

# Joint Factors in Fitzgerald's Fictional Works: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract**—The fictional works of F. Scott Fitzgerald are very rich in many ways. Thematically, they expose the air of his age particularly the post-World War I lost generation by the illusion of their American Dream which they nourished on ever since their childhood years. The clash between the rich and the poor is another theme, not to mention tens of other themes, such as love and war, success and failure. All these and other themes are delivered by Fitzgerald in innovative and novel styles and techniques quite peculiar to him. The present paper highlights the major themes and joint elements in Fitzgerald's major works, such as *This Side of Paradise*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Tender is the Night Tender*. There are many joint factors in Fitzgerald's aforesaid works. The American Dream is one outstanding joint theme that marks Fitzgerald's works. Most of the scholars and lecturers of Fitzgerald's works refer to this topic without further explanation of the seeds of this ideal dream. The present paper sheds a glimpse of light on this issue. The protagonists' journeys and final destinations to fulfill their dreams and aims constitute another theme; the class distinction and ruthlessness of the upper middle class against the young generation; the origins and scientific, philosophical and medical, geographical, and historical elements; all constitute minor themes and topics need tracing and further researches of Fitzgerald's works. This paper is a comparative study of all the major and minor themes and topics mentioned above.

**Keywords**—American Dream, Fitzgerald's works, Gatsby, Paradise, Tender.

## I. INTRODUCTION

F. Scott Fitzgerald's fictional works are marked with a blend of similar and diverse thematic and technical factors that contribute in flavoring them as simply being peculiar to Fitzgerald (Rauf, 2015, p. 73). Themes, such as the American Dream, the contrast between the very rich and the poor, the Jazz Age (Maklad, 2015), and the journey toward the East and backward are a few of many problematic themes in his works. Technically speaking, Fitzgerald was obsessed with the aim of finding new methods and techniques to contribute to the art of narration other than those of Emily Bronte, Joseph Conrad, and James Joyce.

This study highlights the major themes and joint elements in Fitzgerald's major works, such as *This Side of Paradise*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Tender is the Night*.

The American Dream is one of the outstanding joint themes that mark Fitzgerald's works. Most of the scholars and lecturers of Fitzgerald's works refer to this topic without further explanation of the seeds of this ideal dream. The paper sheds a glimpse of light on this issue. The journeys made by Fitzgerald's genteel heroes, or as he used to call them "my

brothers" (Fitzgerald, 1964, p. 66) such as Amory Blaine of *Paradise*, Jay of *Gatsby*, and Dick Diver of *Tender*, and final quest to fulfill their dreams and aims constitute another theme; social elation and class discrimination practiced by the ruthlessness of the upper middle class against the young generation; the origins and scientific, philosophical and medical (the geographical and historical elements; all constitute the major themes and topics need tracing and further researches of Fitzgerald's works (Rauf, 2015, p. 73).

According to Mizener (1966, p. 601), Fitzgerald's works are full of autobiographical elements, personal experience, readings, intellectual and philosophical thoughts along with the scientific and industrial progresses, and novel trends in fashion and arts. Fitzgerald was the founder of the Jazz Age trend of his day together with his exemplary role of his age. Rauf (2020) mentioned that "His wife, Zelda Sayers' schizophrenic character left a significant impact on his career and morale. She exhausted him to the extent that he employed her character in his works in one way or another".

All these factors gave Fitzgerald not only themes and techniques, but rather gave him material, circumstance, and

the vision of a seer that he was famous of. Accordingly, Fitzgerald deployed all of these within his major works as major joint factors in his novels.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fitzgerald's quest for exploring his personal experience and exposing it through some exquisite words as best explained by him in his autobiographical piece, "The Crack Up" (Fitzgerald, 1964, p. 42), "My own happiness in the past often approached such an ecstasy that I could not share it even with the person dearest to me but had to walk it away in quiet streets and lanes with only fragments of it to distill into little lines in books" (Fitzgerald, 1965) is not that of the Holy Grail. In fact, his belief in himself and his intelligence made him innovate his methods and themes out of his personal life; he believed that "A test of a first-rate intelligence is to hold two opposed ideas in the mind in the same time and still retain the ability to function." (Millard, 1965 p. 12).

Fitzgerald amuses his writing by juxtaposing two ambivalent situations, attitudes, and circumstantial cases to come up with the final outcome, which is mostly tragic in a way or another. His protagonists, like him, belong to geographical regions either to the Midwest or to Southern States and they seek success in the East; they are of modest financial backgrounds antagonized by the very rich people; they are idealists to be clashed, lashed, and crushed by materialists. These paradoxical events create the major conflicts in Fitzgerald's fictional works.

