

Intimations of a Crack-Up: Fitzgerald's Divided Psyche and the Inevitability of Failure

by

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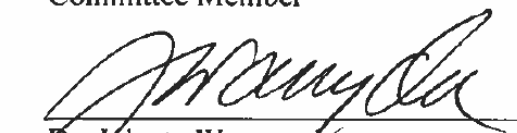
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Abstract

Though to the modern reader he has come to mainly represent the glamor and excess of the Jazz Age in water-logged or ash-ridden symbolism through *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's career remains tantamount with the frenetic rise and tragic fall of the entire decade itself. Mirroring the fallout of the Crash of 1929, Fitzgerald's career was practically over by the thirties. His alcoholism ravaged his personal life and his debilitating inferiority complex led to bouts of depression and an inability to publish much of anything, other than half-hearted short stories in any magazine willing to publish him. During this period, his beloved wife Zelda had been institutionalized for treatment of schizophrenia, and his daughter, Scottie, was away at boarding school. He comes to express his financial frustrations, pains, and inability to write through a striking, three-part essay series, "The Crack-Up," in *Esquire* magazine. His literary colleagues were embarrassed by the sudden, pitiful self-expression and rejected the author for it. This thesis traces the intimations of Fitzgerald's impending crack-up and proves that it should be no surprise that his career came to a close as it did, and that the author even presaged his own demise through the fiction that propelled him there in the first place.

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I'm about as good with deadlines as Daisy Buchanan behind the wheel.

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Introduction

After the roar of the 1920s softened to a great, depressing silence in the 1930s, Scott Fitzgerald struggled, like everybody, to keep things together financially. After the crash of 1929, America's palate changed and nobody wanted to read about light romances and the highbrow troubles of rich men anymore. Times were tough and Fitzgerald struggled to get many of his works published. This, paired with a growing sense of hopelessness in his personal life, led to "The Crack-Up" (1936), in which he reflected on his life and career and came to realize that "[he] had become identified with the objects of [his] horror or compassion": the leisure class about which he cherished both "an abiding distrust [and] an animosity" (81, 77). It is evident when re-reading the essay that he suffered the same financial and psychological downfall that he presaged in his life's work. After he entered his Crack-Up period, Fitzgerald was thousands of dollars in debt and living out of a hotel room in North Carolina to remain near his wife Zelda, who was receiving treatment for schizophrenia. The glitz and glamor were gone and now readers just see the man, looking back. Thomas Stavola describes "The Crack-Up" as being "written in a casual nakedness, self-mocking humor, and wisdom too deep for tears" (67). Fitzgerald's essay is an honest plea for commiseration that his contemporaries spurned: Maxwell Perkins saw it as an embarrassment, John Dos Passos demanded he find something else to write about, and Ernest Hemingway offered to have him killed so that Zelda and Fitzgerald's daughter Scottie could collect the insurance (Brucoli 401-402).

By 1936, out of print and deeply in debt, Fitzgerald neared the completion of a very real tragedy of dissipation, similar to his own fiction. While his characters have more money than they know what to do with, they lose touch with the vitality of life and essentially deteriorate before their own eyes. The tragedy of the Fitzgerald story is the existential crack-up experienced

by each protagonist. Stavola writes that “Fitzgerald’s heroes possess infinite longings unaffected by the sense of limitation that has governed the values of less rapidly changing societies” (108). And while their infinite longings are admirable to Fitzgerald and the reader alike, they inevitably lead the character to certain destruction or failure. In some instances, they die like Jay Gatsby; in others, they listlessly mope around not knowing what to do any more, like Anthony Patch or Charlie Wales from *The Beautiful and Damned* and “Babylon Revisited.” By tracing the conflicting outlooks and sentiments felt by Fitzgerald at the time of each publication, evidence of his impending crack-up appears to have been laid out even before his life began to unravel. While his contemporaries may have been shocked after the publication of the infamous essay, his issues had been evident for years.

This thesis analyzes three of Fitzgerald’s major texts and highlights the conflicting emotions and divided mindsets felt by Fitzgerald at the specific time each text was written. Fitzgerald’s second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), displays his inability to decide whether he should critique or satirize the wealthy class he both admired and hated. His third, and most successful text, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) illustrates the author’s trouble with conflating impossible goals with boundless ambition. And “Babylon Revisited” (1931), his best short story, depicts the author’s trouble with guilt and remorse and how he consolidates the ideas of mercy and justice in the story and his personal life alike. By analyzing biographical influences as well as societal implications and the state of the author’s relationships with Zelda and other friends like Harold Ober, Max Perkins, Edmund Wilson, the Hemingways, and the Murphys, it is clear that Fitzgerald’s failure loomed on the horizon no matter how successful he became or how well he could write.

Fitzgerald was talented, and yet conflicted as well. His divided psyche led to horrific bouts with depression and alcoholism, which played immense roles in the formulation of his work. By analyzing Fitzgerald's mental conflict and his attempt to conflate both admiration and disdain for wealth, it becomes clear that his divergence bled through into the narration and the sentiments felt by the protagonists of the texts echo Fitzgerald's own conflicted feelings.

The initial conflict expressed in "The Crack-Up" is Fitzgerald's ironic ability to write about his inability to write. His depressive episodes prevented him from getting much writing completed, and when he did, his heart was no longer in it. "I had prematurely cracked," he writes ("Crack-Up" 70). He goes on to say that he had been "a mediocre caretaker of the things left in [his] hands" and expresses remorse after miserable remorse ("Crack-Up" 71). He had essentially been forgotten by the world, and the essay is a call for help, a flare out of the darkness expressing his willingness and need to write and his inability to escape the debilitating darkness of the world that gradually swallowed him up. He writes that the "natural state of the sentient adult is qualified unhappiness" and that in the "real dark night of the soul, it is always three o'clock in the morning, day after day" ("Crack-Up" 84, 75). The essay concludes with Fitzgerald likening himself to a half-starved dog, desperate for someone to throw him a bone. He even offers to lick your hand should you be so kind as to give him a chance.

While Fitzgerald's friends and contemporaries were shocked by the sudden expression of darkness felt by the once brilliant and admired author, it comes as no surprise that he had prematurely cracked. He battled depression and alcoholism all his life and the eye with which he expresses the failure of life could only belong to an expert, "an authority of failure" (*Notebooks* 181).

Chapter One:

Beautiful, but Damned: Fitzgerald's Divergent Sentiments on Wealth Presented Through *The Beautiful and Damned*

In March of 1922, Fitzgerald published his much anticipated second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, the reception of which was disappointing to readers who were not looking for satire, whether it was intentional or not. More recently, the novel has been regarded as Fitzgerald's least popular work, and by some scholars, even a failure. Much of the limited scholarship focuses on the incoherence of the tone and criticizes Fitzgerald for his inability "to decide whether to satirize or to lament the decline of his protagonist's privileged class" (Enfield 671). Indeed, the novel does seem to bounce around with its intentions, but this uncertain direction appears to derive from Fitzgerald's own inability to decide whether to satirize or to lament himself. The novel is a fascinating look at Fitzgerald's own divergent thoughts and sentiments and has become an autobiographical source that acts as an eerie premonition of his own tragic future. Jay Parini writes in his introduction to the novel that Fitzgerald was practically reading his own palm and explains that Anthony Patch, like many other Fitzgerald protagonists, "believes unabashedly that happiness and financial success are identical" (vii-viii). Patch is obsessed with the materialistic objects that express his social status and he measures his own worth by the people he knows or the friends that he makes, rather than by any tangible merit or achievement. By the conclusion of the novel, these skewed values all combine to leave Anthony in shambles, and a decade later, ruin the conflicted author himself.

In the early stages of planning the novel,¹ Fitzgerald wrote to Scribner that Patch "is one of those many [people] with the tastes and weaknesses of an artist but with no actual creative

¹ At this point, titled *The Flight of the Rocket* (Letters 41).

inspiration. How he and his beautiful young wife are wrecked on the shoals of dissipation is told in the story” (*Letters* 41). Anthony Patch is not a man that works hard. He has no drive and no initiative. He devotes himself fully to being a member of a society that he adores and the wealthy ideal that he has ballooned out of proportion. Ruth Prigozy writes that both Anthony and his wife Gloria are “as empty as the world they inhabit” (*Beautiful* 368). They have no substance and no real worth. The doomed couple focus entirely on their status and the appearance of success, flaunting money they did not earn and embracing the pageantry of a post-war world, newly freed from accountability and consequence. Ironically, the same was said about the Fitzgeralds. Their notorious binges and antics were the gossip of their contemporaries who believed that writing should be taken more seriously.² The Fitzgeralds spent the summer of 1926 in Juan-les-Pins with the Murphys. Every night ended in some sort of drunken fiasco. One night, they kidnapped a waiter and threatened to saw him in half. Another night, Zelda jealously threw herself down a flight of stairs after meeting Isadora Duncan. They held drunken diving competitions off of the high cliffs near Juan-les-Pins and often drove around the city under the influence (Brucoli 251-254). Gerald Murphy wrote later that the Fitzgeralds were “always searching for some kind of adventure *outside* the party” (qtd. in Brucoli 253).

