

A Study of Fitzgerald
— Fitzgerald and the Lost Paradise —

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INTRODUCTION

The big three elements in Fitzgerald's literature are youth (vitality), beauty and wealth (money), but youth is 'lost youth' in his major novels in which Fitzgerald described the disturbed situation of the *après-guerre* generation in its spiritual aspect. He looked at the real society of modern American materialism with the light irony—the romantic irony—by the use of his romantic young heroes. The merciless rich destroy the romantic imagination of young idealist to the bitter end. The fact is, as Richard D. Lehan says, that "Fitzgerald's persistent theme of lost youth is really the theme of lost opportunity—a failure of permanent achievement—and the object of achievement is the splendid life which only the very rich can afford."¹ In Fitzgerald's literature, however, the rich class is a symbol of the 'moral let-down' enjoyed by the postwar generation. Although Gertrude Stein's description of the young writers who left America for Paris at this time as a "lost generation" is almost universally accepted as a valid statement of their condition, Alfred Kazin points out that the young expatriates actually possessed a strong sense of their own individuality at the same time that they were cognizant of the moral breakdown of the world they had inherited. In other words, the established rich betray his young heroes' sense of romantic visions and dreams, and they destroy his sad young heroes by the influence of money. In his early days, however, Fitzgerald himself was attracted by the gorgeous life of the rich class.

Fitzgerald's youth worship originated in Princeton days with his reading of Keats, Swinburne, Wilde, and Rupert Brooke. As a matter of course, the title of *This Side of Paradise* is taken from Rupert Brooke's poem: '.....Well *this side of Paradise* ! There's little comfort in the wise.' At the same time, on the back page of the cover Fitzgerald put Oscar Wilde's poem: 'Experience is the name so many people give to their mistakes.' Thus Fitzgerald loved to read the poems of these Romantic Poets in his young days.

The postwar generation made a denial of the traditional moral value in the prewar

generation. Under such a social situation of the Jazz Age, Fitzgerald searched for a new judgement of value which is worth believing, and he projected the feeling of restlessness to search the criterion of action, that is, the searching full of anxieties in his novels. Almost of Fitzgerald's young heroes have the romantic visions for their life in their young days.

Fitzgerald's romantic heroes regard their youth as an endless world of dream, promise, beauty, pleasure and wealth (money) in their demoralized societies of waste land. The wasteland of East Egg is defined by the "white palaces of fashionable East Egg," so like the "whited sepulchers" of the gospels that we are asked to take them as repositories for dead men's bones. The opulent red-and-white mansion of the Buchanans adds to the sterility of the wasteland, the torments of an inferno. His young heroes are the great superman in the corrupted and distorted society. Fitzgerald felt keenly the evil of the rich class and depicted it criticizing the 'moral let-down' of merciless people. On this subject, he dexterously depicted the young and innocent idealist in conflict with the sophisticated materialist, and communicated his sense of lost youth at the hands of heartless rich people.

Especially in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald imagined that his personal themes had their parallel in historical point of view; he admirably enlarged it in this novel, through symbol, metaphor, sarcasm and allusion, until the fabulous story of Gatsby related to the story of America itself—the romantic idealism in the desperate struggle with ruthless materialism, the prewar generation in contrast to the postwar, and the east society in contrast to the west in America²⁾. As a matter of course, the hero Gatsby among Fitzgerald's young heroes symbolizes clearly 'lost youth' in the Jazz Age representing the material civilization of American society.

The rich enchanted Fitzgerald's heroes to death and destroyed the sad young heroes enamored of beauty and wealth in the rich class. In this connection, Milton Hindus says well as follows :

One of the prime feelings in all of Fitzgerald's work is that inspired by *the contrast between wealth and poverty* which America presents. He is not only attracted by the leisurely and aesthetic life which is possible for the rich but he is repelled by the ugly conditions of life to which the poor are condemned.³⁾ (Italics mine)

