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F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Born: St. Paul, Minnesota; September 24, 1896

Died: Hollywood, California; December 21, 1940

An outstanding stylist and acute social observer, Fitzgerald captured the essence of American life between World War I and World War II.

BIOGRAPHY

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, one of the most talented of American writers, was born on September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota. His father, Edward, was unsuccessful in a variety of enterprises and the family moved numerous times until Fitzgerald's mother inherited sufficient money for them to settle in one of the more exclusive neighborhoods of St. Paul. Even as a young boy, Fitzgerald was acutely aware that his mother, rather than his father, provided the financial foundation of the family. It was a situation—a wife's inherited money—that was to recur frequently in his writing.

In 1911, Fitzgerald entered Newman School, a Catholic institution in Hackensack, New Jersey. It was there that he decided upon Princeton University as the ideal college, thus beginning one strand that would run throughout his writing, especially in his earlier works and his popular first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), with its collegiate setting.

It was also at Newman that Fitzgerald met and was encouraged in his literary ambitions by Father Sigourney Fay, a priest who became one of the most important influences upon Fitzgerald's development. Father Fay strengthened the

young Fitzgerald's sense of a noble character as an essential element in achieving high goals—and of the accompanying dangers of anything that would weaken that character, disrupt its resolve, or corrupt its nature: the lure of unearned wealth, sins of the flesh, moral weakness. These beliefs were woven deep into Fitzgerald's psyche and found repeated, perhaps obsessive, expression in his fiction.

After he entered Princeton in the fall of 1913, Fitzgerald was active in the literary and social activities of the college; he was a talented and frequent contributor to the shows of the Triangle Club and the literary magazines. Perhaps as a result, his grades were marginal at best, causing him to drop out for a semester during his junior year, returning to Princeton a year behind his classmates.

By then another goal had presented itself: With the entry of the United States into World War I, Fitzgerald had determined to join the Army. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in October 1917. He started the first draft of a novel provisionally titled "The Romantic Egotist," which greatly reworked, would become *This Side of Paradise*. In June, 1918, Fitzgerald was transferred to Camp Sheridan near Montgomery, Alabama, where he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, a southern beauty. Fitzgerald received orders for Europe, but the war ended before he sailed for France.

His engagement with Zelda flickered on and off while Fitzgerald was discharged from the Army; he worked briefly in advertising in New York, sold his first commercial short stories, and continued with his novel. In September, 1919, *This Side of Paradise* was accepted by Scribner's; the editor who made

the decision, Maxwell Perkins, was one of the most discerning and influential figures in publishing during the period, and he was to have a close professional association with Fitzgerald for many years. Fitzgerald also began publishing short stories in *The Saturday Evening Post*, one of the most popular and highly paying magazines of the time. Now a success, Fitzgerald married Zelda in New York City on April 3, 1920.

Scribner's had published *This Side of Paradise* the month before, and the novel was an immediate success making its twenty-three-year-old author a critical and commercial success. Later in 1920, Fitzgerald's first collection of short stories, *Flappers and Philosophers*, was also published. Young, wealthy and in love, the Fitzgeralds lived well on their income during a period when the United States was shaking free the past and entering a period later to be known as the Jazz Age. F. Scott Fitzgerald was its chronicler: His second collection of stories, published in 1922, was titled *Tales of the Jazz Age*.

Residing in a succession of rented houses, traveling to Europe, living the good life, and beginning to drink perhaps more than he should, Fitzgerald still found time to write. His second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, came out in 1922, and he tried a play, *The Vegetable: Or, From President to Postman* which was unsuccessful; it closed at its tryout in Atlantic City in November, 1923. Undeterred, he began work on his third, and probably most important novel, *The Great Gatsby*, which was published in 1925, bringing its author the best critical reception he received during his lifetime.

The Fitzgeralds continued to travel, often living for months at a time in Europe, where they associated with literary figures such as Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce. Perhaps because of his drinking perhaps because of his wife's deteriorating mental and emotional health, Fitzgerald practically abandoned the novel to concentrate on short stories. While among these were some masterpieces there are many that were written quickly (although well) for money. In a sense, Fitzgerald was succumbing to the temptations against which Father Fay had warned him earlier in his life.

