in the world:

"Think how you love me," she whispered. "I don't ask you to love me always like this, but I ask you to remember. Somewhere inside me there'll always be the person I am tonight."¹¹

It might be argued that the only reason the love did not survive was Nicole's illness -- that the reason for Dick's failure was an external, and not as much an inevitability as has been here suggested. But this is to assume either that Fitzgerald was merely telling stories, not making a detailed, deliberate examination of man; or that his characters had some measure of independent existence outside his creation. A moment's thought will show the latter objection is fallacious, and to counter the former has been the whole object of this study.

Fitzgerald dramatized all possible approaches to love that he could imagine. He was trying to find some lasting partnership which could be an absolute value in the face of the nothingness he had uncovered at the heart of existence. His search ended in failure. He found no basis for a lasting love. He could easily conceive of love's beginning, but time would inexorably destroy it.

Time as destroyer is one of Fitzgerald's most deep-seated conceptions. Amory Blaine had not lost faith in the future by the end of This Side of Paradise, but he came very

¹¹ ibid., p. 201.

close to rejecting the present. His Wellsian discussion of socialism includes an acceptance of a better world to come sometime in the hazy future, but Amory's ultimate destination in the book is back into the past. He goes back to the ghostly Civil War graveyard and to the mediaeval purity of Princeton to get a fresh start. He accepts the present only as it is contained within himself: his Gods are dead, his wars are fought and any faiths he might have inherited are shaken. He knows himself and that is all. But Amory's conclusions are not necessarily Fitzgerald's. Though Amory's last words are at least partly triumphant, as if Amory is now better equipped to face the world than he was before, Fitzgerald implies that the mediaeval world of the past, where gods, faiths and battles were meaningful, was probably a more congenial time to mankind than is the present -- and by extension, the future can be expected to be worse still.

Fitzgerald's lovers, then, must come to terms with the downhill course of time. Amory and Isabelle thought they had escaped time in their enraptured love-letters; but no, Fitzgerald says, they had not escaped time, they had merely slipped entirely into its stream: "and so on in an eternal monotone that seemed to both of them infinitely charming, infinitely new."¹² Fitzgerald's statement makes it clear that it was not new, it was a pattern as old as eternity. And nothing but the

¹² ibid., p. 82.

youthful optimism Amory embodies could overcome the relentless logic of the way time entered later:

"Isabelle!" he cried, half involuntarily, and held out his arms. As in the story-books, she ran into them, and on that half-minute, as their young lips first touched, rested the high point of vanity, the crest of his young egotism.¹³

From then on, as implied in any peak, the decline was inevitable. The point was made again in a remark about Amory's love for Rosalind:

"I'm so happy that I'm frightened. Wouldn't it be awful if this was -- was the high point? ..."

She looked at him dreamily.

"Beauty and love pass, I know. . . . Oh, there's sadness, too. I suppose all great happiness is a little sad. Beauty means the scent of roses and then the death of roses ---"

"Beauty means the agony of sacrifice and the end of agony. . . ."

"And, Amory, we're beautiful, I know. I'm sure God loves us --" . . .

Intangibly fleeting, unrememberable hours.¹⁴

"Unrememberable hours" -- pleasure will inevitably die, and it can never be recaptured. That became the central point of Gatsby:

"And she doesn't understand," he [Gatsby] said.

"She used to be able to understand. We'd sit for hours --- " . . .

"I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured.

"You can't repeat the past."

"Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously.

"Why of course you can!"¹⁵

And Gatsby is wrong, of course. Every one of the many clocks in the novel reminds us of the fact. Gatsby would have to

¹³ TSOP, p. 39; repeated in TS, p. 126.

¹⁴ TSOP, pp. 188-189.

¹⁵ Gatsby, p. 111.

escape time to recapture Daisy. Fitzgerald presses the point so hard the symbolism employed occasionally becomes a bit heavy. In Gatsby's first interview with Daisy he had at least briefly stopped time's flow, and if she could be induced to come over to him, he would have destroyed time's effect:

Gatsby . . . was reclining against the mantelpiece. . . . His head leaned back so far that it rested against the face of a defunct mantelpiece clock . . .

