His Lost City: F Scott Fitzgerald's New York

Kris Robert Murphy

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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HIS LOST CITY: F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S NEW YORK

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Kris R. Murphy
1993
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

[Signature]
Author

Approved, July 1993

Scott Donaldson
Christopher MacGowan
Robert MacCubbin
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The author is indebted to Professor Scott Donaldson for his patience, his example, and his encouragement. The author also wishes to thank Professor Christopher MacGowan and Professor Robert Maccubbin.
The purpose of this study is to trace F. Scott Fitzgerald's development and deterioration as an artist and a man through his fictional treatment of New York City.

As an imaginative and extravagantly ambitious young man from St. Paul, Minnesota, Fitzgerald wanted to believe that there was someplace on earth where he could realize his fantastic dreams of love and wealth. He became enamored of the romantic New York he found in books and plays and decided to go East to take advantage of the unlimited opportunities he was sure he would find there.

Fitzgerald's initial sojourn in New York was a catastrophe. He failed to establish himself as a writer and lost the girl he hoped to marry, Zelda Sayre, in the process. These failures disillusioned him and provided him with material for a story about a poor boy from the middle-west who travels to New York in search of his destiny. He told this story repeatedly throughout his career as a fiction writer, weaving it together with another story about a wealthy girl who rejects a poor boy's love in The Great Gatsby, his best novel.

It is suggested that New York was, for Fitzgerald, originally a symbol of the romantic promise inherent in what he referred to as the "idea" of America, but that the city eventually became in his mind a monument to the betrayal and death of that promise. Fitzgerald's ambivalence toward New York, his desire to believe in its myths even after he had seen those myths revealed as lies, is illustrated and explained through analysis of Fitzgerald's novels, short stories, essays, correspondence, and notebooks.
HIS LOST CITY: F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S NEW YORK
"I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, amongst imaginary things, happenings and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. Every novel contains an element of autobiography—and this can hardly be denied, since the creator can only explain himself in his creations."

--Joseph Conrad to Arthur Symons
(Heart of Darkness 235)

"Over the river from Christopher Street, that’s where the West begins..."

--Ring Lardner
(“Jersey City Gendarmerie, Je T’Aime” 83)
I: "The far away East. . . the vast, breathless bustle of New York"

"Mostly," wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald in a 1933 essay entitled "One Hundred False Starts,"

we authors must repeat ourselves—that's the truth. We have two or three great and moving experiences in our lives. . . . Then we learn our trade, well or less well, and we tell our two or three stories—each time in a new disguise—maybe ten times, maybe a hundred, as long as people will listen. . . . When I face the fact that all my stories are going to have a certain family resemblance, I am taking a step toward avoiding false starts. If a friend says he's got a story for me and launches into a tale of being robbed by Brazilian pirates in a swaying straw hut on the edge of a smoking volcano in the Andes, with his fiancée bound and gagged on the roof, I can well believe there were various human emotions involved; but having successfully avoided pirates, volcanoes and fiancées who get themselves bound and gagged on roofs, I can't feel them. Whether it's something that happened twenty years ago or only yesterday, I must start out with an emotion—one that's close to me and that I can understand. (Afternoon Of An Author 132)

Fitzgerald was certainly writing about himself and about emotions he'd felt years before when, "transparently concealing himself behind the alias Basil Duke Lee" (The Basil And Josephine Stories. "Introduction" vii), he wrote, between March 1928 and February 1929, the nine Basil Duke Lee stories in which "the chief episodes were drawn from the author's experiences" (Bruccoli 310). So, in "Forging Ahead," when Basil, brooding over his family's financial misadventures and the loss of his "friendly and familiar" dreams of Yale, thinks longingly of the East and New York City, one may be sure that Fitzgerald himself was suffused with just such longing as a young man growing up in the "middle-west" (The Great Gatsby 137) of St. Paul, Minnesota:

Yale was the far-away East, that he had loved with a vast nostalgia since he had first read books about great cities. Beyond the dreary railroad stations

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1 See also The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald: "That spoonful of magic which is allowed us once or twice in life" (no. 1848).
of Chicago and the night fires of Pittsburgh, back in the old states, something went on that made his heart beat fast with excitement. He was attuned to the vast, breathless bustle of New York, to the metropolitan days and nights that were tense as singing wires. Nothing needed to be imagined there, for it was all the very stuff of romance—life was as vivid and satisfactory as in books and dreams. (The Basil and Josephine Stories 147)

Fitzgerald first saw New York City one day in 1906. Remembering that day in a 1933 essay entitled “My Lost City,” he wrote: “There was first the ferry boat moving softly from the Jersey shore at dawn—the moment crystalized into my first symbol of New York” (The Crack-Up 23). Five years later, during “his period of unpopularity and unhappiness” (Bruccoli 37) at Newman School in Hackensack, New Jersey, Fitzgerald “went into the city from school to see Ina Claire in ‘The Quaker Girl’ and Gertrude Bryan in ‘Little Boy Blue.’ Confused by my hopeless and melancholy love for them both, I was unable to choose between them—so they blurred into one lovely entity, the girl. She was my second symbol of New York. The ferry boat stood for triumph, the girl for romance” (“My Lost City” 23). At Newman Fitzgerald thought of himself as “a poor boy in a rich boy’s school” (As Ever, Scott Fitz- 357), but his trips to New York fueled his voracious imagination with sights and experiences “commensurate to his capacity for wonder” (The Great Gatsby 140).

He was particularly enthralled by the theaters of Broadway which “excited his craving for metropolitan glamour and reinforced his theatrical ambitions” (Bruccoli 37), and he incorporated some of his early memories of Broadway into his first novel, This Side of Paradise:

There was a bright star in February. New York burst upon him [Amory Blaine] on Washington’s Birthday with the brilliance of a long-anticipated event. His glimpse of it as a vivid whiteness against a deep blue sky left a picture of splendor that rivaled the dream cities in the Arabian Nights; but this time he saw it by electric light, and romance gleamed from the chariot-race sign on Broadway and from the women’s eyes at the Astor, where he and young Paskert from St. Regis’ had dinner. When they walked down the aisle of the theatre, greeted by the nervous twanging and discord of untuned violins and the sensuous, heavy fragrance of paint and powder, he moved in a sphere of epicurean delight. Everything
enchanted him. (29-30)

Fitzgerald’s vision of New York “as a vivid whiteness against a deep blue sky” remained indelibly stamped on his creative consciousness even as his “enchant[ment]” with the city waned. Seen from afar in Fitzgerald’s fiction and essays, New York is “the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps” (*The Great Gatsby* 54), “the tall white city” (“My Lost City” 26) and “the white glacier” (“My Lost City” 30). Seen up close, “the white heaps and sugar lumps” resolve into individual white buildings and streets. “At Fiftieth Street a group of men on a very white sidewalk in front of a very white building” turn to stare at two drunk boys who are riding down Broadway in a taxi yelling “'Yo-ho! Yea! Yoho! Yo-bubba!’” (“May Day,” *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* 136).

The Metropolitan Museum of Art at Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street is a “great white ghost” (*The Beautiful And Damned* 102). The Plaza Hotel at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street is “rather unusually white and attractive” (*The Beautiful and Damned* 125).

This white city of upper east side hotels, restaurants and museums, crisp and graceful, elegant and imposing, scrubbed and gleaming in the glare of an early summer afternoon’s acrid sunshine or twinkling in the cold, velvety darkness of a December midnight, is the New York City that first comes to mind when one thinks of Fitzgerald’s New York. As Alfred Kazin writes: “To this day Fitzgerald remains the only poet of New York’s luxurious upper-class landmarks, like the Plaza Hotel. New York was a dreamland to Fitzgerald. It represented his imagination of what is forever charming, touched by the glamour of money, romantically tender and gay. No writer born to New York’s constant pressure can ever associate so much beauty with it--can ever think of New York as the Plaza Hotel” (“The Writer and the City” 121). New York was “a dreamland” to Fitzgerald and it did represent his most cherished conceptions of everything that was most charming and glamourous. However, he also eventually became well-acquainted with the grime and brutality of New York, with the lies, delusions and unalterable, disconcerting facts that
nested just behind the city's fantastic facade. As an older and wiser man who believed that "life is essentially a cheat and its conditions are those of defeat" (Letters 96), Fitzgerald knew, better than most inveterate New Yorkers, that "At three o'clock in the morning, grey broken old women scrub the floors of the great New York Hotels" (Notebooks no. 297), simply because, as a young man, he "took the style and glitter of New York even above its own valuation" ("My Lost City" 24). "We may agree," says John Berryman, that Fitzgerald "went in heavily and childishly for fireworks, beautiful in the immediate darkness, a mess of wire and cardboard in the morning" (Berryman 101). When "the whole shining edifice that [Fitzgerald] had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground" ("My Lost City" 32), when the fireworks ended, when the gray New York dawn revealed broken old washerwomen and "a mess of wire and cardboard" and the city "no longer whisper[ed] of fantastic success and eternal youth" ("My Lost City" 33), then Fitzgerald knew New York both as "dream cit[y]" (This Side of Paradise 29) and as a nightmare of "wasted youth" ("Echoes of the Jazz Age," The Crack-Up 22). Then too he knew truths about the greatest city of the "far-away East" that are denied to both natives of New York, who are inured by routine and familiarity to the more extreme possibilities of their city, and to those many millions who simply cannot "feel...[their] surroundings...quite so intensely" ("Echoes of the Jazz Age" 22) as Fitzgerald felt New York when he was young.

Fitzgerald, I believe, knew what he was doing when he "took the style and glitter of New York even above its own valuation" and set out to conquer and love the city as one would set out to conquer and love a beautiful, if particularly inaccessible, woman. He was, after all, in "the business of creating illusion." Writing of The Great Gatsby to Moran Tudury in 1924 he said:

I am so anxious for people to see my new novel which is a new thinking out of the idea of illusion (an idea which I suppose will dominate my more serious stuff) much more mature and much more romantic than This Side of
Paradise. The B&D [The Beautiful and Damned] was a better book than the first but it was a false lead...a concession to Mencken...The business of creating illusion is much more to my taste and talent. (Correspondence 139)

This is not to say that Fitzgerald could not or would not see through the enchanting but particularly virulent illusions he created. “I...never accepted any of the practically anonymous invitations to debutante balls that turned up in an undergraduate’s mail,” he admitted, “perhaps because I felt that no actuality could live up to my conception of New York’s splendor” (“My Lost City” 24). Nevertheless, he was heartbroken when his splendid, illusory New York became corroded and sullied. Fitzgerald’s thorough understanding of the illusions he cherished was no guarantee of immunity to the pain and confusion that followed hard upon the loss of those illusions.

So why did Fitzgerald insist on idealizing New York if he knew that the actual city could never live up to his expectations and if he suspected, as early as June 1915, that New York might be “essentially cynical and heartless” (“My Lost City” 24)? He idealized New York because he wanted, even needed, to believe that there was someplace on earth where “nothing needed to be imagined,” “where life was as vivid and satisfactory as in books and dreams,” where an intensely imaginative boy with a “heightened sensitivity to the promises of life” (The Great Gatsby 6) could realize the “universe of ineffable gaudiness [that] spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked on the wash-stand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor” (The Great Gatsby 77). Like Dexter Green in “Winter Dreams,” Fitzgerald “wanted not association with glittering things and glittering people—he wanted the glittering things themselves” (Short Stories 220-221). Needing a suitably fantastic setting for the projected realization of his many ambitions, and believing that New York was a city of unlimited opportunity, a place where great fortunes were made and the best parties were thrown, he embraced the city and all the romance and glamor it claimed, explicitly or implicitly, to embody with the same “willingness of the heart” that Henry Marston, the protagonist of “The Swimmers,”
believes to be the defining characteristic of the American spirit: “France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea, was harder to utter--it was the graves at Shiloh and the tired, drawn, nervous faces of its great men, and the country boys dying in the Argonne for a phrase that was empty before their bodies withered. It was a willingness of the heart” (Short Stories 512).

If New York was the universal hub of “triumph” and “romance,” the very mecca of “glittering things,” and if the Plaza Hotel, which opened in 1907 “to the huzzahs of millionaires, many of whom instantly rented whole suites of apartments for themselves” (Tauranac 123), was “New York at its best” (as it was still being advertised as of 1988 [New York December 19-26, 1988: 10]), then a young man in search of “triumph,” “romance” and “glittering things” had to somehow find his way to the Plaza. As Henry Clews, a successful Wall Street banker, pointed out in his 1908 memoir Fifty Years in Wall Street, “. . .people of wealth are apt to be drawn to New York because it is the great magnet of the country, whose attractive power is nigh irresistible. . . .What London is to the Continent, what Rome was in its imperial day to the Empire, New York is to the immense domain of the American Republic, a natural stage. . . .for the great drama of civilization on this Continent” (448-449). Fitzgerald, as Scott Donaldson points out, “was not poor in any absolute sense” (Fool For Love 100), but neither was he rich. He was not one of the “people of wealth,” but he knew where those people lived and, like the young Amory Blaine, he planned to live there himself one day. “He was going to live in New York, and be known at every restaurant and café, wearing a dress suit from early evening to early morning, sleeping away the dull hours of the forenoon” (This Side of Paradise 31).

When Fitzgerald eventually became “disillusion[ed] as to New York and New Yorkers” (Correspondence 576), his disappointment in the city and his cynicism in the face of its pleasures and promises were just as intense as his love of it had once been.
Kazin argues that “Fitzgerald felt about New York what a man might feel about an adored woman too exciting to be trusted” (121), but this is only half the story. Fitzgerald did feel about New York as he would have felt about an adored woman too exciting to be trusted, but knowing better he trusted her anyway. He adored her, believed her promises and convinced himself that he was loved in return as “the arch type of what New York wanted” (“My Lost City” 26). When the city tired of him, forgot about him and moved on to other men, he reacted as a jilted lover might, damning the woman he still loved with charges of inconstancy, dishonesty and coldheartedness. Fitzgerald eventually felt about New York what Dexter Green feels about Judy Jones in “Winter Dreams.” He knew her many faults from bitter experience but he “had no desire to change her. Her deficiencies were knit up with a passionate energy that transcended and justified them” (227).

In “My Lost City,” Fitzgerald details not only the “triumph” and “romance” of the New York of his youth, but also the process whereby “One by one my great dreams of New York became tainted” (26). Walking “reverently through the echoing tomb” (32) of New York after the stock market crash of 1929, he confronts the “awful realization that New York was a city after all and not a universe” (32), and laments “All is lost save memory . . . .For the moment I can only cry out that I have lost my splendid mirage. Come back, come back, O glittering and white!” (33).

“My Lost City,” asserts Fitzgerald, “is not an account of the city’s changes but of the changes in this writer’s feeling for the city” (27). Fitzgerald’s novels and short stories, when considered as the fictional manifestations of his own experiences, also provide “an account” of “the changes” in Fitzgerald’s “feeling” for New York City. New York, the “incalculable city” (“My Lost City” 26), the city of “glamor and loneliness” (“My Lost City” 29), “the city of luxury and mystery, of preposterous hopes and exotic dreams” (The Beautiful and Damned 282), the city where “anything can happen . . . anything at all” (The Great Gatsby 55), the “sad and glorious” city (Tender is the Night 204), appears again and
again in Fitzgerald’s works, and his fictional treatment of New York parallels his development and deterioration as an artist and a man.
II : “Trips to New York”

A January 1907 entry in Fitzgerald’s Ledger, a “business ledger in which he methodically recorded his professional and personal activities” (Bruccoli 18n), records his first literary efforts: “He began a history of the U.S. and also a detective story about a necklace that was hidden in a trapdoor under the carpet. Wrote celebrated essay on George Washington & St. Ignatius” (F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Ledger: A Facsimile 161). None of these pieces is extant. Fitzgerald’s earliest surviving story, “The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage,” was also his first to be published, appearing in the October 1909 edition of the St. Paul Academy Now and Then. The opening paragraph of “The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage” employs New York City as a setting: “When I first saw John Syrel of the New York Daily News, he was standing before an open window of my house gazing out on the city. It was about six o’clock and the lights were just going on. All down Thirty-third street was a long line of gayly illuminated buildings” (Apprentice Fiction 20). New York is not the primary setting of “The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage.” The story is concerned primarily with a “Great Crime Committed in Suburbs of City” (21) and the action veers from “Santuka,” the scene of the crime, to “Lidgeville” to Ithaca to Princeton and back to New York. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the ten year old Fitzgerald already thinks of New York as a romantic, “gayly illuminated” place and that “The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage” opens as “the lights were just going on,” as the day ends and the sun sets over Manhattan. For Fitzgerald, twilight in New York was the most romantic time of the day. “He was forever haunted by the picture of the girl floating slowly out over the city at dusk, buoyed up by delicious air, by a quintessence of golden hope, like a soaring and unstable stock issue” (Notebooks no.
In *This Side of Paradise*, Amory Blaine, musing on the social and erotic lives of the “Popular Daughters” of prominent New Yorkers, describes an “Afternoon at the Plaza, [when] with winter twilight hovering outside and faint drums downstairs. . .they strut and fret in the lobby, taking another cocktail, scrupulously attired and waiting” (59). Later, “deeply and passionately in love” (186) with Rosalind Connage, Amory “wander[s] slowly up the avenue” thinking

of the night as inevitably his--the pageantry and carnival of rich dusk and dim streets. . .it seemed that he had closed the book of fading harmonies at last and stepped into the sensuous vibrant walks of life. Everywhere these countless lights, this promise of a night of streets and singing--he moved in a half-dream through the crowd as if expecting to meet Rosalind hurrying toward him with eager feet from every corner. . .(186-187).

The twilight of *This Side of Paradise* is giddy and tense with the charge of imminent sexual contact. In *The Beautiful and Damned*, the “deepening twilight” moves Anthony Patch to ponder the city and its possibilities:

*The Bronx--the houses gathering and gleaming in the sun, which was falling now through wide refulgent skies and tumbling caravans of light down into the streets. New York. . .the city of luxury and mystery, of preposterous hopes and exotic dreams. Here on the outskirts absurd stucco palaces reared themselves in the cool sunset, poised for an instant in cool unreality. . . .The train moved in through the deepening twilight, above and past half a hundred cheerful sweating streets of the upper East Side, each one passing the car window like the space between the spokes of a gigantic wheel. . . .* (282-283)

New York seen in the twilight is a liminal city, a city situated between day and night, between the endured chaos of the laborious workday and the anticipated “cool unreality” of darkness and its attendant pleasures.

In “Winter Dreams” the sun goes down over New York as Dexter Green mourns his inability to feel any longer the romantic intensity Judy Jones once quickened in his heart: “He lay down on his lounge and looked out the window at the New York sky-line into which the sun was sinking in dull lovely shades of pink and gold. . . .The dream was}
gone. Something had been taken from him” (235). In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the New York twilight stirs the ache of loneliness in Nick: “At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others--poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner--young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life” (47). The city at twilight was an element of Fitzgerald’s creative consciousness from the very beginning of his career as a published writer.

Fitzgerald, says Turnbull, was “a pariah” (36) at Newman School because of his “‘bossing everyone around’” (35) and his “freshness” (35). “He was underdog in several fistfights, one of which he provoked in sheer desperation. He began to walk in the least-used corridors and spent most of his time in his room. His marks suffered. He was called exclusively by his last name. Something about his bitter sulkiness goaded the masters into punishing him for every petty offense, and losing their sense of justice, they piled on the demerits” (36). It was in the midst of this “year of real unhappiness” (*Ledger* 66) that Fitzgerald was first “infected by the enticement of New York” (Bruccoli 37) and solaced by the enchantment of the musical comedies he saw on Broadway. He was eventually to achieve some distinction and happiness at Newman, but he continued to travel to New York as often as he could. “Trips to New York” reads a January 1912 entry in his Ledger (166). In February, Fitzgerald saw “‘Over the River’ in New York” ((166). Then, in April 1912, “More New York trips” (166) and, in November of that same year, “Shows in New York” (167). In a January 1912 letter to Elizabeth Magoffin, “a large, plump, enthusiastic girl in her mid-twenties” (Turnbull 42) who sponsored St. Paul’s Elizabethan Dramatic Club, for which Fitzgerald wrote four plays between 1911 and 1914, fifteen year old Scott tells how “We arrived three hours late in New York,” reveals some of the secrets of his success with women (“A girl should always be kept guessing--always”) and signs off “Your Admirer / Francis Scott Fitzgerald / Playright” (*Correspondence* 6). Fitzgerald’s
first several trips to New York aroused his literary ambitions even if they did not improve his spelling.

While at Newman, Fitzgerald published three stories in the Newman News. Two of these, “A Luckless Santa Claus” (Newman News, IX [Christmas 1912]) and “The Trail of the Duke” (Newman News, IX [June 1913]) are set squarely in Manhattan. In “A Luckless Santa Claus,” “a wet snow. . .turned to slush as it touched the pavements” (52): “It was Christmas Eve. Salvation Army Santa Clauses with highly colored noses proclaimed it as they beat upon rickety paper chimneys with tin spoons. Package laden old bachelors forgot to worry about how many slippers and dressing gowns they would have to thank people for next day, and joined in the general air of excitement that pervaded busy Manhattan” (Apprentice Fiction 48). This story features, besides New York City, several other leitmotifs that appear regularly in Fitzgerald’s mature fiction. Harry Talbot, the protagonist, is an early version of the man who, like Dexter Green, James Gatz and Dick Diver, “performs a grand deed for the sake of his beloved and who sometimes breaks against her selfishness” (Brucoli 39). Dorothy Harmon is a prototype, albeit a rather sketchy one, of the proud, wealthy “golden girl” (The Great Gatsby 94), like Rosalind Connage and Daisy Fay, who, in her compulsive quest for financial security in the shape of a husband, destroys emotionally or physically or both her less than financially secure but utterly devoted suitor: “Miss Harmon was responsible for the whole thing. If it had not been for her foolish whim, Talbot would not have made a fool of himself” (48). Miss Harmon’s foolish whim is to charge Talbot, who “can’t even spend money, much less earn it!” (48), with the task of giving away twenty-five dollars on Christmas Eve in New York so that he will, presumably, learn the value of a dollar through “real charity” (49). “A Luckless Santa Claus” is primarily about money. Late in his life, Fitzgerald would tell Laura Guthrie “Everything is either love or money. There is nothing else that counts” (Fool For Love 99).
In the process of trying to give away his twenty-five dollars, Harry Talbot works his way from the warmth and luxury of the parlor of Miss Harmon’s house, which is “situated on a dimly lighted residence street somewhere east of Broadway” (48), to the squalor of the Bowery, where “some boys jeered at him” (52), and lower Third Avenue, where he is beaten by beggars suspicious of his motives. The young Fitzgerald is obviously well aware of New York’s class system and of the specific areas of the city to which each class is generally indigenous, and he takes care to populate the various streets and locales in his story with appropriate characters. Thus, Talbot meets “a gentleman in a top hat” (50) a block and a half from Miss Harmon’s house, a “ragged” tramp (51) and “an Italian bootblack” (51) on Broadway itself and the two extremely hostile beggars who assault him on lower Third Avenue. One of these beggars, “a thin, ugly looking fellow” (52), speaks just the kind of self-consciously dramatic, tough “New Yawker” lingo that a boy well-versed in the beggars and “crooks” of “books about great cities” and Broadway comedies, but innocent of any actual experience of the inhabitants of the Bowery, might imagine such a beggar to speak: “’Oh!’ he sneered, ‘you’re one of those stiff’s tryin’ the charity gag, and then gettin’ us pulled for beggin’. Come on, Jim, let’s show him what we are’” (52). The New Yorkers of “A Luckless Santa Claus” are stock characters, immigrants and beggars and gentlemen in top hats from books and plays.

Fitzgerald never did become adept at depicting immigrants, beggars or other members of the “tired, huddled masses” of New York’s lower social strata, simply because, unlike Dos Passos or O. Henry, he was never particularly interested in New York’s lower social

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2 See William R. Taylor’s In Pursuit of Gotham: Culture and Commerce in New York: “Localization of class life. . .tended to lock the wealthy, wage earners, and the impoverished into distinct areas of the city. By the 1890s, each had acquired a name and a recognizable mythos, much as the Bowery, whose reputation lingered on, had done in the antebellum period” (71).
strata. He was interested instead in “the atmosphere of the millionaires’ houses I sometimes frequented” (“My Lost City” 26), in the Fifth Avenue mansions “of granite and marble” which “muttered dully a millionaire’s chaotic message to whosoever would listen: something about ‘I worked and I saved and I was sharper than all Adam and here I sit, by golly, by golly!’” (The Beautiful and Damned 124). Indeed, even though “Fitzgerald never portrayed the rich sympathetically in his fiction” (Fool For Love 112), the “idea of city life without money” was probably as repugnant to him as it is to Amory in This Side of Paradise:

The rain gave Amory a feeling of detachment, and the numerous unpleasant aspects of city life without money occurred to him in threatening procession. There was the ghastly, stinking crush of the subway—the car cards thrusting themselves at one, leering out like dull bores who grab your arm with another story; the querulous worry as to whether some one isn’t leaning on you. . . .at worst a squalid phantasmagoria of breath, and old cloth on human bodies and the smells of food men ate--at best just people--too hot or too cold, tired, worried.

He pictured the rooms where these people lived--where the patterns of the blistered wall-papers were heavy reiterated sunflowers on green and yellow backgrounds, where there were tin bathtubs and gloomy hallways and verdureless, unnamable spaces in back of the buildings; where even love dressed as seduction--a sordid murder around the corner, illicit motherhood in the flat above. And always there was the economical stuffiness of indoor winter, and the long summers, nightmares of perspiration between sticky enveloping walls. . . . (255-256)

Amory is also sickened at “the smells of the state’s alien population” (118) on the train from New York to Princeton. What bothers Amory most about “city life without money” is the sheer, animal physicality of poverty, especially the odor of many human beings perspiring and breathing in small, enclosed spaces. The Fitzgerald who wrote This Side
of Paradise had lived in New York, in “a drab room in the Bronx”4 and a “square foot of the subway” (“My Lost City” 25), and he undoubtedly knew the many less than genteel smells of the city’s daily crush. The Fitzgerald who wrote “A Luckless Santa Claus” had much less experience of the city and probably associated it, as young Amory does in the first chapter of This Side of Paradise, with the “heavy, sensuous” (30) theater odors of “paint and powder” (30), perfume and cigarettes. Therefore, the various lowlife characters Talbot meets in “A Luckless Santa Claus” do not smell at all. They merely look “ragged” and “inebriated” and “thin.” In fact, once Talbot gets to know the beggars who “hit him . . . mashed him . . . got him down and jumped on him” (52), they turn out to be “two gentlemen” (53) who, despite their propensity for violence, are quite reasonable and friendly. As the story ends, Talbot, having received his reward from Miss Harmon in the form of a hug and a whispered “Dearest . . . you did this all for me” (53), is taking his two new “friends” (53) “home with me to spend Christmas” (53).

“The Trail of the Duke,” “a foray into the lives of the Fifth Avenue rich” (Turnbull 40), features a plot almost identical to that of “A Luckless Santa Claus.” Dodson Garland, a young, polo-playing, mint-julep swilling, butler-harrying inhabitant of “upper Fifth Avenue” (54) is pressed into service by Mirabel Walmsley, his fiancee, to find “the Duke” (55). Dodson thinks the missing Duke is “the Duke of Dunsinlane or Artrellane or some lane or other” (55) who was to have arrived at Mirabel’s house on “the white way” (55) of Broadway “to see Mirabel’s papa” (55). Muttering “Oh, curses on the nobility” (56), Garland searches the restaurants of New York (Sherry’s, Delmonico’s, Martin’s) in vain, only to find, upon returning to Mirabel’s house, that “the Duke” is really “Dukey,” Mirabel’s poodle which has returned to its “cool and fascinating” owner in Garland’s

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4In “My Lost City,” Fitzgerald says that in 1919 he lived on Claremont Avenue (26), in a “drab room in the Bronx” (25). However, as Bruccoli points out, “There is no evidence that Fitzgerald lived in the Bronx. Claremont Avenue is on Manhattan’s West Side” (114n).
absence. Just as in "A Luckless Santa Claus," the protagonist of "The Trail of the Duke" is sent on a "miserable quest" (58) through the streets of New York by the rich girl to whom he is engaged. Both Talbot and Garland find frustration and acute physical discomfort on those streets. Talbot is beaten until he is only "a wretched caricature of a man" (53) and Garland, wandering about on "a typical, hot New York summer night" (54), finds "his money...getting low, his spirits lower still; but his temperature soaring majestically and triumphantly aloft" (57). Garland is also threatened by a "New Yawk" tough guy whose "unmistakable east-side accent" (58) and gangster movie lingo make him sound suspiciously like the lower Third Avenue beggar who assaults Talbot in "A Luckless Santa Claus": "I saw you was a swell and I’d dropped you bad only I’m just out of jail myself. Now listen here. I’ll give you two seconds to get scarce. Go on, beat it" (58).

The sixteen year old author of "A Luckless Santa Claus" and "The Trail of the Duke" knew from books and plays, even if he did not yet know it from experience, that violence and danger awaited the privileged inhabitants of New York who strayed too far from the luxurious castles of Fifth and Park Avenues, castles which constituted oases of safety and comfort in the midst of a city whose squalor and poverty belied its glamorous reputation. Only later would Fitzgerald come to regard the entire city as a dangerous place. In a 1937 letter to his daughter Scottie, he warned:

I will bet two-thirds of the girls at Miss Walker’s school have at least one grandparent that peddled old leather in the slums of New York, Chicago or London, and if I thought you were accepting the standards of the cosmopolitan rich, I would much rather have you in a southern school, where scholastic standards are not so high and the word ‘nice’ is not debased to such a ludicrous extent. I have seen the whole racket, and if there is any more disastrous road than that from Park Avenue to the Rue de la Paix and back again, I don’t know it...If I come up and find you gone Park Avenue, you will have to explain me away as a Georgia cracker or a Chicago killer. God help Park Avenue. (Letters 101-102)

"It was Fitzgerald’s humor," writes Arthur Mizener, "to place the events of any fiction he wrote about undergraduate life at Yale. But the real source of Basil Duke Lee’s inner
experience at Yale was Scott Fitzgerald’s experience at Princeton” (Afternoon of an Author 70). Princeton’s close proximity to New York City and the regular train service from Princeton Junction to Manhattan enabled Fitzgerald to indulge in the city’s many distractions on a regular basis. As McDowell, a “gay young sophomore” (95) in This Side of Paradise, confides to Amory: “Those poor birds who haven’t a cent to tutor, and have to study during the term are the ones I pity. . .I should think it would be such a bore, there’s so much else to do in New York during the term. I suppose they don’t know what they miss, anyhow” (95). Amory finds McDowell’s “you and I” presumptions maddening and “very nearly push[es] him out of [an] open window” (96), but Amory himself has few compunctions about carousing in New York when he should be studying: “Mostly there were parties—to Orange or the Shore, more rarely to New York and Philadelphia, though one night they marshalled fourteen waitresses out of Childs’ and took them to ride down Fifth Avenue on top of an autobus. They all cut more classes than were allowed, which meant an additional course the following year, but spring was too rare to let anything interfere with their colorful ramblings” (80). Fitzgerald, Amory’s flesh and blood counterpart, told his friend Edmund “Bunny” Wilson, Princeton class of 1916, “Why, I can go up to New York on a terrible party and then come back and go into church and pray—and mean every word of it, too!” (Wilson, A Prelude 106).