In April, 1930, Zelda Fitzgerald had her first serious mental breakdown. She was placed in a Swiss clinic, and it was not until September, 1931, that the couple returned to the United States. Zelda's

condition did not improve; in early 1932, she went into a clinic of the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In the meantime, Fitzgerald had turned this stuff of personal tragedy into the material for art and his fourth novel, *Tender Is the Night*, which concerned a mental patient and her doctor husband was published in April, 1934. It met with a mixed reception and Fitzgerald continued his slide into alcoholism while Zelda was moved from clinic to clinic.

Although Fitzgerald had been successful as a novelist and was one of the most highly paid short-story writers of the time, the couple's expensive lifestyle and the costs of Zelda's care had plunged them deeply into debt. In the summer of 1937, Fitzgerald took a course that was often, if reluctantly followed by serious authors of his time: He went to Hollywood as a screenwriter. He was not a success in that medium, but he did begin work on another novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941), which used the motion-picture world, modern America's greatest example of the power of illusion, as its theme. He was working on the novel when he died on December 21, 1940, of a heart attack. Eight years later, after dying in a fire that destroyed the North Carolina clinic where she was staying, Zelda Fitzgerald was buried beside her husband.

ANALYSIS

In one of the most haunting passages of *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator, Nick Carraway, sees his mysterious neighbor perform a strange ritual:

[H]e stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness.

What *Gatsby* is trying to do in the novel, literally as well as symbolically, is reach out to recapture the past. For *Gatsby*, that past is embodied in Daisy Buchanan the woman he loved as a young lieutenant while stationed in her hometown in the South. He loves her still and, as a rich man, hopes to regain her and in doing so recapture his youthful dreams and promise.

It is a scene and a dream that runs throughout Fitzgerald's fiction. All of his heroes carry that sense of the lost past, of misspent promise. They are outsiders in some form or other—usually because they come from the lower or middle class—and they are further set apart because of the high goals and exacting standards they have set for themselves. From Amory Blame, in Fitzgerald's first novel, through Monroe Stahr, in his last, left unfinished at the time of his death, Fitzgerald created protagonists who aspired to be larger than life but who were destroyed by the commonplace existence they sought to rise above.

In a sense, these fictional characters have many of the attributes of their author; in particular, they share with him a keen sense of morality and destiny that applies particularly to them. When they fail betrayed by human lapses into drink or by the dark promise of sex, they find themselves on a downward spiral, often overindulging in the failings that distracted them initially. Their tragedies are largely self-made, as they become victims of their own romantic moralism.

This romantic moralism is especially painful in the relationships between men and women. A love which begins as strengthening, almost magical in its nature, turns out badly; the woman is frequently the agent of the hero's downfall. Anthony Patch, in *The Beautiful and Damned*, sinks into dissipation after his marriage to Gloria Gilbert. Dick Diver, the brilliant and promising young psychiatrist in *Tender Is the Night*, is undermined personally and professionally when he marries his patient, the heiress Nicole Warren. Most notably of all, Jay Gatsby is destroyed because of his love for Daisy: shot dead in his own swimming pool at the end of a series of sordid and entangling events that never would have occurred without Gatsby's obsessed pursuit of her.

The style in which these tragedies are told is one of the most famous in American literature: a brilliant sensuous, lyrical prose that re-creates for the reader the sense of emotional ecstasy and despair felt by the Fitzgerald character. As he developed as a writer, Fitzgerald's style gained in strength and clarity, dropping much of its earlier, self-conscious rhetoric but retaining its beauty, until it became a powerful and supple instrument that captured both particular insights and wide-ranging social observations.

Perhaps because Fitzgerald felt so keenly his own role as an outsider, he had a sharp and most perceptive view of American social mores. A large part of the power—and a cause for the immediate success—of *This Side of Paradise* was its fresh, vivid portrayal of college life, presenting it in a more realistic fashion than had been done before. Whether etching the characters of heedless expatriates on the French Riviera, giving sharp, thumbnail portraits of New York gangsters, or presenting the excesses of the irresponsibly rich during the jazz age, Fitzgerald was a master of creating accurate indelible images of American life—what they wore, drove, drank, and sang—during his time. His writings are a social history of the first rank.

These were the qualities which won for Fitzgerald success early in his career and which, for a while, made him the most popular and highly paid writer of his day. He was especially gifted in the short-story form, finding it particularly suited to his skills in crafting characters who have come to a point of crisis in their lives, a crisis that requires them to make a choice that will, almost inevitably destroy their youthful dreams. The best of these stories, such as "The Rich Boy," "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," or "Babylon Revisited," are recognized as authentic masterpieces.