Thus Fitzgerald's *alter ego*, that is, his young hero longs to get money and the beautiful girl through his transitory dream. However, this hero's lover, beyond his

reach, belongs to the rich class of American society, and in other words his lover is, as the title of one of Keat's famous poems, 'la belle dame sans merci' and has the thorny heart, that is to say, the evil of her heart poisoning hero's mind to death. And also, in this respect, Lehan says as follows :

If Fitzgerald's attitude toward the past was ambivalent, so was his attitude toward money. He is said to have worshipped money as a means, not an end—as a means to greater mobility, as a means to the heightened world that his imagination had created. And yet *Fitzgerald distrusted the very rich and was suspicious of them*. The reason for this stems from an experience that has not as yet been fully investigated. In January of 1917, Ginevra King, from a very wealthy Chicago family, broke with Fitzgerald, and on September 24, 1918 she married William Mitchell. Ginevra's father never approved of his daughter's interest in Scott. Charles King was a wealthy broker. He was born in 1873 into a prominent Chicago family of mortgage bankers. In 1894, when he left Yale, he joined the family firm of Shanklin and King, and in 1906 he organized his own firm—King Farnum and Co. He kept two homes—in the winter living at 1450 Astor Street in Chicago, and in the summer on Ridge Road in Lake Forest. To Mr. King, Fitzgerald was from another world, and Fitzgerald soon became aware that he was considered socially beneath Ginevra.⁴ (Italics mine)

In short, Fitzgerald detested the abominable ruthlessness and irresponsibility of the rich class, and therefore, he felt sympathy for his sad young heroes through his works. Ginevra was to become the prototype of the elusive "golden girl" who was to fire the imagination of so many of Scott's male protagonists.⁵ In this connection, Andrew Turnbull describes very well in a biography on Scott Fitzgerald as follows :

Fitzgerald sensed a corruption in the rich and mistrusted their might. 'That was always my experience,' he wrote near the end of his life, '—a poor boy in a rich town ; a poor boy in a rich boy's school ; a poor boy in a rich man's club at Princeton..... I have never been able to forgive the rich for being rich, and it has colored my entire life and works.' He told a friend that 'the whole idea of Gatsby is the unfairness of a poor young man not being able to marry a girl with money. This theme comes up again and again because I lived it.'⁶VI (Italics mine)

This thought flows at the bottom of Fitzgerald's literature, and the love patterns in

his major novels exist in the case where poor heroes love their rich lovers and get them in their hands. This idea matched completely with the current of the Jazz Age in America.

I'll discuss *This Side of Paradise*. This novel is, without question, a searching, vivid portrait of American youth in those years preceding and following World War I. Fitzgerald presents the turbulent emotions of his generation—a generation whose adolescent years were shaped by the war, whose coming of age coincided with that unprecedented phenomenon in American history, the Jazz Age. *This Side of Paradise* consists of two parts, that is, 'The Romantic Egotist' and 'The Education of a Personage'. In book one 'The Romantic Egotist', Amory Blaine's childhood, his school life and his joining the army for World War I are treated, and while in book two Amory's experiences of young days in the postwar society are depicted. In book one, Amory, endowed with fine looks, excellent intelligence, and fabulous wealth, sets about his journey of life. He, however, endures a series of mental and emotional ordeals of the real world. Then finally, Amory reaches a sad selfknowledge at the end of the novel. His way of life epitomizes that of the younger generation in America. In reality, his brave revolt against the real society aroused sympathy from the young men and women in the Jazz Age of America. In his world-weariness and wailing for his lost youth on the mental aspect, Amory is the archetypal hero of the Jazz Age.

Amory dreams of becoming the youngest general in the world, and then, he falls in love with the top girl, and regards it as a moral code to live by a sort of aristocratic egotism. When he is thirteen-year-old, Amory's mother sends him to her relatives in Minneapolis and the rough vulgarity of Western society catches him. During his Princeton life, Amory makes friends with the various students and has the chance of reading Wilde, Swinburne, Keats and so forth. At a certain time, he is present at the petting party, and then his gesture of revolt takes the form of a rejection of the Victorian morality and genteel tradition. Amory's aestheticism is encouraged by his intimate friend Monsignor Darcy, to whom he refers all his ideas and moral judgments, and his advices are helpful for the young and sensitive heart of Amory on every side. While Amory is living in his dreamy world of imagination, American real society is changing gradually. At the end of youth, Amory is confronted with the War, and he leaves Princeton for the army, and finally from a letter which concludes book one, we learn that Amory succeeded in getting over his own duty.