After the publication of *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald’s friend and editor, Edmund Wilson, wrote that he was like a stupid old woman with whom someone has left a diamond; she is extremely proud of the diamond and shows it to everyone who comes by, and everyone is surprised that such an ignorant old woman should possess so valuable a jewel; for in nothing does she appear so inept as in the remarks she makes about the diamond (qtd. in Epstein

² Whereas Hemingway was known for his strict writing regiment, Brucoli writes that Fitzgerald “did not reserve part of every day for writing; he usually worked in concentrated bursts when a story had to be finished. In Paris his routine was to rise at 11 in the morning and try to start writing at 5 P.M. He claimed that he worked intermittently until 3:30 A.M., but too often his nights were spent on the town” (234).

52). Wilson cannot seem to comprehend how a man that was so irresponsible could possibly construct prose the way he did. To modern readers and scholars, the Fitzgeralds' antics have become synonymous with the frenetic energy of their generation. There was both a boom of creative expression and a noticeable lack of moral consequence, until it all came crashing down in October 1929.

Although stylistically very well written, the novel did not do nearly as well as Fitzgerald hoped upon publication—not for of a lack of good prose, but because thematically, it was conflicted between lamentation and satire. If read strictly for satire, the novel is mildly clever. If read as a serious attempt at presenting the plight of the rich man, it falls flat as it fosters disdain for Anthony and his foppish nightgowns or fear of the dark. Brucoli writes:

[T]he novel does not maintain a consistent attitude toward its characters. At times, the author seems to credit Anthony and Gloria with a certain integrity of irresponsibility, casting them as victims of philistinism; but Fitzgerald's moralizing compulsion takes over as the novel becomes a warning prophesy for the Fitzgeralds' own marriage. (151)

Shining brightly through these divided novelistic intentions is Fitzgerald's own complicated sense of inferiority. He feels the need to implement autobiographical aspects into the text, but toggles between laughing at himself and mourning his own impending doom.

Despite the thematic flaws of the novel, the conflicting sentiments prove valuable when analyzing Fitzgerald's divided psyche. The novel represents the author's simultaneous admiration and disdain for the wealthy class, which manifests in this inability to decide whether to lament or to satirize them. As a boy, Fitzgerald lived right on the edge of the wealthy street in St. Paul, close enough to mingle with the rich, but far enough away to know that he did not belong there. At the age of nine, he developed a conviction that he was not really the son of his

parents, but was actually from royal lineage (Brucoli 18). The allure of Princeton University fed his hunger for superiority, but his nagging inferiority complex led to poor grades and his eventual removal from school before graduation. After flunking out of the classroom and being deemed too small for football, Fitzgerald enlisted in the Army to seek greatness on the battlefield. Unfortunately, the war ended before he could get overseas, but he met Zelda during boot camp in Alabama and completed his first novel to gain her affections. Brucoli writes that Fitzgerald's sense of alienation developed into an impeccable sense of social observation, hence his writing talent (Brucoli 22). After the success of *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Fitzgerald gained considerable wealth and was able to satirize and poke fun at himself for finally becoming a member of that coveted, superior class of people. However, that dreaded sense of inferiority remained in his psyche, and the ugly nature of people began to disgust him. As his romanticisms decayed, so did his admiration for wealth and class. A loathing took hold and cracks began to form.

The Beautiful and Damned begins with a lengthy family history, examining the Patch family pedigree. Fitzgerald shows that Anthony is persuaded to attend Harvard by his European tutor, who tells him the Ivy League school would "open doors for him...it would give him innumerable self-sacrificing and devoted friends" (*Beautiful* 6). The tutor mentions nothing about the academic benefits of the school, and he concentrates entirely on the social aspect of the institution. Anthony's focus is not on the degree he would earn, but on the friends and the connections he is sure to make. Fitzgerald implements the satire here as he explains that Anthony develops into quite an "exquisite dandy" while at school, with a fully stocked library and "a rather pathetic collection of silk pajamas, brocaded dressing-gowns, and neckties too flamboyant to wear" (*Beautiful* 7). He attends parties, meets people, and fosters a dependence on alcohol that

would haunt him later in life. By senior year, he finds that he is “looked upon as a rather romantic figure, a scholar, a recluse, a tower of erudition,” which of course “secretly pleased him” and pushes him further away from academia and more towards the society that he has always cherished (*Beautiful* 7). Anthony enjoys the idea of being seen as a literary figure or a romantic and mysterious author. Rather than actually doing any writing, he prefers to sit in his library or his immaculate bathroom thinking of himself as quite the interesting character.

Similarly, Gloria Patch is influenced heavily by, if not based entirely on, Zelda. Gloria is outspoken and independent and must always be the dazzling center of attention. Gloria lights up every room she enters, and Anthony loves that all men are jealous of him for marrying her. Even a cursory examination of the texts indicates that Fitzgerald actually lifted sections of Zelda’s diary to replicate in passages of Gloria’s diary. In her study, Amy Elias shows that, after being asked to review the novel herself for *The New York Tribune*, Zelda wrote, “It seems to me that on one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters which, though considerably edited sound to me vaguely familiar. In fact, Mr. Fitzgerald seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home” (qtd. in Elias 248). Elias also makes an interesting connection to Fitzgerald’s marginal notations and edits that indicate Gloria’s habit of biting a corner of her lip. He appears to have confused it with Zelda’s real-life gum-chewing habit and switched back and forth multiple times throughout the early draft, blending the character and his wife together in his mind. This blending of the two women, plus using Zelda’s own writing, is evidence that Fitzgerald created Gloria with Zelda in his mind.

However, Fitzgerald seemed to refuse to see the full scope of his influence and wrote to his daughter, Scottie, in 1940 that “Gloria was a much more trivial and vulgar person than your

mother. I can't really say there was any resemblance except in the beauty and certain terms of expression she used, and also I naturally used many circumstantial events of our married life" (qtd. in Elias 249). He may have been apprehensive to fully realize the undeniable parallels of his characterization and their ill-fated counterparts, but even rudimentary examinations of the text show Zelda's influence in a clear re-imagining, worst-case-scenario version of the Fitzgeralds' marriage, which, by the end, proved to be shockingly accurate. In the midst of his crack-up in 1930, the irony surely having taken shape for him, Fitzgerald attempted to draw another distinction in an additional letter, this time to Zelda, in which he lamented, "I wish the Beautiful and Damned [*sic*] had been a maturely written book because it was all true. We ruined ourselves—I have never honestly thought that we ruined each other" (qtd. in Bruccoli 151). While Gloria and Anthony cannot help but take as many shots at each other as possible, Fitzgerald and Zelda, though separated by this point, never gave up on each other. Their love was genuine and he shows that their mutual destruction was explicitly self-induced. Anthony and Gloria, perhaps satirically, ruined each other because of their inherent incompatibility and inflated sense of self-worth. The Fitzgeralds, though a loving couple, still unfortunately found themselves washed up on those same shoals of dissipation as the Patch family due to their self-destructive nature.

Anthony and Gloria's incompatibility stems from their own shallow personalities. They cannot find true value in each other, besides baseline qualities like appearances, because of an inability to find deeper or more endearing qualities in themselves. As Fitzgerald said earlier in his letter to Scottie, the only real virtues Gloria shared with Zelda were their "beauty" and those "certain terms of expression" used in conversation (qtd. in Elias 249). Anthony and Gloria's obsession with appearance and prestige leads to a marriage, not entirely bereft of love, but one in which each spouse objectifies the other as a symbol of their own status. Strong marriages can

survive financial problems, but the Patch marriage disintegrates when Anthony's inheritance is taken away. Anthony and Gloria bicker relentlessly, taking every opportunity they can to hurt each other's feelings. In one Gatsby-esque passage of the novel, Fitzgerald writes "between kisses Anthony and this golden girl quarreled incessantly" (*Beautiful* 108). They fight constantly and then attempt to "patch" things up with physical affection, which works temporarily, but can in no way truly fix the selfish nature of them both.