All Fitzgerald's writings come, sooner or later, to the themes which he explored throughout his career: early promise betrayed, the romantic hero broken by the indifferent world, love lost, and the impossibility of recapturing the past. These are themes woven deep into the American mind as well, and in pursuing them Fitzgerald is perhaps the most "American" author in the literature of the United States.

In the end, that dual sense of promise and loss, innocence and fall, is Fitzgerald's characteristic tone. It sounds strongest in *The Great Gatsby*:

I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby, like Fitzgerald's other heroes, is ignorant of his loss until the realization of it destroys him. The message of F. Scott Fitzgerald is that knowledge is tragedy but that such tragedy summons forth true greatness.

THIS SIDE OF PARADISE

First published: 1920

Type of work: Novel

The intellectual and moral development of Amory Blame is described, from his pampered childhood to his early manhood.

This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald's first novel, made him an enormously successful popular author when he was only twenty-three years old. The combination of romanticism and realism, mingled with a fresh and—for the time—sometimes startling depiction of college life, caught the attention of the reading public and made the novel representative of an entire generation.

This Side of Paradise is loose and episodic, a collection of vivid scenes which do not fuse into a wellstructured novel. It is divided into two sections: "The Romantic Egotist" (the title of the novel's first draft) and "The Education of a Personage."

The first takes Amory Blame from his childhood through his years at Princeton University and concerns his intellectual and moral development.

Convinced that he has a great, if obscure, destiny Amory is greatly influenced by a Catholic priest, Father Darcy, who awakens him to the reality and power of evil. Darcy is based upon Father Sigourney Fay, who exerted a comparable influence on Fitzgerald. In the novel, this moral and spiritual education is dramatized by incidents that appear supernatural, as when Amory is pursued by a diabolic figure through the streets of New York. Perhaps a remnant of Father Fay's moralism, the sense of sin and the power of sex are mixed in Amory's mind in an inextricable, if often confusing fashion.

The second section is restricted to one year 1919, and concentrates on Amory's character de-

velopment which it traces by following his adventures after service in World War I. As Fitzgerald had no experience of combat, he wisely omitted any actual description of Amory in the conflict. In book 2, Amory's courtship of Rosalind Conrage is ended after the sudden loss of his family fortune. Having weathered this traumatic event, Amory undergoes another supernatural experience, involving the death of Father Darcy and again related to his confused feelings about sex, sin, and morality. Yet the death of Father Darcy frees Amory, in a sense, and at the end of the novel he gazes on the lights of Princeton and vows to begin his real search for his unknown but surely glorious destiny.

Readers responded to several different aspects of *This Side of Paradise*. It was one of the first novels to use the college setting in a realistic way—as opposed to the simplistic "Dink Stover at Yale" genre—and, although later generations were to see it as sentimental, even naïve, Fitzgerald's contemporaries were treated to a fresh and innovative point of view concerning the young. His scenes of college life, enticing to younger readers, were even thought shocking by some—including the president of Princeton, John Grier Hibben, who wrote Fitzgerald an aggrieved letter.

Hibben was troubled that *This Side of Paradise* seemed to emphasize the facile and superficial aspects of Princeton life. On the other hand, it should be noted that Fitzgerald's novel is highly concerned with the development of Amory Blame's intellect. A recurrent theme in *This Side of Paradise* is the importance of reading in forming character: One critic has counted sixty-four book titles and the names of ninety-eight authors in the novel. In this concern with its hero's intellectual growth, *This Side of Paradise* is very similar to another influential novel of the period, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Both books startled many by their blend of the mental and physical desires of their protagonists, including what was, for the times, a frank approach to sexual awakening.

Also startling to many readers, long accustomed to conventional portraits of women, were the manners and actions of Fitzgerald's women characters. Such young women as Eleanor Savage, a heedless and self-indulgent romantic, for example, were far removed from conventional

morality. Actually, this realistic aspect of the novel fit quite well with the highly moral, even religious, sentiments of Amory Blame concerning sex, by underscoring the dangerous power of physical desires.

The style of the novel, remarked upon by many critics, remains its most distinguishing feature. Although *This Side of Paradise* is in many passages highly rhetorical, even excessively so, it contains the essential qualities of Fitzgerald's writing: the precise social observation aptly rendered, the flowing rhythmic passages, and the presentation of abstract ideals embodied in specific individuals. In his later books and stories, Fitzgerald refined and developed these attributes, but they are clearly present from the start of his career.

THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED

First published: 1922

Type of work: Novel

The moral characters of a young couple disintegrate as they wait to inherit a vast fortune.

The Beautiful and Damned, Fitzgerald's second novel, follows the decline—fiscal, physical, and moral—of Anthony and Gloria Patch. Like so many of Fitzgerald's figures, the Patches are destroyed by great wealth; the irony in this novel is that they are undone not by the possession of money but merely by expecting it.

Anthony, the only heir of his wealthy grandfather Adam Patch, is a young Harvard University graduate who lives on money left by his father and disdains work because he believes nothing is equal to his supposed abilities. He marries the beautiful Gloria Gilbert, and they sink into a pointless and destructive life, squandering their income in an endless round of parties and extravagant expenses. When Grandfather, an inflexible and intolerant reformer walks in unexpectedly on one their ginsoaked parties, he writes Anthony out of his will. Following his death, the Patches must sue to claim the inheritance which lured them into destruction. At novel's end, they triumph, but

the cost has been high: Gloria's beauty has been coarsened, and Anthony's mind snapped by worry and drink.

Anthony and Gloria are selfish, self-indulgent characters who begin the novel with some perverse appeal but quickly deteriorate under the influence of greed, excess, and alcohol. As they move through their pointless round of pleasures, they demand wilder and stronger stimulation, but this only contributes to their downward spiral. Rejected as officer material when the United States enters World War I, Anthony is later drafted and while on training in the South, has an affair. In the meantime, Gloria fails to win the film role she covets, which had been offered to her by a former admirer. All in all the aptly named Patches made-shreds of their lives.

A strong sense of moralism runs through all Fitzgerald's works, and in *The Beautiful and Damned* it is married to the sophisticated, modern style of *This Side of Paradise*. The two elements are not cleanly fused, and this causes difficulties with the novel chiefly with the view Fitzgerald takes of the main characters. The third-person narrator veers between bemused appreciation of Anthony and Gloria as unapologetic hedonists and hardly veiled disapproval of their waste of talent and lives. In the earlier portions of the book, Fitzgerald seems to have some sort of respect for the code the Patches have adopted for themselves, but as their lives and code cheapen, the tone of the book becomes harsher. It seems that even dissipation has its standards.

As with most of Fitzgerald's writings, *The Beautiful and Damned* has many autobiographical elements. Quite a few of the pleasure-seeking, care-free antics of Anthony and Gloria—at least in the earlier sections of the novel—are based on escapades of Fitzgerald and his wife. In the second portion of the novel, Anthony is stationed in the South and has a love affair with a local woman; this echoes Fitzgerald's history, but with significant exceptions. Fitzgerald was an officer, while Anthony Patch is an enlisted man; Dot, Anthony's lover, is a common sort of woman, quite unlike the aristocratic Zelda. Most notably, Anthony and Dot have a simple but sordid relationship, unlike the romantic passion of which Fitzgerald and Zelda believed themselves to be the central characters.

Although *The Beautiful and Damned* is a more structured and planned book than *This Side of Paradise*, it still shows Fitzgerald as a writer learning the difficult skills of crafting a novel. Too often uncertain and wavering in its tone and point of view overwritten in many of its descriptive passages, the book is redeemed by the power of its depiction of the deterioration of the Patches, who emerge for the reader as flawed but vividly memorable characters.

THE GREAT GATSBY

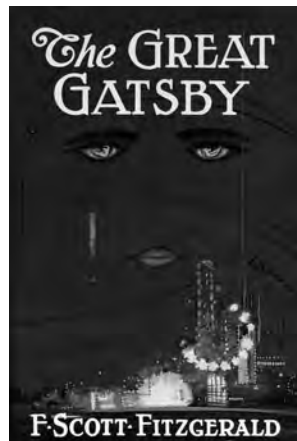
First published: 1925

Type of work: Novel

Seeking to recapture his lost early love and all that she symbolizes, a man is destroyed.

The Great Gatsby is Fitzgerald's finest novel, an almost perfect artistic creation which is perhaps the single most American novel of its time. It should be seen as the ultimate vehicle for the themes that form the central concerns of Fitzgerald's career and indeed of so much of the United States' national life: lost hope, the corruption of innocence by money, and the impossibility of recapturing the past. These elements are fused together by Fitzgerald's eloquent yet careful prose in a novel that transcends its period and has become a touchstone of American literature.