In “My Lost City” Fitzgerald remembers how the New York of his early days at Princeton, the New York of undergraduate dissipation, of Bustanoby’s [an elegant Broadway restaurant known for the alcoholic and sexual shenanigans that went on in its private dining rooms, (Erenberg, 52)] Shanley’s [a Broadway restaurant and cabaret], Jack’s [another Broadway restaurant] . . . became a horror and though I returned to it, alas, through many an alcoholic mist, I felt each time a betrayal of a persistent idealism. My participation was prurient rather than licentious and scarcely one pleasant memory of it remains from those days; as Ernest Hemingway once remarked, the sole purpose of the cabaret is for unattached men to find complaisant women. All the rest is a wasting of time in bad air. (24-25)
He also remembers how the “horror” of “undergraduate dissipation” was forgotten with his “first impression of that new thing—the Metropolitan spirit” (24). He “found” (23) the “Metropolitan spirit” one day shortly before America’s entry into the First World War when he saw Edmund Wilson taking his afternoon walk in Manhattan. Fitzgerald “was still an undergraduate at Princeton” while Wilson “had become a New Yorker” (23). “He was no longer the shy little scholar of Holder Court—he walked with confidence, wrapped in his thoughts and looking straight ahead, and it was obvious that his new background was entirely sufficient to him” (24). That night, “in Bunny’s apartment, life was mellow and safe, a finer distillation of all that I had come to love at Princeton. The gentle playing of an oboe mingled with city noises from the street outside. . . . I had found a third symbol of New York and I began wondering about the rent of such apartments and casting about for the appropriate friends to share one with me” (25).

The “Metropolitan spirit” is very much in evidence in “The Spire and the Gargoyle,” printed in the February 1917 edition of Princeton’s Nassau Literary Magazine, and judged by Fitzgerald in a February 1916 Ledger entry to be “the beginning of mature writing” (170). The protagonist of “The Spire and the Gargoyle” is never identified by name. He is only “the boy,” and “the boy,” a freshman at Princeton, shares with Amory Blaine and F. Scott Fitzgerald an inability to concentrate on his studies when the wonders of New York are only a short train ride away:

In his case it all depended on this examination. If he passed it he would become a sophomore the following fall; if he failed, it meant that his college days faded out with the last splendors of June. Fifty cut recitations in his first wild term had made necessary the extra course of which he had just taken the examination. Winter muses, unacademic and cloistered by Forty-second Street and Broadway, had stolen hours from the dreary stretches of February and March. Later, time had crept insidiously through the lazy April afternoons and seemed so intangible in the long Spring twilights. So June found him unprepared. (106)

“The boy” fails the examination and, drawn to the city by the promise of employment and his “winter muses” (perhaps prefigurements of Dexter Green’s “winter dreams”), he
moves to New York. Deprived of the intellectual stimulation offered by Princeton and feeling that the “whole range” of his life, most of which is spent in an unspecified “office,” is “pitifully small” (108), “the boy” spends his “crisp autumn afternoons” riding on “the tops of the shining auto busses” which serve Fifth Avenue (108): “So Fifth Avenue and the top of the busses had really grown to stand for a lot. They meant relief from the painted, pagan crowds of Broadway, the crowded atmosphere of the blue serge suits and grated windows that he met down town and the dingy middle class cloud that hovered on his boarding house. Fifth Avenue had a certain respectability which he would have once despised; the people on the busses looked better fed, their mouths came together in better lines” (108-109).5

Fitzgerald later transposed “the boy’s” love of “shining auto busses” to Amory in This Side of Paradise: “The weeks tore by. Amory wandered occasionally to New York on the chance of finding a new shining green autobus, that its stick-of-candy glamour might penetrate his disposition” (134). Amory is also possessed of a hatred of Broadway that is similar to, if rather more intense than, “the boy’s” hatred of Broadway:

    Then Broadway broke upon them, and with a babel of noise and painted faces a sudden sickness rushed over Amory.
    ‘For God’s sake, let’s go back! Let’s get off of this--this place!’
    Sloane looked at him in amazement.
    ‘What do you mean?’
    ‘This street, it’s ghastly! Come on! let’s get back to the Avenue!’
    ‘Do you mean to say,’ said Sloane stolidly, ‘that ‘cause you had some sort of indigestion that made you act like a maniac last night, you’re never coming on Broadway again?’... . . .
    ‘Man!’ [Amory] shouted so loud that the people on the corner turned and followed them with their eyes, ‘it’s filthy, and if you can’t see it, you’re filthy too!’ (116-117)

Why this horror of Broadway? To answer this question one must make a brief inquiry

5"Fifth Avenue," says the narrator of Horatio Alger’s 1868 novel Ragged Dick or Street Life in New York, “as most of my readers already know, is the finest street in the city, being lined with splendid private residences, occupied by the wealthier classes. Many of the cross streets also boast houses which may be considered palaces, so elegant are they externally and internally” (43).
into Fitzgerald’s attitudes toward women and sex. Sloane is correct when he guesses that his friend’s fear and disgust may be traced back to last night’s “indigestion.” Amory and Sloane had taken two chorus girls to Bistolary’s (Bustanoby’s?), a cafe on Broadway, had moved on to Maxim’s and Deviniere’s, where Amory notices a strange, middle-aged man watching his friends and him “intently” (111). Eventually the Princetonians end up in the girls’ flat. The girls’ apartment building is, not surprisingly, white, but its whiteness, unlike the clean, monumental whiteness of the Plaza or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is profoundly disconcerting:

. . .piling intimately into a taxicab, they drove out over the hundreds and drew up at a tall, white-stone apartment-house. . . .Never would he forget that street. . . .It was a broad street, lined on both sides with just such tall, white-stone buildings, dotted with dark windows; they stretched along as far as the eye could see, flooded with a bright moonlight that gave them a calcium pallor. He imagined each one to have an elevator and a colored hall-boy and a key-rack; each one to be eight stories high and full of three and four room suites. (111-112)

Amory’s face adopts the “calcium pallor” of the “white-stone buildings” when, sitting next to one of the girls on a couch in “Phoebe’s living room” (112), flushed with brandy and sexual opportunity, he suddenly realizes that the man he saw in Deviniere’s is now standing across the living room from him and that this man, whose “feet were all wrong” (113), is the devil. For Amory, sexuality, or at least the possibility of “illicit” sex with girls he hardly knows, is inextricably bound up with evil. The white buildings, “flooded with a bright moonlight that gave them a calcium pallor,” and, the next day, the “painted faces” on Broadway, are suggestive of both death and a decidedly feminine, witch-like, malevolence. “Broadway” is somehow “filthy” because it is tainted with sexual corruption.

All his life, Fitzgerald, in the words of Donaldson, “took a rather prudish attitude toward sex” (Fool For Love 73). Nothing interested him more than love and women, but he developed as a child or an adolescent the conviction, a conviction probably nurtured by
his Irish-Catholic background, that “the problem of evil” was also “the problem of sex”:

“The problem of evil had solidified for Amory into the problem of sex. He was beginning to identify evil with the strong phallic worship in Brooke and the early Wells. Inseperably linked with evil was beauty—beauty, still a constant rising tumult...” (This Side of Paradise 280). As late as 1927 he was still writing stories like “A Short Trip Home” which, in Bruccoli’s opinion, “is one of Fitzgerald’s most effective treatments of the theme of sexual corruption—here linking it with death” (Short Stories 372).

Some of Fitzgerald’s characters find the mere physicality of women to be repulsive and threatening. Young Amory, having just kissed a girl for the first time, is suddenly overcome with “disgust, loathing for the whole incident. He desired frantically to be away, never to see Myra again, never to kiss anyone; he became conscious of his face and hers, of their clinging hands, and he wanted to creep out of his body...” (This Side of Paradise 14). Anthony Patch “was convinced that no woman he had ever met compared in any way with Gloria...Beside her the two dozen schoolgirls and débutantes, young married women and waifs and strays whom he had known were so many females, in the word’s most contemptuous sense, breeders and bearers, exuding still that faintly odorous atmosphere of the cave and the nursery” (The Beautiful and Damned 104). Nick Carraway had “been writing letters once a week” (48) to “an old friend” (19) in the middle-west “and signing them ‘Love, Nick,’ and all I could think of was how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint mustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip” (The Great Gatsby 48).

It is strange then, that the protagonist of “The Spire and the Gargoyle,” who is sickened by the “painted, pagan,” decidedly feminine, crowds of Broadway, should be delighted by “the people on the busses” on Fifth Avenue whose “mouths came together in better lines” and that “from the roofs of other passing busses a face barely seen, an interested glance, a flash of color assumed the proportion of an intrigue” (108). What is implied is that “the boy” enjoys riding down Fifth Avenue on an autobus roof because it
affords him many excellent opportunities to see, and wordlessly flirt with, beautiful, rich
dwomen. "The Spire and the Gargoyle" is the first story in which Fitzgerald portrays New
York, and especially Fifth Avenue, as a place of seemingly unlimited erotic or romantic
possibilities. Thousands of beautiful women, the sexual charge of money and power, and
the city's fabled anonymity all combine to make New York heaven for lovers and
predatory young men, but rather depressing sometimes for a young man like Nick
Carraway who is "slow thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on [his]
desires" (The Great Gatsby 48). Yet even Nick

began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night and
the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines
give to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out ro-
mantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was
going to enter their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove.
Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the com-
er of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they
faded through a door into warm darkness. (46-47)

Fitzgerald was right when he judged "The Spire and the Gargoyle" to be "the
beginning of mature writing," at least so far as his fictional portrayal of New York City is
Santa Claus" and "The Trail of the Duke" is a city built as much or more out of "books
about great cities," Broadway comedies and stock "New Yawk" characters as it is from
Fitzgerald's personal experience of New York and its people. The New York of "The
Spire and the Gargoyle" is New York as Fitzgerald experienced it and, as such, the
precursor of "the great city" ("May Day" 97) he constructed out of his experience and his
imagination in the stories and novels, several of them masterful, that he wrote between
1919 and 1926.
III: “The land of ambition and success”

“What Fitzgerald valued most,” wrote John Berryman in his 1946 essay “F. Scott Fitzgerald,” “was a beauty and intensity of attachment, which his imagination required should be attachment to something inaccessible. For the wholly inaccessible he admitted two modes, the never existent and the already past. He drove his characters sometimes towards the first, as in certain of the stories which are actual fantasies, but regularly toward the second, as in *Gatsby*. And his finest work is saturated with...desperate or ecstatic nostalgia” (Berryman 106-107). “NOSTALGIA OR THE FLIGHT OF THE HEART” reads a heading in the “Scenes and Situations” section of Fitzgerald’s Notebooks, and under that heading, along with such entries as “Young St. Paul,” “Paris Left Bank” and “Montgomery as it was,” is written “New York 1911, 1917, 1920,” (Notebooks no. 1538). Fitzgerald’s Notebooks, says Bruccoli, “were assembled not during the Twenties when [he] seemed to have the Midas touch, but during the Thirties when everything he touched crumbled” (Notebooks, “Introduction” vii). Fitzgerald was nostalgic for the “already past” New York of 1911, 1917 and 1920 because the city he knew in those years was the city of happiness and success he so often imagined but so rarely experienced. In 1911 he went into the city to see *The Quaker Girl* and *Little Boy Blue* and discovered the “romance” of New York. “The Quaker Girl. The wonderful vacation” (166), reads a December 1911 entry in his *Ledger*. In 1917 Fitzgerald discovered “the Metropolitan spirit” in Edmund Wilson’s New York apartment. “Almost
flunked out. Ideas of going to war. Washington Square with Bunny Wilson. Tea time at the Plaza with Grace” (Ledger 171). Fitzgerald finally moved to New York in 1919 but his first sojourn in “THE LAND OF AMBITION AND SUCCESS” (Correspondence 38) was an unmitigated disaster. “I was a failure--,” he wrote in “My Lost City,” “mediocre at advertising work and unable to get started as a writer. Hating the city, I got roaring, weeping drunk on my last penny and went home. . .” (26). “I retired from business,” he wrote in another, later essay, “not on my profits, but on my liabilities, which included debts, despair, and a broken engagement and crept home to St. Paul to ‘finish a novel’” (“Early Success,” The Crack-Up 85). That novel was This Side of Paradise. It was published on March 26, 1920 and, in Fitzgerald’s words, “suddenly, everything changed” (“Early Success 86). Heady with success, he went back to New York and literally lived out his boyhood dreams of romantic, literary and financial triumph. Those first few months Fitzgerald spent in New York in 1920 were “the very best” of the many months he spent in “the far-away East”. It was, he remembered, “a short and precious time” and when the “delicious mist” of success rose “in a few weeks, or a few months” he found “that the very best [was] over” (“Early Success” 86). A long decline in his “feeling for the city” followed thereafter. The seeds of that decline were sown in the months between February 1919 and June 1919, “the four most impressionable months” of Fitzgerald’s life (“My Lost City” 25) when “one by one, [his] great dreams of New York became tainted” (“My Lost City” 26), and in the three and a half years that preceded those months, years in which he suffered several failures from which he never wholly recovered.

“I talk with the authority of failure” (Notebooks no. 1915) wrote Fitzgerald, and

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6Washington Square is located at the foot of Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village. Anthony Patch, the protagonist of The Beautiful and Damned, spends part of his childhood in his family’s house on Washington Square (6). A popular song called “Rose of Washington Square” is referred to in “The Rich Boy” (327) and Mr. Washington Square is the name of the fragment of a “Musical Comedy” written by Basil Duke Lee in “The Captured Shadow” (The Basil and Josephine Stories 101).
failure, sometimes mitigated by later success, sometimes absolute, was a compelling force behind much of his fiction. “He had,” observed Arnold Gingrich in a 1941 obituary essay entitled “Salute and Farewell to F. Scott Fitzgerald”, “a queer Keltic tendency to enjoy ill-luck as some people enjoy ill-health. He liked to dramatize to himself the inevitability of both his latest and his next defeats. . . . Failure always fascinated him. . . . [and] his wild and wilful nature always inclined to defeatism, frustration, negation and failure” (In His Own Time 479-480). Why was Fitzgerald, a man who considered American history to be “the history of me and of my people. . . . the history of all aspiration—not just the American dream but the human dream” (Notebooks no. 2037), “fascinated” by failure? I believe that Fitzgerald, as an artist who could only write a good story when he could “feel” the “various human emotions involved” (“One Hundred False Starts” 132), needed failure and its attendant emotions to do his best work because failure was the most fertile source of emotions, of story material, that he knew. “All my stories,” he told Harold Ober, “are conceived like novels, require a special emotion, a special experience—so that my readers, if such there be, know that each time it’ll be something new, not in form but in substance” (As Ever, Scott Fitz-- 221). In “Our April Letter” he wrote: “I have asked a lot of my emotions—one hundred and twenty stories, The price was high, right up with Kipling, because there was one little drop of something not blood, not a tear, not my seed, but me more intimately than these, in every story, it was the extra I had” (Notebooks no. 885). Failure, with its extremes of self-loathing, hatred, anxiety, rage, love, renewed determination and despair provided Fitzgerald with rich veins to mine, with the intense emotional experiences he needed if he was to write stories and novels that afforded his readers “new” and memorable emotional experiences. It may be going too far to imply, as Gingrich does, that Fitzgerald enjoyed failure and wanted to fail, but it is certainly true that Fitzgerald endured many failures, understood failure and rarely missed a chance to put his feelings about failure to good literary use. “Taking things hard--,” he wrote in one of his
Notebooks, “from Genevra to Joe Mank—: That’s stamp that goes into my books so that people can read it blind like braïl” (no. 1072).

Fitzgerald’s failures in New York in 1919, failures which only exacerbated the pain and shame he was still feeling from failures he suffered in his last years at Princeton, damaged irreparably his faith in New York and its promises of fulfillment, just as they damaged irreparably whatever faith he still possessed in romantic love as a power greater than, and distinct from, money and in the “leisure class” as an enlightened, generally benevolent bunch whose ranks one might join if one only worked hard enough. Fitzgerald discussed the changes he underwent as a result of his experiences in New York in 1919 and Zelda Sayre’s concomitant initial rejection of his proposals of marriage in “Pasting It Together”:

It was one of those tragic loves doomed for lack of money, and one day the girl closed it out on the basis of common sense. During a long summer of despair I wrote a novel instead of letters, so it came out all right, but it came out all right for a different person. The man with the jingle of money in his pocket who married the girl a year later would always cherish an abiding distrust, an animosity, toward the leisure class—not the conviction of a revolutionist but the smouldering hatred of a peasant. In the years since then I have never been able to stop wondering where my friends’ money came from, nor to stop thinking that at one time a sort of droit de seigneur might have been exercised to give one of them my girl. (Crack-Up 77)

Money, Fitzgerald learned, could win a girl’s heart when love alone had failed utterly. Consequently, money might also be used to steal his girl’s heart from him. For if the golden girls of the world gave their hearts and bodies to the men with the most money, did it not make sense for Fitzgerald to fear that his girl would run off with any rich boy who happened to have more money than he did? He was not “a revolutionist,” he felt that the best way to hold on to his girl was to beat the rich boys at their own game instead of trying

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7 Genevra King was the first great love of Fitzgerald’s life (see pages 32-33 of this study for details). Joseph Mankiewicz, an M-G-M producer, “thoroughly revised” (Bruccoli 434) a screenplay for Erich Maria Remarque’s novel Three Comrades written by Fitzgerald and E. E. Paramore in 1937. Fitzgerald regarded Mankiewicz’s revisions as evidence of Hollywood’s gross undervaluation of his talents, took to referring to Mankiewicz as “Monkeybitch” (As Ever, Scott Fitz— 380), and never forgave him.
to change the rules of the game, but he did resent the members of the “leisure class” when he realized that his charm, his brains and his great capacity for love meant little in the face of their money and long-established influence. “I’m sick,” says Amory Blaine, “of a system where the richest man gets the most beautiful girl if he wants her. . .” (This Side of Paradise 277).

Fitzgerald’s attitude toward Zelda after she took him back was more complex. He understood and even admired her selfishness, her egotism and desire for money and excitement, because he was an egotist and a seeker of money and excitement himself. “The most enormous influence on me in the four and a half years since I met her,” he told Edmund Wilson in January 1922, “has been the complete, fine and full-hearted selfishness and chill-mindedness of Zelda” (Letters 331). “It is one of the many flaws in the scheme of human relationships,” says the narrator of “The Adjuster” (1925), “that selfishness in women has an irresistible appeal to many men” (Six Tales Of The Jazz Age 148).

Fitzgerald’s understanding of Zelda’s selfishness did not, however, prevent him from becoming somewhat disillusioned about their love. Zelda’s behavior, notes Donaldson, “smacked of calculation, and the romantic side of Fitzgerald objected. By the time she finally said yes, some of the magic had dissipated” (Fool For Love 65).

George O’Kelly experiences this same disillusionment at the damage done to love by the “necessary but sordid” (Lewis, New Essays 56) exigencies of mundane reality in “The Sensible Thing” (1924). Having lost Jonquil Cary for lack of “something...immediately profitable” (292) and then regained her upon attaining “a position of unlimited opportunity” (297), O’Kelly discovers that some intangible, but precious and irreplaceable, aspect of his love for Jonquil has vanished in the months between his initial defeat and his final victory:

All the time in the world—his life and hers. But for an instant as he kissed her he knew that though he search through eternity he could never recapture those lost April hours. He might press her close now till the
muscles knotted on his arms—she was something desirable and rare that he had fought for and made his own—but never again an intangible whisper in the dusk, or on the breeze of night. . . .

Well, let it pass, he thought; April is over, April is over. There are all kinds of love in the world, but never the same love twice. (Short Stories 301)

By the time New York City “finally said yes” to Fitzgerald in 1920, finally opened the offices of its editors and publishers to him and lionized him as one of its archetypal success stories, he had lost much of the faith he had invested in the city as a boy. As “a moralist at heart” (Letters 63) and a man who believed that “Work is the one salvation for all of us—even if we must work to forget there’s nothing to work for” (In His Own Time 257), Fitzgerald was suspicious of the city that had callously rejected him when he was poor, trusting and willing to work, but whose impresarios and movie producers were now “begging” and “panting” for his services (“My Lost City” 26) simply because a book which the editors in that world capital of literature had twice rejected, but in which he had always had faith, had finally been successfully published. Twenty-three-year-old Fitzgerald, “who knew less of New York than any reporter of six months standing and less of its society than any hall-room boy in a Ritz stag line, was pushed into the position not only of spokesman for the time but of the typical product of the same moment” (“My Lost City” 27). New York, it seemed, was not interested in poor college boys who were ready to work hard, but it could be easily won over by young men who knew the rules of the game, young men who had a little money and a reputation for knowing the way to the hearts and wallets of the bobbed and besotted votaries of America’s new cult of youth. Maybe New York was “essentially cynical and heartless” after all. “Something in his nature,” Fitzgerald wrote in his Notebooks, “never got over things, never accepted his sudden rise to fame because all the steps weren’t there” (no. 1284). In the very beginning though, he kept his mouth shut and let the city incorporate his own personal myth into its great impersonal myth because he had wanted what the city was now offering him for too long to spoil things by quibbling over matters of propriety.
Fitzgerald was not so dismayed by Zelda’s selfish behavior that he did not ask her again to marry him when *This Side of Paradise* was accepted by Charles Scribner’s Sons. Nor was he so dismayed by New York’s heartlessness and greed that he did not love the city for fulfilling the dreams of success in New York he had cherished since his childhood. Consequently, the New York of *This Side of Paradise* and “May Day” is “a bad town unless you’re on top of it” (*This Side of Paradise* 257), and “Heaven” (“May Day” 140) when you are on top of it. Life in New York for Fitzgerald and his new wife was hectic and exciting in 1920 and 1921, but Fitzgerald’s memories of his past failures continued to haunt him so that, even though “the whole golden boom was in the air” (“Early Success, 87), he mistrusted the city and “all the stories that came into [his] head had a touch of disaster in them—the lovely young creatures in [his] novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of [his] short stories blew up, [his] millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Thomas Hardy’s peasants” (87). He would continue to idealize New York and to portray it as a mythical embodiment of distinctly American aspirations, but his idealization and his myth-making would be deliberate, self-conscious acts, where they had once been reflexive acts that came naturally to a young man from the middle-west with “an extraordinary gift for hope” and an exceptional “romantic readiness” (*The Great Gatsby* 6).

The succession of failures from which Fitzgerald never wholly recovered, the failures which eventually drove him “home to St. Paul. . .to write a novel” (“Who’s Who--And Why,” *Afternoon Of An Author* 85), began in the autumn of 1915, and some understanding of these failures is necessary if one is to reconcile the competing currents of elation and anxiety that run through Fitzgerald’s fictional New York of 1919-1922. Fitzgerald did not quite, like the protagonist of “The Spire and the Gargoyle,” flunk out of Princeton, but he did cut classes regularly and failed some of his courses two and three times. He spent most of his days and nights reading books of his own choosing, writing for the *Nassau Literary Magazine*, the *Princeton Tiger* and the Triangle Club, and
attempting to better his social reputation in the hope that he would receive a bid to join one of Princeton’s more exclusive eating clubs. He was elected secretary of the Triangle Club in February 1915 and happily accepted a bid from the University Cottage Club, one of Princeton’s four “big” clubs (“Princeton,” Afternoon Of An Author 76), in March of the same year, but his failure of a make-up exam in qualitative analysis at the beginning of his first semester as a junior made him ineligible for the presidency of the Triangle Club and wrecked his dreams of becoming “one of the gods of [his] class” (This Side of Paradise 43). Fitzgerald’s junior year ended prematurely when he contracted either malaria or a relatively mild case of tuberculosis and temporarily withdrew from Princeton in January 1916 to recover.

The beginning of the end of his romance with Ginevra King, the wealthy, “wide eyed dark haired beauty from Chicago. . . .with a reputation for what passed, in those days, as sexual daring” (Fool For Love 48) whom Fitzgerald met and fell in love with in January, 1915, also came in 1916. Fitzgerald visited Ginevra in August at her family home in Lake Forest and his Ledger includes a terse account of that trip’s adventures as well as some rather discouraging advice, advice that may or may not have been given to Fitzgerald by “stockbroker and horseman Charles King, Ginevra’s imposing father and the likely model for Tom Buchanan in The Great Gatsby” (Fool For Love 50):


In November 1916, Ginevra went to Princeton with Margaret Cary to attend the Yale game with Fitzgerald. After the game Ginevra and Margaret ditched Scott and one of his friends in a New York City train station for two Yale boys who were hiding behind a pillar (Fool For Love 50). Fitzgerald’s January 1917 Ledger entry reads “Final break with Ginevra” (171).
The “terrible disappointments” (Ledger 170) of 1915 and 1916, “the end of all college dreams” (Ledger 170) and the loss of Ginevra, caused Fitzgerald intense pain for the rest of his life. “To the end of his days the thought of Ginevra could bring tears to his eyes” (The Far Side of Paradise 50), and the shame he felt at the thought of his setbacks at Princeton was so great that even in the last years of his life he was unable or unwilling to tell the truth about his academic failures. In “Pasting it Together,” written in 1935, he does not mention his failure of the qualitative analysis exam and manages to imply that illness robbed him of the Triangle presidency:

I left Princeton in junior year with a complaint diagnosed as malaria. It transpired, through an X-ray taken a dozen years later, that it had been tuberculosis—a mild case, and after a few months of rest I went back to college. But I had lost certain offices, the chief one was the presidency of the Triangle Club, a musical comedy idea, and also I dropped back a class. To me college would never be the same. There were to be no badges of pride, no medals after all. It seemed on one March afternoon that I had lost every single thing I wanted. . . . (76)

In a September 1940 letter to Scottie, Fitzgerald alludes to his academic misadventures even as he implies that the Committee on Non-Athletic Organizations disallowed him from officially participating in extracurricular activities out of spite or malice: “I went back to junior year with Princeton in my pocket and it took them four months to take it all away from me—stripped of every office and on probation—the phrase was ‘ineligible for extracurricular activities.’ I was in the hospital besides” (Letters 94). It “may seem incredible,” as Bruccoli says, “that Fitzgerald’s reaction to the deprivation of a college honor was so extreme as to cripple his whole life” (68), but as a young man Fitzgerald believed that “Life was something you dominated if you were any good. Life yielded easily to intelligence and effort, or to what proportion could be mustered of both” (“The Crack-Up,” Crack-Up 69), and if one was not dominating life, if beautiful rich girls and Committees on Non-Athletic Organizations did not yield “easily” to one’s intelligence and hard work, then one was a failure and failure was not to be forgiven or ever forgotten.
Fitzgerald’s inability “to move fundamentally or to hold” Ginevra King (“Winter Dreams” 233) and his frustrated attempts to become one of the “big men” (This Side of Paradise 43) of his class at Princeton were the events that first spurred him to take seriously literature in general and his own writing in particular:

Years later I realized that my failure as a big shot in college was all right--instead of serving on committees, I took a beating on English poetry; when I got the idea of what it was all about, I set about learning how to write. On Shaw’s principle that ‘If you don’t get what you like, you better like what you get,’ it was a lucky break--at the moment it was a harsh and bitter business to know that my career as a leader of men was over. Since that day I have not been able to fire a bad servant, and I am astonished and impressed by people who can. Some old desire for personal dominance was broken and gone... A man does not recover from such jolts—he becomes a different person and, eventually, the new person finds new things to care about. (“Pasting it Together” 76)

Would Fitzgerald have taken up writing as a career if he had gotten what he wanted, if he had served on committees, been “a leader of men,” married Ginevra King? He may have ultimately become a writer even if he had fulfilled his youthful dreams, for he loved to write even as a child and, as he told Scottie in August 1940, “People often struggle through to what they are in spite of any detours” (Letters 91). However, I do not believe that Fitzgerald would have ever become the writer he was if he had made Ginevra his wife or gotten himself elected President of the Triangle Club, simply because the profound, ineradicable and insatiable longing that characterizes his best work comes directly from what Lionel Trilling, in his 1945 essay “F. Scott Fitzgerald,” calls “the grief of the lost and the might-have-been” (Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby 13). Fitzgerald could not write a story unless he had personally experienced the emotions central to the story, and the emotions he experienced most intensely, the emotions with which he imbued so many of his romantic heroes, were feelings of attachment to and longing for dreams that were unfulfilled or unfulfillable and places, people and other emotions lost to the past.

George O’Kelly longs for the “intangible whisper in the dusk, or on the breeze of
night” that once made his love for Jonquil Cary so breathlessly exciting, but knows that he can “never recapture” them. Dexter Green, confronted with Judy Jones’ deterioration, has a sudden and awful realization. “In a sort of panic he pushed the palms of his hands into his eyes and tried to bring up a picture of the waters lapping on Sherry Island and the moonlit veranda, and gingham on the golf-links and the dry sun and the gold color of her neck’s soft down. And her mouth damp to his kisses and her eyes plaintive with melancholy and her freshness like fine new linen in the morning. Why, these things were no longer in the world! They had existed and they existed no longer” (235). Anson Hunter, the protagonist of “The Rich Boy,” is rarely moved because his monumental self-absorption and his sense of utter superiority preclude emotional involvement. When, however, he and the only woman he ever loved meet for the first time in years outside the Plaza Hotel “a sudden quickening of memory” (346), a pang of grief at what was and what might have been, breaks his heart:

“I wasn’t ever engaged. I tried to be engaged, but I never loved anybody but you, Paula.”

“Oh,” she said. Then after a moment: “This baby is the first one I ever really wanted. You see, I’m in love now—at last.”

He didn’t answer, shocked at the treachery of her remembrance. She must have seen that the “at last” bruised him, for she continued:

“I was infatuated with you, Anson—you could make me do anything you liked. But we wouldn’t have been happy. . . . You’ll never settle down. . . .”

The phrase struck him from behind. . . . (Short Stories 346)

Jay Gatsby does not believe in failure or concession to time’s demands. His longing for past joys is bound up with his “extraordinary gift for hope” (6), so he believes not only that one can repeat the past (86), but also that the past, once recaptured and repeated, will make the experienced present as orderly and satisfying as the remembered past. “He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. . . .” (86). Abe North finds that alcohol
enables him to feel the lost happiness of the past in the present. After ordering a lunch which he does not eat “he just sat, happy to live in the past. The drink made past happy things contemporary with the present, as if they were still going on, contemporary even with the future as if they were about to happen again” (Tender Is The Night 103).

Fitzgerald, in his more coldly rational moments, knew that “‘You can’t repeat the past’” (The Great Gatsby 86), that the wise forget as much of the past as they can and refuse “to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age” (The Great Gatsby 106), and that most men and women whose dreams are stymied or destroyed “eventually...find new things to care about,” but none of this stopped him from dwelling obsessively on his past or longing for the fulfillment of dreams long ago snuffed out or deferred. He tried to win Ginevra King and failed, but “his rejection by Ginevra motivated much of his fiction. Time after time he attempted to exorcise—and paradoxically, to keep alive—that pain in story and novel” (Fool For Love 51). He tried to become a “big shot” at Princeton and failed, but he never got over that failure and insisted that his literary career was a direct consequence of it. He went to New York City in February 1919 to “write or something” (Letters 375) and to make the fortune that would enable him to marry Miss Zelda Sayre of Montgomery, Alabama immediately. He failed at literature and love alike, but these failures spurred him to write This Side of Paradise and to try his mettle in New York again.