In one grueling passage late in the novel, Anthony tells Gloria, rather off-handedly, that "I always have an instinct to kick a cat" (*Beautiful* 235). Seeing how upset Gloria becomes by the notion, Anthony cruelly moves on to detail an instance in which he acted on his instinct and booted a kitten in the dead cold of winter. He enjoys seeing how upset she is for a few minutes and then makes a perfunctory effort to cheer her up when they arrive home. Gloria "crie[d] herself to sleep that night, for the kitten, for Anthony, for herself, for the pain and bitterness and cruelty of all the world" (*Beautiful* 236). This instance in the novel occurs the same week they are denied a visit with Adam Patch in the hospital. Anthony takes out his frustrations on Gloria and cannot help but inflict what he thinks is an equal amount of cruelty dished out on him from his grandfather onto his delicate wife. Adam Patch dies that very same night, sealing their expulsion from the will for good. Several days later, Anthony is similarly "reminded of the cruelty of all life and, in consequence, of the increasing bitterness of his own" when his friend, the doorman of his building, is surprisingly killed in a robbery (*Beautiful* 244).

But Anthony is not the only one guilty of picking unnecessary fights. Gloria hurls insults at him about his inability to actually get anything published. Going all the way back to college, Anthony enjoyed the idea of being a writer, but his obsession with status clouds his ability to

actually do any writing at all. After he claims to have “worked some” one night, Gloria lets loose and scoffs:

Work! Oh you sad bird! You bluffer! Work—that means a great arranging of the desk and the lights, a great sharpening of pencils, and “Gloria, don’t sing!” and “Please keep that damn Tana away from me,” and “Let me read you my opening sentence,” and “I won’t be through for a long time, Gloria, so don’t wait up for me,” and a tremendous consumption of tea or coffee. And that’s all. In about just an hour I hear the old pencil stop scratching and look over. You’ve got out a book and you’re “looking up” something. Then you’re reading. Then yawns—then bed and a great tossing about because you’re all full of caffeine and can’t sleep. Two weeks later the whole performance over again. (*Beautiful* 171-172)

Clearly hurt, Anthony tries to rebuff these charges, but knows full well that his writing “career” is practically nonexistent, other than one insignificant publication in *The Florentine*. Gloria attacks Anthony for his writer’s block because he refuses to see the full scope of his inability. He does not fully understand himself or why he has a hard time writing, but it stems from a complete lack of drive and creative inspiration. He has nothing to write because he has nothing to say, nothing of value to contribute to the world. From an extremely young age, Anthony has been taught that the world owes him. He did not need to work because riches and success just had their way of showing up for him. It was his job to maintain that image of wealth and success with no real skill or value on which to fall back. He relies on the promise of his grandfather’s inheritance as an adult because that is all he knows: receiving the money his family earned for him and acting as if he did it all himself. Gloria recognizes this character flaw and “lapse[s] into silence, giving him rope. And if he had not hanged himself, he had certainly come to the end of

it” (*Beautiful* 172). Anthony and Gloria are equally shallow people, but show it in different ways. Their obsession with appearances does not allow for the healthy growth of emotions and instead creates two insufferable, egomaniacal deadbeats by the end of the novel.

While there are drastic differences between the plight of the Fitzgeralds and the plight of the Patches, stark comparisons can still be made between the author and his fictional counterpart. Anthony’s objectified interest in Gloria stems entirely from his need to have other men feel jealous of him. He is not initially attracted to her character or personality and simply sees her as a symbol with which he can raise his own status. Anthony’s shallow bid for romance echoes Fitzgerald’s, when he writes later, “When I like women, I want to own them, to dominate them, to have them admire me” (*Notebooks* 169). In the novel, Fitzgerald paints an image of failure with such prowess it could only have been done with the eye of an expert. Unfortunately, Fitzgerald wound up exactly where Anthony is at the end of the novel: washed up, practically destitute, and struggling to understand where it all went wrong. The novel is a story of dissipation, disintegration, and disappointment. Fitzgerald falters in the writing process with the aforementioned inability to choose between satire and lamentation, and if he had chosen one or the other, the novel would be much stronger. That being said, the dissipation displayed in the novel is entirely reminiscent of the forthcoming crack-up and Fitzgerald’s complex inability to fully understand and present himself on the page.

Chapter Two:

“The Man Smoking Two Cigarettes”: The Duality of Fitzgerald’s Psyche as Narrated in *The Great Gatsby*

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s elegant masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), fully encapsulates the author’s complicated sentiments and feelings about his generation and the world around him. Not only is the novel incredibly profound, but it is also stylistically perfect, expertly planned and executed, fully displaying Fitzgerald’s control of the written word. After sending the first manuscript of the novel to his agent, Harold Ober, in September 1924, Fitzgerald exclaims, “Artistically its [*sic*] head + shoulders over everything I’ve done” (*Letters* 81). A month later, he wrote to his editor Max Perkins, asking that he not include blurbs or reviews on the new book’s jacket: “I’m tired of being the author of *This Side of Paradise* [*sic*] and I want to start over,” indeed recognizing the gravity of his new novel³ (*Letters* 86).

Fitzgerald was fully aware that what he had just completed was his masterpiece, a striking improvement from his previous work. In reply, Perkins concurred, and in addition to some minor critiques, wrote on November 18th, “it has vitality to an underlying thought of unusual quality. It is a marvelous fusion, into unity of presentation, of the extraordinary incongruities of life today. And as for sheer writing, it’s astonishing” (*Letters* 86). Two days later, Perkins again wrote, “And all these things, the whole pathetic episode, you have given a place in time and space, for with the help of T.J. Eckleberg and by an occasional glance at the sky, or the sea, or the city, you have imparted a sort of sense of eternity” (*Letters* 88). The message of the book represents eternity itself: the frustrating, yet splendid eternity of human

³ Gertrude Stein also apparently noticed Fitzgerald’s maturation and wrote that *This Side of Paradise* was alright. *The Great Gatsby* “is a good book and different and older and that is what one does, one does not get better but different and older and that is always a pleasure” (qtd. in Bruccoli 232).

nature that Fitzgerald captures in his prose. As critic Richard Lehan writes, the book demonstrates the elements of “vision and decline, energy and waste,” all of which remain eternal in both Fitzgerald’s writing and the world around him (83). The novel simultaneously basks in the frenetic splendor of Fitzgerald’s generation and yet also hints at his rising disgust and disdain. Rife with clever symbolism and dazzling descriptions, the novel divides into two halves and presents a full portrait of Fitzgerald’s conflicted psyche and the contradictory world around him.

While *The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald’s most notable text and he was at the top of his career when writing it, he noted in his ledger that 1923-24 was “the most miserable year since I was nineteen, full of terrible failure and acute miseries. Full of hard work fairly [*sic*] well rewarded in the latter half and attempts to do better” (Ledger 74). In July, Zelda had an affair with a French naval aviator, Edouard Jozan, which Fitzgerald labelled “The Big crisis—13th of July” in his ledger. Bruccoli writes that Fitzgerald claimed to have fought Jozan after Zelda asked him for a divorce, but explains that these claims could never be substantiated (Bruccoli 195). It is interesting that Fitzgerald connected the miseries of 1924 with the miseries of 1916 in which he was notoriously turned down by his first love, Ginevra King, who told him, “poor boys shouldn’t think of marrying rich girls,” a sentiment echoed in the novel, thus igniting Gatsby’s quest for greatness (Ledger 66). No matter how successful Fitzgerald was throughout his career, he was always borne back by some aspect of his personal life, whether it be his own illness, Zelda’s illnesses, or their severe alcoholism. These bifurcated sentiments of ambition and failure resonate through the novel and lead to a clear understanding of Fitzgerald’s mindset at the time he was creating his masterpiece.

“We’ll meet you on some corner. I’ll be the man smoking two cigarettes,” Daisy suggests, her wit rising faintly, on the way to the hotel in chapter seven (*Gatsby* 125). Though rather offhand and easily missed by readers, the little joke Daisy makes in this passage carries a good deal of symbolic weight for the novel. The mysterious quip towards the middle of the chapter alludes to the duality of her situation: Does she remain with Tom or does she take a leap of faith and leave him for Gatsby? Unfortunately, regardless of the decision she makes, Daisy has doomed herself to fail. She is performing a balancing act, or as her joke suggests, she is smoking two equally compelling and addictive cigarettes, both of which reinforce her carelessness and her ability to retreat further and further back into her money, bereft of any real consequence (*Gatsby* 179). Fitzgerald further illustrates this duality after Myrtle’s death. Tom and Daisy sit at their kitchen table and mime a nice family dinner, but “[t]hey weren’t happy, and neither of them had touched the cold chicken or the ale—and yet they weren’t unhappy either” (*Gatsby* 145). The duality of the Buchanan marriage, though not necessarily the focus of the novel, directly correlates with Fitzgerald’s dual concentration on ambition and wonder depicted at the novel’s forefront.