Nick Carraway, the first-person narrator of the novel, lives on Long Island, New York, next door to the enormous mansion of a mysterious man named Gatsby, who throws gaudy, glittering parties. Wild, improbable rumors circulate about Gatsby, but when Nick meets him, he finds himself charmed and intrigued. He learns



that Gatsby is in love with Nick's cousin, Daisy Buchanan, whom Gatsby met while stationed in her hometown in the South during World War I. Gatsby seeks to rekindle that earlier love in Daisy, now married to a coarse brutal husband, Tom. The effort fails, and Gatsby becomes entangled in the lives of the Buchanans and is killed, shot by the confused and grieving husband of Tom's mistress. Gatsby's glowing dream ends in sordid confusion.

In this novel Fitzgerald relies on a narrative technique that he clearly learned from the works of the English writer Joseph Conrad: He gradually unveils Gatsby's story as Nick pieces it together a bit at a time. Each chapter allows Nick, and the reader more insight into Gatsby's past and his true character. The facts are sifted from rumors and speculation until Jay Gatsby (born Gatz) is revealed as a flawed, but still great, hero.

Like so many of Fitzgerald's heroes, Gatsby is a romantic, a man who began with a high, even exalted vision of himself and his destiny. He aspires to greatness, which he associates with Daisy. If he can win her, then he will have somehow achieved his goal. Gatsby's wealth, his mansion, his parties his possessions, even his heroism in battle are but means to achieve his ultimate end. Gatsby is mistaken however, in his belief that money can buy happiness or that he can recapture his past. His story is clearly a version of the traditional American myth, poor boy makes good, but is it a distorted version or an accurate one? Fitzgerald leaves this ambiguity unresolved, which adds to the power of his novel.

As a romantic, Jay Gatsby does not understand how money actually works in American life. He believes that if he is rich, then Daisy can be his. This is displayed most powerfully and poignantly in the scene where Gatsby shows Daisy and Nick the shirts he has tailored for him in London: He hauls them out in a rainbow of color and fabric, almost filling the room with the tangible yet useless symbols of his wealth. The shirts cause Daisy to cry, but they do not win her; they cannot let Gatsby realize his dream.

Gatsby has amassed his money by dealings with gangsters, yet he remains an innocent figure—he is a romantic, in other words. Ironically, Daisy Buchanan his great love, is a much more realistic hard-headed character. She understands money

and what it means in American society, because it is her nature; she was born into it. Gatsby intuitively recognizes this, although he cannot fully accept it when he remarks to Nick that Daisy's voice "is full of money." Even so, Gatsby will not admit this essential fact because it would destroy his conception of Daisy. In the end, this willful blindness helps lead to his destruction.

Actually, both Gatsby and Daisy are incapable of seeing the whole of reality, as he is a romantic and she, a cynic. This conflict is found in the other characters of the novel as well and is a key to *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald uses a variety of symbolic scenes and images to express the blindness that the characters impose upon themselves. Gatsby's ostentatious material possessions are aspects of illusion. So is the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, the light that Gatsby gazes upon but cannot reach.

Other symbolic touches illuminate the book: the ash heaps which litter the landscape between Long Island and New York, for example, or the eyes of Doctor Eccleberg, found on a billboard dominating the valley of the ash heaps. The ash heaps are a reference to the vanity of life (and a nod at T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, published in 1922) and the eyes a comment on the blindness of the book's characters, who do not fully understand what they behold.

While such devices add to the depth of *The Great Gatsby*, its true power derives from it being a quintessentially American novel, full of American characters and American themes. Nick Carraway the midwestern narrator, encounters the sophistication of the East: New York, gangsters, the promise and hollowness of wealth. Tom and Daisy Buchanan insulated by their money, do what they want without consequence, showing no remorse for their actions and no concern for those they have harmed. Jay Gatsby, like the hero in a story by Horatio Alger, rises from being a penniless youth through ambition and good fortune, only to discover that his wealth cannot buy what he most desires—and is, in fact, the very agent of his destruction. They are all American characters in an American setting.