According to Cowley (1963), understanding this approach "is central to any discussion of Fitzgerald's novels. "Double vision" denotes a two-level reading." It suggests the complicated strain when Fitzgerald juxtaposes things in opposition such as we, as readers, may subjectively encounter the incidents around which Fitzgerald exposes, and still are able to retain the required detachment to objectively disapprove it. The basis of this double vision is split, the situation of extremity against each other; the outcome is intense strain. Tracing Fitzgerald's narrative technique from *This Side of Paradise* to *The Great Gatsby* and finally to *Tender Is the Night*, one may track the evolution of his double vision, which eventually is to study this evolution of a genius man of letters in his narrative technique.

*The Far Side of Paradise* (Mizener, 1986, p. 6) is another contribution of Arthur Mizener to Fitzgerald's biography. Mizener edited and wrote the "Introduction" with an artistic survey of Fitzgerald's contribution to the American literary library. More than ten critics wrote various essays on his personal life, career, social and financial problems, and his technical and thematic achievements in the realm of modernist fiction. Hundreds of scholars publish articles, reviews, and critical essays on Fitzgerald's unique art of narrative technique, the autobiographical aspects, and many other thematic subjects.

In 1936, Edmund Wilson edited and collected some of Fitzgerald's unpublished short stories and autobiographical including his confessions in "The Crack Up" in a short volume named *The CrackUp*. By doing so, Wilson became

Fitzgerald's first biographer. The volume included such stories like "The Rich Boy", "Babylon revisited" as well as many other remarkable pieces of Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald, 1964).

## III. DISCUSSION

### A. *The American Dream*

The American Dream is founded on various sacred and secular forces that compose a myth cluster that envisions a new American Adam who is supposedly perfectible both socially and morally so that through personal diligence and strife he could better his lot and that of his fellowmen (Sachan, 2014). Thus, by doing so this new Adam can recover Eden, or in American terms, he can establish God's heaven on the American soil as a final incarnation at some millennial time. This dream remained one of the glowing visions of civilized man since America's discovery by the end of the fifteenth century (Rauf, 2020. p. 66). With the lack of cultural tradition, the Americans kept priding themselves on this dream. However, its discrepancies whether theoretical or practical, remain invisible in the American life till the aftermath of World War I (Rauf, 2020. p. 66).

This war is considered by historians a barrier that marked the death of the old serene and ethical order of the genteel tradition. This radical change was manifested in a revolution against the long-established manners and morals and spearheaded by the young generation who considered themselves disillusioned by the war and deceived by its ideal slogans (Rauf, 2020. p. 66).

Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) is considered a literary representative and spokesman of the young American generation during 1920s which he named as the Jazz Age. During the period between the two World Wars, the American society witnessed the breakdown of the old values and the cultural foundations that built up the myth of the American Dream of social success and elation. Fitzgerald's fictional works reflect the impact of the subsequent changes in economic, social, intellectual and ethical standards upon the young intelligentsia (Rauf, 2020. p. 67). His personal life and fictional works manifest a reflection of the general air of despair that hovered in the American horizon during that period. Hence, he was considered a prophet of his generation and age (Rauf, 2020. p. 66). To have a full understanding of his contemporary national mood, Fitzgerald penetrated deep into the American history that the main reason of his generation's disillusionment lied in the illusion itself, which he considered "the lies of generations" (Fitzgerald, 2023. p. 22), and "the muddled, unchastened [sic] war... the mistakes and half-forgotten dreams of dead statesmen and poets" (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 253), and "the unreality of reality, a promise that rock of the War World II [sic] was founded securely on a fairy's wing" (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 100). Therefore, most of his novels and fictional pieces (except the hack ones) exposed a clash between a genteel romantic hero committed to fulfill his ideal dream, which is part of his national dream of success, and the ugly, materialistic and inhuman reality which negates every idealism in its pragmatic discourses.

Throughout the studied novels, Fitzgerald manipulates certain factors that stand as metaphors and similes for either side of the conflict. Then with the help of his symbolic narrative, he juxtaposes the paradoxical forces as warring conflicts that end with the inevitable defeat of these genteel heroes. All these factors are embodied within a cyclic journey that always begins toward the East to ends backward in a given time. Geographical locations are frequently employed by Fitzgerald as metaphors for certain moral and philosophical conceptions in a way to serve his theme (Rauf, 2020).