'The Education of a Personage' begins with the dramatic scenes between Amory and an *après-guerre* girl named Rosalind. She is all the world to Amory, and he is

heartbroken when she rejects him because he is poor. And after that matter, Amory encounters the romantic Eleanor, but their love affair comes to an end because of the death of Eleanor's mother. Amory's disappointment comes to be incurable, and he keenly feels the nothingness of life in real society. Amory impulsively confronts the house-detectives to shield a friend, and reading the newspaper his eyes fall on the announcement of Rosalind's engagement. He has lost her, and on top of his humiliation it is a heavy blow to his heart, and consequently his pillars of heart crack up one by one, as he learns that he can expect no further remittances from his mother's estate, and then receives news of the unexpected death of Monsignor Darcy. As he has lost supports of his youth, Amory comes to be a personage.

This Side of Paradise came to be, in the young readers' minds, a novel of protest and revolt against Victorian hypocrisy. Fitzgerald thought, at that time of his writing *This Side of Paradise*, that the poor young man cannot get the beautiful top girl because he is not rich and has not sufficient money. In fact, Fitzgerald describes in the novel, "His (Amory's) instinct perceived the fetidness of poverty, but no longer ferreted out the deeper evils in pride and sensuality."⁷ Fitzgerald instinctively detested 'the fetidness of poverty', and yet felt 'the evil of heart of the rich', His emotional involvement with both Ginevra King and Zelda Sayre accounts for his difficulty in maintaining an ironic attitude towards Amory's romances. He observed attentively the action and idea of the very rich, and criticized the immorality and unfaithfulness of their materialism.

Historically speaking, the nineteen-twenties was the time when young men and women felt keenly the agitation of thought in American society, and also the change of American life was very rapid. In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald describes clearly the outstanding characteristics of the Jazz Age :

'Modern life,' began Amory again, 'changes no longer century by century, but year by year, ten times faster than it ever has before—populations doublings, civilizations unified more closely with other civilization, economic interdependence, racial questions, and—we're *daudling* along.'⁸

And then,

.....the chosen youth from the muddled, unchastened world, still fed romantically on the mistakes and half-forgotten dreams of dead statesmen and poets. Here was

a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through a revery of long days and nights ; destined finally to go out into that dirty grey turmoil to follow love and pride ; *a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success ; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken*.....⁹⁾ (Italics mine)

The novel dramatizes the restless groping of a generation “grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken.....” Thus, in a certain sense, as Cross says, it is evident that *This Side of Paradise* remains “one of the most important social documents of the Jazz Age.”¹⁰⁾ On the other hand, however, the deeper meaning and the more important subject were hidden in the novel.

For Amory, seeking for the grail, in reality, results from the entertainment of ‘lost youth’. In this connection, Fitzgerald observes exactly and clearly the reality of the Jazz Age as follows :

There was no God in his (Amory's) heart, he knew ; his ideas were still in riot ; there was ever the pain of memory ; the regret for his lost youth—yet the waters of disillusion had left a deposit on his soul, responsibility and a love of life, the faint stirring of old ambitions and unrealized dreams.....¹¹⁾ (Italics mine)

Thus the hero Amory must live on in the world of ‘waste land’, and there is no God whom he can believe in. Therefore, in one sense, *This Side of Paradise* can be said the chronicle of Fitzgerald’s loss of religious faith. Namely, in the spiritual aspect, youth of young people is lost in the large gap between the old generation and the new one. The magnificently sad ending of *This Side of Paradise* must have moved many a youthful reader’s heart :

‘It’s all a poor substitute at best,’ he (Amory) said sadly. And he could not tell why the struggle was worth while, why he had determined to use to the utmost himself and his heritage from the personalities he had passed..... *He stretched out his arms to the crystalline, radiant sky.*