Fitzgerald's skill as a novelist was at its peak with *The Great Gatsby*, and this is shown best in his command of the book's structure. By using Nick Carraway as the first-person narrator, Fitzgerald

establishes a central focus for the novel, a character who is partly involved with the plot but partly a commentator upon it. Nick is presented as an honest reliable person, and his perceptions and judgments are accepted by the reader. Nick ties the novel together and through him it makes sense. Most important Nick's solid, midwestern common sense validates Gatsby as a character despite Gatsby's outrageous background and fabulous adventures. In the end, if Nick Carraway accepts Gatsby and approves of him—and he does—so does the reader.

Nick's approval is what allows Gatsby to be called "great," but his greatness has a curious, puzzling quality to it, as it cannot be easily or completely defined. Gatsby certainly lacks many of the qualities and fails many of the tests normally associated with greatness, but he redeems this by his exalted conception of himself. It is to this romantic image of Gatsby that both Nick and the reader respond.

TENDER IS THE NIGHT

First published: 1934

Type of work: Novel

The career and character of a brilliant young psychiatrist are undermined by wealth and an irresponsible lifestyle.

Nine years elapsed between the publication of *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night*, and during that time Fitzgerald worked on his fourth novel in several stages, completing the final version in about a year. It is an ambitious novel, a multilayered work which charts the moral and psychological decline of Dick Diver, a young and promising American psychiatrist, set against the background of American expatriates in Europe during the 1920's. In a sense, Fitzgerald is tracing two parallel cases of decay—an individual's and a generation's.

Tender Is the Night is divided into three books and covers the years 1925 through 1929. Dick and Nicole Diver are at the center of an amusing circle of friends, including the alcoholic composer

Abe North, who has never fulfilled his early promise and the sinister mercenary Tommy Barban, who is in love with Nicole. Through a flashback, Fitzgerald reveals that Nicole was originally Dick's patient placed in his care after being traumatized by being raped by her father.

It is an essential part of Dick Diver's personality to feel loved and needed, and this causes him to marry Nicole. The dual pressures of being Nicole's husband and her doctor, combined with the lure of Nicole's inherited fortune, undermine Dick's dedication to his work. Using Nicole's money, Dick becomes partner in a psychiatric clinic in the Swiss Alps but is unable to concentrate on his duties. In the meantime, the master treatise that he has long planned goes unwritten, and he sinks deeper into pointless and frenzied activity, fueled by alcohol.

As his career sinks further into decline, Dick reaches bottom, symbolized by a drunken brawl and arrest in Rome. The Divers return to the Riviera the scene of their earlier triumphs, but to no avail: Nicole leaves Dick for Tommy Barban, and Dick returns to the United States, losing himself in obscurity as an unsuccessful doctor, wandering from town to small town.

In *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald returns to the technique he employed so successfully in *The Great Gatsby*, that of gradually revealing the full nature of his characters—in this case, by the use of flashbacks. This allows the reader to become almost a participant in creating the novel, building the characters while reading. The method does have one drawback, as some critics have noted, in that it makes the deterioration of Dick Diver difficult to understand and accept. It requires careful reading to discern that the flaw in Dick's character is his desire—almost a compulsion—to be loved and needed. It is this that draws him into his fatal relationship with Nicole.

Dick's decline occurs on two levels, personal and professional, and both are directly connected with his wife. Nicole had originally been his patient a deeply disturbed young woman whose personality was fragile and whose grasp of reality was uncertain. As the novel progresses, Nicole grows stronger psychologically and more distant from Dick emotionally. As his wife comes to depend upon him less, Dick loses his purpose. He begins to drink more—and more irresponsibly. He has

an affair with a young American actress, less out of physical desire than from the need to find someone who depends upon him and will admire him, as Nicole had done. His once-promising professional career also fades, and the important book that he had planned to write is never finished. The clinic bought with Nicole's money, slips out of his control and he must let it go. He ends up a failure, no longer respected (or even known) by his peers.

This trajectory follows a pattern familiar in Fitzgerald's works. A hero with a high conception of his potential is diverted from his original purpose and wastes his gifts. The growing realization that he is squandering his talents only hastens the process and causes the downward slide to accelerate. Alcohol and unearned money are essential elements in the collapse, and although they do not cause the hero's fall, they certainly speed it along.

This pattern shows Fitzgerald's romantic moralism which flows through all of his novels. Women in particular women with inherited money, are often agents of moral destruction, diverting the hero from his goals. Without Nicole's wealth, Dick Diver is an acute and resourceful psychiatrist, skillful and capable in exploring the human mind. When his wife's fortune takes hold, Dick loses his vision, literally becoming incapable of understanding the psychology of people, including himself. Once a diver into the mind, as his symbolic name indicates, he has gotten out of his depth.