This Side of Paradise grew out of The Romantic Egotist, a novel “so close to This Side of Paradise as to be a working draft for the novel Fitzgerald published in 1920” (Bruccoli 96). Fitzgerald began writing The Romantic Egotist in November 1917 (Ledger 172) while he was training for the Army at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The United States had entered the First World War on April 6, 1917, “rather to Fitzgerald’s relief, for it solved the problem of his future” (Bruccoli 83), and he received a commission as infantry second lieutenant on October 26, 1917. “These were the great days;” he wrote, “battle was on the
horizon; nothing was ever going to be the same again and nothing mattered. And for the
next two years nothing did matter. Five per cent of my class, twenty-one boys, were
Wilson, “purports to be the picaresque ramble of one Stephen Palms from the San
Francisco fire thru school, Princeton, to the end, where at twenty-one he writes his
autobiography at the Princeton aviation school. It shows traces of Tarkington, Chesterton,
Chambers, Wells, Benson (Robert Hugh), Rupert Brooke and includes Compton
Mackenzie-like love affairs and three psychic adventures including an encounter with the
devil in a harlot’s apartment” (Letters 323). Charles Scribner’s Sons rejected the novel in
August 1918, but one of the editors, probably Maxwell Perkins, suggested that Fitzgerald
revise and resubmit it (The Romantic Egoists 34; Correspondence 31-32). He did so, but
The Romantic Egotist was rejected again in October. “The end of a dream” wrote
Fitzgerald in his scrapbook (The Romantic Egoists 35).

Fitzgerald was assigned to the 45th infantry regiment. The 45th was transferred
several times in 1918 and Fitzgerald was stationed at Camp Sheridan near Montgomery,
Alabama by June. He met Zelda Sayre at a country club dance on a Saturday night in July
1918. “Fell in love on the 7th” reads his first Ledger entry for September 1918 (173).
Zelda continued to encourage other men but she was in love too. “Scott had appealed to
something in Zelda which no one before him had perceived: a romantic sense of self-
importance which was kindred to his own” (Milford 33). Camp Mills was to have been
the last stop for Fitzgerald’s regiment before embarkation to France, but the Kaiser’s
armies were already retreating all along the western front and Fitzgerald “‘didn’t get over’”
(“I Didn’t Get Over,” Afternoon of an Author 170). Instead of fighting Germans he ended
up going to New York on leave. Distraught at having missed his chance to distinguish
himself in the trenches, at having been kept out of “what every other bastard belonged to;
the greatest club in history” (Drawbell 176), he got drunk and was surprised by one of the
Hotel Astor’s house detectives as he entertained a nude girl in a friend’s room (Mizener, F. Scott Fitzgerald 41; Mellow 56).

On February 14, 1919 Fitzgerald was discharged from an Army that was, presumably, happy to see him go. On February 18 he entrained for New York, hoping to sell his stories and to find a job that would provide him with enough money to convince Zelda, who “had never seen New York but . . .was wise enough to be rather reluctant” (“My Lost City” 25), to join him in the city. Upon reaching New York he sent a wire to Montgomery:

DARLING HEART AMBITION ENTHUSIASM AND CONFIDENCE I DECLARE EVERYTHING GLORIOUS THIS WORLD IS A GAME AND WHITE I FEEL SURE OF YOU LOVE EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE I AM IN THE LAND OF AMBITION AND SUCCESS AND MY ONLY HOPE AND FAITH IS THAT MY DARLING HEART WILL BE WITH ME SOON. (Correspondence 38)

Thereafter, Fitzgerald’s confidence eroded rapidly. He had trouble finding a job and when he was finally hired his salary was so small as to make Zelda’s appearance in the city an impossibility:

I arrived in New York and presented my card to the office boys of seven city editors asking to be taken on as a reporter. I had just turned twenty-two, the war was over, and I was going to trail murderers by day and do short stories by night. But the newspapers didn’t need me. They sent their office boys out to tell me they didn’t need me . . .Instead I became an advertising man at ninety dollars a month . . .After hours I wrote stories . . .No one bought them, no one sent personal letters. I had one-hundred and twenty-two rejection slips pinned in a frieze about my room. (“Who’s Who—And Why” 85)

The Smart Set finally bought “Babes in the Woods” for thirty dollars, but this small victory depressed Fitzgerald almost as much as rejection had because that “story had been written in college two years before, and a dozen new ones hadn’t even drawn a personal letter. The implication was that I was on the down-grade at twenty-two” (“Early Success” 86).

Zelda, meanwhile, was becoming “NERVOUS” (Correspondence 43), meaning that
plenty of immediately available young men who were more financially secure than Fitzgerald were courting her and she was wondering just how long it was going to be before her “darling lover” (Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings 446) would make his fortune and send for her. Fitzgerald was jealous and miserable. He sent her an engagement ring, called her “my own wife” (Correspondence 39), and went to Montgomery on the fifteenth of April to reassure her: “Hysteria. Montgomery on 15th . . . More stories. Failure. I used to wonder why they locked Princesses in towers” (Ledger 173). Zelda continued to do as she pleased and tired of her fiance’s “Wild letters” (Ledger 173). Fitzgerald’s vitality was at a low ebb and New York had become a bad dream:

As I hovered ghost-like in the Plaza Red Room of a Saturday afternoon, or went to lush and liquid garden parties in the East Sixties or tipped with Princetonians in the Biltmore Bar [in the Biltmore Hotel at Madison Avenue and Forty-third Street] I was haunted always by my other life—my drab room in the Bronx, my square foot of the subway, my fixation upon the day’s letter from Alabama. . .my shabby suits, my poverty, and love. The gilded youth circling around young Constance Bennet in the Club de Vingt [location unknown], the classmates in the Yale-Princeton Club [at Vanderbilt Avenue and Forty-fourth Street, across from Grand Central Station] whooping up our first after-the-war reunion, the atmosphere of the millionaires’ houses I sometimes frequented—these things were empty for me, though I recognized them as impressive scenery and regretted that I was committed to other romance. . . .One by one my great dreams of New York became tainted. (“My Lost City” 25-26)

Alcohol provided some relief from the tedium of the advertising business and the humiliation of thwarted ambitions, so Fitzgerald got drunk regularly. One evening, drinking martinis in the upstairs lounge of the Yale-Princeton Club, “he announced that he was going to jump out of the window. No one objected; on the contrary, it was pointed out that the windows were French and ideally suited for jumping, which seemed to cool his ardor” (Turnbull 93). Other parties inclined less toward suicidal gloom and more toward manic hilarity. One such party, a Yale fraternity dance at Delmonico’s, the venerable and elegant restaurant at Fifth Avenue and Forty-fourth Street, later became the central event of “May Day.” Fitzgerald drank all night at the dance before repairing to
Childs', a diner at Fifty-ninth and Broadway, where he mixed eggs and hash in someone's bowler and stood up on a table while attempting to make a speech. He then went back to Delmonico's with Porter Gillespie, a Yale undergraduate, and appropriated two large cardboard signs, one reading "IN" and the other reading "OUT," which he and Gillespie wore over their shirt fronts as they paraded drunkenly about the upper east side. "Well into the next morning they breakfasted on shredded wheat and champagne, carrying the empty bottles carefully out of the hotel and smashing them on the curb for the benefit of the churchgoers along Fifth Avenue" (Far Side of Paradise 82). In his Ledger Fitzgerald wrote "Mr. In and Mr. Out--and other parties" (173).

Fitzgerald returned to Montgomery in June, hoping to alleviate his anxiety and loneliness by convincing Zelda to marry him without further delay. She refused and, disconcerted by his inability to make money and his lack of confidence, broke their engagement. Back in New York, Fitzgerald quit his job and spent all his remaining money on an alcoholic spree that lasted three weeks, took him to Boston and back, and only ended when the Eighteenth Amendment took effect on July 1, 1919. "Montgomery. The break. Drunk in N.Y." (Ledger 173). Exhausted and penniless, but determined to revise "The Romantic Egotist" and see it published, Fitzgerald left New York on a train bound for St. Paul where his parents had agreed to give him his old third story room at 599 Summit Avenue but had refused the profligate's requests for money. He borrowed money from his friends and, fueled by Coca-Cola, cigarettes, and sandwiches made by his mother, rewrote his novel. "He wasted no time and proceeded systematically, with a schedule of chapters pinned to the curtain of his top-floor room. For some one so youthful and impulsive he was already surprisingly organized and professional about his work. He refurbished the old material and wove in new, some of it drawn from stories written and rejected during the spring" (Turnbull 97). Fitzgerald finished a first draft by July 25 and mailed it to Maxwell Perkins at Scribners with a cover letter in which he
described his new work as a “definate attempt at a big novel” and confided that he was “blatantly confident” Perkins would “risk its publication” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 17).

Fitzgerald mailed the completed manuscript on September 4 and Perkins wrote back on September 16: “I am very glad, personally, to be able to write to you that we are all for publishing your book, ‘This Side of Paradise’” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 21). In his Ledger Fitzgerald summed up the months between September 1918 and September 1919 as “The most important year of my life. Every emotion and my life work decided. Miserable and ecstatic but a great success” (173).

This Side of Paradise is, in Bruccoli’s words, “the 300-page history of Amory Blaine from his indulged childhood with his eccentric mother through prep school and Princeton, culminating in an unhappy love affair and a renewed quest for values upon which to erect a fulfilling life” (143). It is generally agreed that This Side of Paradise is “autobiographical” (Bruccoli 146). Donaldson calls it “Fitzgerald’s first and most openly autobiographical novel” (Fool For Love 7). Malcolm Cowley refers to it as “a very young man’s novel and memory book” (The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald ix). There is less agreement, however, as to the degree of similarity between Fitzgerald’s actual emotional responses to the various experiences he attributed to Amory in This Side of Paradise and Amory’s fictional emotional responses to those same experiences. Mizener concedes that “This Side of Paradise depends indirectly on Fitzgerald’s personal experience,” but then goes on to argue: “If Amory Blaine...like Fitzgerald, settled in New York after the war, worked for an advertising firm, and had a love affair which ended in disaster and an epic three-week drunk, we should nonetheless be wrong to conclude that what he felt about his experience was what Fitzgerald felt about his” (Far Side of Paradise 96). Bruccoli disagrees: “In writing his first novel Fitzgerald worked toward the method of ‘transmuted autobiography,’ which subsequently allowed him to combine his own emotions with the qualities of an actual figure in his most enduring characters. Fitzgerald worked close to
life, but after *This Side of Paradise* he rarely transcribed real people" (146-147). Bruccoli does not bluntly assert that Amory’s fictional emotions are Fitzgerald’s actual emotions, but he implies that Amory, with his unmistakably Fitzgeraldian emotions, is a prototype of such characters as Dick Diver and Jay Gatsby, who, Fitzgerald told John Peale Bishop, “started as one man I knew and then changed into myself” (*Letters* 358). Regardless of the general similarity or lack of similarity between Amory’s emotional responses and Fitzgerald’s, Amory’s responses to New York are remarkably similar to Fitzgerald’s responses to the New York he knew between 1906 and 1919, the New York he documented in “My Lost City,” “Early Success” and “Who’s Who--And Why”. *This Side of Paradise* is “the history of Amory Blaine,” but it is also the only slightly fictionalized history of “the metropolitan days and nights” of Fitzgerald’s youth.

The novel is divided into two books, “The Romantic Egotist” and “The Education Of A Personage.” New York serves as the setting for much of Book One and as the primary setting of Book Two, but the New York of “The Romantic Egotist” and the New York of “The Education Of A Personage” are different cities. The New York of Book One is a “dream cit[y]” (29), an amusement park where Amory enjoys himself and sees people, places and spectacles that fuel his extravagant ambitions and inspire him to cast New York as the projected setting for all of his projected triumphs. When Amory first sees New York “the metropolis, barely glimpsed made little impression on him, except for the sense of cleanliness he drew from the tall white buildings seen from a Hudson River steamboat in the early morning” (23). Five months later, however, the city “burst” (29) upon him and, exploring Broadway with his prep school chum Paskert, he decides that New York is the only place for him: “They wandered on, mixing in the Broadway crowd, dreaming on

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8See also Alexander McKaig’s diary entry for October 13, 1920: “Fitz made another true remark about himself... cannot depict how any one thinks except himself and possibly Zelda. Find that after he has written about a character a while it becomes just himself again” (*Turnbull* 113-114).
the music that eddied out of the cafes. New faces flashed on and off like myriad lights, pale or rouged faces, tired, yet sustained by a weary excitement. Amory watched them in fascination. He was planning his life. He was going to live in New York..." (31).

Fitzgerald’s first memorable emotional experience of New York was one of “triumph” as he approached Manhattan at dawn on a ferry boat. His second memorable emotion, “hopeless and melancholy love,” was aroused when he saw Ina Claire and Gertrude Bryan on Broadway. Amory is not very impressed by his view of New York from a steamboat but, like Fitzgerald, he is rent with desire when he sees a beautiful actress in a musical comedy:

The play was ‘The Little Millionaire,’ with George M. Cohan, and there was one stunning young brunette who made him sit with brimming eyes in the ecstasy of watching her dance.

Oh--you--wonderful girl,
What a wonderful girl you are--

sang the tenor, and Amory agreed silently, but passionately. . . . Oh, to fall in love like that, to the languorous magic melody of such a tune! . . . . Amory was on fire. . . to meet a girl who should look like that--better, that very girl; whose hair would be drenched with golden moonlight, while at his elbow sparkling wine was poured by an unintelligible waiter. When the curtain fell for the last time he gave such a long sigh that the people in front of him twisted around and stared. . . . (30)

Fitzgerald’s emotional reactions to the potent combination of Ina Claire, Gertrude Bryan and New York City were so rich that he was still capable of transforming them from “felt” experience into promising material for fiction in “The Freshest Boy,” a Basil Duke Lee story written almost seventeen years after “the wonderful vacation” and more than eight years after he’d used the same material in This Side of Paradise. Basil, contrary to his expectations of prep school life, is miserable at St. Regis. His freshness has made him “the most detested boy in school” (The Basil and Josephine Stories 60). Consequently, a “trip to New York. . . . come[s] to mean everything to him--surcease from the misery of his daily life as well as a glimpse into the long-awaited heaven of romance” (61). Lunching in
the Manhattan Hotel, Basil “watches the nonchalant, debonair, blasé New Yorkers at
neighboring tables, investing them with a romance by which these possible fellow citizens
of his from the Middle West lost nothing” (68). Later, at a Broadway matinee, Basil
witnesses “the show of all shows that he wanted to see” (70):

ACT II. The Foyer of the Hotel Astor

Yes, she was, indeed, like that song—a Beautiful Rose of the Night. The waltz buoyed her up, brought her with it to a point of aching beauty and then let her slide back to life across its last bars as a leaf slants to earth across the air. The high life of New York! Who could blame her if she was carried away by the glitter of it all, vanishing into the bright morning of the amber window borders, or into distant and entrancing music as the door opened and closed that led to the ballroom? The toast of the shining town. (71)

Amory’s vision of a Broadway show populated by gorgeous dancing girls, exotic waiters, warbling tenors and himself as a heaven of fulfilled desires may be absurd, and Basil’s conception of the musical he attends as a “long moment of incomparable beauty” (72) may want critical rigor, but Fitzgerald’s accounts of Amory’s love for the “wonderful girl” and Basil’s appreciation of a girl carried away by the romance of New York are deeply felt and utterly convincing. New York’s pleasures are outwardly superficial and sentimental, but Amory and Basil apparently do not know any better or do not care. Despite its gaudy spectacles and relatively cheap thrills, the city is able to elicit genuine and intensely felt emotions from Amory whose “facile, imaginative mind” (4) appreciates few things more than an intensely felt emotion, and from Basil, whose own imaginative capacities enable him to dream of the night when he will shock a “mysterious group of society people” at a “hidden Broadway restaurant” (54) with the revelation that he “is none other than that elusive gentleman, Basil Lee, better known as The Shadow” (55). If New York had not existed, Fitzgerald and his characters would have found it necessary to invent a comparable city of limitless possibilities. That New York did exist, albeit in a form that sometimes compared rather unfavorably with Fitzgerald’s Platonic conception of a city of
limitless possibilities, drove him and his characters to make the most of the material at hand. If one found oneself starved for romance while lunching in New York, it was comforting to look about and feel confident that the other people lunching in the same restaurant were New Yorkers and therefore more romantic than your average fellow-luncher from Chicago or Cleveland. If one was miserable and went to a musical comedy on Broadway, it was comforting to remember that Broadway was the theatrical mecca of the known universe and that the various bruises on one’s soul were about to be assuaged by the sights and sounds of girls who were much more beautiful than the girls who sang and danced on other stages in other cities.

Amory returns to Broadway when, as a sophomore, he invites Isabelle Borge, “who is based on Ginevra King” (Bruccoli 144), to the Princeton prom, and more romance ensues. One of Fitzgerald’s Ledger entries for June 1915 reads “Ritz, Nobody Home [a Broadway show] and Midnight Frolic [a cabaret] with ginevra” (169). Amory and Isabelle “had luncheon in New York, and in the afternoon went to see a problem play at which Isabelle wept all through the second act, rather to Amory’s embarrassment—though it filled him with tenderness to watch her. He was tempted to lean over and kiss away her tears, and she slipped her hand into his under cover of darkness to be pressed softly” (88).

There are some intimations of New York’s less romantic, more lethal aspects in Book One of This Side of Paradise, but Amory ruthlessly suppresses any foreboding or mistrust of the city that terrifying events in or around the city quicken in him. “Tragedy’s emerald eyes glared suddenly” at him when “a crowd sallied to New York in quest of adventure, and started back to Princeton about twelve o’clock in two machines” (85). Dick Humbird, who has “been drinking too much” (86), is killed when the car he is driving flips over going around a curve: “Under the full light of a roadside arclight lay a form, face downward in a widening circle of blood” (86). Amory is initially horrified by Humbird’s death but the prom is imminent, Isabelle and Broadway beckon, and he wastes no time in
forgetting the accident. "The next day, by a merciful chance, passed in a whirl. When Amory was by himself his thoughts zigzagged inevitably to the picture of that red mouth yawning incongruously in the white face, but with a determined effort he piled present excitement upon the memory of it and shut it coldly away from his mind" (87). Another romantic egotist, Jay Gatsby, also shuts a victim of an automobile accident "coldly away from his mind." Daisy, driving Gatsby's "death car" (107) from New York to East Egg, strikes Myrtle Wilson who, "her life violently extinguished, kne[els] in the road and mingle[s] her thick, dark blood with the dust" (107). Later, Gatsby asks Nick Carraway

"Did you see any trouble on the road?"
"Yes. . . ."
"Was she killed?"
"Yes."
"I thought so; I told Daisy I thought so. It's better that the shock should come all at once. She stood it pretty well."
He spoke as if Daisy's reaction was the only thing that mattered. . . .
"Was Daisy driving?"
"Yes," he said after a moment, "but of course I'll say I was. . . . The second my hand reached the wheel I felt the shock—it must have killed her instantly."
"It ripped her open—"
"Don't tell me, old sport." (112-113)

Nick, considering the fatal events of that "broiling, almost the last, certainly the warmest" day "of the summer" (89) in retrospect, summarizes the trip from Manhattan to the ashheaps in poetic terms that are as tender as they are ominous: "So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight" (106). Amory is actually composing "the ghost of two stanzas of a poem" (85) in his mind as he and his friends drive back to Princeton from New York: "So the gray car crept nightward in the dark and there was no life stirred as it went by. . . ." (85).

Another instance of Amory's suppression of New York's less glamorous aspects is his insistence, the day after his encounter with the devil (who, inexplicably, has Dick Humbird's face) in the chorus girls' apartment, that he must "get off" Broadway because it is "filthy" and is making him sick. Amory adores that part of Broadway between Forty-
Second and Fiftieth Streets, the “Great White Way, theatrical center of America and wonder of the out-of-towner” (Federal Writers’ Project, WPA Guide to New York City 167), but he finds the rest of Broadway, which is noisy, dirty and surging with the raw vitality of commerce and “painted faces,” repulsive. Fifth Avenue, a street lined with millionaires’ homes and shops that cater to the carriage trade, a street whose air “is a soft, light wine” (This Side of Paradise 116), helps Amory to forget that New York is full of noise and dirt and complaisant chorus girls so he walks east to Fifth and feels better, if only for a moment. This incident reminds one of Father Schwartz’s advice to young Rudolph Miller in “Absolution.” Schwartz tells the boy to “go and see an amusement park. . . .Go to one at night and stand a little way off from it. . . .But don’t get up close. . . .because if you do you’ll only feel the heat and the sweat and the life” (Short Stories 271). New York is primarily Amory’s amusement park in Book One of This Side of Paradise, but when he gets up close, when he sees the dirty streets, the sexual vigor and the threat of sudden death that lurk outside the restaurants and theatres, he feels “the heat and the sweat and the life” and is appalled.

In the brief “Interlude” between “The Romantic Egotist” and “The Education Of A Personage”, Amory writes a letter to T. P. D’Invilliers, the Princetonian (modelled on John Peale Bishop) who supposedly wrote the fragment of poetry about the “gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover” which serves as The Great Gatsby’s epigraph, wherein he expresses his intention to live in New York after the war. “We meet in Manhattan on the 30th of this very mo.; we then proceed to take a very sporty apartment, you and I and Alec, who is at me elbow as I write. . . .oh, we’ll get a Jap butler and dress for dinner and have wine on the table and lead a contemplative, emotionless life until we decide to use machine-guns with the property owners--or throw bombs with the Bolshevik. God! Tom, I hope something happens. I’m restless as the devil and have a horror of getting fat or falling in love and growing domestic” (161-163). “Something” does happen in Book Two of This
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**Side of Paradise.** Amory, contrary to his wishes, falls in love with Rosalind Connage, Alec’s sister. When, like Fitzgerald, Amory loses Rosalind because of his poverty and his failure to rise quickly in an advertising firm, he finds himself disgusted with New York, gets very drunk and eventually decides to leave the city, the city in which he once wanted nothing more than to live for good. The New York of “The Education Of A Personage” is not an amusement park, evoked in romantic terms and twinkling with “stick-of-candy glamour” (134), but a more realistic city where daily labor is a necessity and poverty kills romance.

“Amory’s feelings about Rosalind,” asserts Bruccoli, “are obviously drawn from Fitzgerald’s for Zelda, but the girls’ backgrounds differ markedly; Rosalind is a New York debutante” (144). Donaldson disagrees, arguing that “the section of *This Side of Paradise* called ‘The Debutante’—really a short story [published in *The Nassau Literary Magazine*, January 1917 and again in *The Smart Set*, November 1919] in the form of a playlet, with dialogue and stage directions—painfully relives Fitzgerald’s rejection by Ginevra King” (Fool For Love 102). Both biographers are, in a sense, correct. James West believes that “the *Nassau Lit* version of The Debutante,”” which was originally written a year and a half before Fitzgerald met Zelda, “had been based on Fitzgerald’s romance with Ginevra King. The female lead, whose name is Helen...is hardly more than a rich, spoiled little girl. The *Smart Set* version, however, was written after Fitzgerald had fallen in love with Zelda--indeed, while they were engaged--and as a result the heroine (now named Rosalind) is a more alluring mixture of Helen from the *Nassau Lit* and Zelda from real life” (The Making Of *This Side of Paradise* 63-64). Fitzgerald “had submitted a ribbon typescript” of “The Debutante” to *The Smart Set*, “but he had kept a carbon copy” and “in composing the chapter for *This Side of Paradise* he simply took this carbon and incorporated it into his manuscript” (63). So Rosalind is a combination of Ginevra from Lake Forest and Zelda from Montgomery. In a July 12, 1940 letter,
Fitzgerald told Scottie "Once I thought that Lake Forest was the most glamorous place in the world. Maybe it was" (Letters 84).

In This Side of Paradise, however, the golden girl sits in state at "a luxurious dressing table" in "the Connage house on Sixty-eighth Street, New York" (167). New York is certainly the "most glamorous place in the world" for Rosalind, even if out-of-towner Amory, in his frustrated quest to make Rosalind his own, ultimately finds it rather brutal and shabby. New York is a source of constant and immediate gratification for her, the city where she gets "all the attention" (169), the city where she reigns as "the princess" (167) who "treats men terribly...abuses them and cuts them and breaks dates with them and yawns in their faces--and they come back for more" (170). Manhattan, the home of innumerable banks, brokerage houses and sundry thriving business concerns, is also home to "'Rosalind Unlimited'" (174), not a corporation but a decidedly profitable enterprise nonetheless. "Fifty-one shares, name, good-will, and everything goes at $25,000 a year" (174). Amory is eager to do business, but he betrays his middle-western sensitivity, a liability frowned upon by Eastern financiers and businessmen, when he "disapprovingly" summarizes "'Rosalind Unlimited'" as "sort of a chilly proposition" (174). Rosalind’s own mother concedes that her daughter is "a very expensive proposition" (177), but is not herself adverse to chilliness in the interests of business and advises Rosalind to check "Mr. Blaine’s" advances as he "doesn’t sound like a money-maker" (178).

Rosalind falls in love with Amory anyway, though she is anxious about his financial prospects from the very beginning:

ROSALIND: What are you going to do?
AMORY: Can’t say--run for President, write--
ROSALIND: Greenwich Village?
AMORY: Good heavens, no--I said write--not drink.
ROSALIND: I like business men. Clever men are usually so homely. (184)

Amory does his best to make money and his mark on the city, but his mind is not on the
advertising accounts he is assigned and he alternates “between astonishing bursts of rather 
exceptional work and wild dreams of becoming suddenly rich and touring Italy with 
Rosalind” (186). Rosalind, besieged by rich boy Dawson Ryder and her mother, finally 
ends the relationship when she realizes that Amory’s inability to make more than $275.00 
a month and the very qualities that make him attractive to her, “the ones,” she tells him, 
“that will always make you a failure” (193), disqualify him from consideration as a 
possible husband. Like Zelda, like Jonquil Cary of “The Sensible Thing,” Rosalind fears 
that poverty, even the relative poverty of the middle-class, will destroy the “romantic sense 
of self-importance”, the romantic egotism, which is the basis of their love: “I can’t, 
Amory. I can’t be shut away from the trees and flowers, cooped up in a little flat, waiting 
for you. You’d hate me in a narrow atmosphere. I’d make you hate me” (195). Amory 
stumbles out into the streets and Rosalind, like Dexter Green and George O’Kelly, but 
unlike most of Fitzgerald’s golden girls (except, of course, Josephine Perry in “Emotional 
Bankruptcy” [The Basil and Josephine Stories]), is left “feeling that she has lost 
something, she knows not what, she knows not why” (197).

Chapter two of “The Education of a Personage” is comprised almost entirely of 
Amory’s alcoholic attempts to forget Rosalind. He drinks Bronxes and rye high-balls, 
lurching from the Knickerbocker Bar to the Biltmore Bar to the Cocoanut Grove to 
Shanley’s. When Carling, class of ‘15, asks him “What are you celebrating?”, Amory 
replies “Cel’brating blowmylife. Great moment blow my life. Can’t tell you ‘bout it” 
(200). Only “the advent of prohibition. . .put[s] a sudden stop to the submerging of 
Amory’s sorrows” (208). In chapter three of Book Two, Amory vacations in Maryland 
where he meets Eleanor, who “was, say, the last time that evil crept close to Amory under 
the mask of beauty, the last weird mystery that held him with wild fascination and 
pounded his soul to flakes” (222). Fitzgerald, in his marked copy of the novel, annotated 
this chapter with the comment “This is so funny I can’t even bear to read it” (Bruccoli
Back in New York Amory stands, appropriately enough, outside of a theatre as the matinee ends and a crowd spills out onto Broadway. "New York seemed not so much awakening as turning over in its bed. Pallid men rushed by, pinching together their coat-collars; a great swarm of tired, magpie girls from a department-store crowded along with shrieks of strident laughter, three to an umbrella; a squad of marching policemen passed, already miraculously protected by oilskin capes" (255). This metropolitan tableau, part of what West calls "the best piece of lengthy description in the novel" (71-72), arouses only hatred in Amory: "I detest poor people...I hate them for being poor. Poverty may have been beautiful once, but it's rotten now. It's the ugliest thing in the world" (256). Even as a penniless young man trying to stay out of the rain, Amory's heart is with the rich boys in their Fifth Avenue clubs. "He seemed to see again a figure whose significance had once impressed him--a well-dressed young man gazing from a club window on Fifth Avenue and saying something to his companion with a look of utter disgust. Probably, thought Amory, what he said was: 'My God! Aren't people horrible!'" (256). Amory walks to Fifth Avenue and climbs to the roof of an autobus. As the bus proceeds uptown a rather Joycean interior dialogue begins in his head:

Q.--Can you live?  
A.--I can't imagine not being able to. People make money in books and I've found that I can always do the things that people do in books. Really they are the only things I can do.  
Q.--Be definite.  
A.--I don't know what I'll do--nor have I much curiosity. Tomorrow I'm going to leave New York for good. It's a bad town unless you're on top of it. (257)

Amory's disillusionment with New York is genuine. He has, to borrow a phrase from Turnbull (56), "over-dreamed" New York and is disgusted with it and with himself when his penchant for "reach[ing] out for the best without knowing why he wanted it" ("Winter Dreams" 221) and his stubborn faith in the inevitability of his own triumph leave him with
nothing to show for all of his ambition and faith in the city. Implicit, however, in his
dismissal of New York is the belief that it might very well be a good town if and when one
finds oneself on top of it. Amory does not give up at the end of This Side of Paradise so
much as he regroups and, despite his intention to leave New York “for good,” one
imagines that he will be back, for what other city on earth would be so amenable to “a new
generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success;
grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken. . .” (282)?
“Amory, Son of Beatrice” (3), is a forerunner of Jay Gatsby, “son of God” (The Great
Gatsby 77), in that he too is in “the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty” (The
Great Gatsby 77); he too is seeking fulfillment of the “promises of life” in a life without
promise. New York, the vastest, most vulgar and meretricious city on earth, is an
appropriate arena for the performance of such service. If the beauty is revealed as illusion,
if the search for fulfillment is cruelly frustrated, if the “sense of cleanliness” exuded by the
white city is superficial at best, then he will leave, but he will leave with unfinished
business on his mind and “the faint stirring of old ambitions and unrealized dreams” (This
Side of Paradise 282) in his heart. Fitzgerald harbored the same stirring, the same desire
to even accounts, in his own heart when he left New York as a failure in July 1919. New
York would welcome him back in 1920 and he would stay in all the best hotels and go to
all the best restaurants and shows with the golden girl he had worked so hard to make his
own. Yet Fitzgerald’s experiences in New York would never be quite so wonderful as the
New York he had dreamed and his deep ambivalence toward it--an ambivalence amply
illustrated by “May Day”, the realistic tour de force Fitzgerald counted among his five best
stories (Correspondence 224)--would strain relations between the egotist and his beloved
city for the next twenty-one years.
IV: “The great city of the conquering people”

On May 27, 1920 John Grier Hibben, the President of Princeton, wrote Fitzgerald a letter in which he “very frankly” told the young author of that “Princeton book, This Side of Paradise” that he had been “grieved” by Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the University as “a country club” even as he had admired the “descriptions of the beauty and charm of Princeton” (Correspondence 58). He also praised “The Four Fists,” a story Fitzgerald characterized as “trash” (Correspondence 68), and the “philosophy of life” contained therein, a philosophy he assumed Fitzgerald had embraced:

Let me first say that I feel that in this last story of yours you have shown not only your rare ability as an artist, but also your power to present a philosophy of life which I wish every young man of our country would feel and appreciate. Your description of “Samuel,” attributing to him “some instinct stronger than will, deeper than training” [Flappers and Philosophers 188], presents a picture of human nature at its best. This philosophy of the instinctive nobility of man I hope may be further developed in your writings. . . . (58)

Fitzgerald wrote back “My view of life, President Hibben, is the view of the Theodore Dreisers and Joseph Conrads--that life is too strong and remorseless for the sons of men . . . . ‘The Four Fists,’ latest of my stories to be published, was the first to be written. I wrote it in desperation one evening because I had a three-inch pile of rejection slips and it was financially necessary for me to give the magazine what they wanted. The appreciation it has received has amazed me” (Letters 462).9 Fitzgerald’s adoption of “the view of the

9 Robert Sklar, in his book F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Last Laocoon, asserts that “There is no definite indication that Fitzgerald had read either Dreiser or Conrad by June 1920; rather he is quoting directly from Mencken’s Book of Prefaces.” The passage from which Fitzgerald quotes directly may be found in Mencken’s essay “Theodore Dreiser”: “‘Conrad,’ says Walpole, ‘is of the firm and resolute conviction that life is too strong, too clever and too remorseless for the sons of men’. . . . Substitute the name of Dreiser for that of Conrad, and you will have to change scarcely a word. Perhaps one, to wit, ‘clever.’ I suspect that Dreiser, writing so of his own creed, would be tempted to make it ‘stupid,’ or, at all events, ‘unintelligible’” (The Vintage Mencken 48). But there is no definite indication that Fitzgerald had not read
Theodore Dreiser's and Joseph Conrad's work was due in large part to the influence that H. L. Mencken, who, Fitzgerald once opined, “has...done more for American letters than any man alive” (“How To Waste Material,” Afternoon Of An Author 119), had on him.