*‘I know myself,’ he cried, ‘but that is all.’*¹²⁾ (Italics mine)

This romantic ending of the novel is one of the essentials in Fitzgerald’s literature. In other words, *This Side of Paradise* can be said the important novel for the new

generation, that is, the generation which had grown up to find "all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken." In this respect, the truth is that *This Side of Paradise* announces the 'Lost Generation'. At the end of the novel, the hero Amory must step on the path of his life full of sadness and disillusion, keeping 'lost youth' to himself and also hoping against hope. In the long run, it seemed to Amory that life was, as M. Hindus says, "a meaningless trajectory between nothingness and nothingness."¹³ In other words, in this restless generation, life was a cheat and also youth is an enchanted time, and accordingly traditional standards and categories for judgement and belief were denied by the new generation. Amory examines older American traditions which have had mythic proportions and finally rejects them in favor of a pragmatic modern philosophy.

In the next place, I'll discuss *The Beautiful and Damned*, which consists of three parts. The hero Anthony Patch, richly endowed on every side like Amory Blaine, lives aimlessly through the meaningless life. Dirt-disease-decay imagery powerfully supports *The Beautiful and Damned's* theme—life is bleak, meaningless. Ironically, the single most important reason the Patches viewed existence as meaningless is that Anthony and Gloria found the natural processes of life dirty and repugnant. The justification for his extravagant way of life is his philosophy that 'life is meaningless', yet he is aware that the possession of sufficient wealth makes it possible. Anthony dislikes his grandfather, Adam Patch, who turned social reformer seeks to suppress liquor, literature, art, and Sunday theatres, representing the Victorian morality and conventions against which youth is in revolt.

His beautiful wife Gloria Gilbert, who is a flapper like other heroines of Fitzgerald's novels, is devoted to a life of idleness and the proposition that life is meaningless, and accordingly her single matter of concern is with her own youth and eternal beauty. Gloria in New York returns to her flapper-style life which gives her a renewed vision of herself in society. Throughout the novel there is a slow decay of morality, a dissipation of energy and money. In frantic pursuit of happiness Anthony and Gloria spend their wealth and youth extravagantly, live aimlessly, and expend themselves recklessly, and for this reason they hold the meaningless parties, one after another. The climax is reached when Grandfather Patch unexpectedly visits their apartment house while they are holding a wild party. Outraged by their drunken attitudes, he cuts Anthony out of his economic support, and for this reason Anthony contests the human spirit, but suffers a complete mental bankruptcy, and finally they attain a degree of selfknowledge at the end of the novel.

Thus in *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald vividly depicted the agony of Anthony under the waste land of the Jazz Age in America. Anthony is clearly a lonely quester in an American city which has become a wasteland of sterile values. Anthony cannot endure the recognition of restlessness, living in the generation of restlessness, and wishes to get the peace of living by doing nothing but by escaping from it. Anthony and Gloria, who lived in the First World War and the postwar time and society, made up a new illusion in their hearts instead of avoiding the restlessness to cling to the certainty. It was an intangible shadow of restlessness and solitude flowing at the bottom of the Jazz Age that Anthony tried to wipe away. In this connection, the meaningless view of life is perceived in the conversation between three men :

Maury : I know—with intellectual lyrics that no one will listen to. And all the critics will groan and grunt about ‘Dear old Pinafore’. And *I shall go on shining as a brilliantly meaningless figure in a meaningless world.*

Dick (pompously) : *Art isn’t meaningless.*

Maury : It is in itself. It isn’t in that it tries to make life less so.

Anthony : In other words, Dick, you’re playing before a grandstand peopled with ghosts.

Maury : Give a good show any how.

Anthony (to Maury) : On the contrary, *I’d feel that it being a meaningless world, why write? The very attempt to give it purpose is purposeless.*¹⁴⁾ (Italics mine)

Therefore, under such a meaningless modern society Anthony wanted to cling to the party, and on the other hand, Gloria did to cling to her eternal youth and beauty. The meaningless was the illusion which Anthony believed as the most certain thing. The tragedy and disillusion are always promised for those who believed the illusion. They had the ‘damned destiny’ on their back ever since they believed the illusions. In other words, they are damned because they dedicate their youth to falsity : Gloria cannot reconcile herself with the loss of her beauty, and Anthony clings perversely to the empty illusion that these qualities are unchanging.