The novel’s sense of duality shows both the damage dreams can inflict and the heights to which a person will reach to get what he or she wants. Fitzgerald simultaneously criticizes the arrogance of human dreams, and yet he also admires the unwavering dedication to achieving them. The novel’s binary theses contradict each other. However, as Fitzgerald meditates over a decade later, “the test of first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and retain the ability to function. One must be able to see that things are hopeless, and yet be determined to make them otherwise” (“Crack-Up” 69). Fitzgerald demonstrates his diametrically opposing mindsets together in the novel and instills them into two

characters. He emulates his unwavering ambition and sense of wonder through Jay Gatsby, and he displays his budding cynicism and disgust through the narration of Nick Carraway, proving that he, the author himself, is indeed also a man smoking two cigarettes. By shaking the ash out of the book, readers can determine which of Fitzgerald's cigarettes was left behind and can see how the author's opposing mindsets manifest themselves again in his looming crack-up a decade later.

While Nick may be an unreliable narrator whose elitist upbringing leads to snobbish judgements and sub-textual social commentary, Fitzgerald also cleverly instills a sense of naiveté in the character. So, while the narration definitely criticizes The Lost Generation's frenetic lifestyle and casual alcoholism, by the end of the novel, Nick presents the reader with a sense of his own growth, despite suffering the debilitating tragedy of Gatsby's death. He struggles to reconcile his sentimental, Midwestern values with the sordid ugliness he has encountered on Long Island. Because the narration is situated two years after the fateful summer of Gatsby's death, Nick has since come to recognize the growth he experienced over the course of the story. The anger, frustration, and disgust remain, but he is able to reflect on the beauty of Gatsby's dedication and wonder as well, perhaps setting up the novel with a pseudo-happy ending. The events are troubling to him and yet, by narrating the novel in this divided way, Nick is solidifying his growth and development from that time in his life.

The past-tense narration style is reminiscent of the hard-boiled detective fiction popular in the twenties and thirties, perhaps leading to the novel's mischaracterization as simply a "crime story." Granted, Gatsby's mysterious rise to power is rooted in bootlegging, he associates with noted mobsters, and three violent deaths occur in the book. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald clearly had loftier intentions for the novel and may have been held back by the quick judgement of early

readership. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel that features crime, but is not meant to be a simple whodunnit. However, Fitzgerald was influenced by the genre and incorporates the elements of detective novels to heighten Gatsby's mysterious past and highlight the sordid criminal nature of the company he keeps. In keeping with the genre of detective stories that are narrated in the past tense, Nick ingrains a sense of hopelessness to the tone of the book from the beginning. Readers are privy to the fact that things are not going to go well for Gatsby from the start.

Maureen Corrigan's thorough study of the novel touches on Fitzgerald's noted interest in the detective genre, including an instance in which Dashiell Hammett allegedly stood up to Hemingway, calling him out for bullying Fitzgerald, whom he believed to be the better writer (143-144). Fitzgerald was known to create reading lists for friends and colleagues. In addition to recommending the classic works of John Keats, Henry James, and Charles Dickens, among the forty titles on the list made for Sheilah Graham⁴ is Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (Corrigan 143). Christopher Raczkowski's study of Dashiell Hammett's fiction indicates that the narrative is typically constructed as "a visual world of surfaces and exteriority—a type of vision where motivation, desire, and identity remain largely invisible to the viewing subject" and that the reader's entertainment derives from the narrator working outside of the action itself (631). Raczkowski connects this excluded-narrator concept to Gertrude Stein's foray in detective fiction⁵ as well, in which she writes, "That is the way to see a thing, from the outside" (qtd. in Raczkowski 631). While Nick Carraway may not be solving a mystery in the novel, his separation from the action allows for a more compelling detective style presentation of events.

⁴ After Fitzgerald's death, Graham donated the collection of books given to her by Fitzgerald to the Princeton collection, many of which were evidently stolen from the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Library at some point during his employment (Corrigan 143).

⁵ *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* (1933).

Nick's physical separation from the action is also symbolically represented by his living in a small shack on the outskirts of Gatsby's property, a clever foil to the immaculate mansions in which all other characters live. Each chapter of the novel focuses on a particular party or some type of social gathering, and each time, Nick consistently removes himself from the action so that he can quietly judge people. Michael Dubose writes that Nick is "clearly his own man, unattached to any single social group at the party," and is therefore able to paint a disparaging picture of anyone with whom he comes in contact (82). Nick's fierce criticism serves two purposes for the novel. On the one hand, Fitzgerald is able to present his unabashed and familiar critique of the higher society he both derided and wanted to join. On the other, Nick presents the development of his growing mindset, beginning with the ugliness of society and eventually progressing to the shining beacon of Gatsby's ambition on which he fixates for the remainder of the novel. Nick also notes that some of the guests have actually died since that summer, in some cases by suicide, or in another, accidental drowning, furthering the unsettling nature of people he encounters. Nick's impeccable judgements and negative social commentaries show a preconceived notion of morals and the reasons behind his fixation with the purity of Gatsby's dream, concluding that Gatsby was "worth the whole damn bunch put together" (*Gatsby* 154). Nick has clearly learned a lesson from his summer on Long Island, both from his friend and the people he grew to despise. Each description or comment demonstrates Nick's gradually developing ethos and the way in which he grew to idolize Gatsby's limitless capacity for wonder.

While the story may be hopeless and readers know that Gatsby is doomed from the start, Nick shows that the events of that summer put him on a path of development, a path in which he achieves awareness of the world around him and learns to appreciate Gatsby's ambition, despite the shallow nature of everyone else. As Fred Carlisle explains in his critique, "Nick's experience

and growth provide the main continuity in the novel, and in this sense, Nick does not narrate Gatsby's story so much as he tells his own story in which Gatsby becomes an important agent in Nick's movement from innocence to awareness" (351). Nick begins the story explaining that he grew up rather sheltered in the Midwest. He explains that his father instructed him to reserve judging others as they may have "not had the advantages you've had" (*Gatsby* 1). He promptly moves East and forgets his father's advice. He joins the bond business, not because of any real interest in banking, but because many of his contemporaries were doing so. As the summer progresses, Nick's naiveté is gradually replaced with annoyance, and eventually disgust with the careless lifestyle of the Buchanans and other Long Islanders. Though he is heavily engaged with all events of the story, Nick never actually becomes involved in the action. He is passive and observes life around him, as does Jordan Baker, who is also methodically detached from any real action in the story at all. Nick comes close to having a hand in the rekindling of Gatsby and Daisy's relationship by hosting the tea party. However, it must be noted that this was all Gatsby's idea from the beginning. While Gatsby and Daisy re-connect, Nick stands outside in the rain, comparing himself to Immanuel Kant and staring at Gatsby's mansion in the distance (*Gatsby* 88).

No matter how infatuated with Gatsby's dream Nick becomes, he never goes as far as to claim that Gatsby is perfect. He makes it clear that Gatsby is flawed as well. When he finds Gatsby observing Tom and Daisy through their window after running down Myrtle, Nick reflects, "I disliked him so much by this time that I didn't find it necessary to tell him he was wrong [about the possibility of Daisy changing her mind]" (*Gatsby* 143). Fred Carlisle goes as far as to assert that Nick "realizes that Gatsby is a fraud, a hoodlum, whose values and assumptions are empty and morally wrong. At the same time, he sees Gatsby more as a victim

than an agent— a victim of the fraudulent value system that has been perpetrated ever since the American Dream became confused with money, position, and power” (Carlisle 359). In Nick’s eyes, Gatsby is a product of his environment. He has a corrupted sense of values and incorrectly believes that money, success, and happiness all mean the same thing, leading to his unquenchable need to repeat the past (*Gatsby* 110). However, the purity and innocence of his dream, along with his impeccable charm, earn Gatsby back into Nick’s favor.