Mencken “fought for the recognition of Theodore Dreiser and was one of Joseph Conrad’s staunchest partisans” (Bruccoli 159). “As a matter of fact Mr. Mencken,” wrote Fitzgerald in a copy of This Side of Paradise he inscribed for the “Sage of Hollins Street”, “I stuck your name in on page 224 in the last proof—partly, I suppose, as a vague bootlick and partly because I have since adopted a great many of your views” (Correspondence 55).

Theodore Dreiser lived and worked in both Chicago and New York and wrote extensively about both cities. “To go to the city,” he wrote in an 1896 magazine column, “is the changeless desire of the mind. To join in the great, hurrying throng; to see the endless lights, the great shops and stores, the towering structures and palatial mansions, Dreiser or Conrad by June 1920. In a letter written on February 3, 1920 he tells Perkins “Another of my discoveries is H. L. Mencken who is certainly a factor in present day literature. In fact I'm not so cocksure about things as I was last summer--this fellow Conrad seems to be pretty good after all” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 28). Fitzgerald may have read some of Conrad’s work shortly before he wrote this letter or he may have only read about Conrad’s work in one or more of Mencken’s essays. Bruccoli believes that Fitzgerald read Charles G. Norris’s Salt while he was still a student at Princeton (52). Fitzgerald counted himself among “the most enthusiastic readers of Charles Norris’s ‘Salt,’” and wrote Norris “an excited letter of praise” upon finishing the book (“‘Poor Old Marriage’: Review of Charles G. Norris’ Brass”, In His Own Time 126-127), so he was familiar with American realism, the most notorious example of which was Dreiser’s Sister Carrie, well before 1920. One could not summarily dismiss as unfounded Fitzgerald’s acceptance of “the view of life...of the Theodore Dreisers and Joseph Conrads” even if it could be proved that he had not read any of their works before 1920 because, as Robert Roulston astutely remarks in his essay “Something Borrowed, Something New: A Discussion of Literary Influences on The Great Gatsby,” “It should be...self-evident that a person need not read a novel or poem to acquire some notion of both its contents and its technical innovations. And—especially with a mind as wide-ranging, wayward, and retentive as Fitzgerald's—influences are as likely to come from conversations, second- and third-hand published accounts, or from a derivative minor work as from direct familiarity with an apparent 'source'—a fact, no doubt, vexing to poor souls who crave precision and certainty” (Critical Essays on Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby 55-56).

Bruccoli notes that Fitzgerald and Mencken “developed mutual respect” although “the stolid Mencken and the flamboyant Fitzgerald were too different to become close friends” (159). “Will you sometime give me a chance to talk with you—I mean socially and with leisure?” asked Fitzgerald in a March 1926 letter to Mencken. “I’ve never met you without being either shy or drunk” (Correspondence 190).
becomes a desire which the mind can scarcely resist. Mansions and palaces, libraries, museums, the many theatres and resorts of wealth and pleasure all attract, just as a great cataract attracts” (Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose 95). Fitzgerald read Sister Carrie, Dreiser’s 1900 novel about a working-class girl who “assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue” (1) she finds in Chicago and New York but fails to find contentment in material success, and thought it “damn good” (Letters 59). Dreiser’s account of naive Carrie’s response to New York reminds one of the account Fitzgerald gives in “My Lost City” of his own initial responses to New York: “The round green hills sentinelling the broad, expansive bosom of the Hudson held her attention by their beauty as the train followed the line of the stream. She had heard of the Hudson River, the great city of New York, and now she looked out, filling her mind with the wonder of it” (212).

Dreiser himself was anything but naive and the delight he sometimes took in the “dash and fire of metropolitan life” (Uncollected Prose 96) was tempered by a kind of disgusted awe:

As a boy of course, I had invested Chicago with immense color and force, and it was there, ignorant, American, semi-conscious, seeking, inspiring. But New York was entirely different. It had the feeling of gross and blissful and parading self-indulgence...Life here was harder perhaps, for some more aware, more cynical and ruthless and brazen and shameless, and yet more alluring for these very reasons. Wherever one turned one felt a consciousness of ease and gluttony, indifference to ideals, however low or high, and coupled with a sense of power that had found itself and was not easily to be dislodged, of virtue that has little idealism and is willing to yield for a price. Here, as one could feel, were huge dreams and lusts and vanities being gratified hourly...I seemed everywhere to sense either a terrifying desire for lust or pleasure or wealth, accompanied by a heartlessness which was freezing to the soul, or a dogged resignation to deprivation and misery. (Newspaper Days 451-452, 480)

When Fitzgerald wrote “May Day” in March 1920 he “was under the influence of naturalism—the deterministic development of realism that he had found in Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser” and ““May Day’ is the only story in which he fully developed this method” (Bruccoli 163-164). The New York of “May Day” is filthy, lethal and chaotic, the most realistic fictional New York Fitzgerald ever created. It is more realistic than the
New York of Book Two of *This Side of Paradise* and, as Fitzgerald himself made clear in his “impossible Table of Contents” (xi) for *Tales of the Jazz Age*, it is a fictional version of the city of failure and despair he knew in 1919:

This somewhat unpleasant tale, published as a novelette in the “Smart Set” in July, 1920, relates a series of events which took place in the spring of the previous year. Each of the three events made a great impression upon me. In life they were unrelated, except by the general hysteria of that spring which inaugurated the Age of Jazz, but in my story I have tried, unsuccessfully I fear, to weave them into a pattern—a pattern which would give the effect of those months in New York as they appeared to at least one member of what was then the younger generation. (viii)

The “three events” to which Fitzgerald refers are, presumably, his alcoholic early morning antics with Porter Gillespie after the Yale dance at Delmonico’s, a raid on the *New York Call*, and “the suicide of a young Princetonian who shot himself” (Turnbull 96) in circumstances similar to the ones that drive Gordon Sterrett to “fire a cartridge into his head just behind the temple” (“May Day” 141). The “returning soldiers” of the story’s first paragraph came directly from Fitzgerald’s experiences in 1919: “New York had all the iridescence of the beginning of the world. The returning troops marched up Fifth Avenue and girls were instinctively drawn East and North toward them—this was the greatest nation and there was gala in the air” (“My Lost City” 25). Violence and discontent were in the air too. “The ten-year period that, as if reluctant to die outmoded in its bed, leaped to a spectacular death in October, 1929, began about the time of the May Day riots in 1919” remembered Fitzgerald in “Echoes Of The Jazz Age.” “When the police rode down the demobilized country boys gaping at the orators in Madison Square, it was the sort of measure bound to alienate the more intelligent young men from the prevailing order” (13).

As realistic as it is though, the New York of “May Day” is not entirely bereft of the romantic potential with which Fitzgerald imbued the “dream city” of “The Romantic Egotist.” “The sensuous, heavy fragrance of paint and powder” that filled Amory’s beloved Broadway theaters in *This Side of Paradise* also fills Delmonico’s in “May Day”:
So [Edith] came out of the dressing room at Delmonico’s and stood for a second in the doorway... From the room she had left drifted out the heavy fragrance left by the passage to and fro of many scented young beauties—rich perfumes and the fragile memory-laden dust of fragrant powders... It was an odor she knew well, exciting, stimulating, restlessly sweet—the odor of a fashionable dance... “I smell sweet,” she said to herself simply, and then came another thought—"I'm made for love.” (113-114)

The New York of “May Day” is a hybrid, a palpably Dreiserian city of greed, death and despair and an exuberant early-Fitzgeraldian city of glamor and beauty.

The desire for “lust or pleasure or wealth” is not always terrifying in “May Day,” but it is the defining characteristic of the story’s New York City and is readily evident in what Bruccoli calls the “quasi-Biblical preamble” (164):

There had been a war fought and won and the great city of the conquering people was crossed with triumphal arches and vivid with thrown flowers of white, red and rose. All through the long spring days the returning soldiers marched up the chief highway... while merchants and clerks left their bickerings and figurings and, crowding to the windows, turned their white-bunched faces gravely upon the passing battalions.

Never had there been such splendor in the great city, for the victorious war had brought plenty in its train, and the merchants had flocked thither from the South and West with their households to taste of all the luscious feasts and witness the lavish entertainments prepared—and to buy for their women furs against the next winter and bags of golden mesh and varicolored slippers of silk and silver and rose satin and cloth of gold.

So gaily and noisily were the peace and prosperity impending hymned by the scribes and poets of the conquering people that more and more spenders had gathered from the provinces to drink the wine of excitement, and faster and faster did the merchants dispose of their trinkets and slippers until they sent up a mighty cry for more trinkets and slippers in order that they might give in barter what was demanded of them. Some of them even flung up their hands helplessly, shouting:

“Alas! I have no more slippers! and alas! I have no more trinkets! May heaven help me, for I know not what I shall do!” (97-98)

The heightened glory and prosperity of the “great city” was a direct result of victory in the World War. America’s late entry into that war, its relatively light losses of men and material, and its good fortune in having never suffered combat on its own soil, all contributed to the “plenty” that, paradoxically, the bloodiest war in history brought to New York. The New York of the preamble is one populated chiefly by merchants “with their households” and clerks. They perform the primary work of the city and they are also the
primary beneficiaries of the World War. The soldiers, though they are certainly of interest as a spectacle to the merchants and clerks, are not beneficiaries of the World War. As the "gesticulating little Jew" (108) asks a crowd of soldiers: "--What have you got outa the war? . . . Look arounja, look arounja! Are you rich? Have you got a lot of money offered you?--no; you’re lucky if you’re alive and got both your legs. . . . Who got anything out of it except J. P. Morgan an’ John D. Rockerfeller?" (108). In fact, the city as a whole is "thoroughly fed up with soldiers unless they [are] nicely massed into pretty formations and uncomfortable under the weight of a pack and rifle" (104). In "May Day" merchants, from bickering shopkeepers to millionaires, run New York. Money is the city’s life blood. Merchants are drawn to the city by its promise of luxury and prosperity. They, in turn, draw money into the city and, with the willing cooperation of the “spenders,” keep it circulating perpetually after its arrival.11 Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the role of the merchant in New York is a realistic one despite the parabolic tone he adopts in the preamble. As William R. Taylor notes in his book In Pursuit of Gotham: Culture and Commerce in New York, “New York’s economic life descended directly from that of such Western trading cities as Venice and Amsterdam centuries earlier. It shared with them an extensive sea trade, constricted land area, and the absence of the heavy hand of national government authority or official cultural institutions. This last characteristic, rare among major cities of the world, gave the mercantile and business classes in each city comparatively unchecked power to shape them. . . .” (71). The soldiers in “May Day” are either unwilling or unable to recognize the indispensability of their contribution to New York’s financial well-being.

11 "There is little in New York," wrote Mencken, "that does not issue out of money, but what issues out of money is often extremely brilliant, and I believe that it is more brilliant in New York than it has ever been anywhere else. A truly overwhelming opulence envelops the whole place, even the slums" (Prejudices, Fifth Series 240). See also Zelda’s 1928 essay “The Changing Beauty of Park Avenue”: “It [Park Avenue] is . . . an international street—where the tradespeople are accustomed to a clientele who need nothing, want nothing, and buy freely because they have large leisure and filled purses. Here shopping is pleasant and expensive and holy” (Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings 404).
and the injustice of their relegation to the bottom of the city’s economic ladder. They consider the Jew a “God damn Bolsheviki!” (108) and reward him for his labors with a severe beating. Key and Rose virtually salivate over “vivid pictures of millionaires dining at Delmonico’s and throwing away fifty-dollar bills after their first quart of champagne” (109). The “sojers” (112) have no interest in supplanting New York’s merchants, in extracting from those merchants some recompense for their war service or in challenging the potentially exploitative “institutions. . .which kept them alive” (107). They are happy just to get drunk, to contemplate seemingly lucrative careers as waiters and to attack proponents of those very economic theories which might free them from their “bondage” (107). Armies and intellectuals are powerless in the face of New York’s merchants who are armed not only with great sums of money, but also with the promise of the good life and the enthusiastic support of the man and woman in the street.

Fitzgerald read and reread Joseph Conrad’s Preface to The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ and his letter to Hibben leaves little doubt that he adopted Conrad’s conception of “the warlike conditions of existence” (“Conrad’s Preface,” The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ xlviii) as his own.12 Conditions in the New York of “May Day” are certainly warlike but parties who should be allies are enemies and the objective of the fighting is obscure. There are soldiers in the streets but the only enemies they engage are boredom and the very people who wish to aid them. Men and women are pitted against each other in a struggle for control of the city. Two of the story’s main characters, Sterrett and Rose, die in the fighting but their deaths, though indirectly caused by enemy action, finally result from their own weaknesses. The only clear winners in this war are the inscrutable city itself and the merchants who control the white fortress of uptown Manhattan, a fortress that draws

infiltrators such as Rose into its heart so as to render them helpless with wonder and facilitate their capture.

As powerful as he is though, the merchant is not an autonomous actor in the New York economy of “May Day.” He may be doing the work and getting the glory, but his wife or mistress or daughter is creating the demand for furs and slippers, the demand that keeps merchants busy and money moving. The New York of “May Day” is teeming with women. “Working girls, in pairs and groups and swarms” crowd Fifth Avenue and Forty-fourth Street at noon (104) and the Biltmore is “alive with girls” (105)—and these girls, like the merchants’ “women,” want things, expensive things and quite a lot of things. Besides slippers and furs and mesh bags they want “purses and strings of pearls in gray velvet cases. . .gaudy feather fans of many colors. . .laces and silks of expensive dresses . . .bad paintings. . .fine period furniture in the elaborate showrooms of interior decorators . . .engagement rings. . .wedding rings and. . .platinum wrist watches” (104). This is not to say that the men in “May Day” do not also want or appreciate fine things. Philip Dean has a rather Gatsbyesque “family of thick silk shirts littered on the chairs” of his room at the Biltmore “amid impressive neckties and soft woollen socks” (99). He also buys “a dozen neckties” in Rivers Brothers, “selecting each one after long consultations” with another man. “Did he think narrow ties were coming back? And wasn’t it a shame that Rivers couldn’t get any more Welsh Margotson collars? There never was a collar like the ‘Covington’” (105). Gordon Sterrett, who “can’t stand being poor” (101), longingly gives one of Dean’s shirts, a shirt of “very heavy silk, yellow, with a pale blue stripe” (99), “a minute examination” and thinks, “quite without amusement, that only three years before he had received a scattering of votes in the senior elections at college for being the best-dressed man in his class” (99).

These male desires, however, seem mere whims when compared to the intense desires that drive the women in “May Day,” desires these women are determined to satisfy by any
means necessary. Jewel Hudson, who "used to be 'pure'" (101), wants more than mere things. "‘She wants some money; claims she can make trouble for [Sterrett] if she doesn’t get it’" (101). Later, though, she tells Sterrett "‘I don’t care about the money that bad... I wanted to see you... Come on with me, Gordon... We’ll go over to Devineries’ and have a drink, and then we can go up to my apartment’" (125). Sterrett tries feebly to resist but Jewel’s indomitable will and sexual aggression break him:

“I can’t, Jewel,—”
“You can,” she said intensely.
“I’m sick as a dog!”
“Well, then, you oughtn’t to stay here and dance.”
With a glance around him in which relief and despair were mingled, Gordon hesitated; then she suddenly pulled him to her and kissed him with soft, pulpy lips.
“All right,” he said heavily. “I’ll get my hat.” (125-126)

Edith Bradin, a “pure woman—and all that sort of thing” (118), also has designs on Sterrett. “There was a quality of weakness in Gordon that she wanted to take care of; there was a helplessness in him that she wanted to protect. And she wanted someone she had known a long while, someone who had loved her a long while. She was a little tired; she wanted to get married” (114). The New York of “May Day” is a city driven by feminine desire.13 The men in the story know this. As Dean astutely notes “‘You’ve got to look at things as they are. If you haven’t got money you’ve got to work and stay away from women’” (102). The merchants in the preamble know that they are in trouble when they run out of the things women want. They fling up their hands “helplessly” and raise “a great outcry” (98).

When the men in “May Day” find themselves frustrated and helpless in the face of

13 The New York of The Beautiful and Damned is also a city driven by feminine desire: “Throughout the previous winter one small matter had been a subtle and omnipresent irritant—the question of Gloria’s fur coat. At that time women enveloped in long squirrel wraps could be seen every few yards along Fifth Avenue. The women were converted to the shape of tops. They seemed porcine and obscene; they resembled kept women in the concealing richness, the feminine animality of the garment. Yet—Gloria wanted a gray squirrel coat” (389).
feminine desire they start drinking. Sterrett, knowing in his heart that “she’s got me, all right” (101), gets very drunk. Peter Himmel tries to kiss Edith in a taxi. She “snub[s]” him because he is “nothing but a college boy,” because his elbow brushes her elaborately coiffed hair and because her rekindled desire for Gordon Sterrett makes other men seem tedious (113). “’Well,,’” decides Himmel, “’if any girl ever led a man on and then jolted him, she did—and she has no kick coming if I go out and get beautifully boiled’” (119). Sterrett and Himmel are not, however, the only men in “May Day” looking for a chance to drink themselves into a stupor. Dean, who seems relatively immune to feminine wiles and who “can’t stand [the] sort of woman” (102) who would demand money from her lover, ends up drunkenly reproving Sterrett for his weakness in Childs’ restaurant on Fifty-ninth Street: “‘Ah-ha, Gordy. . . .What’d I tell you. . . .Gordy an’ I friends. Been tryin’ help him, haven’t I, Gordy?’” (134). Key and Rose consider the possibility of taking part in a riot but decide that they would “rather get some liquor” (109). They eventually find their way to Delmonico’s and a “radiant feast of spirits. There were long walls of alternating bottles set along two white covered tables; whiskey, gin, brandy, French and Italian vermouths, and orange juice, not to mention an array of syphons and two great empty punch bowls” (111). Indeed, getting “enthusiastically drunk” (129) is the favored activity of most of the male characters in “May Day” and this behavior is not exactly frowned upon by the women in the story. Edith is terrified when she sees how physically and emotionally wrecked Gordon is, but she generally “like[s] men to have something to drink; they [are] so much more cheerful, and appreciative and complimentary—much easier to talk to” (116). Jewel encourages Sterrett to drink even when “liquor seem[s] to have hardened on him like a crust” (125) and he can hardly speak or stand.

Alcohol is an integral part of Fitzgerald’s fictional New York, just as it was an integral part of his actual experiences in New York. He first drank in New York as a Princeton undergraduate for the sheer pleasure of it. Later, like Amory Blaine, he drank in New
York to “submerge[e] his sorrows,” to “shield himself from the stabs of memory” and to help himself through “the first flush of pain” that followed failure and heartbreak (This Side of Paradise 208-209). After they were married on April 3, 1920 Fitzgerald and Zelda got drunk regularly as a matter of course. Alexander McKaig, a Princeton friend of Fitzgerald’s who lived in New York in the 1920s, wrote in his diary “April 12. Called on Scott Fitz and his bride. Latter temperamental small town Southern Belle. Chews gum--shows knees. I do not think marriage can succeed. Both drinking heavily” (Turnbull 112). Little stands to be gained by inquiring into the already much-inquired-into question “Why did Fitzgerald drink so much?”. The most reductive but perhaps most accurate answer to this question is that, as Cowley, Bruccoli, Donaldson and Tom Dardis have all noted,14 Fitzgerald was an alcoholic. “My work,” he told Perkins, “is the only thing that makes me happy—except to be a little tight—and for those two indulgences I pay a big price in mental and physical hangovers” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 126). In the very early 1920s, however, Fitzgerald does not seem to have yet been physically addicted to alcohol. He drank heavily but was, in Bruccoli’s words, “partly playing a role. Writers were supposed to drink. His difficulty in controlling it—which in his case meant staying on the wagon—was compounded by the circumstance that his society ran on alcohol. His friends were drinkers, and the social gatherings he attended were drinking occasions” (217).

In addition to drinking as part of a role he was playing, Fitzgerald also drank to “to enhance life, to heighten its possibilities” (Turnbull 186). He lived, even more than most writers, in and by his imagination. “I can never remember,” he noted, “the times when I wrote anything--This Side of Paradise time or Beautiful and Damned and Gatsby time for instance. Lived in story” (Notebooks no. 1029). When he was not living in a story life,

even life in New York, seemed dull, lacking as it did the ecstatic, even "orgastic" (The Great Gatsby 141), intensity\footnote{15} that made the fictional world he lived in when writing so fulfilling. A few drinks induced something like that intensity and served to close the gap between reality and possibility, served to transform New York into the fevered, giddy place Fitzgerald and Zelda believed it to be at its best. "When bored," he remembered, "we took our city with Huysmans-like perversity. An afternoon in our ‘apartment’ eating olive sandwiches and drinking a quart of Bushmill’s whiskey presented by Zoë Akins\footnote{16}, then out into the freshly bewitched city, through strange doors into strange apartments with intermittent swings along in taxis through the soft nights. At last we were one with New York, pulling it after us through every portal. Even now I go into many flats with the sense that I have been there before or in the one above or below. . ." ("My Lost City" 28).

The “freshly bewitched city,” a New York made more radiant and exciting by alcohol, appears in "May Day" and The Beautiful and Damned. “There was,” says the narrator of The Beautiful and Damned in relating some of Anthony Patch’s drunken adventures in Manhattan,

> a kindliness about intoxication—there was that indescribable gloss and glamour it gave, like the memories of ephemeral and faded evenings. After a few high-balls there was magic in the tall glowing Arabian night of the Bush Terminal Building [130 West Forty-second Street]—its summit a peak of sheer grandeur, gold and dreaming against the inaccessible sky. And Wall Street, the crass, the banal—again it was the triumph of gold, a gorgeous sentient spectacle; it was where the great kings kept the money for their wars. . .
> . . .The fruit of youth or of the grape, the transitory magic of the brief passage from darkness to darkness—the old illusion that truth and beauty were in some way entwined. (417)

\footnote{15} “The purpose of a fiction story is to create passionate curiosity and then to gratify it unexpectedly, orgasmically. Isn’t that what we expect from all contacts?” (Notebooks no. 2038).

\footnote{16} “1921, Jan.: Eating ham + olive sandwiches with Zoë Akins whiskey” (Ledger 175).
Himmel has a similar experience in “May Day”: “At the second highball, boredom, disgust, the monotony of time, the turbidity of events, sank into a vague background before which glittering cobwebs formed. Things became reconciled to themselves, things lay very quietly on their shelves; the troubles of the day arranged themselves in trim formations and at his curt wish of dismissal, marched off and disappeared. . . . He himself became in a measure symbolic, a type of the continent bacchanal, the brilliant dreamer at play” (119). Hours later, Himmel is part of a “noisy medley of chorus girls, college boys, debutantes, rakes, filles de joie—a not unrepresentative mixture of the gayest of Broadway, and even of Fifth Avenue” (131), which watches through the front window of Childs’ and a slowly dissipating, but still potently transformative haze of last night’s liquor as the sun starts to rise over Columbus Circle. “The great plate-glass front had turned to a deep creamy blue, the color of a Maxfield Parrish moonlight—a blue that seemed to press close upon the pane as if to crowd its way into the restaurant. Dawn had come up in Columbus Circle, magical, breathless dawn, silhouetting the great statue of the immortal Christopher, and mingling in a curious and uncanny manner with the fading yellow electric lights inside” (135). Mr. In and Mr. Out—Himmel and Dean respectively—are both extremely drunk and the Manhattan dawn makes them feel euphoric. In a taxi sit “the souls of Mr. In and Mr. Out discussing with amazement the blue light that had so precipitately colored the sky behind the statue of Christopher Columbus. . . . They were agreed on all things, from the absurdity of the bouncer in Childs’ to the absurdity of the business of life. They were dizzy with the extreme maudlin happiness that the morning had awakened in their glowing souls” (135-136). Mr. In and Mr. Out experience an hour or two of what Virginia Woolf might call “being” (“A Sketch of the Past” 64-70), during which liquor, the many emotions and desires stirred by the Yale dance, and the strange beauty of the “creamy” amorphous dawn breaking over the dark, angular city combine to transform New York into a paradise of heightened sensual experience that they will “remember always” (139).
They go to real places, the Commodore and the Biltmore, but the “champagne for
breakfast” (138) they consume transforms these places into something rich and strange:
“The dining-room was whirring and shifting now; a curious lightness permeated and
rarefied the heavy air” (139). They witness a typically exciting moment in the city’s frantic
life, the apprehension of Rose in the Biltmore lobby, but “this event [is] merely a
particolored iridescent segment of a whirring, spinning world” (140). Mr. In and Mr. Out
finally find themselves “in an elevator bound skyward” (140) and, having already become
“one” with New York by marvelling at its beauty and sampling some of its more riotous
pleasures, they pay homage to the spirit of the city by demanding more:

“What floor please?” said the elevator man.
“Any floor,” said Mr. In.
“Top floor,” said Mr. Out.
“This is the top floor,” said the elevator man.
“Have another floor put on,” said Mr. Out.
“Higher,” said Mr. In.
“Heaven,” said Mr. Out. (140)

“Have another floor put on” could serve admirably as the motto of the fictional New York
Fitzgerald constructed in his early stories and novels. Fitzgerald was “an exceptionally
optimistic young man” (“Handle With Care,” The Crack-Up 80) before he was a sad
young man and New York embodied all of his youthful hopes for love, prosperity and
literary success. The first word he ever spoke as an infant was “up” (The Romantic
Egoists 5; Ledger 151) and New York was a place for going up and up again, a city of
ascension, a Heaven of fulfilled potential and ambition. “As a restless and ambitious
man,” wrote Fitzgerald in 1938, “I was never disposed to accept the present but always
striving to change it, better it, or even sometimes destroy it. There were always far
horizons that were more golden, bluer skies somewhere” (Correspondence 494).

But the drunkenness that so literally transports Mr. In and Mr. Out to the heights of
New York’s possibilities is not the only kind of drunkenness in “May Day.” Sterrett, the
very picture of Dreiser’s “dogged resignation to deprivation and misery”, does not drink to
enhance New York’s pleasures. “You’ve been drinking, Gordon” notes Edith:

“Thanks.” He inclined his head gravely. “Thanks for the information.”
“Why do you drink?”
“Because I’m so damn miserable...I’m in an awful mess.” (117-118)

Sterrett drinks not to celebrate life’s potential but to deaden the despair he feels over having squandered his own potential. “I used to think I was clever, talented, an artist. Now I know I’m nothing...I can’t draw, I can’t do anything...I’m a failure. I’m poor as hell” (118). The city has crushed Sterrett’s confidence. He “came down to New York to get a job” (100) and he did get one, but his weakness for some of the city’s pleasures, namely women and liquor, has cost him that job and his self-respect. “This whole place,” he says, “is like a dream to me--this Delmonico’s--” (118), but it is a bad dream and not at all like the magically unreal Manhattan of Mr. In and Mr. Out. His suicidal drive is evident in his drinking and obvious in the story’s final scene. Edith, who is marvelously alive and whose “cheeks [are] glowing with excitement” (124), senses this drive and feels “an unutterable horror” (117) in the face of it. Edith, compared with most of Fitzgerald’s other heroines, is relatively compassionate when she is confronted with the spectacle of a man she once loved who is now broken and destitute. She sits with Sterrett and tries to help him but eventually her “distaste” (118) at his wretchedness overcomes her remembered love and she leaves him alone, thinking as she does that “love is fragile...but perhaps the pieces are saved...are treasured up for the next lover” (119).

Even as Mr. In and Mr. Out are asking to be taken higher uptown, Sterrett finds himself at rock bottom downtown. He awakens with a skull-splitting hangover in “a small hotel just off Sixth Avenue” (141). His room and the large leather chair in it are dusty, decrepit and have been “long in use” (141). The sudden realization that he is “irrevocably married to Jewel Hudson” (141) is too much for him so he taxis to his room on East Twenty-seventh Street and kills himself. Life in New York is “too strong and remorseless” for Gordon Sterrett and his suicide recalls Hurstwood’s in Sister Carrie in
that Hurstwood is undone by New York and his weakness for a woman and kills himself in a shabby downtown room (367). Sterrett’s despair is opaque. One seeks an iota of redemption in his death and does not find it because the scene in which he shoots himself, and not the scene in which Mr. In and Mr. Out are ascendant, is the story’s final scene. Death has the last word in “May Day.” Sterrett’s New York is a place of stunted dreams, of self-hatred, of poverty, of “heartlessness” which is “freezing to the soul.” If this squalid, forbidding New York seems wildly inconsistent with the splendid New York of Mr. In and Mr. Out it is helpful to remember an oft-quoted “general observation” Fitzgerald made in “The Crack-Up”: “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function” (69). In 1920 Fitzgerald was holding his boy’s idea of New York as a city of limitless possibilities in his mind along with his young man’s bitter experience of failure in New York and these two cities, melded together as they are by the friendship between Dean, who has “came East to have a good time” (103) and Sterrett, are distinctly evident in “May Day.” Their obvious and striking dissimilarity is a result of Fitzgerald’s ambivalence toward the city in which he was now living as a successful young author, a city that had only recently spurned him. He had felt the expansive sense of confidence and joy in the city that Mr. In and Mr. Out feel and how could he help but feel it again now that he had conquered the city’s formidable literary redoubt with raw talent and force of will? Yet he knew, indeed had felt first hand, Sterrett’s loss of faith in himself and the city and was understandably wary of New York’s charms even as he gloried in them.