Anthony and Gloria felt in their youth that life was meaningless. In this respect, as Edmund Wilson says, it is evident that Fitzgerald, in *This Side of Paradise*, tried to discover “a meaning in life”, while in *The Beautiful and Damned*, he felt “the meaninglessness of life”¹⁵⁾. This attitude emerges clearly in a conversation as follows :

‘*There’s only one lesson to be learned from life, anyway,*’ interrupted Gloria, not in

contradiction but in a sort of melancholy agreement.

'What's that?' demanded Maury sharply.

'That there's no lesson to be learned from life.'

After a short silence Maury said :

'Young Gloria, the beautiful and merciless lady, *first looked at the world with the fundamental sophistication* I have struggled to attain, that Anthony never will attain, that Dick will never fully understand.'¹⁶⁾ (Italics mine)

Youth of Anthony and Gloria has been lost ever since they believed that life is meaningless. In fact, as Robert Sklar says, *The Beautiful and Damned* "might as well be about the 'Stone Age' as the 'Jazz Age'."¹⁷⁾ In the mental aspect, Anthony and Gloria lived in the Stone Age of America. Sailing on the sea toward what he naively assumes will be a new life, Anthony is a broken old man muttering to himself. To win the hollowest of victories, he has devastated himself. At the conclusion of this novel Fitzgerald describes as follows :

Only a few months before people had been urging him (Anthony) to give in, to submit mediocrity, to go to work. But he had known that he was justified in his way of life—and he had struck it out staunchly. Why, the very friends who had been most unkind had come to respect him, to know he had been right all along. Had not the Lacys and the Merediths and the Cartwright-Smiths called on Gloria and him at the Ritz-Carlton just a week before they sailed?

Great tears stood in his eyes, and his voice was tremulous as he whispered to himself.

*'I showed them,' he was saying. 'It was a hard fight, but didn't give up and I came through!'*¹⁸⁾ (Italics mine)

At the end of the novel, this sad young Anthony regards his lost youth as a road to the triumph of a hard fight. As for Anthony, living on the lost paradise was a very strict ordeal to transcend 'the meaninglessness of life'. A major theme in *The Beautiful and Damned* is that life is meaningless.

CONCLUSION

Thus Fitzgerald, figuratively speaking, painted vividly the portrayal of the lost paradise of the Twenties in America as an imaginative young artist through *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*. However, Fitzgerald's heroes, both Amory

and Anthony, live in the world of illusions, and at the ends of the two novels, they awake clearly from their illusions and taste the bitterness of corrupt reality in the Jazz Age of America.

NOTES

- 1) Richard D. Lehan, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Works* (Forum House, 1969), p.171.
- 2) *Ibid.*, pp.49-50.
- 3) Milton Hindus, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York, Brandeis University, 1967), p.23.
- 4) Richard D. Lehan, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Works*, p.54.
- 5) Rose Adrienne Gallo, *F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978), p.4.
- 6) Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography*, New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962, p.141.
- 7) *This Side of Paradise*, p.236.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p.245.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p.253.
- 10) K. G. W. Cross, *Scott Fitzgerald* (Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and Kondon, 1964), p.21.
- 11) *This Side of Paradise*, p.254.
- 12) *Ibid.*, p.254.
- 13) Milton hindus, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: An Introduction and Interpretation*, p.23.
- 14) *The Beautiful and Damned*, p.211.
- 15) Edmund Wilson, "The Literary Spotlight: F. Scott Fitzgerald," *The Bookman*, LV (March, 1922), p.364.
- 16) *The Beautiful and Damned*, p.211.
- 17) Robert Skalar, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Last Laocöon* (Oxford University Press, 1967), p.99.
- 18) *The Beautiful and Damned*, p.364.

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