An ambitious and sensitive novel, *Tender Is the Night* has a keen sense of character, especially for the two main figures. The structure of the book which moves back and forth in time, and the way in which Fitzgerald gradually reveals important information however, have been confusing to some readers. Some critics have believed that these are damaging flaws and that a more straightforward chronological approach would have been better. Fitzgerald himself considered this possibility after the novel was published, even reworking it for reissue in a revised form. Still, given the complex theme and psychological aspects of the work, the original presentation is undoubtedly the more appropriate. *Tender Is the Night* is a complex novel because the human mind and heart are themselves complex, complicated, and mysterious.

“THE DIAMOND AS BIG AS THE RITZ”

First published: 1922 (collected in *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 1989)

Type of work: Short story

A young man falls in love with the daughter of the world's richest man and is nearly destroyed.

“The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” is Fitzgerald’s most successful fantasy story, a genre in which he worked mainly during the early phase of his career. While it contains what might be read as a happy ending, the story carries many of the tragic elements inherent in Fitzgerald’s most enduring theme: how a young man is destroyed by the wealth of the woman he loves.

The plot of “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” is relatively simple. John T. Unger, a young man from the small midwestern town of Hades, is sent by his ambitious parents to the exclusive eastern school of St. Midas. There he makes friends with Percy Washington and is invited to spend the summer at the Washington estate in the far West. Unger learns that the Washingtons are literally the richest family in the world, because they own a flawless diamond that is as large as the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. There is also a darker side to this fortune: To protect it, the Washingtons have made their estate a fortress completely isolated from the outside world, and intruders are held captive in a giant cage.

While in this strange combination of luxury and prison, Unger meets and falls in love with Kismine Percy’s sixteen-year-old sister. From Kismine Unger learns that all invited visitors to the Washington estate are murdered before they can leave. As Unger and Kismine flee, the place is attacked by airplanes, led there by one of the prisoners who managed to escape. The fabulous estate is destroyed as Unger and Kismine discover they have fled with worthless rhinestones instead of diamonds they are free but penniless.

“The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” is a story full of symbolic and allegorical touches, many of them dealing with the soul-destroying potential of wealth. The hero, named Unger, is avid for more than his hometown can offer, and he seems to

find it in Kismine Washington: young, beautiful, and heiress to a great fortune. The Washington fortune has become a prison for the family, however: They are isolated from the world, guarded by blacks who have been tricked into believing that slavery still exists. There is an obvious parallel between the two kinds of bondage, a parallel ironically emphasized by the family name of Washington, so closely associated with American freedom.

Wealth is also destructive in a religious sense. The train that carries Unger and Percy stops at the town of Fish, which has a population of only twelve men, who await the arrival of the train as a mystical event directed by the “Great Brakeman.” (The fish was an early Christian symbol for Jesus, who urged his followers to renounce wealth, often in extremely pointed terms.) Yet these twelve have no real belief: By mere proximity to the Washingtons, these counterparts to the twelve Apostles have been drained of all faith.

Even more emphatic are the baneful effects of incalculable wealth on the family. Their land is literally nowhere, as they have taken extraordinary measures to keep it off even official government maps. To protect their secret, the Washingtons are ready to perpetuate slavery, imprison the innocent and even commit murder, including fratricide. When the estate is about to be overrun, Percy’s father offers a bribe to God—an enormous gem backed by promises of human sacrifice—and then destroys his estate himself, rather than submit.

These various elements, which do not quite fit together in a consistently coherent fashion, are united by Fitzgerald’s use of both fantasy and realistic descriptions, which allow the reader to accept the fairy-tale premises of the story. In a sense, “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” is a magical counterpart to the more realistic *The Great Gatsby*, and the two explore many of the same themes and concerns.

“THE LAST OF THE BELLES”

First published: 1929 (collected in *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 1989)

Type of work: Short story

A romantic young Army lieutenant and a southern belle learn that dreams are destroyed by time.

“The Last of the Belles” combines autobiographical elements of Fitzgerald’s courtship of Zelda Sayre and his theme of the lost dreams of youthful promise. Beautiful, blond, and vivacious, Ailie Calhoun captivates all the young officers who meet her in the small Georgia town of Tarleton, where they are in training for World War I. Many pursue her, including the narrator, Andy, and one young man may even have killed himself in a plane crash because of her. Ailie is perversely attracted to—and at the same time repelled by—Earl Schoen, an uncouth Yankee who is alien to everything she has known. In the end, she rejects all her beaux but is herself rejected by time and the modern world which leaves her as the last of the traditional southern belles, a memory of what was once youthful and applauded.