The New York of “May Day” is, then, a product of deliberate, self-conscious myth making. After the disasters of 1919 Fitzgerald knew that New York was not a city of limitless possibilities. “The dream was gone” (“Winter Dreams” 235), but the desire for the dream’s fulfillment did not die with the dream, so Fitzgerald recreated the dream in the story of Mr. In and Mr. Out and their mutual desire for perpetual ascendancy. One does
not, of course, find out what happens to Mr. In and Mr. Out after they sober up, for neither drunkenness nor ascension are perpetual. What goes up must come down but Fitzgerald had no place in his early dreams of New York for descent so Mr. In and Mr. Out remain fixed on the top floor forever. Still, Fitzgerald undermines the myth of “the great city” even as he propagates it by making the men who live that myth two drunken undergraduates and by closing the story with Sterrett’s suicide. Indeed, he is punching holes in the myth of New York and its glamorous inhabitants as early as the deliberately myth-like preamble. “Day by day,” intones the narrator, “the foot soldiers trod jauntily the highway and all exulted because the young men returning were pure and brave, sound of tooth and pink of cheek, and the young women of the land were virgins and comely both of face and figure” (98). Ironically, the people of New York are sick of soldiers, the “young men returning” one meets in the story, namely Key and Rose, are “ugly, ill-nourished” (106), anything but “pure and brave”, and Edith might be a virgin but Jewel most certainly is not. Edmund Wilson might have been thinking of “May Day” when he said “One should know...that Fitzgerald is partly Irish and that he brings both to life and to fiction certain qualities that are not Anglo-Saxon. For, like the Irish, Fitzgerald is romantic, but also cynical about romance; he is bitter as well as ecstatic; astringent as well as lyrical” (The Shores of Light 30-31).

Fitzgerald was not, like Dreiser, a reporter at heart but an inventor, an embellisher. In “May Day” he is trying to follow the advice given to the artist by Conrad in his Preface to The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’, to “snatch in a moment of courage...a passing phase of life” (xlix), “of those months in New York” (Tales of the Jazz Age viii), and to “reveal the substance of its truth” (“Conrad’s Preface” xlix), but the truth of the city gets wound up and embellished with his dream of the city and the two become an insoluble one. By the spring of 1924 Fitzgerald had tired of realism and the particular kind of truth its
proponents demanded. Consequently, the New York of The Great Gatsby is not literal, hyper-realistic, Dreiserian, but “material without being real” (The Great Gatsby 126) instead, a city whose very physical existence is “a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality” (The Great Gatsby 77). In 1920, though, Fitzgerald was doing his best to write in a naturalistic manner so the New York of “May Day” is both material and real, a city of furs and neckties and slippers of silk and satin, of marble tables and frying-pans (131), of poverty and despair. Yet this city, with its dark shops like “shadowy tombs” (126), its “flare of fire” roaring down an elevated track (126), its luminous blue dawns and “curious[ly] . . . rarefied” air prefigures the surreal New York of The Great Gatsby in spite of itself. Fitzgerald could not wholly suppress the lyricism Wilson noticed in him.

The task of separating truth from dreams was taken up not only by Fitzgerald in his fiction but also by Fitzgerald and Zelda as newlyweds in New York. “Within a few months” they

were thought to embody the spirit of New York. Not Edith Wharton’s aristocratic New York, nor the poor man’s New York of Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser, but a brand-new, luxurious, postwar New York, its face changed by a building boom, peopled by a new generation come from all over the country with money and ambition but without preconceived notions, showing the cultural tint daubed on them by the universities. . . . a city of big hotels and small cliques, Successville, whether on Wall Street or Broadway or in Greenwich Village. (Le Vot 82)

Twenty-three-year-old Fitzgerald and his nineteen-year-old wife quickly realized that there was no recognizable line between fact and fiction in the city and that there were few touchstones of reality to which they, as products of the middle-west and south, could cling. “New York was more full of reflections than of itself,” says the narrator of Zelda’s Save Me The Waltz, “—the only concrete things in town were the abstractions” (Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings 49). The Fitzgeraldds “were celebrities—young,
handsome, rich (so it seemed), with no one to exercise authority over them” (Bruccoli 155). They were free to make of New York whatever they wanted to make of it but this prospect, as exciting as it was, bewildered them. “Within a few months after our embarkation on the Metropolitan venture,” wrote Fitzgerald, “we scarcely knew any more who we were and we hadn’t a notion what we were. A dive into a civic fountain, a casual brush with the law, was enough to get us into the gossip columns, and we were quoted on a variety of subjects we knew nothing about” (“My Lost City” 27).

Some of their bewilderment was undoubtedly due to their penchant for transience. The Fitzgeralds never bought a home or stayed at one address for very long and they first developed their nomadic habits in New York. The spent their honeymoon at the Biltmore in room 2109 but “transferred two blocks to the Commodore Hotel on 42nd Street” when the Biltmore’s management asked them to leave because they were disturbing the other guests (Bruccoli 159). Years later, Zelda still remembered vividly those first New York hotels:

We are married. The sibylline parrots are protesting the sway of the first bobbed heads in the Biltmore paneled luxe. The hotel is trying to look older.

The faded rose corridors of the Commodore end in subways and subterranean metropolises—a man sold us a broken Marmon and a wild burst of friends spent half an hour revolving in the revolving door. . . . The Manhattan took us in one late night though we looked very young and gay. Ungratefully we packed the empty suitcase with spoons and the phone book and a big square pincushion. (“Show Mr. and Mrs. F. To Number—”); Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings 419

She recalled “the strangeness and excitement of New York, of reporters and furry smothered hotel lobbies, the brightness of the sun on the window panes and the prickly dust of late spring. . . . and a trunk that exhaled sachet and the marshmallow odor of the Biltmore” (Correspondence 245).18 Hotels always played a large part in the Fitzgerald’s

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18See also Zelda’s “Fall 1939” letter to Fitzgerald: “So many years ago when we were just married and making Holiday about the Biltmore corridors, money was one of the things one simply stated the necessity for, went through the requisite ritual and waited” (Correspondence 555).
New York adventures.

"We're having some people," everybody said to everybody else, "and we want you to join us," and they said, "We'll telephone."

All over New York people telephoned. They telephoned from one hotel to another to people on other parties that they couldn't get there--that they were engaged. It was always teatime or late at night. (Save Me The Waltz 49)

"Zelda," remembered Edmund Wilson, "used to say that hotel bedrooms excited her erotically" (The Twenties 214). Scott considered the Plaza "his headquarters in New York" (In His Own Time 284) and even rented "an apartment at 38 West 59th Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues--conveniently near the Plaza Hotel" (Bruccoli 169) so that he and Zelda could order their meals from the hotel's kitchen.19 John Dos Passos visited the Fitzgeralads at the Plaza on "a crisp autumn day" in October 1922. His account of that visit in The Best Times captures the opulent atmosphere of "the favorite hotel of the period" (Mizener, F. Scott Fitzgerald 52) and something of the proprietary pride Fitzgerald felt in his "headquarters":

I arrived breathless at the Plaza. Inside the carpets felt cloyingly thick. The flowers in the flowershop had the look of goldbacked ten dollar bills. A gust of expensive-smelling perfume that came out of the coiffeur on the way to the elevator gave me a moment's sickish feeling. . . . The elevator man's buttons flashed like gold sovereigns.

Scott met me at the door of his suite. I wondered afterward whether the Fitzgeralads were really living there or whether they hired the suite just for the day to impress their guests. Scott gave me a searching look out of his blue eyes and scolded me for being late. . . . Sherwood [Anderson] got talking about his writing and I could listen and roam around the room and look out the tall windows into Central Park where the leaves were just beginning to turn, and at the skillful elderly waiter and the glittering luncheon table. . . . there was a golden innocence about [the Fitzgeralads] and they were both so hopelessly goodlooking.

As I remember we drank Bronx cocktails, and then champagne. Scott had good bootleggers. The meal was something like lobster croquettes--Scott always had the worst ideas about food--but everything at the Plaza was good in those days. There was always the creamiest sweet butter to spread on crisp French rolls. (128-129)

19 "The Plaza," wrote Zelda, "was an etched hotel, dainty and subdued, with such a handsome headwaiter that he never minded lending five dollars or borrowing a Rolls-Royce" ("Show Mr. and Mrs. F. To Number--"; Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings 420).
Fitzgerald loved all of New York’s great hotels, though, and regarded his ability to stay at them regularly as a measure of his success. On a trip to New York in early 1920 to complete the sale of “Head and Shoulders” to Metro Films for $2,500 he celebrated by staying at the Knickerbocker Hotel. “Princeton friends and old acquaintances” found him there “drunk, being bathed by bellboys, or dressed by valets, to whom he dispensed healthy tips. When he left the hotel, he insisted on sticking $100 dollar bills, or $20 or $50 bills, into his pockets so that they were prominently displayed. Friends managed to get the money away from him and leave the $500 or $600 with the hotel cashier” (Mellow 80). Fitzgerald could not believe it when, three months after his marriage, he asked the cashier at his bank, the Chatham and Phoenix at Thirty-third Street and Fifth Avenue, “How much money have I got?” and was told “None.” “I wasn’t poor—,” he insisted, “they couldn’t fool me. Poverty meant being depressed and living in a small remote room and eating at a rotisserie on the corner, while I—why, it was impossible that I should be poor! I was living at the best hotel in New York!” (“How To Live On $36,000 A Year,” Afternoon Of An Author 89).

Another reason for the Fitzgeralds’ bewilderment in New York was their ambivalence about each other, an ambivalence that set in soon after their marriage. In Brucelli’s words, “The Fitzgerald’s marriage brought an ascendancy change in their relationship. Before the wedding Zelda was a Montgomery celebrity and Fitzgerald was one of a crowd of suitors. In New York, Fitzgerald was the famous one. At first Zelda did not appear to mind the role reversal because her stronger personality dominated the marriage; but it became increasingly difficult for her to accept the subordinate role of wife to F. Scott Fitzgerald” (157). In short, Zelda was bored. This was obvious to McKaig when he visited 38 West Fifty-ninth Street on October 12, 1920. “Went to Fitzgeralds” he wrote in his diary. “Usual problem there. What shall Zelda do? I think she might do a little housework--apartment looks like a pig sty. If she’s there Fitz can’t work--she bothers
him—if she’s not there he can’t work—worried what she might do” (Turnbull 113). Fitzgerald worried what Zelda might do when she was away from him because most of their friends were men and Zelda “flirted because it was fun to flirt” (“Eulogy On The Flapper,” *Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings* 391) and because it was an excellent method of gaining her husband’s undivided attention. “When Zelda first began kissing John [Peale Bishop] and Townsend [Martin],” wrote Wilson in his diary, “Fitz tried to carry it off by saying: ‘Oh, yes, they really have kisses coming to them, because they weren’t at the wedding, and everybody at a wedding always gets a kiss.’ But when Zelda rushed into John’s room just as he was going to bed and insisted that she was going to spend the night there, and when she cornered Townsend in the bathroom and demanded that he should give her a bath, he began to become a little worried and even huffy” (*The Twenties* 55). Zelda found additional relief from boredom in shopping. Like the women in “May Day,” she loved expensive luxuries. McKaig observed, “Fitz is hard up now but Zelda is nagging him for a $750 fur coat & she can nag. Poor devil” (Turnbull 114).

Fitzgerald’s friends advised him “not to marry a wild, pleasure loving girl like Zelda” but he had fallen “in love with her courage, her sincerity and her flaming self-respect” (*Correspondence* 53) and decided to marry her anyway. He recounted the results of his decision in a bitter but nonetheless moving 1938 letter to Scottie:

> When I was your age I lived with a great dream. The dream grew and I learned how to speak of it and make people listen. Then the dream divided one day when I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me. I was sorry immediately I had married her but, being patient in those days, made the best of it and got to love her in another way. . . . But I was a man divided—she wanted me to work too much for her and not enough for my dream. She realized too late that work was dignity, and the only dignity, and tried to atone for it by working herself, but it was too late. . . . The mistake I made was in marrying her. We belonged to different worlds. . . . (Letters 32)

This letter was, of course, written with hindsight and if Fitzgerald regretted his marriage as early as 1920 he was unwilling, unable or simply too “patient” to say so explicitly. When,
however, a reporter from the New York *Evening World* asked him in 1922 “how far he considered the young married woman to blame for the ‘damnation’ of her own life and that of her husband” he replied “She’s very largely to blame... Our American women are leeches... They simply dominate the American man... I’ve often asked myself the question, ‘To what is a woman entitled from life?’ The answer, obviously, is ‘All she can get!’ And when she marries she gets the whole thing. She makes a man love her, then proceeds to hog all his emotions, to get all the money out of him she can, to keep him at her beck and call. She makes a monkey out of him, in many cases, and he has to stand it unless he wants a continuous verbal battle’” (*In His Own Time* 256).

“Fitz & Zelda fighting like mad—say themselves marriage can’t succeed” noted McKaig (Turnbull 112), but they were nonetheless virtually inseperable. They were, despite their rich and chaotic social life, lonely among “a lot of rather lost and lonely people” (“My Lost City” 28). Their New York “contacts” consisted of no more than “a dozen unmarried college friends and a few new literary acquaintances” (“My Lost City” 27). “Lonesome Xmas” reads one of Fitzgerald’s *Ledger* entries for December 1921. “We begin to feel alone” (175). They were alone with their dreams and their love, “like small children in a great bright unexplored barn” (“My Lost City” 28). “Finding no nucleus to which we could cling,” remembered Fitzgerald, “we became a small nucleus ourselves and gradually we fitted our disruptive personalities into the contemporary scene of New York. Or rather New York forgot us and let us stay” (“My Lost City” 27). “I love you,” wrote Zelda after a particularly grueling fight, “—and I cant tell you how much... Goofo, you’ve got to try [to] feel how much I do--how inanimate I am when you’re gone... Nobodys got any right to live but us...” (Milford 76).

A third reason for the Fitzgerald’s bewilderment in New York was their drinking. The early twenties, said Fitzgerald, were a time “when we drank wood alcohol and every day in every way grew better and better” (“Echoes Of The Jazz Age” 22). McKaig’s diary
entry for December 11, 1920 reads "Evening at Fitz. Fitz & I argued with Zelda about notoriety they are getting through being so publicly and spectacularly drunk. Zelda wants to live life of an 'extravagant.' No thought of what world will think or of future. I told them they were headed for catastrophe if they kept up at present rate" (Turnbull 114).

Tales of the Fitzgerald's displays of drunken abandon in New York have been told and retold by their many biographers. Scott decided to strip in the sixth row of George White's Scandals. Zelda danced on top of the Waldorf's kitchen tables. Scott, sober, jumped into the Pulitzer Fountain in front of the Plaza. Zelda, drunk, jumped into the fountain at Union Square. Scott rode on the roof of a taxi while Zelda rode on the hood.

Less often recounted by biographers are the hangovers, the depressions and beatings that followed in the wake of the hilarity. Fitzgerald himself detailed the hangovers and the depressions in The Beautiful and Damned. Gloria Patch rolled over on her back and lay still for a moment in the great bed. . . . For a time she had no accurate sense of her whereabouts or of the events of the day before, or the day after that. . . . She could hear. . . . Anthony's troubled breathing beside her; she could smell whiskey and cigarette smoke. She noticed that she lacked complete muscular control. . . . Morning now--theirs to add up the checks cashed here and there in clubs, stores, restaurants. Theirs to air the dank staleness of wine and cigarettes out of the tall blue front room, to pick up the broken glass and brush at the stained fabric of chairs and sofas. . . . to take their smothery half-feverish bodies and faded depressed spirits out into the chill air of February. . . . (218-219, 225)

Fitzgerald also detailed the violence, the beatings and scuffles which usually only


20In Edmund Wilson's "The Delegate From Great Neck," an "imaginary dialogue" between Mr. F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mr. Van Wyck Brooks, Mr. Fitzgerald says "Why, once, when I'd just arrived in New York with a lot of money to spend, after being away in the West, and I came back to the Plaza the first night and looked up and saw that great creamy palace all blazing with green and gold lights, and the taxis and the limousines streaming up and down the Avenue--why, I jumped into the Pulitzer fountain just out of sheer joy! And I wasn't boiled either." "Are you sure," asks Mr. Brooks, "you weren't a little hysterical?" "No," replies Mr. Fitzgerald, "I've been hysterical too. This was exhilaration" (The Shores of Light 153-154).

21"It costs more to ride on the tops of taxis than on the inside. . . ." (Save Me The Waltz; Zelda Fitzgerald; The Collected Writings 57).
transpired after he had blacked out on his feet. Sometimes his accounts of drunken mayhem were funny, as when he did his best to remember “the night when (as I read with astonishment in the paper next morning) ‘Fitzgerald Knocks Officer This Side of Paradise’? Successful scrapping not being among my accomplishments, I tried in vain to reconstruct the sequence of events which led up to this denouement in Webster Hall” (“My Lost City” 28). Other accounts of violence were obfuscated and not meant for public consumption. Cryptic January 1921 entries in Fitzgerald’s Ledger read “Broke down bathroom door” and “The black eye” (175). Zelda was more explicit when, in a 1930 letter, she remembered “We moved to 59th Street. We quarrelled and you broke the bathroom door and hurt my eye” (Correspondence 245). In late April 1921 a “somewhat wobbly” Fitzgerald, urged on vehemently by Zelda, tried repeatedly to order another drink at a speakeasy called The Jungle Club and was brutally beaten by a bouncer who thought that the vociferous and belligerent blond man had already consumed more drinks than he should have (Turnbull 123-124). Fitzgerald was thrashed in drunken brawls in cities all over America and Europe but never so often as he was in New York. As late as 1939 he arrived at Harold Ober’s Scarsdale home with a black eye given to him by the New York cabbie he had hired (Bruccoli 540). “I would go out to dinner with him,” remembered Ernest Hemingway, “and he would insult people and I would have to square it to keep him from being beaten up. He could never fight a lick on the best day he ever lived and he got so he liked to hit people and I would have to take over. . . .after one awful night when I had to give a large sum to the doorman at the Plaza to square something really awful Scott had done, I told him I couldn’t ever go out and eat with him any more unless he would promise not to be horrible to people” (Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 835). The

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22The Fitzgeralds lived in Manhattan hotels from the day of their marriage until early May 1920 when they moved into the Wakeman house in Westport, Connecticut. The lived in Westport until October 1920 when they moved back to Manhattan. They stayed at 38 West Fifty-ninth Street until July 1921 when they sailed for Europe.
New York that looked so enchanting to Fitzgerald through one or two or three highballs looked very different through a hangover and a bandage. "Golly," says Anthony Patch, "I feel like the devil!" (The Beautiful and Damned 220).

Fitzgerald was happy in New York in 1920. He had achieved literary and financial success, he had won back and married the girl he loved, and he was living "the high life of New York" more extravagantly than even he had dreamed it could be lived. "I felt a little patronizing toward the millionaires riding down Fifth Avenue in their limousines," he recalled, "—because my income had a way of doubling every month. This was actually the case" ("How To Live On $36,000 A Year" 88). But for all of the hope and energy Fitzgerald expended in realizing his dreams of glory in Manhattan, his happiness there was exceedingly fragile and short-lived.

From the confusion of the year 1920 I remember riding on top of a taxi-cab along deserted Fifth Avenue on a hot Sunday night, and a luncheon in the cool Japanese gardens at the Ritz... and writing all night again and again, and paying too much for minute apartments... The first speakeasies had arrived, the toddle was passe, the Montmartre was the smart place to dance... The plays were Declassée and Sacred and Profane Love, and at the Midnight Frolic you danced elbow to elbow with Marion Davies and perhaps you picked out the vivacious Mary Hay in the pony chorus... And lastly from that period I remember riding in a taxi one afternoon between very tall buildings under a mauve and rosy sky; I began to bawl because I had everything I wanted and knew I would never be so happy again. ("My Lost City" 27-29)

This passage is a compendium of all that Fitzgerald loved in New York: Fifth Avenue, the "cool" elegance of the great hotels, the beautiful, inaccessible women, the speakeasies and cabarets, and Broadway. Yet in the midst of this paradise of fulfilled desire sits Fitzgerald in the New York twilight crying because he knows that a fulfilled dream is the death knell of the sense of limitless promise inspired by genuine and overweening aspiration. "It was always the becoming he dreamed of, never the being" (This Side of Paradise 17-18), for the being, no matter how satisfactory, was not suffused with the exquisite suspense and
maddening desire which made the wanting and becoming so exciting.  

Basil Duke Lee, having just met a beautiful, “extremely reserved” rich girl and gotten his first glimpse of his friend George Dorsey’s “white stone” house on Fifty-third Street, is suddenly “possessed by the same longing for a new experience that his previous glimpses of New York had aroused. In the hard bright glitter of Fifth Avenue, in this lovely girl with no words to waste beyond a mechanical ‘How-d’ya-do,’ in the perfectly organized house, he recognized nothing, and he knew that to recognize nothing in his surroundings was usually a guaranty of adventure” (“The Perfect Life,” The Basil and Josephine Stories 128). Once Fitzgerald became, for however brief a time, “one with New York,” once he recognized his surroundings and became conscious of the satisfaction of his desires, then the dream began immediately to dissipate. New York was no longer inaccessible once he had “everything” he wanted from it. It was no longer a product of his imagination but a real city and, though it was certainly an exciting and beautiful place, it could not become more beautiful and exciting with each passing day of anticipation as it had in his imagination. Fitzgerald found neither ecstasy nor contentment in the fruition of his desire to live in New York, but a profound anticlimax instead. So, as his mind “unwillingly matured,” as his symbols of New York’s triumph and romance became memories and “commonplace,” as the “ever-quickening city” began to transform itself into something even faster and harsher than it already was, Fitzgerald tried to “save some” of the city of his dreams even as he attempted to portray in his fiction the hysterical New York of the boom (“My Lost City” 29-31), a New York so drunk with satisfied desire that it amazed even the young writer from the middle-west who had dreamed of a city wherein anything could happen.

23 See also “The Diamond As Big As The Ritz”: “It is youth’s felicity as well as its insufficiency that it can never live in the present, but must always be measuring up the day against its own radiantly imagined future--flowers and gold, girls and stars, they are only prefigurations and prophecies of that incomparable, unattainable dream” (Short Stories 195).
Fitzgerald wanted to believe in New York’s myths even when his own experience and better sense told him that those myths were mostly lies. He needed the sense of limitless possibilities those lies imparted. “I can even live with a lie,” he wrote in his notebooks, “(even someone else’s lie can always spot them because imaginative creation is my business and I am probably one of the most expert liars in the world. . .)” (Notebooks no. 1249). Founding part of one’s life on a lie is almost invariably a dangerous business, though. The drinking, flirting and general carelessness in which the Fitzgeralds indulged spontaneously at first gradually became deliberate strategies for holding at bay the realities of their marriage, Scott’s career and Zelda’s lack thereof, and the city they were trying to make their home. As far as the city went, Fitzgerald remembered how he and Zelda had once tried to recapture the early innocence they had known in New York but had realized to their dismay that “It was too late—or too soon. For us the city was inevitably linked up with Bacchic diversions, mild or fantastic. . . We had no incentive to meet the city half way” (“My Lost City” 29).

The Beautiful and Damned. Fitzgerald’s second novel, was published on March 4, 1922. “I wish,” wrote Fitzgerald to Zelda in 1930, “the Beautiful and Damned had been a maturely written book because it was all true. We ruined ourselves—I have never honestly thought that we ruined each other” (Correspondence 241). Ten years later he told Scottie “I naturally used many circumstantial events of our early married life. However the emphases were entirely different. We had a much better time than Anthony and Gloria had” (Correspondence 600). All of the horrors and disappointments the Fitzgeralds experienced in New York between April 1920 and April 1922, the pitched marital battles, the alcoholic misadventures, the alienation and anxiety, may be found, fictionalized, in The Beautiful and Damned. “It has awful spots,” Fitzgerald was to admit, “but some good ones. I was trying to learn” (Correspondence 620).
Irrevocable, heartbreaking things often happen suddenly in Fitzgerald’s fiction. Love dies in a few seconds or minutes or hours, life-altering realizations occur in an instant, and characters find their lives split neatly into two halves, into a cherished past which will “come back no more” (“Winter Dreams” 236) and a terrifying future full of loneliness and diminished expectations. A momentary glance in a mirror reveals to Gloria Patch the irreversible diminution of her beauty wrought by years of hard living:

> She strained to see until she could feel the flesh on her temples pull forward. Yes—the cheeks were ever so faintly thin, the corners of the eyes were lined with tiny wrinkles. The eyes were different. Why, they were different!...And then suddenly she knew how tired her eyes were.
> “Oh, my pretty face,” she whispered, passionately grieving...“Oh I don’t want to live without my pretty face!” (The Beautiful and Damned 404)

Gatsby knows that as soon as he kisses Daisy and “forever wed[s] his unutterable visions to her perishable breath” (86) he will cease to be the man he was up until the very instant that her lips touched his. His life will be cleanly divided into two halves, a pre-kiss half and a post-kiss half, and “his mind [will] never romp again like the mind of God” (86).

Anson Hunter believes that he can take Paula Legendre’s love for granted. She literally walks away from the man to whom she is engaged and her heart cries “Ask me—oh, Anson, dearest, ask me!” (“The Rich Boy” 327). Anson wonders why he should ask her to marry him “when he might hold her so, biding his time, for another year—forever?...For a moment, when she said suddenly that she must go back to her hotel, he hesitated, thinking, first, ‘This is the moment after all,’ and then: ‘No, let it wait—she is mine...’” (327). But Anson forgets that Paula is “worn away inside with the strain” of their three-year affair. “Her mood” and her love “pas[s] forever in the night” (327), and
Anson spends the rest of his days “learning the rarity, in a single life, of encountering true emotion” (336).

Josephine Perry runs through beau after beau before finally meeting Captain Dicer, whom she considers to be “the sort of man I really could love” (“Emotional Bankruptcy,” Short Stories 551), but realizes during the few seconds of their first kiss that she has “not a flower left for him—not one” (560). “You’re everything,” she tells him, “everything I’ve always wanted.”

Her voice continued inside herself: “But I’ve had everything.”
“But you simply couldn’t love me.”
“I’ve got nothing to give you. I don’t feel anything at all.”
He got up abruptly. He felt her vast, tragic apathy pervading the room, and it set up an indifference in him now too—a lot of things suddenly melted out of him. (560)

Nicole Warren fights “with the accumulated resentment of years” (Tender is the Night 301) to free herself from her husband, “And suddenly, in the space of two minutes she achieved her victory and justified herself to herself without lie or subterfuge, cut the cord forever. Then she walked, weak in the legs, and sobbing coolly, toward the household that was hers at last. . . .The case was finished. Doctor Diver was at liberty” (302).

Should one, in light of all these memorable but fictional moments and seconds, take seriously Fitzgerald’s story of the day in 1920 when he broke down and “bawl[ed]” in a New York taxicab because he had “everything” he had ever wanted and “knew” he “would never be so happy again” (“My Lost City” 29)? Did Fitzgerald actually intend his readers to believe that he was possessed of a kind of Janus-like omniscience in 1920? After all, even if a man being driven through Manhattan in a taxi did suddenly become aware of the fulfillment of his every dream and desire, how likely would he be to know with such awful certainty at the very moment of that realization that the happiest moments of his life had come and gone forever? “Surely,” one might say, “hindsight is at work here. Fitzgerald was exhausted and depressed in 1933 and he might have found some perverse
comfort in arbitrarily designating a few moments in 1920 as the happiest of his life and in then being able to say ‘There, that is where the long decline began.’ Sudden, irrevocable realizations and changes of heart might be appropriate, and even necessary, in short stories and novels, but they rarely occur in real life. Fitzgerald had written so many epiphanic moments into his fiction by 1933 that the imposition of such moments on his own past was probably no more than a kind of professional reflex.”

Strangely enough, such a reasonable and seemingly well-founded attack on Fitzgerald’s account of his 1920 taxi ride would ultimately come to naught, for that taxi ride, or some other experience so similar in its profound and permanent effect on Fitzgerald’s emotions as to be indistinguishable from, and interchangeable with, that ride, actually was the culmination of the happiest days of Fitzgerald’s life, and memories of those days haunted him for the rest of his life. “I feel very old this winter,” he told his literary agent, Harold Ober, in January 1925. “I’m twenty-eight. I was twenty-two when I came to New York and found that you’d sold ‘Head and Shoulders’ to the Post. I’d like to get a thrill like that again but I suppose its only once in a lifetime” (As Ever, Scott Fitz—73). “Once in the middle twenties,” he wrote in 1937,

I was driving along the High Corniche Road through the twilight with the whole French Riviera twinkling on the sea below. As far ahead as I could see was Monte Carlo, and though it was out of season...the very name was so incorrigibly enchanting that I could only stop the car and like the Chinese whisper: “Ah me! Ah me!” It was not Monte Carlo I was looking at. It was back into the mind of the young man with cardboard soles who had walked the streets of New York. I was him again--for an instant I had the good fortune to share his dreams, I who had no more dreams of my own. And there are still times when I creep up on him, surprise him on an autumn morning in New York or a spring night in Carolina. . . .But never again as during that all too short period when he and I were one person, when the fulfilled future and the wistful past were mingled in a single gorgeous moment—when life was literally a dream. (“Early Success” 90)

Like Keats, Fitzgerald felt acutely both the crushing finality of time’s passage and the fragility of happiness and beauty, and “never again” was a phrase that sent a strange thrill of grief through his maudlin Irish heart. As he sat crying in his taxi on that afternoon in
1920, Fitzgerald must have felt as George O’Kelly feels as he sits with Jonquil Cary on the Cary’s living room sofa at the end of “The Sensible Thing.” He must have believed that “though he search through eternity he could never recapture” the elation or the intense romance he had known in his first months in the city of his dreams. New York “was something desirable and rare that he had fought for and made his own— but never again . . . .” (Short Stories 301). Perhaps he also felt, as Basil does at the end of “The Captured Shadow,” that “it was already behind him. . . .a great vacancy c[a]me into his heart. It was over, it was done and gone—all that work, and interest and absorption. It was a hollowness like fear” (The Basil and Josephine Stories 119).