### B. Journey

The journey meant here is the quest toward the fulfillment of the American Dream. The genteel hero, to start with, is either, like Fitzgerald, a Mid-Westerner, such as Amory Blaine of *Paradise*, Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby of *Gatsby*, or is like his father a Southern as Dick Diver of *Tender*. All of these heroes are brought up on the moral standards of work, honor, courage, courtesy, good instincts, etc., of the genteel tradition of their hometowns. Yet most of them have poor financial backgrounds, at least by the time they begin experiencing life. To expose this (ethically rich but financially poor) situation of his heroes in his novels, Fitzgerald employs certain minor characters of shadowy figures that stand for all the old genteel morality that help his heroes, to a certain extent, preserve their ethical standards and keep them intact against immoral perversion.

Despite her shortcomings, Beatrice O'Hara of *Paradise*, for instance, is presented as "one perfect bud" of the genteel tradition from whom Amory Blaine inherits his noble vision of America, but before her death, she distributes Amory's inherited money among charity houses and by her death, Amory gets deprived of both the money and the genteel stratum (Kelly, 2012, p. 18). On the other hand, Monsignor Darcy stands as a spiritual father to Amory who, again, gets into spiritual vacuum after Monsignor's death (Kelley, 2012, p. 19).

### C. The Father Image

The image of a poor but moral father is displayed by Fitzgerald more artistically in *Gatsby* when Mr. Gatz, an exhausted but respected figure, comes a long way to honor the funeral of his son Gatsby at the end of the Gatsby's tragedy, believing, ironically enough, that the reasons of his son's success are due to Ben Franklin's legendary line of success which Gatsby charted on the flyleaf of his book since he was a child. On the other hand, Nick Carraway's moral judgments are echoed in his father's advice to him (Fitzgerald, 2011, pp. 1, 174). In *Tender*, this same moral image of a father takes sentimental turn to Dick Diver's father, the image of a poor Southern clergyman who comes from the "hard soil" of another America, to whom Dick refers judgments as his only "moral guide." After his father's death, Dick believes that he has no more ties with the old order. This old ideal America, Dick also envisions in the image of the gold star mothers who have come to mourn their dead sons (Fitzgerald, 2010, pp. 223-5, 169).

### D. The Genteel Intelligentsia

Despite their intelligence, Fitzgerald's genteel heroes nurtured the romantic vision of the world they live in. They

are full of ideal dreams for the promises of life and take for granted that their intelligence and honest diligence are going to be rewarded according to the promises of the American Dream. They are made to believe in this dream innocently so that it blinds their sights from the real beasts of the American life. They hold the entire ideal "illusions of eternal strength and health, and the essential goodness of people – they were illusions of a nation, and they so naïvely believed that there were no wolves outside..." (Fitzgerald, 2011, p.22).

Full of such promises, Amory Blaine begins his journey believing that "he was a boy marked for glory" and goes on to fulfill his dream to be "one of the gods of the class" at Princeton University (Fitzgerald, 2012, p. 23). Nick Carraway, on the other hand, identifies his personal dreams of the elations of men, with Gatsby's image: "There was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life ... it was an extra-ordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness..." (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 2). Dr. Diver of *Tender* expresses to Franz his only ambition to be a good psychologist and maybe to be the greatest one that ever lived; and Franz replies, "That's very good – and very American" (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 37).

Fitzgerald's genteel heroes set off on their journeys toward the East. Amory Blaine's boarding high school St. Regis's is in Connecticut, then Princeton University is in New Jersey, and during the "Interlude" of the war, he is sent overseas to Europe, and after getting discharged, he remains in New York. Nick Carraway comes from Minnesota to New York, and then further eastward to Long Island, whereas Gatsby himself comes from an obscure place North Dakota, moves upward to Great Lakes, then settles, like Nick, in Long Island, whereas Dick Diver sets out across the Atlantic to Europe. All the given Eastern places, both within the American continent or in Europe, stand for corruption and moral let down in Fitzgerald's novels. One Mid-Western state is to be added to Fitzgerald's list of corruptive places, and this is Chicago. Chicago is the place of the very rich of America where Tom Buchanan of *Gatsby* and Mr. Warren, Nichole's father in *Tender*, come from with their ruthlessness and the germs of their ancestral corruption. It is in the East where these young men's potential dreams breakdown into an impotent vacuum.