After reading an early draft of the novel, Max Perkins advised Fitzgerald to incorporate more of Gatsby’s history into the novel. He writes, “you might here and there interpolate some phrases and possibly incidents, little touches of various kinds, that would suggest that he was in some active way mysteriously engaged” (*Letters* 87). Clearly, Fitzgerald took the advice and included the mysterious phone calls, the meeting with Meyer Wolfsheim, and the party guests’ speculation that Gatsby is a murderer. The next draft, titled *Trimalchio*,⁶ includes a scene in which Gatsby presents Nick with his entire history with Dan Cody and his work with Wolfsheim. The scene is “confessional in nature, with Nick acting as priest” and comes directly after Myrtle Wilson’s death as if to suggest Gatsby feels guilty (Dubose 74). Fitzgerald again edited the scene, eliminating the confession, and suggests that Gatsby’s attention lies entirely on Daisy rather than Myrtle’s grisly death (*Gatsby* 143). The completed version of the novel, now with its familiar title, removes Gatsby’s perspective, and Nick briefly retells his history, somewhat whitewashing the story and absolving Gatsby of any serious wrongdoing. At the conclusion of the novel, Nick takes one more walk over to Gatsby’s empty mansion. He notices on the white marble “steps an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick” (*Gatsby* 180). Nick

⁶ A reference to *The Satyricon* by Petronius in which a freed slave mysteriously becomes wealthy and hosts lavish parties.

takes care to scrub the word away, thus cleansing Gatsby's reputation and cementing a legacy more fitting to Nick's high regard of him.

The confessional aspect of their relationship is interesting and can be traced back to the novel's earliest stages. The scrapped false start of the novel was eventually repurposed into a short story titled "Absolution" (1923). In the story, a young boy named Rudolph Miller tangles with the concept of sin and his belief that he is "too good to be the son of [his] parents" ("Absolution" 262). The boy, like Fitzgerald and Gatsby, is raised in a middle-class home in Minnesota and dreams of a life far surpassing his current state. The boy imagines another persona for himself, a rich and charismatic boy named Blatchford Sarnemington, who struts down the street and "lived in great sweeping triumphs" ("Absolution" 263). Fitzgerald decided not to incorporate the childhood of his forthcoming protagonist in the novel and at some point in the revision process, changed his name to Gatsby. Another concept from the story kept for the novel is the imagery of an amusement park. The priest tells young Rudolph to

Go to one at night and stand a little way off from it in a dark place—under dark trees.

You'll see a big wheel made of lights turning in the air, and a long slide shooting boats down into the water. A band playing somewhere, and a smell of peanuts—and everything will twinkle. But it won't remind you of anything, you see. It will all just hang out there in the night like a colored balloon—like a big yellow lantern on a pole. But don't get up close because if you do you'll only feel the heat and the sweat of life. ("Absolution" 271)

The art on *The Great Gatsby's* dust jacket depicts a beautiful amusement park seen from a distance whose glow reflects off the water and illustrates Gatsby's delicate affection for his dream floating just out of reach before him. Also on the cover, just above the distant amusement park, weeps the disembodied face of a woman, who also floats just out of reach from the reader.

In August of 1924, Fitzgerald wrote to Perkins, updating him on the status of the novel, saying, “For Christs sake don’t give anyone that jacket you’re saving for me. I’ve written it into the book” (*Letters* 79). The face and amusement park in the distance come to illustrate the very essence of Gatsby’s dream, similar to the green light on Daisy’s dock, a beautifully illuminated, composite entity floating just out of reach. As he gets closer to achieving his dream and winning Daisy back into his life, everything disappears and he is ruined. The realities of life far supersede the intangibility of his goals, and he is killed in a senseless act of cowardice and misunderstanding. Gatsby’s shallow dream leads to his inevitable failure, but his unwavering dedication to that dream becomes Nick’s vision of beauty in the world. He shows that money and status do not protect someone from misguided or senseless emotion, and that heat and sweat of life are always present under the facade of luminescent beauty.

Gatsby’s obsession with Daisy takes on an air of religious dedication. He does not worship at church, but he does worship the idea of bringing her back into his life and away from her brutish husband. Just as Gatsby capitalizes on the disembodied idea of Daisy across the bay, Wilson looks above to the disembodied eyes of T.J. Eckleberg, conflating them with the eyes of God himself. While mourning Myrtle’s death, Wilson mentions that, just before she was killed, they were fighting and that he took Myrtle to the window to see the eyes on the billboard and told her, “God knows what you’ve been doing, everything you’ve been doing. You may fool me, but you can’t fool God!” (*Gatsby* 159). His friend, Michaelis, tries to get Wilson to snap out of his delirium, pointing out that Eckleberg was merely an advertisement, but Wilson is too far gone at this point and is left “nodding into the twilight,” planning his misguided revenge (*Gatsby* 160). In the earliest stages of the novel, June 1922, Fitzgerald wrote to Perkins saying, the novel “will concern less superlative beauties than I run to usually + will be centered on a smaller

period of time. It will have a catholic element” (*Letters* 60). The sentiments of *Gatsby* and “Absolution” demonstrate a general distaste for religion itself. He seems to express a disdain for the concept as the only religious character is “so dumb he doesn’t even know he’s alive” (*Gatsby* 26). Instead, Fitzgerald’s passions and interests lie in ambition and dedication to an intangible dream. Through Nick, we see that Gatsby’s pursuit of Daisy is more compelling than the pitiful admonitions mourned by Wilson in the Valley of Ashes.

The bifurcated commentary and narration presented throughout the novel depict an author at odds with himself. He both admired the ambition and the frenetic energy of his generation, but he also despised the way in which greed and selfishness drove the bulk of the action. The novel allows for introspection and a study of Fitzgerald’s complicated psyche. Though loyalties to ambition and wonder are present, the blows of Fitzgerald’s divided life eventually begin to take a toll and crack the author for good. His bitter summation of the twenties as “the most expensive orgy in history” may differ greatly from the glitzy symbolism implemented in the novel, but the critiques definitely hint at Fitzgerald’s gradual acknowledgement and growing cynicism about the world around him (“Echoes” 21). His “view of the Jazz Age fully recognizes the vulgarity and waste, but it also evokes the sense of boundless possibility that he felt” (Brucoli 310). Fitzgerald shows, both in the novel and in the later essays, that we will always look back to a time when ambition was prevalent, hope was overflowing, and consequences were at a minimum; we are always going to be borne back into the past. The novel’s foundation is built on the opposing concepts that life can be hopeless and yet still beautiful, if not futilely optimistic.

Chapter Three:

Ghosts of Babylon: Conflating the Concepts of Forgiveness and Mercy with Consequence and Justice

Fitzgerald's work with short fiction is typically experimental and often repurposed for use in novels. Notable thematic comparisons can be made between "Winter Dreams" (1922) and *Gatsby*; for example, both feature protagonists who yearn for women out of their league. And, as Brucoli points out, the paragraph of "Babylon Revisited" (1931) in which Charlie walks the streets of Paris reappears in *Tender is the Night* ("Babylon" 617). According to Fitzgerald's letters, the bulk of his short fiction seems to have been written simply to pay bills and many of them read as such. Initially, because of the overwhelming popularity of *This Side of Paradise* (1920), he could sell short stories to magazines rather easily from name recognition alone. However, as his popularity began to wane, finances became a greater issue, even more so after the Crash of 1929. By the late twenties and early thirties, short stories became chores to write and got in the way of finding time to work on the novel. In a bitter letter to Hemingway in 1929, Fitzgerald likened himself and his dependence on *Saturday Evening Post* publications to "the old whore" who earned "\$4000 a screw. But now its [*sic*] because she's mastered the 40 positions—in her youth one was enough" (*Letters* 169). Fitzgerald also noted in the detailed ledger of his life the constant ebb and flow of Zelda's health. The year 1931 is labelled "Zelda well, worse, better. Novel intensive begins" (Ledger 82). In the later stories, Fitzgerald separated himself from the familiar tales of young love and focused on more difficult subjects like regret and guilt. When he broke away from the overplayed romances, Fitzgerald regained his creative stride, and at this point in his career his best short story arose. Rife with his complex emotions of guilt and

pride, “Babylon Revisited” allowed Fitzgerald to project his own feelings and misfortunes on Charlie Wales and experiment with the concepts of forgiveness and consequence.

In his introduction to “Babylon Revisited,” Bruccoli writes that the story “is intensely personal, expressing his feelings about his alcoholism, his wife’s mental collapse, and his responsibility to his daughter” (“Babylon” 616). Fitzgerald himself wrote that he had announced the death of his young illusions with the story (*Letters* 402). Like all of Fitzgerald’s best work, the autobiographical elements depict an author tangling with his past and speculating about his future. Fitzgerald was a changed man at this point in his career; after reaching the crest from one side of paradise, he found that all he could do was plummet to the other side. Success had eluded him, and he had little to write about, other than where everything went wrong. As author of the story, Fitzgerald plays judge, jury, and executioner, but he also performs well as the defense attorney. He forces the reader to share in his disgust of Charlie’s actions, but to also search for mercy and grant him atonement for the common depravities of his generation. At this point in his career, Fitzgerald was fed up with their wasteful nature and with the story, and depicts the bitter hangover from the frenetic decade in Paris.