In 1920 Fitzgerald lived out Amory Blaine’s dreams of “liv[ing] in New York,” of being “known at every restaurant and café,” of “wearing a dress suit from early evening to early morning” (This Side of Paradise 31). He had married “the top girl” (Notebooks no. 1378), “the most beautiful girl in Alabama and Georgia” (Milford 67), and had become a famous and successful author but, like Amory, he considered himself “a romantic person” and was therefore sure that his happiness would be short-lived. “I’m romantic,” Amory tells Rosalind, “—a sentimental person thinks things will last—a romantic person hopes against hope that they won’t” (177). Later in the novel he tells Eleanor much the same thing: “I’m not sentimental— I’m as romantic as you are. The idea, you know, is that the sentimental person thinks things will last—the romantic person has a desperate confidence

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24See also The Great Gatsby and The Cruise of the Rolling Junk. “But it was all going by too fast now for his blurred eyes and he knew that he had lost that part of it, the freshest and the best, forever” (The Great Gatsby 119). “I wonder if any such adventure is ever worth the enthusiasm put into it and the illusion lost. None but the very young or very old can afford such voluminous expectations and such bitter disappointment. And if you had asked me then if I would do it again I would have answered with an emphatic No. And yet—I have discovered in myself of late a tendency to buy great maps and pore over them . . . sometimes, just before I go to sleep, distant Meccas come shining through my dreams and I tell Zelda of white boulevards running between green fields toward an enchanted sunset land” (The Cruise of the Rolling Junk 70).
that they won't’” (229). As a romantic, as a man who said of Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” “I can never read through [it] without tears in my eyes” (Letters 88), Fitzgerald knew that “youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies” (John Keats 286; line 26) and that “Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes / Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow” (lines 29-30), and he took an intense but bitter satisfaction in that knowledge. “‘Things are sweeter when they’re lost,’” says Anthony Patch with uncharacteristic conviction,

I know--because once I wanted something and got it. It was the only thing I ever wanted badly... And when I got it it turned to dust in my hands... I’ve often thought that if I hadn’t got what I wanted things might have been different with me. I might have found something in my mind... I might have been content with the work of it... you can’t have anything, you can’t have anything at all. Because desire just cheats you. It’s like a sunbeam skipping here and there about a room. It stops and gilds some inconsequential object, and we poor fools try to grasp it--but when we do the sunbeam moves on to something else, and you’ve got the inconsequential part, but the glitter that made you want it is gone. (The Beautiful and Damned 341)

This does not, however, mean that he felt happy or vindicated when he realized that “the very best [was] over” (“Early Success” 86). He had dreamed and realized a great dream, but, having gotten, enjoyed and lost exactly what he wanted in exactly the manner he had hoped to get, enjoy and then lose it, he was not at all sure what to do with himself next. Like Tom Buchanan, he had “reach[ed] such an acute limited excellence” in his early twenties “that everything afterwards savour[ed] of anti-climax” (The Great Gatsby 8). Hugh Kenner, in succinctly stating one of the primary questions Fitzgerald struggled to answer in Tender is the Night, inadvertently sums up the dilemma faced by Fitzgerald after his fateful taxi ride: “Let the hero marry the girl; let him have what he wants; what then?” (A Homemade World 47). Fitzgerald, says Kenner, “saw” that the Twenties “was a time whose tone derived from people who had what they wanted” (47), but what do people

25See also The Notebooks, entry number 1329: “The very elements of disintegration seemed to him romantic...”
who have what they want do?

"What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon," cried Daisy, "and the day after that, and the next thirty years?"

"Don't be morbid," Jordan said. "Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall."

"But it's so hot," insisted Daisy, on the verge of tears. "And everything's so confused. Let's all go to town!" (The Great Gatsby 92)

Fitzgerald went "to town," to New York, regularly in the months between May 1920, when he and Zelda moved to Westport, Connecticut, and May 1924, when he and Zelda sailed for France. He regarded the city as a tonic for boredom, as an inspiration, as the best place to either unwind after working or to raise hell when he was too restless to work.


26Fitzgerald began The Flight of the Rocket, the novel that became The Beautiful and Damned, in July 1920. In a letter dated August 12, 1920 he told Charles Scribner II, "My new novel, called The Flight of the Rocket, concerns the life of one Anthony Patch between his 25th and 33d years (1913-1921). He is one of those many with the tastes and weaknesses of an artist but with no actual creative inspiration. How he and his beautiful young wife are wrecked on the shoals of dissipation is told in the story. This sounds sordid but it's really a most sensational book and I hope won't disappoint the critics who liked my first one" (Letters 145).

27The narrator of Save Me The Waltz says of the Knights' first months in New York: "Almost everybody had theories: that the Longacre Pharmacies carried the best gin in town; that anchovies sobered you up; that you could tell wood alcohol by the smell" (Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings 48).

28Fitzgerald may have utilized some of the experiences noted in this Ledger entry in The Beautiful and Damned and The Great Gatsby. Nick lies "half asleep in the cold lower level of the Pennsylvania Station, staring at the morning 'Tribune' and waiting for the four o'clock train" (The Great Gatsby 32). Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert find "a drugstore in the Grand Central Station" where Gloria buys some perfume (The Beautiful and Damned 101). The confrontation between Tom and Gatsby takes place in a Plaza suite on "the last, certainly the warmest" day of the summer (89): "The room was large and stifling, and, though it was already four o'clock, opening the windows admitted only a gust of hot shrubbery from the Park" (98). "I found out what your 'drug stores' were," Tom tells Gatsby. He then tells Daisy, Jordan and Nick that Gatsby and Wolfshiem "'bought up a lot of side-street drug stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter" (104).
along the Post Road and trips to New York” ([Correspondence] 245).

During the months between May 1920 and April 1924 Fitzgerald created Anthony and Gloria Patch, the protagonists of [The Beautiful and Damned] who “are,” said Fitzgerald, “representative... of the great army of the rootless who float around New York” ([Letters] 331), as well as Yanci Bowman, Dexter Green, Rudolph Miller and George O’Kelly, all middle-westerners who look to New York for love, for money, for “something ineffably gorgeous... that has nothing to do with God” (“Absolution” 271). During those same months he also took his first tentative steps toward the writing of [The Great Gatsby].

“When I send on this last batch of stories,” he told Perkins in June 1922,

I may start my novel and I may not. Its locale will be the middle-west and New York of 1885 I think. It 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. I’m not quite sure whether I’m ready to start it quite yet or not. ([Dear Scott / Dear Max] 61)

In creating Anthony and Gloria Patch, Bowman, Miller, Green and O’Kelly and in planning his third novel, Fitzgerald was utilizing and reevaluating his own journey from St. Paul to New York. He was, in effect, telling his own story over and over again. His rejection by Ginevra King had already supplied him with the basic materials for one of “the two or three stories” he told over and over again, “each time in a new disguise” (“One Hundred False Starts” 132), and now his experiences in New York provided him with the basic materials for another one of those two or three stories.

The Ginevra story, reduced to its most basic elements, is about a poor boy’s love for a rich and beautiful girl. The boy is usually damaged irreparably by the girl’s incapacity for “total romantic commitment” (Brucoli 89), by her refusal to subordinate practical concerns such as financial security to the desires of her suitor or even to the desires of her own heart:

[Michael Curly] had met Caroline Dendy whe she was seventeen, possessed her young heart all through her first season in New York, and then lost her, slowly, tragically, uselessly, because he had no
money and could make no money; because, with all the energy and
good will in the world, he could not find himself; because, loving
him still, Caroline had lost faith and begun to see him as something
pathetic, futile and shabby, outside the great, shining stream of life
toward which she was inevitably drawn. ("The Bridal Party," Short
Stories 561-562)

"The whole idea of Gatsby," said Fitzgerald, "is the unfairness of a poor young man not
being able to marry a girl with money. This theme comes up again and again because I
lived it" (Turnbull 150).

The New York story, reduced to its most basic elements, is about a young middle-
westerner's love for a rich and beautiful city: "[Yanci Bowman] adored New York with a
great impersonal affection--adored it as only a middle-western or Southern girl can. In its
gaudy bazaars she felt her soul transported with turbulent delight, for to her eyes it held
The middle-westerner is first drawn to New York by the city's glamorous image, but
usually ends up disillusioned and irreparably damaged by New York's disregard for
dreams and sentiment, by its insistence on the centrality of such practical, decidedly
unromantic concerns as financial well-being, the source of one's next meal, and the
necessity of remaining whole and sane in a city that kills the weak and the mad. This
theme comes up again and again because Fitzgerald lived it. By 1920 he had already
created Amory Blaine of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (This Side of Paradise 6) and
Minneapolis, Minnesota (8), and Gordon Sterrett of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania ("May
Day" 100), two characters from the provinces who discover how nauseatingly unromantic
New York is on an empty wallet and an empty stomach, but it was only after living in the
city for many months as a man who had enough money and plenty to eat that he could
realize how dangerous and unromantic New York could be regardless of one's
circumstances. Only then, in the months between April 1924 and August 1925, could he
create Jay Gatsby, the archetypal Fitzgeraldian middle-westerner, and Anson Hunter, the
only convincing “New Yorker” in all of Fitzgerald’s stories about the city and its inhabitants. Gatsby and Hunter both get everything they want in New York only to find that they have lost the women they love in the process and that all of their triumphs are therefore hollow and meaningless.

In writing *The Great Gatsby* and “The Rich Boy” Fitzgerald realized both that he could never become a “New Yorker,” and that the best part of his dream of New York was not in New York at all, that it “was already behind him” instead, “somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night” (*The Great Gatsby* 141). In 1933 he claimed that he had realized in 1927 that “New York, however often I might leave it, was home” (“My Lost City” 30), and in 1937 he told a man who was writing a paper on him that he “like[d] living in France, though New York is my favorite city” (*Correspondence* 484). Privately, however, Fitzgerald was willing to admit both that he did not really feel at home anywhere and that the middle-west, though it did not excite his imagination as New York did, was the only place that had any claim at all on his heart. In October 1934 he told Marie Hamm (née Hersey), the St. Paul native he thought of as “my oldest friend, certainly my first love” (*Letters* 545),

Scottie has become acclimated to Baltimore but I’d like to have her pull a sort of Gertrude Harris a little later to the extent of having a debut out there [St. Paul]. So a few years may see us settled there for at least a summer. This in spite of the fact that having rambled so much I no longer regard St. Paul as my home any more than the eastern seaboard or the Riviera. This is said with no disloyalty but simply because after all my father was an easterner and I went East to college and I never did quite adjust myself to those damn Minnesota winters. It was always freezing my cheeks, being a rotten skater, etc.—though many events there will always fill me with a tremendous nostalgia. (*Letters* 516)

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29 "The Director of Companies was our Captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realise his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom" (*Heart of Darkness* 7).
Fitzgerald is all ambivalence in this letter. He does not regard St. Paul as his home "any more than" New York, Baltimore or Monte Carlo, but Cecilia Ashton Scott, Fitzgerald's paternal grandmother, could trace her family "back to the seventeenth century in Maryland--to the first Scotts, Keys, Ridgelys, and Dorseys" (Bruccoli 12) and Fitzgerald had gone to Princeton and what in American life was more "eastern" than Princeton, Princeton whose Nassau Hall "was already thirty years old when Hessian bullets pierced its sides" ("Princeton" 72)?

In the end though, Fitzgerald's "vivid memories" (The Great Gatsby 136) of the middle-west creep up on him and quietly give the lie to his claims of being an easterner. For nostalgia was, among all the emotions Fitzgerald felt intensely, perhaps the emotion he felt most intensely. The middle-west was his past and it was always the past Fitzgerald cherished the most, no matter how hard he tried to invest his energies in hope for the future. The middle-western winters he remembered may have been damnable, but when he imagined those winters as remembered by Nick Carraway they became uncanny and beautiful:

> When we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out beside us and twinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour before we melted indistinguishably into it again. (The Great Gatsby 137)

In short, "Fitzgerald didn't belong anywhere. He never had a permanent home or secure position" (Donaldson, Fool For Love x). Even in St. Paul "He lived in no one home, but rather a series of temporary domiciles. The city directories for 1909-19 list five different

30Fitzgerald's invocation of his time at Princeton as an indication of his roots in the East is rather ironic in light of his characterization of Princeton as a kind of foster home for young Americans who, by the very fact that they are Americans, are homeless and rootless: "Alfred Noyes has compared Princeton to Oxford. To me the two are sharply different. Princeton is thinner and fresher, at once less profound and more elusive. For all its past, Nassau Hall stands there hollow and barren, not like a mother who has borne sons and wears the scars of her travail, but like a patient old nurse, skeptical and affectionate with these foster children who, as Americans, can belong to no place under the sun" ("Princeton" 72).
addresses for Edward Fitzgerald, broker, and the family is known to have occupied at least two other houses during this period” (Fool For Love 12). Nonetheless, it was to the middle-west of his youth that Fitzgerald returned again and again in search of solace and material. He was, finally, at home only in the past. New York was the raw, unsatisfying present and the eagerly-anticipated, but always anxiety-inducing, future, and Fitzgerald went there because he had what Mizener calls “a powerful impulse to realize his dream here and now” (F. Scott Fitzgerald 111), but he was always uncomfortable in what he tellingly referred to as New York’s “disordered mind”:

Whole sections of the city had grown rather poisonous, but invariably I found a moment of utter peace in riding south through Central Park at dark toward where the façade of 59th Street thrusts its lights through the trees. There again was my lost city, wrapped cool in its mystery and promise. But that detachment never lasted long--as the toiler must live in the city’s belly, so I was compelled to live in its disordered mind. (“My Lost City” 30-31)

But even if Fitzgerald could not maintain the detachment which allowed him to view New York as a romantic city of “mystery and promise,” he had no choice but to maintain the detachment of the outsider, of the middle-westerner come to the big city “to stare at the show” (“My Lost City” 24). His eventual exile to the fringes of the New York society he wanted so much to be part of galled him sometimes, as when he realized in 1923 that he and Zelda “were no longer important” and that the flappers Fitzgerald portrayed in his early work “had become passé. . .anyhow in the East” (“My Lost City” 29), but that same exile enabled him to be, like Nick Carraway, simultaneously a participant in and a mere observer of the hysterical party that was New York in the 1920s:

I wanted to get out and walk eastward toward the park through the soft twilight but each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild strident argument which pulled me back. . . .Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. (The Great Gatsby 30)
Unfortunately for readers of *The Beautiful and Damned* Fitzgerald still “preferr[ed] the role of the observed to that of the observer” (“My Lost City” 29) in the months between July 1920 and December 1921 when he wrote his second novel. As Henry Seidel Canby pointed out in his March 4, 1922 New York *Post* review of the book, “Mr. Fitzgerald is too much in the whirl, too much in love with its abandoned irresponsibility, to understand it, and to be detached while still sympathetic” (*In His Own Time* 319). Consequently, Anthony and Gloria Patch are just as confused as to what role, if any, they are supposed to be playing in the life of New York City as Fitzgerald was when he created them. One is willing, of course, to forgive Fitzgerald for spending time he might have spent working on *The Beautiful and Damned* at the Plaza or in speakeasies because, as he himself noted, “To record one must be unwary” (*Notebooks* no. 1296), and because he obviously had to know New York before he could “endow place and time with a sense of authenticity” (Bruccoli, “Note on Geography”; *The Great Gatsby* 211), but there is little comfort in the knowledge that Fitzgerald learned from the mistakes he made in writing *The Beautiful and Damned* when one is actually trying to read it.

Bruccoli believes that “Fitzgerald’s self-disapproval in *The Beautiful and Damned* is divided between Anthony Patch and Dick Caramel, a writer who becomes a supplier of commercial entertainment. Both Anthony and Caramel are projections of what Fitzgerald feared for himself” (180). If this is true, Fitzgerald must have feared that he would become not only a hack, but also a pretentious chronicler of life in the big city, for that is exactly what Caramel is. He graduated from Harvard and spent the next year in “the slums of New York muck[ing] about with bewildered Italians as secretary to an ‘Alien Young Men’s Rescue Association’” (74). His first novel, *The Demon Lover*, 31 “was a highly original, rather overwritten piece of sustained description concerned with a Don Juan of

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31 Fitzgerald began “a very ambitious novel called ‘The Demon Lover’” in August 1919 (Dear Scott/Dear Max 22), but never finished it. “Nothing,” says Bruccoli, “is known about its plot” (128).
the New York slums” (141). “‘My publishers, you know,’” boasts Caramel, “‘have been advertising me as the Thackeray of America--because of my New York novel’” (423), but Anthony is unimpressed and notes early on that Caramel’s short stories are “concerned chiefly with the preposterous actions of a class of sawdust effigies who, one was assured, were New York society people. . .” (301).

Oddly enough, Anthony is himself a prime example of a “sawdust effig[yl]” masquerading as a member of “New York society.” One never finds out where he was born, but the novel’s third person omniscient narrator does say that he spent his early childhood in his family’s “house on Washington Square” (6). Anthony’s father, Adam Ulysses Patch, was “a joiner of clubs, connoisseur of good form, and driver of tandems--at the astonishing age of twenty-six he began his memoirs under the title ‘New York Society as I Have Seen It’” (5). Anthony’s grandfather, Adam J. Patch, founded the Patch family fortune on Wall Street in the years after the Civil War. Then, “after a severe attack of sclerosis” (4), he decided to become a philanthropist and to “consecrate the remainder of his life to the moral regeneration of the world” (4). Anthony’s grandmother, Alicia Withers, brought her husband “one hundred thousand dollars and an impeccable entré into the banking circles of New York” (5) when she married him. Fitzgerald is obviously trying to endow Anthony with the kind of background that any member of elite New York society would presumably be happy to call their own. Indeed, he seems to have “borrowed” the background of Townsend Martin, a wealthy New Yorker and fellow Princetonian, for the occasion. Martin, said Wilson, “was the nephew of Frederick Townsend Martin, a ‘philanthropist’ who had achieved a certain reputation as well as

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32 See “The Four Fists”: Samuel [Meredith] became the sort of college student who in the early nineties drove tandems and coaches and tallyhos between Princeton and Yale and New York City to show that he appreciated the social importance of football games. He believed passionately in good form. . . Outside of his own set he was considered rather a snob, but as his set was the set, it never worried him” (Flappers and Philosophers 176-177).
provoked some ridicule as the author of such books as *The Passing of the Idle Rich*, in which, himself a rich man and a figure in New York 'society,' he took to task the other members for their frivolity and wasteful luxury" (*The Twenties* 50). The astute reader, however, will be hard pressed to believe that Anthony is actually a "New Yorker."  

It is necessary at this point to answer the question "Who or what is a 'New Yorker' anyway?". Basil Duke Lee’s ideal New Yorker is someone who is "nonchalant, debonair" and "blasé" ("The Freshest Boy" 68). In 1917, Fitzgerald decided that Edmund Wilson "had become a New Yorker" when he watched from a taxi as Wilson, "light cane" in hand, walked down a crowded sidewalk "with confidence, wrapped in his own thoughts and looking straight ahead. . .it was obvious that his new background was entirely sufficient to him" ("My Lost City" 23-24). In other words, Fitzgerald thought of New Yorkers as people who felt comfortable in New York. This is, of course, a rather nebulous definition  

33The very astute reader, the reader who is familiar with Jay Gatsby’s ludicrous invented past, will find it difficult even to believe that Anthony is a character in a novel and not a parody of a character in a novel. "Well," Gatsby tells Nick, "I’m going to tell you something about my life. . . .I don’t want you to get a wrong idea of me from all these stories you hear" (*The Great Gatsby* 52). He is, he allows, "the son of some wealthy people in the middle-west," San Francisco to be exact, and when his "family all died" he inherited "a good deal of money". "After that I lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe—Paris, Venice, Rome—collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game, painting a little, things for myself only, and trying to forget something very sad that happened to me long ago" (52). "With an effort," remembers Nick, "I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter. The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned ‘character’ leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne" (52). After graduating from Harvard in 1909 Anthony went "abroad. . .to Rome. . .where he dallied with architecture and painting in turn, took up the violin, and wrote some ghastly Italian sonnets, supposedly the ruminations of a thirteenth-century monk on the joys of the contemplative life" (*The Beautiful and Damned* 8). "Some golden day, of course, he would have many millions; meanwhile he possessed a raison d’être in the theoretical creation of essays on the popes of the Renaissance" (13). Yet even though Nick, and presumably the reader, know that Gatsby is a liar, Nick, and many readers as well, are willing to give Gatsby the benefit of the doubt and to sympathize with him. Anthony Patch’s "background" appears to be genuine, he really is the grandson of a millionaire and he actually did write "some ghastly Italian sonnets," but unlike Gatsby he cannot elicit an ounce of sympathy from anyone, not even his own wife. She decides, within a month of marrying him, that he is "an utter coward toward any one of a million phantasms created by him imagination" (157), and when he insists that he has been working on a history of the Middle Ages she exclaims "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 a tremendous consumption of tea or coffee. And that’s all" (211-212). Gatsby is an engaging character because his personality is "an unbroken series of successful gestures" (*The Great Gatsby* 6). Anthony Patch is a merely annoying character because his personality is an unbroken series of unsuccessful gestures.
of "New Yorker," but it is perfectly consistent with Fitzgerald's sense of himself as an outsider in New York. Fitzgerald was "afflicted by...intense social self-consciousness" (Letters 503) all of his life, but his self-consciousness was heightened in the city where, like Yanci Bowman, he tried to mask his insecurity among those he believed to be more sophisticated than himself by acting as he thought real New Yorkers were supposed to act:

"Walking into the hotel at the moment when its exquisitely dressed patrons were assembling for luncheon, it drained at her confidence to appear bored and at ease. Surely the clerks at the desk knew the contents of her pocketbook" ("The Popular Girl" 46).

Yanci imagines that her feigned sophistication makes her conspicuous but, as E. B. White, an authority on New York and New Yorkers if ever there was one, pointed out in 1936, no one really feels comfortable in New York and even inveterate New Yorkers stroll about trying desperately to look metropolitan, worried lest they should be mistaken for "strangers":

The average New Yorker can spot a stranger in town easily. Strangers are extremely careful not to look up at tall buildings, for fear they will be spotted.... Our own problem is to make ourself look like a New Yorker. Somehow, in spite of our fine clothes and worldly ways, nobody ever takes us for a native. Beggars, street photographers...all spot us instantly as fair game. We are the perfect stranger. Probably it's because, although we have lived in New York all our life, the place never seems anything but slightly incredible, and we go along with our mouth open and our face unbuttoned. (Writings From The New Yorker 200)

Any attempt to define "New Yorker" is doomed to failure then, for no one seems to be truly "at home" in New York. One must, however, have some standard of "New Yorker" against which to measure Fitzgerald's many middle-western aspirants to "New Yorker" status, and the best such standard may be found in Anson Hunter, the protagonist of "The Rich Boy".

Anson, says the story's nameless, partially involved Conradian narrator, "was the eldest of six children who would some day divide a fortune of fifteen million dollars, and
he reached the age of reason—is it seven?—at the beginning of the century when daring young women," prototypical flappers, “were already gliding along Fifth Avenue in electric ‘mobiles’” (318). He lived in a “great house” (326) on 71st Street (318). During his childhood “he and his brother had an English governess who spoke the language very clearly and crisply and well, so that the two boys grew to speak as she did. . . .They didn’t talk exactly like English children but acquired an accent that is peculiar to fashionable people in New York” (318). Anson’s father “was a man somewhat superior to his class, which composed New York society, and to his period, which was the snobbish and formalized vulgarity of the Gilded Age” (318). Anson “disdained to struggle with other boys for precedence—he expected it to be given him freely, and when it wasn’t he withdrew into his family. His family was sufficient, for in the East money is still a somewhat feudal thing, a clan-forming thing. In the snobbish West, money separates families to form ‘sets’” (319). He attended Yale but “his very superiority kept him from being a success in college. . . .So, long before he graduated, he began to shift the center of his life to New York” (319). After serving in the First World War as a naval aviator “he plunged vigorously into all the movement and glitter of post-bellum New York, entering a brokerage house, joining half a dozen clubs, dancing late, and moving in three worlds--his own world, the world of young Yale graduates, and that section of the half-world which rests one end on Broadway” (325). He thrived in the brokerage house on Wall Street, “where the combination of his influential family connection, his sharp intelligence, and his abundance of sheer physical energy brought him almost immediately forward” (325). His Uncle Robert “backed him for a city club which was the most difficult in America to enter—one could only join if one’s family had ‘helped to build up New York’ (or, in other words, were rich before 1880). . . .” (329).

Anson Hunter is the real thing, a lifelong New Yorker by birth and choice, a member of the very highest society and the most exclusive clubs, a man with all the right
connections. Even his name marks him as the consummate New Yorker. Scott Donaldson has pointed out that Anson “becomes an emotional cannibal” as his story progresses, “a hunter in fact as in name” (Fool For Love 112). This is certainly true, but the name chosen by Fitzgerald for his archetypal New Yorker is also significant for another reason. As a boy Fitzgerald read Horatio Alger’s tales of ambitious, hard working poor boys. In “Absolution,” Rudolph Miller sleeps on a cot in a “screened-off corner . . . among his Alger books, his collection of cigar-bands, his mothey pennants. . .and the other possessions of his private life” (265). “Much of the endurance of The Great Gatsby,” says Bruccoli, “results from its investigation of the American Dream as Fitzgerald enlarged an Horatio Alger story into a meditation on the New World myth” (259). “Dexter Green,” says Roger Lewis, is “a figure straight from the work ethic of Horatio Alger” (43). In Ragged Dick or Street Life In New York, Alger’s second novel and his most famous, Ragged Dick, an orphaned boy who has lived in New York “ever since I can remember” (37), a boot-black and self-described “rough customer” (3), makes his way, by means of honesty, industry and bravery, from the Bowery to a clerkship in the counting-room of Mr. James Rockwell, a New York City businessman. “I think we can afford to leave Mott Street now,” says Fosdick, Dick’s loyal and studious roommate, in the novel’s last scene. Dick agrees and speaks of his plan to further the interests of a shiftless but likable boy named Johnny Nolan by recommending Nolan to the men whose shoes he himself once shined.

“You might give him your box and brush, too, Dick.”
“No,” said Dick; “I’ll give him some new ones, but mine I want to keep, to remind me of the hard times I’ve had, when I was an ignorant boot-black, and never expected to be anything better.”
“When, in short, you were ‘Ragged Dick.’ You must drop that name, and think of yourself now as”--
“Richard Hunter, Esq.,” said our hero, smiling.
“A young gentleman on the way to fame and fortune,” added Fosdick. (132).

Fitzgerald named the only convincing New Yorker he ever created, a dissolute rich boy
born into one of New York’s best “Fifth Avenue district” families (“The Rich Boy” 331), after a poor but industrious orphan who wants nothing more than to become “a rich man some time” so that he can live on “Fifth Avenoo” (Ragged Dick 97). Anson bears no traces of the poor boy or the social climber. He is confident in his social position to the point of arrogance. But by naming Anson after Alger’s hero, a poor boy to be sure but a New Yorker nonetheless by dint of his relentless upward mobility, Fitzgerald stamped his consummate New Yorker and “one rich boy” (Fool For Love 111) as his own. If he could become neither a New Yorker nor a rich boy, he could at least show the rest of the poor boys from the middle-west how “different” the wealthy New York boys were “from you and me” (“The Rich Boy” 318), how their lives began as compromises instead of merely ending as compromises (“The Rich Boy” 320), and how they paid for their “compensations” (318) with their congenital inability to love or idealize their women.

But the best indicator of Anson Hunter’s status as Fitzgerald’s archetypal New Yorker is not his birthright or his name. Anson is really a real New Yorker as far as Fitzgerald is concerned because he actually feels, at least until he turns thirty, comfortable in the city: “He was at home in New York—there was his own house with ‘the kind of servants you can’t get any more’—and his own family, of which, because of his good humor and a certain ability to make things go, he was rapidly becoming the center, and the débutante parties, and the correct manly world of the men’s clubs, and the occasional wild spree with the gallant girls whom New Haven knew only from the fifth row” (319).34

34One might argue persuasively that Anson Hunter is not the only “convincing New Yorker” Fitzgerald ever created, that Meyer Wolfshiem, with his talk of “business gonnegtion[s]” (The Great Gatsby 56) and gangland executions at “the old Metropole” (56), and Joseph Bloekman, with his evening suit and cane (The Beautiful and Damned 123) and his position at “Films Par Excellence” (135), are both convincing New Yorkers, but Wolfshiem and Bloekman are both Jews and, as such, are beyond the pale of the New York society Fitzgerald alternately disapproved of and longed to be part of, the exclusive society whose members Fitzgerald regarded as the only people capable of living and appreciating “the high life of New York,” and therefore not real New Yorkers in the context of Fitzgerald’s fiction. The New York Fitzgerald loved and the New York he portrayed in his stories and novels was based to some extent on the New York portrayed by Edith Wharton, a rich woman who was not unfamiliar with the upper strata of New York
In addition to being Fitzgerald’s one true New Yorker, Anson is also one of the purest characters Fitzgerald ever created in that Fitzgerald translated him from real life into a story without transforming him, at least in any obvious way, into a fictional version of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald told John Peale Bishop, “started as one man I knew and then changed into myself” (Letters 358). Amory Blaine, Anthony Patch, Dick Diver and Monroe Stahr are all, to a greater or lesser extent, Fitzgerald too. In “The Rich Boy,” though, Fitzgerald confined himself to playing the part of the anonymous narrator: “There is a rich boy, and this is his and not his brothers’ story. All my life I have lived among his brothers but this one has been my friend. . . .The only way I can describe young Anson Hunter is to approach him as if he were a foreigner and cling stubbornly to my point of view. If I accept his for a moment I am lost. . .” (318). Fitzgerald’s real life model for Anson was his friend Ludlow Fowler. Fowler, a truly rich boy, was a New Yorker who attended Princeton and met Fitzgerald there. He served as best man when Fitzgerald married Zelda in the vestry of St. Patrick’s Cathedral on April 3, 1920. “I have written a society, in her stories and novels. Simon Rosedale is “a plump rosy man of the blond Jewish type” (14) in Wharton’s novel The House of Mirth. As the novel opens he has been trying to gain access to the higher levels of New York Society for some time, but has been mercilessly snubbed: “Even Mrs. Trenor, whose taste for variety had led her into some hazardous experiments. . .declared that he was the same little Jew who had been served up and rejected at the social board a dozen times within her memory. . .” (17). Fitzgerald’s Joseph Bloekman, “a stoutening, ruddy Jew of about thirty-five, with an expressive face under smooth sandy hair” (93), is strikingly similar in appearance to Rosedale and is also snubbed by New York society, or by what passes for New York society in The Beautiful and Damned. His attempts to be friendly are greeted with “faint and ironic chill” (94), his interest in Gloria is described as “hideous presumption” (118), and Anthony refers to him as a “Goddam Jew” (437). Late in the novel he changes his last name to “Black” (395), presumably so that he can blend more easily with the gentiles who are the city’s social elite. Wolfshiem, “a small flat-nosed Jew” (55), is, of course, a criminal, so one cannot know if it is his notoriety or his Jewishness or a combination of the two that so offends the Buchanans (who are themselves no great respecters of the law), but the mere mention of Wolfshiem’s name in connection with Gatsby’s name is enough to make Gatsby so great a social liability that Daisy is no longer willing to have anything to do with him. “Who are you anyhow?” demands Tom of Gatsby. “You’re one of that bunch that hangs around with Meyer Wolfshiem. . .” (104). The anti-semitism implicit in all of this is ugly but undeniable. As Donaldson points out, however, Fitzgerald eventually learned to admire Jews, especially movie producer Irving Thalberg, after he had worked for them in Hollywood in the 1930s. Thalberg served as the model for Monroe Stahr, the protagonist of The Last Tycoon, and is “by far [Fitzgerald’s] most sympathetic Jewish character” (Fool For Love 184).
fifteen thousand word story about you called "The Rich Boy,"” Fitzgerald told him in a
March 1925 letter:

--it is so disguised that no one except you and me and maybe two
of the girls concerned would recognize, unless you give it away, but
it is in large measure the story of your life, toned down here and there
and symplified. Also, many gaps had to come out of my imagination.
It is frank, unsparing but sympathetic and I think you will like it--it is
one of the best things I have ever [d]one. (Correspondence 152)

Fitzgerald's story of Fowler's life is ultimately more "unsparing" than it is "sympathetic."
Anson is portrayed as a man who takes more pleasure in feeling superior to women than
he does in loving them. "I don't think he was ever happy," concludes the narrator,
"unless some one was in love with him, responding to him like filings to a magnet,
helping him to explain himself, promising him something. What it was I do not know.
Perhaps they promised that there would always be women in the world who would spend
their brightest, freshest, rarest hours to nurse and protect that superiority he cherished in
his heart" (349). He does not ask Paula Legendre, his one true love, to marry him because
he prefers feeling "sure of her and a little disdainful" (325) to actually committing himself
to her. By the time he turns thirty he "no longer rejoice[s] in his freedom" (336). All of
his friends, including Paula, have married and he is left alone with his superiority. Anson
has a reticent heart. Fitzgerald, of course, suffered from "a two-cylinder inferiority
complex" (Letters 503) and his heart was anything but reticent. The narrator of "The Rich
Boy" succeeds in "approach[ing]" Anson as a "foreigner" and in "cling[ing] stubbornly" to
his point of view. This point cannot be overemphasized: the archetypal Fitzgeraldian New
Yorker is one of the least Fitzgeraldian characters in all of Fitzgerald's fiction. As a
reluctant but confirmed middle-westener, Fitzgerald could not feel what New Yorkers felt;
their emotions were not emotions that were "close" to him ("One Hundred False Starts"
132) and he was therefore incapable of understanding them. So, when he found, after
completing The Great Gatsby in 1925, that he had exhausted his own middle-western
perspective in his attempts to understand New York, he decided to examine the city from a fresh, detached perspective, from the perspective of real New Yorker Ludlow Fowler, in the hope that he might then be able to see the city as New Yorkers saw it.