"We've met before," muttered Gatsby. His eyes glanced momentarily at me, and his lips parted with an abortive attempt to laugh. Luckily the clock took this moment to tilt dangerously at the pressure of his head, whereupon he turned and caught it with trembling fingers¹⁶

More neatly done is the business in The Beautiful and Damned where Blackman's gift to the newly-married Patch¹⁵ is, with perfect appropriateness, a travelling clock. Time is on his side in two ways: as he is a Jew¹⁷ and because time will inevitably destroy Anthony's and Gloria's love.

"You can't ever quite repeat anything", Gloria says, meaning (clearly in the context) 'any pleasure'. As the final paragraphs of Gatsby definitively state, the nature of men is such that they keep trying to achieve the "orgiastic future", some more vigorously than others but all to some degree; but because the future is the future -- because of the nature of time -- it always "precedes before us". We can only, then, define the future in terms of the past: but the past, as Fitz-

¹⁶ Gatsby, p. 47.

¹⁷ Babbalanza, p. 283: "the slow, unceasing creep of time past."

gerald by the end of Gatsby has shown as definitely as he can, is never available to us. Though we are "borne back ceaselessly into the past", we can not turn around; we travel only one way, the hard way, against the current of our understanding.¹⁹ We are hurtling helplessly from past to future. The pleasures we knew are over: the future may hold some happiness but that is inconsequential in the face of the inexorable facts that time will carry us sooner or later to the end of love and to death. The present, then, is only that moment in which one is most grimly aware of the unswerving process. It is essentially unbearable. For instance:

On the long-roofed steamship piers one is in a country which is no longer here and not yet there. . . . One hurries through, even though there's time; the past, the continent, is behind; the future is the glowing mouth in the side of the ship; the dim, turbulent alley is too confusedly the present.²⁰

Time impresses us as if we were being swept along on some ominous journey by railway train. The similarity seems deeply to have impressed Fitzgerald too, especially in The

¹⁹ Fitzgerald seems to think at least some women perceive time differently. They are gifted with an "opportunistic memory" (TIN, p. 300) and can honestly (within their generally limited capacities) alter the nature of the past so as to make the present more bearable and the future more conceivable. He remarks more than once on woman's capacity to view past and future equally: "that illusion of young romantic love to which women look forever forward and forever back" (B&D, p. 371), for instance. These women, at least, are bound more lightly by time because their conception is not based, as a man's is, on a relentlessly linear structure.

²⁰ TIN, p. 205.

Beautiful and Damned. There is the train they miss at the station near Portchester²¹ on the occasion when Anthony blundered by trying to usurp by force the initiative that he should have been worthy of by natural right. The point is made even more strongly just before the "Symposium" at the Marietta station, as a train approaches:

The siren soared again, closer at hand, and then, with no anticipatory roar and clamor, a dark and sinuous body curved into view against the shadows far down the high-banked track, and with no sound but the rush of the cleft wind and the clocklike tick of the rails, moved toward the bridge -- it was an electric train. Above the engine two vivid blurs of blue light formed incessantly a radiant crackling bar between them, which, like a spluttering flame in a lamp beside a corpse, lit for an instant the successive rows of trees and caused Gloria to draw back instinctively to the far side of the road. The light was tepid -- the temperature of warm blood The clicking blended suddenly with itself in a rush of even sound, and then, elongating in sombre elasticity, the thing roared blindly by her and thundered onto the bridge, racing the lurid shaft of fire it cast into the solemn river alongside. Then it contracted swiftly, sucking in its sound until it left only a reverberant echo, which died upon the farther bank.²²

Fitzgerald may have had the train symbol suggested by a reading of Frank Norris' Vandover and the Brute, which he had Amory Blaine read and pronounce an "excellent American novel".²³

²¹ B&D, pp. 199-200.