Fitzgerald’s Paris was the epicenter of 1920s literary and cultural revolution. The world was changing and he was directly in the forefront. Everything was new and exciting and gave way to the vices and addictions of many of its American ex-pat visitors, Fitzgerald especially. For the story, Fitzgerald likens 1920s Paris to the Biblical city of Babylon, wherein the Parisians live in a state of Babylonian fervor: mass confusion, chaos, and excitement. According to the Old Testament, collective ambition rose so high in Babylon that the citizens constructed the Tower of Babel so that they could reach Heaven. To punish them for their ambition, God destroyed the tower and changed the language of everyone involved, hence the confusion. Babylon was also

notably divided into a Left and Right Bank. Fitzgerald's reference is clear as The Lost Generation, while drinking gin and dogearing bootleg copies of *Ulysses* (a literary tower of erudition itself) became tantamount with everything new, exciting, and ambitious in the world.⁷ They bounced around the Ritz, Zelli's, Bricktop's, The Poet's Cave, and everywhere in between, which "cater[ed] to vice and waste... on an utterly childish scale" ("Babylon" 620). The post-war nihilism of Fitzgerald's generation forced its members to make the most out of every singular moment, to reach bliss to the point of freezing time. This custom, while endearing to modern readers and historians, led to the horrific alcoholism and the subsequent hangover of failure of the generation. Consequently, Paris lost its charm for Fitzgerald by 1930, and he uses the story to express both his frustrations and regrets for a time gradually dissipating before his eyes.

As ambition disintegrated and cynicism took hold, the Fitzgeralds moved to Switzerland so that Zelda could be treated at Prangins clinic. During this time, Fitzgerald wrote seventeen stories for the *Post* so that he could afford Zelda's bills and Scottie's tuition. In her analysis of Fitzgerald's writing process, Barbara Sylvester explains that Fitzgerald began writing "Babylon Revisited" in late December 1930 and had it on his agent, Harold Ober's, desk by early January 1931 (181). After an incredibly difficult year, Fitzgerald was extremely bitter and his letters leading up to the story's publication show him struggling to maintain a positive outlook on Zelda's treatments, parenting, and finding time to work on *Tender is the Night*. In November 1930, Fitzgerald wrote to Ober, "In short its [*sic*] been one of those periods that come to all men I suppose when life is so complicated that with the best will in the world work is hard as hell to

⁷ Fitzgerald on *Ulysses*: "I wish it was layed in America— there is something about middle-class Ireland, that depresses me inordinately – I mean gives me a sort of hollow, cheerless pain. Half of my ancestors came from just such an Irish strata or perhaps a lower one. The book makes me feel appallingly naked" (*Letters* 61).

do. Things are better, but no end in sight yet” (*Letters* 201). Fitzgerald’s frustrations and disgust with the world around him had boiled over and resulted in creating the paramount short story of his career, which examines the consequences of alcoholism through the eyes of his literary counterpart, Charlie Wales.

Fitzgerald uses the story to explore the ramifications of alcoholism. At this point, he was trying in vain to remain sober. He wrote to Perkins, “The doctor says she [Zelda] can never drink again (not that drink in any way contributed to her collapse), and that I must not drink anything, not even wine, for a year, because drinking in the past was one of the things that haunted her delirium” (*Letters* 200). Doctor Oscar Forel, head psychiatrist at Prangins clinic and Zelda’s doctor, seems to have concluded that a source of Zelda’s ruin was marital strife resulting from Fitzgerald’s alcoholism. One stipulation in him agreeing to treat her in Switzerland was a temporary separation from her husband (Bruccoli 291). Forel and Fitzgerald also exchanged letters about his drinking, to which Fitzgerald tastelessly blamed Zelda for introducing him to alcohol in the first place. In the letter, he claims to only drink wine with dinner and that several drunken binges in their past would not have led to her current state. He concludes the vicious letter by saying, “My vision of the world at its brightest is such that life without use of its amenities [*sic*] is impossible. I have lived hard and ruined the essential innocence in myself that could make it [*sic*] that possible, and the fact that I have abused liquor is something to be paid for with suffering and death perhaps [*sic*] but not with renunciation” (*Letters* 197). The letter, though unpleasant, seems to be more defensive than angry. It is evident in looking through many other

letters or entries in the *Notebooks*⁸ that Fitzgerald knew he had a problem with alcohol. He was ravaged by guilt and seems embarrassed for being chastised by the doctor.

In a long and possibly un-sent letter to Zelda written in Fall 1932, Fitzgerald became more realistic about his problem and essentially analyzed the cracks of their relationship. He wrote that he was only able to find his confidence at the Ritz and that “I had developed such an inferiority complex that I couldn’t faze [*sic*] anyone unless I was tight” (Bruccoli 292-295). The following summer, while suffering from eczema, Zelda wrote a similar summation of their relationship, which focused on the debilitating nature of his alcoholism. She highlighted his horrible behavior throughout their marriage and concluded:

You didn’t care: so I went on and on—dancing alone, and, no matter what happens, I still know in my heart that it is a Godless, dirty game; that love is bitter and all there is, and that the rest is for the emotional beggars of the earth and is about the equivalent of people who stimulate themselves with dirty post-cards. (Bruccoli 296-301)

Although they were poor influences on each other, Fitzgerald and Zelda did love each other. They grew out of the frenetic energy of the twenties and were forced to face the consequence in the thirties. Fitzgerald’s self-prescribed inferiority complex is an interesting summation as he seemed to have found the root of his issues, though other than try (and fail) to quit drinking, he sought no cure.

Fitzgerald’s literary counterpart, Charlie Wales, suffers from a similar lack of confidence and inferiority complex. At the beginning of the story, he returns to the Ritz under the impression that he has done some growing up since he left. He believes he has rid himself of the awful,

⁸ Filled with little quips and stray phrases, *The Notebooks* often offer stray looks at Fitzgerald’s feelings of alcoholism. For example, he writes with no context, “Then I was drunk for many years, and then I died” (*Notebooks* 191). Shortly after he writes, “Drunk at 20, wrecked at 30, dead at 40. Drunk at 21, human at 31, mellow at 41, dead at 51” (*Notebooks* 196). He clearly recognizes his problem, but cannot help himself.

Babylonian habits imparted on him during his time in Paris. Charlie is so disillusioned that he believes that he has regained control over his own alcoholism by forcing himself to take one drink per day. He brags, “I take that drink deliberately, so that the idea of alcohol won’t get too big in my imagination” (“Babylon” 624). The ceremony, while valiant in nature, shows clearly that his addiction still has a hold on him. The story itself is framed by two different and unnecessary visits to the Ritz in which Charlie has a drink and boasts that he really has changed. Upon arriving in Paris at the beginning of the story, he finds that Paris has changed as well. The Ritz is no longer a bustling, raucous party, but instead remained “still and portentous.” In fact, Charlie says, “It was not an American bar anymore—he felt polite in it, and not as if he owned it. It had gone back into France” (“Babylon” 616). Despite the drastic change in his lifestyle, Charlie still feels out of place in the bar. He leaves feeling oppressed and returns to the street observing the familiar sights in a new way. He notices the “fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs [that] shone smokily through the tranquil rain and felt the sudden provincial quality of the Left Bank” (“Babylon” 617). He laments the fact that he had never actually eaten a cheap meal in Paris and concludes, “I spoiled this city for myself,” between the five course meals and the time wasted at the Ritz (“Babylon” 618). While Charlie evidently enjoyed his time in Paris, he ruined it by not fully appreciating the quiet, reserved beauty of the city. He was too busy binge drinking and spending exorbitant amounts of money, never once enjoying the city for what it is. Charlie feels oppressed on his way out of the bar and into the street because he has suddenly come face-to-face with the iridescent beauty he had ignored all that time.

Each encounter that Charlie has throughout the remainder of the story shows that despite the changes he has made, his poor reputation continues to warp people’s perception of any reform to his behavior. He cannot escape the way people perceive him. It does not matter how

clean he lives or how little he drinks; he will always be the guy who consistently went strong at the bar and on one occasion, stole a butcher's tricycle ("Babylon" 617, 629). Charlie is forced to reassure everyone he tells about controlling his alcoholism, and upon doing so, only receives half-hearted congratulations. Unfortunately, Charlie is painfully aware of his poor reputation and has even had to move his business interests out of America and into Prague because "they don't know me down there" ("Babylon" 617). Similarly, Fitzgerald tangled with his own sense of regret and guilt at this point in his life. He used the story to present his own sense of remorse while demonstrating the fact that the behavior of his past may be unforgiveable. The tragedy of the story lies in Charlie's inability to surpass the reputation of his former self, despite his confidence in the changes he has made, echoing the plight of Fitzgerald's situation at the time the story was written.