Measured against the Anson Hunter "New Yorker" standard, Anthony Patch, Fitzgerald's only other sustained attempt to create a city sophisticate, is a miserable failure as a New Yorker. Anson has a house and a family in New York. His house is on 71st Street, one imagines that it is not too many blocks east of Central Park, and it serves as Anson's headquarters and as a tangible monument to his family's place in the city's social hierarchy. When Paula, a California girl whose family winters in Florida, goes to New York to see Anson she is "impressed with the standing of his family in New York and with the scale on which they lived" (321).

Alone with Anson for the first time in the rooms where he had played as a boy, she was filled with a comfortable emotion, as though she were pre-eminently safe and taken care of. The pictures of Anson in a skull cap at his first school, of Anson on horseback... of Anson in a gay group of ushers and bridesmaid at a wedding, made her jealous of his life apart from her in the past, and so completely did his authoritative person seem to sum up and typify these possessions of his that she was inspired with the idea of being married immediately... (321)

Anson's mother supplies him with "the quiet, expensive superiority of the Hunters" (340) while his father and his Uncle Robert supply him with invaluable business and social connections.

Anthony Patch has no home in New York and one of the methods Fitzgerald uses to dramatize his deterioration is to show him living at progressively worse New York addresses. When he and Gloria are first married they live in his "reproachless apartment" (233) on a fashionable stretch of 52nd Street. This apartment boasts "an English servant

35Zelda was impressed with the "scale on which" Ludlow Fowler lived when she and Fitzgerald visited his family home in New York in 1920: "The strangeness and excitement of New York... the impressiveness of the Fowlers and much tea-dancing and my eccentric behavior at Princeton" (Correspondence 245).
with the singularly, almost theatrically appropriate name of Bounds” (12), “an exquisite bath” (233), “immense” (11) rooms “for which he had bought his furniture and hangings—it was the closest to a home he had ever had” (233). But it is not Anthony’s home (he only rents) and when he and Gloria find to their dismay that they must economize they are forced to rent “a small apartment on Fifty-seventh Street at one hundred and fifty a month. It included bedroom, living-room, kitchenette, and bath, in a thin, white-stone apartment house, and. . .the rooms were too small to display Anthony’s best furniture. . .” (288).

When Anthony and Gloria realize that they are either unable or unwilling to economize and that they are plunging relentlessly toward poverty they abandon midtown Manhattan and move to “Claremont Avenue, which is two blocks from the Hudson in the dim hundreds” (405). Fitzgerald lived on Claremont Avenue himself when he was down and out in New York in the spring of 1919 (“My Lost City” 26) and, in his limited experience of the city, seems to have regarded it as the worst possible address one could possibly have because the neighborhood was full of immigrants and far, far away from the Plaza and the Ritz.

Gloria Patch walks “along that Broadway of Harlem, One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street” and sees Italian children, Salvation Army bands, “and the late sun striking down on the sides of the tall tenements” (The Beautiful and Damned 412). George O’Kelly lives in the same neighborhood, “in a high, horrible apartment-house in the middle of nowhere” (“The Sensible Thing” 290).

Anthony has no family, he is an only child and his parents both died when he was very young. His legendary grandfather is still alive but Anthony hopes fervently that old Adam Patch will die so that he can inherit his money. For his own part, Adam Patch considers Anthony to be a lazy, debauched idler. He eventually cuts his grandson out of his will entirely, but before doing so he pulls some strings for him and “by way of his grandfather’s letter” (224) Anthony secures a job with Wilson, Hiemer and Hardy, a Wall Street brokerage house. He quits after only a few weeks on the job. When he eventually
decides to go to work again he looks for a job without the benefit of his grandfather’s connections and ends up selling shares of “‘Heart Talks,’” a company engaged in the manufacture of little books containing hackneyed phrases meant to boost workers’ spirits and productivity, until he gets “disgracefully drunk” (387) on the job and quits. Anthony, in short, has no job while Anson has an excellent job, “his income in salary and commissions exceeded twelve thousand dollars” (326), and, as John Dos Passos realized, “Really to belong to New York you have to have a job there” (The Best Times 131).

Industrious New Yorker Anson likes to drink as much or more than the next man but he works hard even if he arrives on Wall Street “refreshed by less than an hour’s sleep” (326). Alcoholic poseur Anthony prefers to pass out cold after a long night. He cannot stomach both drink and work so he gives up work.

Anson, on the other hand, does his drinking in six exclusive clubs. He is “a figure” at the Yale Club, “a personality” (335). He likes to play bridge there “until dinner, then four or five raw cocktails in somebody’s room and a pleasant confused evening” (342). Anthony belongs to several clubs but is forced to quit them when he ruins himself financially. “Anthony resigned from his last club, the Amsterdam. He had come to visit it hardly twice a year, and the dues were a recurrent burden. . . .it was a club that, given the opportunity, one indisputably joined— but as a matter of fact he had preferred the Harvard Club. . . .It was relinquished at last, with some regret. His companions numbered now a curious dozen. Several of them he had met in a place called ‘Sammy’s,’ on Forty-third Street, where, if one knocked on the door and were favorably passed on from behind a grating, one could sit around a great round table drinking fairly good whiskey” (415).

Anthony is simply not a New Yorker. He has no home in the city, no family in the city, no job in the city, no connections and none of Anson’s “abundance of sheer physical energy” (325). He is revealed as the tourist he really is at the end of the novel when, having been punched in the face first by Joseph Bloeckman (437) and then by an enraged
good Samaritan (441), he lies on the street outside of his apartment looking up in wonder at "the tall buildings" which "roc[k] to and fro above him. . ." (441). "Strangely enough, he was almost sober. Without moving his head he looked up to where the moon was anchored in mid-sky, shedding light down into Claremont Avenue as into the bottom of a deep and uncharted abyss" (441).

Gloria Patch, a middle-westerner from Kansas City (139), is actually more comfortable in New York than her husband is, and she sides with the city when Anthony complains about it. "'I'm mighty happy just this minute, in this city'" she says. "'I think the city's a mountebank,'" replies Anthony, who is himself a mountebank.

"Always struggling to approach the tremendous and impressive urbanity ascribed to it. Trying to be romantically metropolitan."

"I don't. I think it is impressive."

"Momentarily. But it's really a transparent, artificial sort of spectacle. It's got its press-agented stars and its flimsy, unenduring stage settings and, I'll admit, the greatest army of supers ever assembled--" He paused, laughed shortly, and added: "Technically excellent, perhaps, but not convincing." (136)

Fitzgerald dramatizes the Patchs' differing attitudes toward the city by contrasting their separate responses to the view of Palisades Park they have from the window of their Claremont Avenue apartment.

Palisades Park was an amusement park. In April 1924 Fitzgerald wrote to Perkins about The Great Gatsby, another novel containing references to amusement parks.

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36 "PALISADES AMUSEMENT PARK, Palisades, N. J.; opposite W. 125th St.; entertainment, dancing, pool bathing; general admission 10¢, individual admission to most amusements" (The WPA Guide to New York City (1939), 34).

37 "People were not invited [to Gatsby's house]," says Nick, remembering the first time he went to one of Gatsby's parties in June 1922, "--they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks" (34). Later in the novel, Nick remembers the sight that greeted him when he came home late at night from an evening in New York with Jordan Baker: "Two o'clock and the whole corner of the peninsula was blazing with light which fell unreal on the shrubbery and made thin elongating glints upon the roadside wires. Turning a corner I saw that it was Gatsby's house, lit from tower to cellar. . . .
“While I have every hope & plan of finishing my novel in June you know how those things often come out. And even [if] it takes me 10 times that long I cannot let it go unless it has the very best I’m capable of in it or even as I feel sometimes, something better than I’m capable of. Much of what I wrote last summer was good but it was so interrupted that it was ragged & in approaching it from a new angle I’ve had to discard a lot of it—in one case 18,000 words (part of which will appear in the Mercury as a short story)” (Dear Scott/Dear Max 69). The 18,000 word story was “Absolution,” which appeared in the June 1924 issue of The American Mercury, a magazine edited by Mencken and George Jean Nathan. In 1934 Fitzgerald told John Jamieson,

I agree with you entirely... in your analysis of Gatsby. He was perhaps created on the image of some forgotten farm type of Minnesota that I have known and forgotten, and associated at the same moment with some sense of romance. It might interest you to know that a story of mine called ‘Absolution,’ in my book All the Sad Young Men was intended to be a picture of his early life, but that I cut it because I preferred to preserve the sense of mystery. (Letters 509)

In “Absolution,” Rudolph Miller, “a beautiful, intense little boy of eleven” (260), goes grudgingly to confession at the behest of his father. Rudolph, who “habitually and instinctively” lies, but who nonetheless has “an enormous respect and awe for the truth” (263), lies in confession by telling his confessor, Father Adolphus Schwartz, that he

‘Your place looks like the world’s fair,’ I said.
‘Does it?’ [Gatsby] turned his eyes toward it absently. ‘I have been glancing into some of the rooms. Let’s go to Coney Island, old sport. In my car’” (64).

Coney Island, an amusement park directly south of Brooklyn and nine miles from Manhattan, was, in the words of John F. Kasson, “the undisputed capital of amusement at the turn of the century” (Amusing The Million 28). “Coney Island in effect declared a moral holiday for all who entered its gates. Against the values of thrift, sobriety, industry, and ambition, it encouraged extravagance, gaiety, abandon, revelry... It served as a Feast of Fools for an urban-industrial society” (50). In “Celestial Eyes: From Metamorphosis to Masterpiece,” Charles Scribner III analyzes Francis Cugat’s creation of The Great Gatsby’s original jacket art. “At some point,” he says, “between [Cugat’s penultimate working sketch for the jacket] and the finished gouache painting, the decision was made to enliven the somber skyline of bricks and mortar by superimposing a dazzling carnival of lights, as though Manhattan had been relegated to a backdrop for riotous Coney Island” (151). For a fine reproduction of Cugat’s Gatsby painting, see the cover of Scribner’s 1992 paperback version of Brucoli’s authoritative 1991 Cambridge University Press edition of Gatsby.
"‘never’" tells lies (263). Rudolph knows that a lie told in confession is "a bad mistake" (263) and as he leaves the church he says "over and over to himself the words ‘Blatchford Sarnemington, Blatchford Sarnemington!’": "Blatchford Sarnemington was himself, and these words were in effect a lyric. When he became Blatchford Sarnemington a suave nobility flowed from him. Blatchford Sarnemington lived in great sweeping triumphs. When Rudolph closed his eyes it meant that Blatchford had established dominance over him and, as he went by, there were envious mutters in the air: ‘Blatchford Sarnemington! There goes Blatchford Sarnemington’" (264).

The persona of Blatchford Sarnemington serves Rudolph in two ways. Rudolph becomes Blatchford when he feels vulnerable, for Blatchford is impervious to both God’s will and God’s wrath and when Rudolph assumes his persona he retires into "a corner of his mind where he [is] safe from God" (264). Rudolph also harbors "‘crazy’ ambitions" (268). He wants to be a suave nobleman who lives in sweeping triumphs, he wants to be a Fitzgeraldian New Yorker, and when he dons the mask of Blatchford Sarnemington he lives in a world where his every ambition has been fulfilled. There are no overt references to New York in "Absolution," but Rudolph’s collection of Alger books (265) implies that he is aware of the city and its promise of wealth and triumph, and Bruccoli goes so far as to call Rudolph’s fantasies "dreams of metropolitan glamour" (Some Sort of Epic Grandeur 223).

Rudolph eventually takes communion "with sacrilege," with the lie he told in confession, still "upon his soul" (266). Afterwards, the threat of imminent perdition so terrifies him that he goes back to Father Schwartz to confess his "terrible sin" (260). But when he confesses the priest stares at him and says only "‘When a lot of people get together in the best places things go glimmering’" (270). Rudolph decides that "‘This man is crazy,’" but when the priest repeats his "‘theory,’" "‘that when a whole lot of people get together in the best places things go glimmering all the time,’" Rudolph finds "himself
thinking of Blatchford Sarnemington" (270). Father Schwartz, the mad, prairie-bound celibate, is obsessed with a vision of "metropolitan glamour," of a "best place" like Fitzgerald's own idealized New York where a lot of people, "a lot of gay people" (271), rich, clever, good-looking people, have such a good time that "things" become iridescent, otherworldly, gorgeous. Rudolph recognizes this place for there is a place very much like it in his imagination and he has often been there disguised as Blatchford Sarnemington. Rudolph is terrified, though, so he says nothing, and Schwartz, desperate to impress upon the boy the wonder of his vision, resorts to metaphor.

"Did you ever see an amusement park?"
"No Father."
"Well, go and see an amusement park... It's a thing like a fair, only much more glittering. 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 and the life." (271)

The priest's vision, says Joan Allen in her book Candles and Carnival Lights: The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald, "is Fitzgerald's metaphor for the active secular world, variously described as an amusement park, carnival, circus, or the 'world's fair,' which appears in his notebooks, in all of the novels, and in several stories. The amusement park Father Schwartz describes is the earthly paradise, [St. Augustine of Hippo's] City of Man,

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38In The Best Times, John Dos Passos gives an account of an occasion on which Fitzgerald actually did "stand a little way off" from an amusement park while he and Zelda got "up close" to it: "On the way back [to the Plaza from Ring Lardner's house on Long Island] we passed a carnival. Rollercoasters, whirling lights, a calliope playing. Zelda and I clamored to be allowed to take some rides. Scott wouldn't get out of the car but sat there with a bottle of whiskey he had pulled out from under the seat. Zelda and I rode on the ferris wheel. Carnivals, amusement parks, the flash of colored lights on faces in the dark, the view over misty suburbs twinkling with lights, these were things I liked to try to paint. I tried to explain my infantile excitement to Zelda. She wouldn't listen. Zelda and I kept saying things to each other but our minds never met... It was only looking back at it years later that it occurred to me that... I had come up against that basic fissure in her mental processes that was to have such tragic consequences" (129-130). Dos Passos remembers this day as having been in October 1922, approximately eight months before Fitzgerald wrote "Absolution."
the 'something ineffably gorgeous somewhere that had nothing to do with God'

["Absolution" 271]" (100). Allen explains that Augustine's The City of God is

a summary of Christian doctrine and a view of history to which the Church still holds—namely, that the entire world from beginning to end has, as its end, the constitution of a holy society. . . .in his elaboration of the City of Man-City of God metaphor he did much to establish the antagonism between the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit in Western Christianity. . . .Set in opposition in Augustine's earthly and heavenly cities are love of the world and the flesh and love of God and the spirit, tempestuousness and serenity, the wicked and the just, disorder and order, rivalry with God and submission to God, Babylon and Jerusalem. (5-7)

The New York of The Great Gatsby, a New York prefigured in Father Schwartz's "glimmering" vision and in his metaphor of the amusement park, is instantly recognizable as the City of Man. Jay Gatsby, who has his own light soaked visions of "a universe of ineffable gaudiness" (The Great Gatsby 77), goes to New York, a city, says Jordan Baker, about which there is "something very sensuous. . . .overripe, as if all sorts of funny fruits were going to fall into your hands" (97), to earn the money he believes he can use to buy back Daisy's heart, Daisy's flesh, Daisy's moist and "perishable breath" (86). He meets the distinctly evil, wolfish Wolfshiem, a Jew who wears "'finest specimens of human molars'" as cufflinks (57), and embarks on a life of crime. The New York in which he makes his fortune is eminently disordered, a place where one might see an old dog salesman on the street who bears "an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller" (24) or a man "'on some corner'" who is really a woman "'smoking two cigarettes'" (98), a place where a woman might have her nose broken by someone else's husband (31), a place where God is "'an advertisement'" (125). "The wages of sin," of adultery and crime in the City of Man, "is death" (Romans 6:23, Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version), and Gatsby's New York is just as deadly as it is disorderly, a city wherein one might be "shot. . . .three times in [the]. . . .belly" on the street at dawn (56) or "run over like a dog" (139), a city surrounded by the ashes of those who dreamed and built it:
About half-way between West-Egg and New York the motor-road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (21)

One will certainly “feel the heat and the sweat and the life” of Gatsby’s New York if one gets too close to all of its death and desire. “‘Hot!’” says the conductor on the train from Manhattan to East Egg, “‘Some weather! . . . Hot! . . . Hot! . . . Hot! . . . Is it hot enough for you?’” (89). Meanwhile, a woman sitting next to Nick “lapse[s] despairingly into deep heat with a desolate cry” (89). “‘The thing to do,’” says Tom in the stifling Plaza suite, “‘is to forget about the heat. . . . You make it ten times worse by crabbing about it’” (99). But no one, it seems, can forget about New York’s infernal late summer broil. Nick finds that “the relentless beating heat” bewilders him, and he writhes in discomfort as his underwear “climb[s] like a snake” around his legs and “intermittent beads of sweat rac[e] cool across [his] back” (98). “‘Imagine marrying anyone in this heat!’” gasps Jordan “dismally” as the “compressed heat explode[s]” into Mendelssohn’s Wedding March (99). When Michaelis and another bystander reach Myrtle Wilson’s body in the road outside George Wilson’s garage they tear open “her shirtwaist still damp with perspiration” and find that her left breast is “swinging loose like a flap” and that there is “no need to listen for the heart beneath” (107).

As a “son of God” (77) and a denizen of the City of Man Jay Gatsby is God’s rival. Until he kisses Daisy his mind “romp[s]” like God’s mind (86), he does his best to recreate himself, and he replies to Nick’s “‘I wouldn’t ask too much of her. . . . You can’t repeat the past’” with God-like confidence and scorn. “‘Can’t repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’” (86).

The amusement park Father Schwartz describes in “Absolution,” the amusement park which prefigures the New York of The Great Gatsby, is itself prefigured, albeit rather
sketchily, in the Palisades Park of *The Beautiful and Damned*. Late in the novel Anthony looks “up One Hundred and Twenty-seventh street toward the [Hudson] river” from the window of his Claremont Avenue apartment, the same window Fitzgerald himself must have looked out of in 1919. “Across the water were the Palisades, crowned by the ugly framework of the amusement park—yet soon it would be dusk and those same iron cobwebs would be a glory against the heavens, an enchanted palace set over the smooth radiance of a tropical canal” (405). Anthony, wary of New York and sure that it is no more than an “artificial sort of spectacle,” sees the naked girders beneath the lights of the carnival. Yet, like Fitzgerald, he looks forward to New York’s glimmering dusk and knows that he will forget about the city’s “ugly framework” when the sun goes down and the restaurants and cabarets fill with intoxicated and intoxicating people.

The bare bones of the amusement park, the raw foundations of the city, are not readily apparent to Gloria, who believes that New York’s gaudy displays are just as impressive as they claim to be. She “turn[s] out the lamp, and leaning her elbows on the window sill look[s] out at Palisades Park, where the brilliant revolving circle of the Ferris wheel [is] like a trembling mirror catching the yellow reflection of the moon” (412). But she is more aware of New York’s underside than she knows, and when she catches influenza the city figures prominently in her delirious ravings: “‘Millions of people...swarming like rats, chattering like apes, smelling like all hell...monkeys! Or lice, I suppose. For one really exquisite palace...on Long Island, say—or even in Greenwich...for one palace full of pictures from the Old World and exquisite things...I’d sacrifice a hundred thousand of them, a million of them’” (394).

There are really two New Yorks in *The Beautiful and Damned*. One of them is the amusement park, an artificial, almost cloyingly charming city akin to the New York of

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39Joan Allen spends very little time on *The Beautiful and Damned* in *Candles and Carnival Lights* and does not mention the Palisades Park scenes.
Book One of *This Side of Paradise*:

Six o’clock stole down too soon and rang the querulous melody of St. Anne’s chimes on the corner. Through the gathering dusk [Anthony and Gloria] strolled to the Avenue, where the crowds, like prisoners released, were walking with elastic step at last after the long winter, and the tops of the busses were thronged with congenial kings and the shops full of fine soft things for the summer, the rare summer, the gay promising summer that seemed for love what the winter was for money. Life was singing for his supper on the corner! Life was handing round cocktails in the street! (126-127)

Midway through *The Beautiful and Damned* Anthony is troubled when the city he thought he knew becomes “this suddenly hostile city” (286). Thereafter, the New York that dominates the book is noisy and menacing, a city full of people who are mere shells of what they once were and buildings which seem intent on mayhem:

Gloria—her shell, her young and lovely body—moved up the broad marble steps of the Grand Central Station with the rhythm of the engine beating in her ears like a dream, and out onto Vanderbilt Avenue, where the huge bulk of the Biltmore overhung the street and, down at its low, gleaming entrance, sucked in the many-colored opera-cloaks of gorgeously dressed girls... It was growing colder and the men passing had flipped up the collars of their overcoats. This change was kind to her. It would have been kinder still had everything changed, weather, streets, and people, and had she been whisked away... Inside the taxicab she wept impotent tears. (359)

Fitzgerald lived in both of these New Yorks in the months between July 1920, when he began *The Beautiful and Damned* and April 1924 when the Fitzgeralds left America to live in Europe for more than two and half years. He remembered the New York he had dreamed of as a boy in the middle-west, the New York he had known as a student at Princeton, and the ecstatic New York of the first six months of 1920, but he searched in vain for the barest traces of those cities in the New York in which he found himself when the “roaring twenties” began to roar in earnest. If the city he loved so much had ever existed it had evaporated almost as soon as he got within its limits. The New York that was standing where he thought his New York was supposed to be standing was a city he did not recognize, a city even wilder than the one he had imagined.
By April 1922 the ambivalence Fitzgerald had always felt toward New York, ambivalence which is palpable in *The Beautiful and Damned*, was metamorphosing into a kind of incredulous hostility. The moralist in Fitzgerald, alternating as always with the bacchant in Fitzgerald, was appalled at all the drinking people were doing in the city. Marguerite Mooers Marshall, a reporter with the New York *Evening World*, interviewed him at the Plaza and found him positively indignant. "New York is going crazy!" he told her.

When I was here a year ago I thought we’d seen the end of night life. But now it’s going on as it never was before Prohibition. I’m confident that you can find anything here that you find in Paris. Everybody is drinking harder—that’s sure. . . .Prohibition, it seems to me, is having a simply ruinous effect on young men. . . .There’s the philosophy of ever so many young people to-day. . . .They don’t believe in the old standards and authorities, and they’re not intelligent enough, many of them, to put a code of morals and conduct in place of the sanctions that have been destroyed for them. They drift. Their attitude toward life might be summed up: "This is ALL. Then what does it matter? We don’t care! Let’s GO!" (In His Own Time 255-256)

Fifteen months later he arrived one afternoon at the Plaza “with Anita Loos in tow” for tea in the Palm Room with Zelda and her Montgomery friend Eleanor Browder, so drunk that the waiter refused to serve him. Scott convinced the three women to let him drive them all back to the Fitzgeralds’ house at 6 Gateway Drive in Great Neck, Long Island.

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40 "‘Parties are a form of suicide,’” Fitzgerald told James Drawbell. "‘I love them, but the old Catholic in me secretly disapproves’" (James Drawbell, An Autobiography 173-174).

41 Zelda realized that she was pregnant in February 1921, so, after their first trip to Europe, the Fitzgeralds “played safe” and moved from New York to Dellwood on White Bear Lake outside St. Paul, Minnesota because “it seemed inappropriate to bring a baby into all that glamor and loneliness” (“My Lost City” 29). They became bored with the middle-west soon after the birth of their daughter, Frances Scott Fitzgerald, on October 26, 1921. “St. Paul is dull as hell. . . .,” Scott told Edmund Wilson, “I am lonesome for New York” (Letters 328). “We are both simply mad to get back to New York,” Zelda told Ludlow Fowler. “This damn place is 18 below zero. . . .” (Milford 85). So, in October 1922 they rented a house in Great Neck on the North Shore of Long Island and lived there until April 1924 when they sailed for France. “We left the middle-west,” wrote Fitzgerald in “How To Live On $36,000 A Year,” “and moved East to a town about fifteen miles from New York. . . .It is one of those little towns springing up on all sides of New York which are built especially for those who have made money suddenly but have never had money before” (Afternoon Of An Author 89-90). “West Egg and East Egg,” says Bruccoli, “which are ‘twenty
Everyone drank champagne in the car, for Fitzgerald was driving around with a case of it in the backseat. Dinner at the Fitzgerald house included cocktails and proceeded smoothly enough until “a woman who had been pursuing Scott came to the front door.” Fitzgerald sent her away but Zelda became jealous and made no secret of it. Fitzgerald reacted to her jealousy by pulling the tablecloth out from under the dinner dishes, sending china, silverware and food crashing to the floor. Then he went outside and passed out under a tree (Turnbull 138). Clearly, Fitzgerald was a divided man when it came to New York’s perpetual orgy. He was amazed at how much and how freely people drank in New York, but he was uncomfortable in the city, it was an exciting place to be, perhaps it was too exciting for a young man from Minnesota, and a few drinks made him feel more at ease, made him feel like one of the natives. Paradoxically, the few drinks that helped him to relax ultimately made the city even more exciting, so exciting that sobriety became in his mind a tedious state of affairs not to be endured. “I was sorry our meetings in New York were so fragmentary,” he told Edmund Wilson in a letter written in the spring of 1922. “My original plan was to contrive to have long discourses with you but that interminable party began and I couldn’t seem to get sober enough to be able to tolerate being sober. In fact the whole trip was largely a failure” (Letters 334). After a certain point Fitzgerald would black out or get into a fight or break down in a taxi. He was, however, sure to be tight again by either the next evening or the next evening after that if he was working or feeling contrite, because drinking was what New Yorkers did. “Most” of Fitzgerald’s New York friends “drank too much—the more they were in tune with the times the more they drank” and “many people who were not alcoholics were lit up four days out of seven” (“My Lost City” 30). He did not want to feel any more out of place, any more, that is, like miles from the city’ [The Great Gatsby 7]—correspond to Great Neck . . . and Manhasset Neck, both outside the New York City limits in Nassau County on the North Shore . . . of Long Island, and separated by Manhasset Bay. Great Neck was a residence of choice for show-business types; the tip of Manhasset Neck was populated by more conservative (old-money) people” (“Note on Geography”; The Great Gatsby 211).
Anthony Patch, than he already did, so he drank a lot and he drank often.

Edmund Wilson realized that Fitzgerald and his fictional characters were out of place in New York and he said as much in an unsigned article entitled “F. Scott Fitzgerald,” which appeared in the March 1922 Bookman. One long paragraph of this article is worth quoting in full for the cold light it throws on both The Beautiful and Damned and its author:

[Fitzgerald] comes from the middle-west--from St. Paul, Minnesota. Fitzgerald is as much of the middle-west of large cities and country clubs as Sinclair Lewis is of the middle-west of the prairies and little towns. What we find in him is much what we find in the more prosperous strata of these cities: sensitivity and eagerness for life without a sound base of culture and taste; a structure of millionaire residences, brilliant expensive hotels and exhilarating social activities built not on the eighteenth century but simply on the flat Western land. And it seems to me rather a pity that he has not written more of the West: it is perhaps the only milieu that he thoroughly understands. When Fitzgerald approaches the East, he brings to it the standards of the wealthy West--the preoccupation with display, the appetite for visible magnificence and audible jamboree, the vigorous social atmosphere of amiable flappers and youths comparatively untainted as yet by the snobbery of the East. In The Beautiful and Damned, for example, we feel that he is moving in a vacuum; the characters have no real connection with the background to which they have been assigned; they are not part of the organism of New York as the characters, in, say, the short story “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” [Short Stories, 25-47] are a part of the organism of St. Paul. Surely F. Scott Fitzgerald should some day do for Summit Avenue what Lewis has done for Main Street. (The Shores of Light 30)

There is certainly something of the snobbishness and sniffishness of the New York intellectual elitist in Wilson’s critique. According to Wilson, Fitzgerald and his characters lack the “culture” of their New York betters and it is the middle-west and not the East that is preoccupied with wealth and appearances. “For Wilson,” asserts Bruccoli, “Fitzgerald remained the undergraduate who had submitted material to him for the Nassau Lit. Indeed, Wilson never broke the habit of patronizing Fitzgerald. Although his affection was genuine, he was finally unable to believe that Fitzgerald was a major writer--in fact, a greater figure than himself” (200). For his own part, Fitzgerald either did not feel that he was being patronized by Wilson or simply believed that Wilson’s criticisms were no more than his due. Wilson sent him a copy of the Bookman article before it was published, and
Fitzgerald responded with a letter in January 1922: “Needless to say I have never read anything with quite the uncanny fascination with which I read your article. It is, of course, the only intelligible and intelligent thing of any length which has been written about me and my stuff--and like everything you write it seems to me pretty generally true. I am guilty of its every stricture and I take an extraordinary delight in its considered approbation” (Letters 330). Fitzgerald regarded Wilson as “my intellectual conscience” (“Pasting It Together” 79), and evidently took his friend’s exhortations to write “more of the West” seriously for The Great Gatsby, the novel he wrote between June 1923 and February 1925 is, according to its narrator, Nick Carraway, “a story of the West, after all . . .” (137).
VI: "I’m a New Yorker!"