²² B&D, p. 246.

²³ TSOP, p. 209.

Vandover and the Brute, by Frank Norris (Toronto, 1914), pp. 230-231:

It was life, the murmur of the great, the force that sprang from the bowels of Nature and drove onward like some enormous engine, restless, an engine that sped straight forward into the infinite herd of humanity, driving it on at tireless speed through all eternity, driving it on at

Wherever the idea came from, it appears repeatedly in The Beautiful and Damned. Symbols of time in The Great Gatsby are more varied, since that novel was Fitzgerald's deepest investigation of the phenomenon. Cars, however, often serve the same sort of function in Gatsby as trains in The Beautiful and Damned. By Tender is the Night the symbol of time as an onrushing machine was so deeply in Fitzgerald's consciousness that he sometimes suggested it without talking about it:

these were some of the people who gave a tinge to Nicole, and as the whole system swayed and thundered onward [*italics mine*] it lent a feverish bloom to such processes of hers as wholesale buying. . . . She illustrated very simple principles, containing in herself her own doom, but illustrated them so accurately there was grace in the procedure.²⁴

Time, then, is also the foundation of beauty and grace. This in no way negates but only elaborates its function as the destroyer. Gloria made it plain in The Beautiful and Damned:

"Don't you want to preserve old things?" asked Anthony.

"But you can't, Anthony. Beautiful things grow to a certain height and then they fail and fade off, breathing out memories as they decay. . . ."

"There's no beauty without poignancy and there's

whither, crushing out inexorably all those who lagged behind the herd and who fell from exhaustion, grinding them to dust beneath its myriad iron wheels, riding over them, still driving on the herd that yet remained, driving it recklessly, blindly on and on toward some far-distant goal, some vague unknown end, some mysterious, fearful bourne forever hidden in thick darkness.

²⁴ TIN, p. 55.

no poignancy without the feeling that it's going, men,
names, books, houses -- bound for dust -- mortal --"²³

Hence the repeated emphasis on death throughout Fitzgerald's work. This is why the incident of Dick Humbird had such an effect on Amory; why Fitzgerald had Anthony and Gloria play out their personal affair in terms of waiting for a death (Adam Patch's); why Gatsby died; and why Dick Diver was presented in an atmosphere of dead minds, decaying society and dying people. Fitzgerald saw time as a fundamental category within which man has to live; time sweeps man onward at every moment, taking him inexorably on the moment of the present toward the end of each individual pleasure, and to death. In construction it is a simple matter of logic -- but its implications are terrible.

²³ BkII, pp. 166-167.

CONCLUSION

THE LAST TYCOON

Fitzgerald's final novel falls largely outside the scope of his investigation into the concept of man. By the end of Fender is the Night he had said virtually all he could say about the categories under which man must exist. The Last Tycoon adds nothing new at the level of conception, but is rather a statement of possible ways to be content, to some extent at least, under the a priori system.

The character of Monroe Stahr amounts to what might be viewed as Fitzgerald's defiant statement flung in the teeth of logic. All Fitzgerald's carefully-developed system points to a nothingness at the heart of existence. But through Stahr Fitzgerald discovers one absolute value, founded on individual clear-sightedness and honesty:

He had flown up very high to see, on strong wings, when he was young. And while he was up there he had looked on all the kingdoms, with the kind of eyes that can stare straight into the sun. Beating his wings tenaciously -- finally frantically -- and keeping on beating them, he had stayed up there longer than most of us, and then, remembering all he had seen from his great height of how things were, he had settled gradually to earth.¹

First and foremost, he was his own man:

"You seem to take things so personally, [he said once] hating people and worshipping them -- always

¹ Id., p. 25.

thinking people are so important -- especially yourselves. You just ask to be kicked around. I like people and I like them to like me, but I wear my heart where God put it -- on the inside."²