Most difficult to persuade is Charlie's sister-in-law, Marion, who blames him for the death of her sister, Helen. Entering her notably American home, "[h]e knew that now he would have to take a beating. It would last an hour or two hours, and it would be difficult, but if he modulated his inevitable resentment to the chastened attitude of the reformed sinner, he might win his point in the end" ("Babylon" 624-625). Charlie tries to defend himself against the onslaught of her anger while remaining on her good side, but he can only take so much. He "gripped the side of the chair. This was more difficult than he expected; he wanted to launch out into a long expostulation and explanation but she interrupted, 'I don't feel up to going over this again,'" ("Babylon" 625). In his heart, Charlie knows that no amount of pleading can excuse what he did. No matter how much he cleans up his act, he will always be the man that locked her sister out of the house during a blizzard. He maintains the position that this act did not have any direct correlation with her eventual death by heart trouble, but his defense is irrelevant. His

reputation precedes him, and he can do absolutely nothing to change Marion's perception of him. However, she begrudgingly relents after seeing that his "feet were planted on the earth now, and her own maternal feeling recognized the naturalness of his desire; but she had lived for a long time with a prejudice—a prejudice founded on a curious disbelief in her sister's happiness" ("Babylon" 627).

Marion cannot understand how Helen could love a man like Charlie, of whom she disapproved from the beginning. However, as referenced by Seymour Gross, Marion and Helen seemed to drift apart long before Charlie was even involved. He points to the foil created by Helen's black mourning dress and the white dress Helen wears on the swing set in Charlie's dream (Gross 133). While they are sisters, and Marion obviously cared for her, they were two different people who did not get along while Helen was alive.

Marion not only feels that Charlie indirectly killed Helen, but also feels that he introduced her to his outrageous life of excess. Marion is self-conscious of her financial situation and feels insulted by Charlie's antics and unending waste. From the fistfuls of money thrown at bellhops or bandleaders to the elaborate meals on the town, Charlie exudes irresponsibility and impulsiveness to a degree insulting to the frugal, conservative sensibilities on which Marion and her husband pride themselves ("Babylon" 626). During the conversation, Charlie chooses his words carefully in describing his apartment in Prague and the French governess he has hired to care for Honoria. He notes, "They couldn't be expected to accept with equanimity the fact that his income was again twice as large as their own" ("Babylon" 626). Marion seizes the opportunity to guilt Charlie by commenting, "I suppose you can give her more luxuries than we can. When you were throwing away money we were living along watching every ten francs...I suppose you'll start doing it again" ("Babylon" 626). Charlie's frustrations continue to grow, but

he is able to hold out until Marion relents and grants him custody again. His success lasts but a few moments until Charlie's excessive and sinful history manifests itself in the badly timed appearance of Duncan and Lorraine at Marion's home, spoiling all of the ground Charlie has regained.

The "sudden ghosts out of the past" barge into the living room, roaring with laughter and squandering any chance that Charlie has of convincing Marion that he has changed at all ("Babylon" 622, 631). She revokes custody of Honoria and storms out of the room. Outraged, Charlie quietly wishes Honoria a goodnight and goes directly back to the Ritz, "with the furious idea of finding Lorraine and Duncan, but they were not there, and he realized that in any case there was nothing he could do," and orders a drink ("Babylon" 632). Conversation at the bar turns to the crash in which Charlie explains that while he lost a lot of money in the crash, "I lost everything I wanted in the boom" ("Babylon" 633). After losing his wife to death and his daughter to his own irresponsibility, Charlie realizes that the great joy of life is more than the cheap thrills had at the bar. And yet, his past is too infamous to escape, and he just cannot outrun the shadow it casts on his foreseeable future. The story ends with Charlie exactly where it began, drinking at the Ritz and trying his best to convince everyone that he was different now. Haunted by the ghosts of his past, Charlie contemplates the lonely consequences of his actions and misses Helen more than he ever had before. Fitzgerald is not ambiguous about the connections to his personal life with the story. While Zelda may have been alive, her debilitating mental illness entirely changed the dynamic of their relationship. He illustrates Zelda's absence in the story through Helen's death, and he illustrates his squandered opportunity as a father figure through Marion's withdrawing of custody.

The story demonstrates the regret Fitzgerald felt about wasting his youth on his spurious race against time, a race he eventually admits to losing in “The Crack-Up” five years later. Seymour Gross explains, “What Fitzgerald wanted, finally, was to fill each moment of life so full of living that time would stand still for him” (128). And it was not for a lack of trying; the Fitzgerald’s antics, while in their prime, were notorious topics of conversation among their peers:

They rode down Fifth Avenue on the tops of taxis because it was hot or dove into the fountain at Union Square or tried to undress at the *Scandals*, or, in sheer delight at the splendor of New York, jumped, dead sober, into the Pulitzer fountain in front of the plaza. Fitzgerald got in fights with waiters and Zelda danced on people’s dinner tables. (Mizener 117)

Their only concern was the moment to be had. They thought little of the future and focused their attention on enjoying every split second of their day. Their behavior, while amusing, grew tiresome and was often criticized by their peers. Arthur Mizener takes care to specify that “they were as likely to be two or three hours late to a dinner party as on time and even more likely not to come at all. They went to people’s houses, carefully greeted their hosts, and then sat down quietly in a corner and, like two children, went fast asleep” (Mizener 117).

As the excitement of the decade began to dissipate, Fitzgerald’s realization about wasted youth and trying to stop time gradually became clear. He suffered as a result of his past behavior, could barely afford Zelda’s treatments, and began to recognize his alcoholism. By wasting his youth trying to stop time, Fitzgerald came to the conclusion that he had wasted his life altogether. He left no possibility for a happy or successful future because his mind was dead set on freezing the current moments of his past. This realization led explicitly to his eventual

cracking-up and the resigned failure that pervaded the last decade of his life. The story focuses on the return to Babylon because Charlie is also on his way to realizing that he has wasted his life before he even knew it began. Charlie's past is ugly because he was also overly devoted to freezing particular moments of his past. Granted, the carefree lifestyle of the Lost Generation is their most endearing quality, but as Charlie demonstrates, not when spun so out of control that one indirectly kills his wife and loses custody of his daughter. The story works as a poignant reminder about the importance of control. The story shows readers that they should find a healthy balance between making the most out of every moment and not losing sight of the future ahead of them.

The foil created by the Peters family and Charlie Wales appears to be a conglomeration of the relationships Fitzgerald observed around him, most notably the family of Zelda Sayre. In an interview in 1979, Scottie confirms the speculation that Marion Peters was inspired by Zelda's older sister, Rosalind, who

was forever trying to prove that my father ruined my mother's life. I don't believe that and I don't believe she ruined his life. I think they were singularly mismatched. There's no question that each needed stability and clearly neither one was able to give the other stability. They encouraged each other's most self-destructive tendencies. (qtd. in Davison 198)

In June 1930, Rosalind, who was living in Brussels with her husband Newman at the time, wrote to Fitzgerald saying, "I would almost rather she die now than escape only to go back to the mad world that you and she have created for yourselves" (qtd. in Brucoli 291-292). The strict, Victorian sentimentalities of the Peters family can also be related back to Zelda's father, Judge Anthony Sayre, who served on the Supreme Court from 1909 until his death in 1931, nine

months after the publication of “Babylon Revisited.” Fitzgerald remained in contact with the Sayre family while Zelda was institutionalized, updating them on her status. In an attempt to impress the Judge with his seriousness, Fitzgerald sent him a copy of Watson’s *Behaviorisms* (Brucoli 237). Fitzgerald also maintained the speculation that Zelda’s condition resulted from bad genes and a rejection of domestic responsibility. Brucoli points out some merit to the claim, showing that the Sayre family had a history of neuroticism: Judge Sayre suffered a nervous breakdown, Zelda’s grandmother committed suicide, there were multiple problematic uncles, and her brother Anthony went on to commit suicide in 1933 (Brucoli 292). Clearly, there is more to Zelda’s condition than her genes, and this supposition may be another instance of Fitzgerald’s hack deflections of responsibility.