The tone of the story is wistful and elegiac. All the events are in the past, which heightens the sense of lost opportunity and gives added emphasis to the connections between Fitzgerald’s own life and the fictional work. At the end of the story Andy returns to Tarleton and, with Ailie, revisits the now desolate site of the abandoned Army camp. Andy wanders there, “in the knee-deep underbrush looking for my youth in a clapboard or a strip of roofing or a rusty tomato can,” another of Fitzgerald’s heroes wondering what became of his youthful dreams and promise.

“BABYLON REVISITED”

First published: 1931 (collected in *Babylon Revisited, and Other Stories*, 1960)

Type of work: Short story

A reformed alcoholic tries to regain his daughter and start life anew, but his efforts are undermined by his past.

Charlie Wales, the central character of “Babylon Revisited,” is a man who lived high and wildly in Paris during the late 1920’s and then lost everything with the Great Depression, including his wife and daughter. After the death of his wife—perhaps hastened when, in a drunken rage, he locked her out of their apartment during a

snowstorm—Charlie had given guardianship of his daughter Honoria, to his sister-in-law.

When the story opens, Charlie has returned to Paris to regain Honoria. Just when it seems he has convinced his suspicious relatives that he is indeed reformed, Charlie has his hopes dashed by the unexpected and disastrous arrival of two drinking companions from the bad old days. At the story’s end Charlie maintains his sobriety, determined to continue in his attempts to regain his daughter.

Once again, Fitzgerald’s theme is the waste of promise, fueled by the harmful effects of alcoholic indulgence. In this story, the theme is made explicit as Charlie comes to realize the meaning of the word “dissipate”: “to dissipate into thin air; to make nothing out of something.” Paris, the place where this wasting has taken place, is for Charlie a Babylon, a city of wasting—not only materially but morally and spiritually as well. Wales has repaired some of the effects of that dissipation—he has partially restored his finances and is once again sober—but the story ends with both Charlie and the reader uncertain if the most tragic loss can be restored and father and daughter reunited.

The character of Charlie Wales is an important part of “Babylon Revisited,” because he is believable and sympathetic, a fully rounded individual who is presented through suggestion and inference dialogue and reference. As the story moves in and out of Charlie’s present and past, the reader comes to understand more than is openly told largely through Fitzgerald’s selection of details.

Fitzgerald’s style in “Babylon Revisited” is remarkable: In place of the lush, romantic prose of earlier stories such as “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” he uses a spare, careful technique that conveys intense and often painful emotions through understatement and implication. The language is supple and powerful, so graceful that the reader is almost unaware of it, but a close and attentive study shows that Fitzgerald has achieved a masterpiece of the modern short story.

SUMMARY

Fitzgerald was an acute social observer and an incomparable stylist. His central concern was with the individual whose promise is destroyed by an uncaring or hostile world, a destruction made possible by some inherent flaw in an otherwise

noble nature. Fitzgerald's writings all have this viewpoint which can best be described as romantic moralism.

Immensely popular with his first novel, highly successful with his short stories, and critically acclaimed for his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald has come to be recognized as one of American literature's premier authors and the creator of some of its most memorable and individual characters. Although his work is clearly a product of and a reflection of its time, Fitzgerald's best efforts transcend that specific period to become universal.

Michael Witkoski

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DISCUSSION TOPICS

- The style of *This Side of Paradise* is described as "highly rhetorical." What does this phrase mean? Is it a strength or a weakness?
- What is the significance of the "green light" in *The Great Gatsby*?
- Is F. Scott Fitzgerald's habit of depicting woman as the cause of man's downfall a sexist weakness?
- Consider Nick Carraway as an observer-narrator. How do his motives and relationship to the other characters differ from George Willard's in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)?
- The setting of *The Great Gatsby* seems quaint and remote by modern-day terms, yet the novel remains popular in the twenty-first century. How do you account for its capacity to outlive the era that it depicts?
- Fitzgerald ends "Babylon Revisited" without a clear-cut resolution of the situation. What are the potential denouements? Does Fitzgerald tip the balance in favor of one of them?

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