Stahr is given to us knowing all the things Fitzgerald had so painstakingly developed in the earlier novels. He knew he was going to die and he knew his way of doing things was doomed; but except for one episode of drunken weakness, when he attempted to fight Brimmer, he tried to be reasonable, tried to support his system from the inside, tried to play the game of making pictures his way according to the rules of the game (we see him doing this in the conference scene). He knew that the days of the great men were over, and "only the little fish are certain"³, certain as time itself. ("Very punctual fish", he said.)⁴ He would not undertake a "merely personal" love affair when Cecilia Brady offered it because it could only have been casual, in the way Collis Clay was "casual" in Tender is the Night. Stahr demanded of himself that he live only on the intensified "key" Dick Diver experienced. Stahr lived in a world of actors, and knew himself that life is at best only a choice of poses among possible poses -- but he passionately believed that whichever course is chosen should be followed to the end. Looking at a range of mountains they were flying over, he said:

² IT, p. 21.

³ IT, p. 113.

⁴ IT, p. 112.

"Suppose you were a railroad man," he said. "You have to send a train through there somewhere. Well, you get your surveyors' reports, and you find there's three or four or half a dozen gaps, and not one is better than the other. You've got to decide -- on what basis? you can't test the best way -- except by doing it. So you just do it. . . . You choose some one way for no reason at all -- because that mountain's pink or the blue-print is a better blue. You see?"²

According to Fitzgerald's notes, Stahr was to have been killed in a plane crash. This is appropriate, since we have enough of the novel to see that the airplane had replaced the train as the dominant symbol of time's force; so time, of course, ultimately defeats Stahr.

He was not defeated, though, before meeting a girl who was as knowledgeable about life and as honest as himself; and on that basis Fitzgerald was finally able to conceive of his characters' getting briefly out of time. To accomplish this they had to escape their own awkwardness and to leave other people -- in the novel they find themselves alone in a house itself significantly suspended in time between the start of construction and completion. In other words, they had to escape reality before real love was possible; for human reality is in one part of its definition a function of time. The finitude of their moment was emphasized by the idea of Kathleen's fiance's onrushing train, and the moment's end was signalled by the arrival of the little fish (which were relentlessly on

² *ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

time); but at least that moment outside time did exist, and it was wonderful while it lasted.

Kathleen and Stahr enjoyed as full and as complete a love as Fitzgerald saw it possible for men to have -- and it was possible only because Kathleen and Stahr were exceptionally clear-headed, self-sufficient people who refused to delude themselves. They recognized each other as members of the tiny group of honest people, they knew their moment could be only just that long, they perceived it and took it.

As for the rest, the more representative of the vast mass of humanity, Cecilia Brady provides Fitzgerald's statement. She is able to perceive the strength of the hero -- Stahr -- and cunning enough to try to possess it. Her failure does not cause us much grief, though, for as far as the novel exists in finished form, she has not shown that she has enough greatness within herself to comprehend that strength -- probably she would merely suck it away after the fashion of Nicole Diver. Certainly Cecilia can hold her own in the ordinary world, and we have the feeling that is where she belongs. She is at least a match for the many characters like Wylie Whyte (an interesting name, considering the importance of whiteness as discussed above) and this, Fitzgerald seems to feel, is the kind of world America is or is becoming.

Fitzgerald's opinion of America's future (and perhaps the world's) was apparently very much like T.S. Eliot's. There is a deliberate parallel with *The Waste Land*, for example, in

Fitzgerald's making Cecilia at home in the living room from "A Game of Chess" (from "The Wasteland"). It might be noted also that Fitzgerald carefully tells us that room "was a lineal descendant of the old American parlour"⁷: but that theme had been stated before⁸, as had almost every one involved in The Last Tycoon. The only new concept Fitzgerald produced in the last novel was that of the hero who knew he must lose but refused to be beaten except by time, the one finally destructive force, and who snatched moments of great happiness along the way. This, Fitzgerald seems to say, is the best type of man possible.

⁷ LT, p. 142.

⁸ TIN, pp. 71-74.

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