Another source of inspiration for the story may derive from the Fitzgerald’s friendship with Gerald and Sara Murphy, notorious ex-pats who inspired the characters of Dick and Nicole Diver in Fitzgerald’s last completed novel, *Tender is the Night*, and were known to care for Scottie throughout her childhood.⁹ Their daughter, Honoria Murphy, who shared a name with Charlie’s daughter in the story, explained as an adult that Fitzgerald often quizzed her about different things like her favorite colors or flowers in the garden when she was a girl (Davison 193). Honoria Murphy admitted that the character more closely depicts the mannerisms and relationship dynamic between young Scottie and her father, but it is certainly not insignificant that she and the character shared a name. Fitzgerald may have used Honoria’s name for the story

⁹ After reading *Tender*, Hemingway wrote to Fitzgerald in May 1934 about using the Murphys as inspiration for the novel. He chastised Fitzgerald for altering the characters and writes, “I liked it and I didn’t. It started off with that marvelous description of Sara and Gerald (goddamn it [John] Dos [Passos] took it with him so I can’t refer to it. So if I make any mistakes—). Then you started fooling with them, making them come from things they didn’t come from, changing them into other people [*sic*] you can’t do that, Scott. If you take real people and write about them you cannot give them other parents than they have (they are made by their parents and what happens) you cannot make them do anything they would not do” (Hemingway 407).

to symbolize the significance of Charlie's goal. By regaining custody of his daughter and seeking reprieve for his past, Charlie is quite literally on a quest for honor. Regaining custody is the critical part of getting his life back together so that he could continue building a responsible, honorable future for himself.

Charlie's quest is thwarted by the ghosts of his past, which loom over Paris. There is not a single instance in the story that he is not reminded of his past. The people he comes in contact with—the Peters family, Duncan and Lorraine, bartenders at the Ritz—are all unable to separate the Charlie they knew from the Charlie they see before them. They have no interest in his future and focus entirely on the mistakes and embarrassments of his past. Though the conclusion of the story is mildly ambiguous, readers can surmise that Charlie will never be granted his honor again, and he will live out the rest of his days prowling the streets of Paris and swearing to anyone who will listen that he has changed for good this time. Readers can assume that no one will listen and Charlie will forever pay for his asinine belief that he could, even just for a moment, stop the steady march of time for his own indulgence.

Ironically, five years after publishing "Babylon Revisited," Fitzgerald went a step further into becoming Charlie Wales. Arthur Mizener details an event that occurred in 1936. Zelda was receiving treatment in North Carolina by this point and Fitzgerald stayed in a hotel nearby. After the couple had a particularly nasty fight, Fitzgerald locked Zelda out of the hotel room. He spent the evening dumping out her suitcase and ripping her clothes apart by hand while she was forced to find her own way back to the hospital. She was apparently spotted by an unnamed friend at the bus station, exquisitely dressed with a bonnet tied tightly around her chin and reading the Bible. The friend informed Fitzgerald of her whereabouts and returned with bus fare (Mizener 263).

“Babylon Revisited” puts readers in an uncomfortable situation. The disgust of Charlie’s actions weighs almost as equally as the mercy readers wish to grant him. It is not clear if Charlie has really changed by the time of his return to Paris, but he certainly believes that he has. While Fitzgerald deflected the blame of his having anything to do with Zelda’s breakdown, it seems that he did truly know that they were bad for each other, as purported by Scottie all those years later. Again, we see a divided subconscious in the author. Do we show Charlie some mercy and let him retrieve his honor, or are the sins of his ignorant, though well-intentioned past, far too great to grant reprieve? At the core of the story, Fitzgerald seems to show he desperately wanted Zelda back in his life and felt remorse for having a hand in her demise, and yet years later, showed no improvement or repentance. The story shows that while Fitzgerald searched for exoneration, he knew he did not deserve it any more than Charlie does.

Conclusion

Fitzgerald once quipped in his *Notebooks*, “Show me a hero and I’ll write you a tragedy” (*Notebooks* 122). Not only did he create complex, riveting protagonists, but the tragedies they endure ended up being not so different from the tragedy of his own life. Fitzgerald had all the drive and ambition in the world to be the best, and yet could not conflate his sense of wonder with the harsh realities of the world around him. His debilitating inferiority complex led to bouts of depression and severe alcoholism, which in turn ruined his marriage and caused him to abandon all hope. While simultaneously representing the frenetic energy and wonder of the Jazz Age, Fitzgerald suffered the downfall of a generation just as harshly. He has become synonymous with the generation as his life mirrored its exciting rise and depressing plummet perfectly. The divisive nature of the twenties echoed easily throughout Fitzgerald’s prose and the consequences of having such a conflicted psyche is demonstrated in the action of his fiction, as well as in the nature of his downfall.

Recently unearthed letters and telegrams between Fitzgerald and his agent, Harold Ober from 1936, depict the author at his worst. At this time Zelda has been moved from Johns Hopkins in Baltimore to Highland Hospital in Asheville while Fitzgerald lived in The Grove Park Inn nearby. Here, he battled numerous depressive episodes and tried to reduce his agonizing debt. Almost every one of the eleven letters includes some request for money in small amounts, just enough to get him to his next paycheck. In May 1936, he writes:

This business of debt is awful. It has made me lose confidence to an appalling extent. I used to write for myself—now I write for editors because I never have time to really think what I *do* like or find anything to like. Its [*sic*] like a man drawing out water in

drops because he's too thirsty for the well to fill. Oh, for one lucky break. (West 488-489)

His debts were so severe at this point that Fitzgerald even allocated \$9,000 of his life insurance to go to Ober in the event of his death, to repay his personal loans (West 497). By the end of the May letter, Fitzgerald fully summarizes his sentiments and frustrations with wealth: "Ah well, everyone has troubles now. Except the rich, damn them" (West 489).

The Grove Park Inn deemed Fitzgerald to be too rowdy and forbade him to remain in the hotel without the constant supervision of a nurse. The complaint stems from a threat of suicide in which he fired off a gun (Brucoli 411). Fitzgerald again attempted suicide after the publication of "The Other Side of Paradise, Scott Fitzgerald, 40, Engulfed in Despair" (1936) by Michael Mok, which appeared in *The New York Post*. Fitzgerald was interviewed on his fortieth birthday and was sick and drinking most of the day. Mok obsesses over the struggling author's alcoholism and paints an incredibly unattractive portrait, saying at one point, "With his visitor he chatted bravely, as an actor, consumed with fear that his name will never be in lights again, discusses his next starring role. He kidded no one. There obviously was as little hope in his heart as there was sunshine in the dripping skies, covered with clouds that veiled the view of Sunset Mountain" (Mok 1). Mok also highlights each trip for a re-fill and compares Fitzgerald to a pitiful, beaten child. In addition to swallowing an overdose of morphine after reading the article, Fitzgerald reached out to his old friend Hemingway to ask for a response, who was happy to help. However, after Fitzgerald learned that his friend was in Montana at the time, he rescinded the request, though was grateful for the offer (Brucoli 411).

Ober eventually convinced Fitzgerald to take a contract with MGM and after writing his will in North Carolina, appointing Ober co-executor of his affairs, he moved to Hollywood in

July 1937. Zelda remained in Highland Hospital until her death in 1948 after a fire burned the hospital to the ground. Fitzgerald consulted on several scripts while in Hollywood and eventually became close with Sheilah Graham, an English gossip columnist. Working on and off as script supervisor,¹⁰ Fitzgerald also began work on his last (unfinished) novel, *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, edited and published posthumously by friend, Edmund Wilson. Fitzgerald was doomed by his chain-smoking and alcoholism, and after suffering a massive heart attack in December 1940, he died a week before Christmas at the age of 44.

Though disappointing and shocking to many readers, Fitzgerald's failure and early death should be no surprise. His complicated and divisive mindset always forced him to be at odds with himself and was illustrated throughout his best fiction. His ill-health and failed marriage were direct byproducts of his divided psyche. While incredibly talented and ambitious, the author could not seem to reconcile his opposing mindsets to use that coveted "first-rate intelligence" he mentions in "The Crack-Up." As is the tragedy of many great artists, Fitzgerald did not live long enough to witness the true scope of his success. He died believing he was a failure, unaware of the accolades his work would receive in the future. The legacy of F. Scott Fitzgerald is that of a brilliantly talented writer whose skills and happiness were hampered by the conflicting thoughts and sentiments ravaging his mind. His work leaves modern readers themselves, borne back ceaselessly into the past, desperately wishing that we could show him all that he accomplished.

¹⁰ Briefly on *Gone With the Wind*.

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