### E. The Feminine Factor

Being financially poor and having a sort of romantic readiness, Fitzgerald's heroes soon transform the objects of their dreams into feminine images. They usually fall in love with girls from the upper physical features; the features that most infatuate these heroes. Rosalind of *Paradise*, Daisy of *Gatsby* and Nicole of *Tender*, all have the same seductive qualities. The genteel heroes begin to infuse their old ambitions into these feminine images and envision them in paradisiacal terms. Hence, whenever Amory of *Paradise* is with Rosalind, they are "always in a sort of hush, as if they feared that any minute the spell would break and drop them out the paradise" (Fitzgerald, 2012, p. 169); while in *Gatsby*, Nick defines Daisy's tempting voice as the real object of Gatsby's dream: "I think it wouldn't be over-dreamed – that voice was a deathless song" (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 97). This same element, Nicole's seductive voice, plays the same role with Dick Diver (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 42).

In *Gatsby* and *Tender*, Fitzgerald's voice keeps hinting at the essential vulgarity, materialism, and corruption of these feminine objects of the American Dream. Gatsby, who is raised to have a "Platonic conception of himself... a son of God," is committed to the service of "the vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty" (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 99). Hence, while Gatsby stands for the ideal illusion of the American Dream, Daisy, on the other hand, stands for the vast, vulgar, and meretricious continent of America. Moreover, in *Tender* by the time of Nicole's temptation, Fitzgerald's voice interferes to warn the reader of the seeds of disaster which Nicole embodies: "Now there was this scarcely save waif of disaster bringing him the essence of a continent" (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 42). Nicole, like America, is a waif whose physical charm appeals to Dick, the genteel hero, who is unaware that this very object of his dream is a crook by heritage (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 311).

Not until the end do these heroes realize their self-delusion by the physical glamour of these fake visions of their homeland. They are the same qualities of a genteel hero that make Rosalind of *Paradise* negate Amory's love: "The very qualities I love you for are the ones that will always make you a failure"; so, she rejects him to marry someone rich of a "background" (Fitzgerald, 2012, p. 175). Moreover, while Gatsby is naively waiting outside Daisy's house till the morning lest she will get hurt by her husband, Nick sees her through the window conspiring with Tom Buchanan against him. Gatsby keeps waiting for a telephone message from her, but she and her husband send Wilson to kill him (Fitzgerald, 2011, pp. 144-46, 162). In *Tender*, Dick's process of gradual deterioration is a long one. This process is balanced with Nicole's reversed one toward recovery; so, she recovers at the expense of his disintegration. Still yet, having ancestral heritage of incest, she betrays Dick before getting divorced. Hence, the sane Nicole is morally sick like her father. Only then Dick feels disgusted from her heretical contamination (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 320).

#### F. Love and War

Fitzgerald's concept of love and war is carried out in the studied novels. Like the ordeal of the war, post-war love romances bring Fitzgerald's genteel heroes' other aftermaths so that they get disillusioned by both: The vulgarity and brutality of the war, and by the vulgarity and materialism of the post-war love romances. When Amory of *Paradise* expresses his restless spirit, his friend Tom tells him: "Love and war did for you" (Fitzgerald, 2003 p. 192). In the *Great Gatsby*, the veteran is back wearing his military uniform with medals of honor but exhausted by hunger, disillusioned by the war as well as by Daisy's loss (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 172). This theme of love and war takes its full shape in *Tender* when Dick says at the French Front: "All my beautiful lovely safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love" (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 125). This is another theme that Fitzgerald manipulates in his novels in a way to serve his major theme which is the collapse of the American Dream during the post-war years.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

All these factors are employed by Fitzgerald to expose the clash between the ideal illusion of the American Dream and the Mammonish forces that shatter this dream. Fitzgerald portrays an image of Adam after the Fall, a defeated hero in the American Wasteland.

Fitzgerald's fiction is also rich of many ideas, themes and techniques. These topics can be tackled separately in further new studies. For instance: Fitzgerald is widely known as one of the few American writers who have a distinguished narrative; the influence of modernism on his stylistic technique; Joseph Conrad's influence on his narrative technique; besides many other technical devices he used and developed in his works.

There are also many thematic topics that can be traced in his works. Among these: his influence by the romantic poets, more especially by John Keats, so one may trace the romantic elements in his works; Fitzgerald as the "Laureate of the Jazz Age" is a topic by itself; his influence by certain philosophers such as Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler can make a good thesis. To sum up, Fitzgerald's life and career are still open for further scholarships throughout the world.

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