On October 16, 1921 Fitzgerald sent Harold Ober a long story called "The Diamond in the Sky" (later retitled "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz") and a letter: "This is a wild sort of extravaganza... I think the [Saturday Evening] Post ought to take it. I shall begin another one tomorrow" (As Ever, Scott Fitz— 28). Fitzgerald worked very hard on "Diamond," believed it to be an excellent story, and hoped that the movies would buy it because his daughter’s birth had made an increase in his income a necessity. "The Diamond in the Sky" was an excellent story, Bruccoli calls it a “masterpiece” and "Fitzgerald’s most brilliant fantasy" (186), but it was rejected by the Post and all of the other high-paying “slick” magazines to which it was offered. "The story," says Bruccoli, "seemed baffling to some editors and blasphemous to others. Those who understood ‘Diamond’ saw it as a satirical attack on the American success ethic or at least on the faith that equates wealth with virtue—a message that might offend advertisers. Commercial magazines exist to sell advertising space, not to publish great fiction" (186).

The story Fitzgerald began the day after mailing "Diamond" to Ober was "The Popular Girl." In early November 1921 Fitzgerald sent this story to Ober with another letter. "Enclosed is another story," read the letter. "This one ought to sell—unless its length... is a disadvantage. I wish you would offer it to the Post because it is precisely their stuff... " (As Ever, Scott Fitz— 29). Ober did offer "The Popular Girl" to the Post and the magazine

42 "Fitzgerald’s principal showcase," writes Bruccoli in his introduction to The Price Was High: The Last Uncollected Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, "was The Saturday Evening Post. Because of its circulation and pay scale, most of the top American writers—including Faulkner and Wolfe—were glad to sell stories to the Post. Sixty-six Fitzgerald stories appeared in the Post from 1920 to 1937. Between 1929 and 1931 he received his peak Post price—$4000 per story, the equivalent in purchasing power of perhaps $10,000 today [1976]" (xiii).
bought it for $1,500. Fitzgerald was “delighted” that Ober “got such a good price for The Popular Girl” (As Ever, Scott Fitz—32), but he was not blind to the story’s weaknesses:

If this one ["The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"] doesn’t go please let me know at once and I’ll do another like The Popular Girl. You notice that The Popular Girl hasn’t the vitality of my earlier stories even tho I’ve learned my tricks better now and am technically proficient. I don’t believe its possible to stand still—you’ve either got to go ahead or slide back and in The Popular Girl I was merely repeating the matter of an earlier period without being able to capture the exuberant manner. (As Ever, Scott Fitz 34)

When Fitzgerald allows that he repeated “the matter” of an earlier period in “The Popular Girl” he is doubtlessly referring to the character of Yanci Bowman, the budding Fitzgeraldian flapper, the independent girl who wants nevertheless to be coddled and protected, the wild young woman who, though she seems to have been everywhere and done everything, is actually saving her body and her heart for the rich man she hopes to marry. “I know that the magazines want only flapper stories from me—,” he complained to Ober, “the trouble you had in disposing of Benjamin Button + The Diamond as Big as the Ritz showed that” (As Ever, Scott Fitz—48).

But Fitzgerald is also referring to the New York “matter” in “The Popular Girl,” almost all of which he recycled from previously published stories and novels. In “The Popular Girl” one finds Yanci Bowman’s Amory Blaine-like dreams of life in New York (27, 53), desirous acquisitive New York women from “May Day” (48), references to New York’s exclusive clubs (47), theaters (53), white buildings (48), great hotels (27), and twilights (53), the “menacing” New York so depressingly different from the one imagined by Amory Blaine and F. Scott Fitzgerald (46), the dread felt by Gordon Sterrett and Anthony Patch at the thought of life in the city without money (60), and Fifth Avenue busses from “The Spire and the Gargoyle” and This Side of Paradise (52). Fitzgerald’s dream of New York as the city where all of his desires would be fulfilled was quite dead by the autumn of 1921, it had been mortally stricken in the spring of 1919 and had lingered for months
before finally expiring in a taxi in 1920, but Fitzgerald was a "professional" ("Early Success" 86), a writer capable of turning any of his deeply felt experiences, even once vital but now dead dreams, into saleable manuscripts. He had learned the truth about New York through his own bitter and ecstatic experiences with the city, but there were plenty of young men and women in Dubuque and South Bend and Wichita, aspiring rich boys and flappers who read the Saturday Evening Post every week, who had never been within 500 miles of New York, and they were eager to read stories about young middle-westerners and their successful quests for love and money in the big city. These were the same young men and women the Post's advertisers wanted to reach, so George Horace Lorimer, the Post's editor, paid Fitzgerald handsomely for his most "commercial" stories. "The present writer," said Fitzgerald in 1931, "looks back to [the Jazz Age] with nostalgia. It bore him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did, that something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the war" ("Echoes of the Jazz Age" 13).

"The Popular Girl" is the finest example of Fitzgerald's deliberate, self-conscious New York myth-making. There he sat at his desk in late 1921. He was just finishing The Beautiful and Damned, a novel about disillusionment and ennui in New York, and needed money so he wrote "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," which brought him only $300.00. What did he do to earn the big paycheck he desperately needed? He reached into his past for the New York story, the story of the young middle-westerner's love for the rich and beautiful city, and he got down to work. To make things interesting he switched the main characters' genders, making the Fitzgeraldian poor boy from the middle-west into a poor girl from the middle-west and changing the Fitzgeraldian New York rich girl (i.e. Rosalind Connage from This Side of Paradise) into a rather sketchy rich boy who, perhaps as a private joke, he named Scott. Then, to make the story attractive to the Post, he gave it a happy ending. The city takes all of Yanci Bowman's money, saps her confidence and
seems about to deal the final blow that will land her in jail or in the potter's field or in both when, thank God, her rich boy rescues her and she lands on Park Avenue instead. The poor girl becomes a rich girl and the city becomes the heaven of fulfilled desire she always somehow knew it would be. Everyone is happy. Lorimer sells approximately ten million dollars worth of advertising space for his February 11 and February 18 issues (LeVot 79). Fitzgerald, once the “poor” boy who read “books about great cities” but now the somewhat richer boy who writes books about great cities, makes $1,500, less $150.00 for Ober's fee, and Zelda can buy baby clothes for young Scottie. If “The Popular Girl” lacked a certain vitality, Fitzgerald was the only one who seemed to notice or to care, and if the Post refused his “genuinely imaginative” work (As Ever, Scott Fitz-- 36) he was willing to fall back on his flappers and his New York story for a guaranteed sale.

No one has ever included “The Popular Girl” in what is regularly referred to in Fitzgerald criticism as the “Gatsby cluster of stories,” the stories written between October 1921, when Fitzgerald began his final revisions of the proofs of The Beautiful and Damned, and April 1924, when he finished “John Jackson’s Arcady,” the last story he completed in Great Neck before sailing for Europe, “in which,” says Bruccoli, “Fitzgerald tested ideas that would be more profoundly developed in The Great Gatsby” (Short Stories 237),43 and this is odd because “The Popular Girl” is the first story in which the outline of The Great Gatsby’s plot is readily apparent. Yanci Bowman is in fact a poor girl from the middle-west, but she thinks of herself as a rich girl who belongs in New York. “She

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43Bruccoli, in Some Sort of Epic Grandeur (201, 210, 221-223), includes the following stories in the Gatsby cluster: “Winter Dreams” (written September 1922), “Dice, Brassknuckles & Guitar” (January 1923), “Absolution” (June 1923), “Diamond Dick and the First Law of Woman” (December 1923), “Gretchen’s Forty Winks,” “Rags Martin-Jones and the Prince of W-les,” “The Sensible Thing” (all written before February 5, 1924 [As Ever, Scott Fitz-- 59n.]), “The Baby Party” (February 1924), “The Third Casket” (March 1924), “The Pusher-in-the-Face” (March 1924), “One of My Oldest Friends” (March 1924), “The Unspeakable Egg” (April 1924), and “John Jackson’s Arcady” (April 1924). Richard Lehan would add “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” (October 1921) to this list because of the similarity of that story’s “valley of Fish” (Short Stories 185) to the valley of ashes in Gatsby (The Great Gatsby: The Limits of Wonder 36-38).
like[s] best to talk about New York” (28) and, though she knows that some girls work in stores and marry “into the proletariat,” the very possibility “that such a fate should threaten her--how absurd! Why, she knew everyone! She had been invited everywhere . . .” (44). When Yanci finds herself orphaned and undeniably poor she sets out for New York, knowing that she will need to lie, to pretend to be someone she is not, to get the rich boy she wants because she has no friends or connections in the city. When she gets to New York she finds that the city is actually a very unromantic place and she suffers from hunger, lack of funds and feelings of inferiority. She also falls in love with Kimberly. In her eyes he begins as merely “a personification of all the riches and pleasure she craved” (49), but he gradually becomes the only person in New York who cares about her and that makes him invaluable. Yanci’s ruse fails, Kimberly does not believe for a moment that she is the sophisticated society girl she pretends to be, but she eventually wins out and ends up safe and happy.

James Gatz is in fact a poor boy from the middle-west but he thinks of himself, and eventually recreates himself, as Jay Gatsby, as a boy possessed of unlimited potential who is bound, if not specifically for New York, then certainly for some equally magnificent mecca of wealth and success. “His heart was in a constant, turbulent riot. The most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night. A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain. . . .Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene with an oblivious embrace” (77). Gatsby orphans himself (“his parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people--his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all” [76]) and sets out on his own to make his fortune. He joins the army and meets Daisy Fay, a genuine rich girl, in Louisville, Kentucky. He finds her “excitingly desirable” (116) and misrepresents himself to her. He lets her believe that he is “a person from much the same strata as herself” and that he is “fully able to take care of her” (116). He makes love to her, intending to forget
about her afterwards, but finds that he has “committed himself to the following of a grail” (116-117), that she is the “incarnation” of all his dreams and aspirations (86). “I can’t describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport” (117), he tells Nick. After both the war and Daisy’s wedding to Tom Buchanan, Gatsby goes to New York to make the money he knows he must have if he is to have any chance of reclaiming Daisy. He finds the city to be a most unromantic place. He suffers from hunger and a debilitating lack of funds and “gonnegtions” until Meyer Wolfshiem discovers him. “He was so hard up,” remembers Wolfshiem, “he had to keep on wearing his uniform because he couldn’t buy some regular clothes. First time I saw him was when he came into Winebrenner’s poolroom at Forty-third Street and asked for a job. He hadn’t eat anything for a couple of days. ‘Come on have some lunch with me,’ I sid. He ate more than four dollars’ worth of food in half an hour’” (133). “Raised up. . .right out of the gutter” (133) by his gangster mentor, Gatsby deliberately sets out to become someone other than he is, to become the rich boy he believes his rich girl will, this time, be willing to marry.

Both “The Popular Girl” and The Great Gatsby are corrupted Horatio Alger stories. Alger’s poor New York boys are honest, industrious, and brave. They are also extraordinarily lucky. Opportunities for young men to display their strengths and virtues materialize regularly in tough but kind-hearted New York and tough but kind-hearted businessmen are almost always there to reward guts and potential with steady jobs. Yanci Bowman is dishonest, violently disinclined to hard work, and more rash than she is brave. She receives no offers of legitimate employment in the city she finds alternately forbidding and inviting, and would surely refuse such offers anyway, but she is extraordinarily lucky and she manages to lie and charm her way into more money than an Alger hero could earn in a lifetime of hard work.

Gatsby’s war record speaks for his bravery (117), but, though he is unfailingly true to
both Daisy and to his romantic conception of himself, he is, like Rudolph Miller, a habitual liar. The only job opportunity he gets in the tough, decidedly hard-hearted city comes not from a legitimate businessman, but from a notorious criminal. This opportunity seems to be a stroke of incredible luck at first, but it later turns out to be a one-way ticket to a netherworld of social unacceptability. Gatsby is, of course, the most industrious of men, but the fact that he has made a career of selling stolen securities (129) and bootleg grain alcohol (104) casts his hard work in a less than favorable light.

Yanci and Gatsby both attempt to bluff their respective ways to the top of New York’s social mountain. Yanci succeeds and becomes the girl she always pretended to be. Gatsby does not succeed. He is revealed as the “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (101) he, at least in one sense, actually is. His story ends in death and ambivalence. Fitzgerald probably considered “The Popular Girl” to be a “cheap story” (As Ever, Scott Fitz– 36) precisely because it did end happily. If Fitzgerald had decided to turn “The Popular Girl” into the kind of “consciously artistic” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 70) novel he created in Gatsby, Yanci’s New York story might have ended quite differently. Kimberly might have lost interest in her when he realized that she was lying about her background or he might have seduced her without ever intending to marry her. Yanci, a pretty but penniless girl threatened with starvation or jail, might then have gotten a job, but it is more likely that she would have become, like Dreiser’s Carrie, some man’s mistress or a showgirl or even, though this is very unlikely in a Fitzgerald novel, a prostitute. She might simply have died on the cold streets for lack of any knowledge of how to make her own way in the city.

But Fitzgerald was not interested in writing a novel in late 1921. He had, after all, just spent most of two years writing The Beautiful and Damned. Instead, he started work on The Vegetable, the play Bruccoli describes as “a flapper comedy combined with political satire and parody of the American success story” (195). In late November 1921, only days before he found out that “The Popular Girl” had been sold, he told Ober, “I am
concieving a play which is to make my fortune” (As Ever, Scott Fitz-- 32). Fitzgerald had difficulty finding someone to produce The Vegetable and he spent months revising it. In August 1922 the Fitzgerald’s decided to leave St. Paul because “they missed New York and Fitzgerald wanted to be there for the anticipated Broadway production of his play” (Bruccoli 201). Before they left the middle-west, however, Fitzgerald conflated his Ginevra King story and his New York story to create “Winter Dreams,” a story he later characterized as “a sort of 1st draft of the Gatsby idea” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 112).

Dexter Green, the protagonist of “Winter Dreams,” is a middle class boy from Keeble, Minnesota (225). His winter dreams consist of ambitions, of intense and very private desires for romance and triumph, and something tells Dexter that these dreams can only be realized in the East:

Now, of course, the quality and seasonability of these winter dreams varied, but the stuff of them remained. They persuaded Dexter.. .to pass up a business course at the State university. . .for the precarious advantage of attending an older and more famous university in the East, where he was bothered by his scanty funds. But do not get the impression, because his winter dreams happened to be concerned at first with musings on the rich, that there was anything merely snobbish in the boy. He wanted not association with glittering things and glittering people-- he wanted the glittering things themselves. (220-221)

After college, Dexter buys a partnership in a Minnesota laundry. “He made money. It was rather amazing” (221), says the story’s narrator, as if he can hardly believe that a middle-class boy in a Fitzgerald story is actually prospering as a businessman. He meets Judy Jones, a beautiful rich girl who asks him if he is poor and gives him a decidedly erotic kiss when she finds out that he is “making more money than any man [his] age in the Northwest” (226), and falls in love with her. “It did not take him many hours to decide that he had wanted Judy Jones ever since he was a proud, desirous little boy” (226). Judy tells Dexter that she loves him but then mistreats and ignores him. Her indifference fails to diminish Dexter’s love. “Already,” says the narrator, “he was playing with the idea of going East to New York. He wanted to take Judy Jones with him. No
disillusion as to the world in which she had grown up could cure his illusion as to her desirability” (228). The desirable girl and the desirable city are part of the same winter dream, and Dexter knows that he will remain unhappy and unsatisfied until he conquers both.

Dexter becomes engaged to Irene Scheerer, who is “sweet and honorable, and a little stout” (228), but when Judy again shows interest in him his desire for her flames up stronger than ever and he breaks his engagement and Irene’s heart. Having demonstrated her complete mastery of Dexter’s will and emotions, Judy drops him and moves on to other conquests.

The sixth and last section of the story takes place seven years later “in New York, where [Dexter] had done well—so well that there were no barriers too high for him. He was thirty-two years old, and, except for one flying trip immediately after the war, he had not been West in seven years” (234). “A man named Devlin from Detroit” comes into Dexter’s office and says “‘So you’re from the Middle West. . . .That’s funny— I thought men like you were probably born and raised on Wall Street’” (234). Then, knowing nothing of Dexter’s feelings for Judy, he tells him how Judy Simms, who is “‘all right’” looking, loves her husband so much that she stays at home with their children while “he drinks and runs around” (233-234). Dexter responds to this unexpected and unsought news of Judy’s decline with incredulity, then with anger, and finally with hysterical laughter. When Devlin leaves Dexter lies down on his lounge and weeps as he looks out the window at the New York twilight. “He thought that having nothing else to lose he was invulnerable at last—but he knew that he had just lost something more, as surely as if he had married Judy Jones and seen her fade away before his eyes. . . .He did not care about mouth and eyes and moving hands. He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more. The gates were closed, the sun was gone down, and there was no beauty but the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time.
Even the grief he could have borne was left behind in the country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished” (235-236).

“The country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life” is the middle-west. Dexter conquers New York; he owns a successful business there and exudes so much confidence and well-being that he is mistaken for a New Yorker by the visitor from the provinces. When, however, he finds out that the once inaccessible Judy has lost her looks, her pride, and her virginity to another man, his hard-won New Yorker composure collapses and the city’s romantic sheen falls away like dead skin, leaving only a strangely beautiful skeleton of gray steel girders. In other words, Judy Jones and New York were both most gorgeous and desirable when they were only the inaccessible stuff of a middle-western boy’s dreams, when they were illusions harbored by a young man who had neither been to the big city nor watched time have its way with someone he loved. Dexter wins over the big city but the price of that victory is an inability to love or to wonder with abandon. The Fitzgeraldian dream of New York is empty without the complementary dream of the lovely rich girl, and to stay in the city without the girl, even as an outwardly successful “New Yorker,” is to risk the permanent emotional sterility with which Dexter finds himself afflicted at the end of his story.

“Winter Dreams” is the best of the Gatsby cluster stories and it prefigures Gatsby in obvious ways. Instead of merely rewriting “The Popular Girl,” as he had promised Ober he would, Fitzgerald wove the Ginevra story and the New York story together in “Winter Dreams” and gave the whole thing an ending that is almost as bewilderingly ambivalent as the ending of Gatsby. Like an Alger hero, Dexter earns legitimate, socially acceptable success in New York by means of his brains and hard work. Unfortunately, his true love is somewhere behind him, trapped back in the middle-west of his past. Fortunately, he does not love her any longer and is spared the kind of misery suffered by Jay Gatsby, the middle-westerner who cannot stop loving his rich girl. Unfortunately, his inability to love
her makes him even more miserable that her rejection of his love once made him. “Winter Dreams” also prefigures “The Rich Boy” in that both stories feature New York twilights that signal the end of something rather than the promise of another night of limitless possibilities in the world’s greatest city.

In “Winter Dreams” and in several of the other Gatsby cluster stories, Fitzgerald tinkered with his New York story and his Ginevra story, combining the two in different proportions, trying out different endings, switching genders, and generally working away from a story in which the unobtainable city and the unobtainable girl are both all they appear to be and toward a story in which the city is really a trap and the girl turns out to be incommensurate with the dream she supposedly embodied. In reading these stories one is both impressed and disturbed by Fitzgerald’s single-mindedness. On the one hand, the stories are good enough to be no more or less than examples of the work of a man, a professional, who is making the most of the materials at hand so that he can feed his family and earn enough time and money to write the excellent novel he knows he can write and desperately wants to write. On the other hand, the Gatsby cluster stories are odd little monuments to Fitzgerald’s obsessions, the products of a mind that dwelt obsessively on dead dreams in the midst of a life that seemed to many of his contemporaries to be the American Dream fulfilled. Late in his life Fitzgerald noted that “The combination of a desire for glory and an inability to endure the monotony it entails puts many people in the asylum. Glory comes from the unchanging din-din-din of one supreme gift” (Notebooks no. 1251). The sound that came from the room over Fitzgerald’s garage in Great Neck in 1923 and 1924 was the unchanging din-din-din of a writer telling two relatively banal stories, the New York story and the Ginevra story, over and over again and melding them
in the process into one sublime story, The Great Gatsby.44

In April 1924, after five months of almost continuous short story writing, Fitzgerald reassessed his relationship with his adopted city. He had earned $16,450 from the sale of the Gatsby cluster stories (Bruccoli 221), and he was ready to go somewhere where he could live cheaply and work hard. “Out of the woods at last + starting novel,” he wrote in his Ledger (178). “Decision on 15th to go to Europe” reads another April 1924 entry (178). “I decided to crash Broadway with a play,” Fitzgerald remembered in 1933, “but Broadway sent its scouts to Atlantic City and quashed the idea in advance, so I felt that, for the moment, the city and I had little to offer each other. I would take the Long Island atmosphere that I had familiarly breathed and materialize it beneath unfamiliar skies” (“My Lost City” 29). “Great Neck, mid-April,” noted Edmund Wilson in his diary. “Fitz said he was going abroad because his reputation was diminishing in America, and he wanted to stay away till he had accomplished something important and then come back and have people give him dinners” (The Twenties 185).

But “Long Island atmosphere” was not the only atmosphere Fitzgerald “materialize[d]” in his third novel. In the twentieth century, says William R. Taylor in In Pursuit of Gotham, New York has “led...[a] kind of subterranean existence as part of the consciousness of writers and artists who carry it with them wherever they [go], internalized, half-dissociated from place....” (21). New York was a permanent part of Fitzgerald’s consciousness and he carried it with him when he, Zelda and Scottie sailed for

44The Vegetable was an unmitigated failure in its week-long Atlantic City run in November 1923 and Fitzgerald was forced to literally write himself out of debt in the winter of 1923-1924: “Over our garage is a large bare room whither I...retired with pencil, paper and the oil stove, emerging the next afternoon at five o’clock with a 7,000-word story. That was something; it would pay the rent and last month’s overdue bills. It took twelve hours a day for five weeks to rise from abject poverty back into the middle class, but within that time we had paid our debts, and the cause for immediate worry was over” (“How to Live on $36,000 a Year” 95). See also Fitzgerald’s Ledger entries for November 1923-March 1924: “Rehearsal. Short of money. Excitement...Atlantic City. The Failure + dismal return. On the wagon. Writing story in one day...Deterioration...Struggling with money. Wrote all night on Baby Party” (178).
France on the Minnewaska in early May. Once the Fitzgeralds were “idyllicly settled” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 72) at the Villa Marie in Valescure, near St. Raphaël on the Riviera, Scott began to “materialize” the New York he had known in the more than two years since his completion of The Beautiful and Damned. “Good work on novel,” he wrote in his Ledger in August (178). The first draft was finished in early September and Fitzgerald began rewriting soon thereafter: “Hard work sets in” (Ledger 179). In October he was “Working at high pressure to finish” (179), and in November he sent the typescript to Perkins, noting “Novel off at last” (179). Perkins responded in a letter dated November 20, 1924 in which he alluded to some of the New York material in the book, specifically the valley of ashes and the party in Myrtle Wilson’s 158th Street apartment, and expressed his admiration for Fitzgerald’s handling of that material.

The description of the valley of ashes adjacent to the lovely country, the conversation and the action in Myrtle’s apartment, the marvelous catalogue of those who came to Gatsby’s house,—these are such things as make a man famous. 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 sense of eternity. (Dear Scott / Dear Max 84).

The Fitzgeralds moved to Rome in November and it was there, in January and February 1925, that Fitzgerald revised and rewrote the galleys of his novel. On April 10 a nervous Fitzgerald wrote to Perkins saying, “The book comes out today and I am filled with fears and forebodings. . . . This is only a vague impression of course but I wondered if we could think of some way to advertise it so that people who are perhaps weary of assertive jazz and society novels might not dismiss it as just another book like his others. I confess that today the problem baffles me—all I can think of is to say in general to avoid such phrases as ‘a picture of New York life’ or ‘modern society’—though as that is exactly what the book is its hard to avoid them. The trouble is so much superficial trash has sailed under those banners” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 100).
Much of what needs to be said about the New York of The Great Gatsby has already been said by Richard Lehan in his 1980 article “F. Scott Fitzgerald and Romantic Destiny” and his 1990 book The Great Gatsby: The Limits of Wonder. “As a novel,” says Lehan, “The Great Gatsby is in the Young-Man-from-the-Provinces tradition, which links it with works like Balzac’s Pere Goriot and Dreiser’s Sister Carrie, novels that conclude with a cemetery scene when the drive to conquer the city brings a fatal defeat” (“F. Scott Fitzgerald and Romantic Destiny” 145). Lehan has studied both Fitzgerald’s interest in Oswald Spengler’s The Decline of the West (vol. 1, 1918; vol. 2, 1922) and the parallels between that work and Gatsby, and has concluded that “The Spenglerian conception of history is so descriptive of The Great Gatsby that one has to be literal-minded to the point of perversity in resisting the affinities of mind at work” (The Great Gatsby: The Limits of Wonder 83).

“World-city and province—,” says Spengler in The Decline of the West, the two basic ideas of every civilization—bring up a wholly new form—problem of History, the very problem that we are living through today with hardly the remotest conception of its immensity. In place of a world, there is a city, a point, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type—true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter—of—fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman. . . . The world—city means cosmopolitanism in place of home. . . . Its uncomprehending hostility to all the traditions representative of the Culture (nobility, church, privileges, dynasties, convention in art and limits of knowledge in science). . . . betoken[s] the definite closing down of the Culture and the opening of a quite new phase of human existence—anti—provincial, late, futureless, but quite inevitable. (25-26)

45 “Did you ever read Spengler—specifically including the second volume?” Fitzgerald asked Perkins in a letter dated June 6, 1940. “I read him the same summer I was writing ‘The Great Gatsby’ and I don’t think I ever quite recovered from him” (Dear Scott / Dear Max 263). It has been pointed out that The Decline of the West was not translated from German into English until 1926 and that Fitzgerald could not read German, but Lehan argues that an 8,000 word essay by W. K. Stewart entitled “The Decline of Western Culture: Oswald Spengler’s ‘Downfall of Western Civilization’ Explained” was published by the Century magazine in the summer of 1924 and that Fitzgerald was an avid reader of the Century (“Romantic Destiny” 137-138).
The New York of *The Great Gatsby*, asserts Lehan in *The Limits of Wonder*, is Fitzgerald's version of Spengler's "world-city."

The city's presence in *The Great Gatsby* takes on immense importance because it marks the last link in a historical process that takes us from feudalism to modernism. We move, that is, from a feudal society dominated by the idea of birthrights to an urban society where natural rights have been subsumed to the privileges and advantages of wealth... We have moved from a world of peasantry to the bourgeoisie, from explorers to pioneers, from feudal faith to Enlightenment optimism, from landed aristocracy to robber baron, from frontier village to modern megalopolis—from one power structure to another, in the last of which Tom Buchanan is the titular head. (81)

When America was first discovered, when Dutch sailors first set wondering eyes on "a fresh, green breast of the new world" (*The Great Gatsby* 140), the continent's vast frontier allowed men to believe that they could make as much of themselves as they dared, invited them to put faith in the idea that the possibilities open to an individual who was willing to work hard were virtually limitless. When, however, the settlers ran out of land, when the frontier was closed, then there was nowhere for the men who had not yet made their fortunes to go but back East to the cities, cities run not by men like themselves, liberal-minded pioneers who were, at least theoretically, willing to give a poor man a chance, but by reactionary rich boys and politicians who saw in the city's masses of immigrants and poor boys only so many laborers willing to work in shops and factories they would never own and to vote for men who would steal what little money they had. The function of this "new city" of the East, says Lehan, "was primarily to process wealth, and such a city gave rise to social institutions, class hierarchies, and a sense of stratification that never

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46 "He felt then that if the pilgrimage eastward of the rare poisonous flower of his race was the end of the adventure which had started westward three hundred years ago, if the long serpent of the curiosity had turned too sharp upon itself, cramping its bowels, bursting its shining skin that at least there had been a journey; like to the satisfaction of a man coming to die--one of those human things that one can never understand unless one has made such a journey and heard the man give thanks with the husbanded breath. The frontiers were gone--there were no more barbarians. The short gallop of the last great race, the polyglot, the hated and despised, the crass and scorned, had gone, at least it was not a meaningless extinction up an alley" (*Notebooks* no. 1267).
existed on the frontier” (Limits of Wonder 34).

Glutted with money and bristling with what appear to be endless opportunities for wealth and fulfillment, opportunities proffered by the rich, the keepers of the city and its image who actually reserve all of the opportunities for themselves, New York is attractive to young men late of the provinces or the frontier who do not know any better. These young men, like the “poor young clerks” Nick sees “loiter[ing]” in the New York dusk, “waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner” (Gatsby 47), will waste “the most poignant moments of night and life” (47), will waste their youth, their idealism, their energy, their opportunities for romance, on a city that promises them everything it never intends to give them. New York, the place where life and love seem to burn most brightly, is really a city of death, a city that saps and does not give back, a city that sours and extinguishes the very dreams it inspires. “In front” of the “modern city with its new institutions,” says Lehan, “is the resplendent world. . .power can buy and the women, like Daisy Fay, who incarnate its glamour. . .” (The Limits of Wonder 79), but that “surface world of genteel values. . .cover[s] economic corruption” (123) and “belie the urban racketeering and the violence that eventually emerge” from behind the city’s facade (131).

Lehan’s analysis of The Great Gatsby is marred only by his characterization of Tom Buchanan as a man “who seems to embody the very meaning of the East” (The Limits of Wonder 106). Tom, unlike Anson Hunter, is not a New Yorker. He is not even an Easterner. He may be “the titular head” of New York’s power structure in The Great Gatsby, but that is only because, just as in The Beautiful and Damned, the only other plausible New Yorker in the novel is a Jew. Tom is a true rich boy, but he is The Great Gatsby’s New Yorker by default and in title only.

Nick leaves no doubt as to Tom’s actual status when he says near the end of the novel, “I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all--Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common
which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life” (137), and Tom betrays himself as a Westerner, or more specifically, as a Chicagoan, by his own behavior. “[Tom’s] family were enormously wealthy—,” says Nick, “even [at Yale] his freedom with money was a matter for reproach— but now he’d left Chicago and come east in a fashion that rather took your breath away. . . . Why [Tom and Daisy] came east I don’t know. They had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn’t believe it. . . .” (9). “Oh, I’ll stay in the East, don’t you worry,”” Tom assures Nick, “‘I’d be a God Damn fool to live anywhere else’” (12). Tom’s reason for moving east is only revealed months later when, during the confrontation between Tom and Gatsby in the Plaza suite, Tom says “‘Daisy loved me when she married me and she loves me now. . . . And what’s more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree. . . . but I always come back. . . .’” (102-103). “‘You’re revolting!’” says Daisy, who then turns to Nick and asks “‘Do you know why we left Chicago? I’m surprised that they didn’t treat you to the story of that little spree’” (103).

No other details of Tom’s Chicago spree are given, but Nick and the reader both know about Tom and Myrtle Wilson and about Tom’s affair with a chambermaid from a Santa Barbara hotel, an affair that was made public after an auto accident in which the girl was hurt (61), so it is obvious that Tom had “some woman” in Chicago just as he’s “got some woman in New York” (15) and that he was probably shamed out of Lake Forest. He is in New York not because he wants to be, but because he is unwelcome in his home town.

Tom is certainly “‘careless’” (139), meaning that he cares solely for himself and does what he wants to do without any regard for the effects of his actions on others,47 and that

47 “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy— they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. . . .” (The Great Gatsby 139).
is not surprising for carelessness is one of the privileges commonly accorded to the rich. But he is also indiscreet, and indiscretion is regarded as an unpardonable sin among the genuinely rich who fear that their collective invulnerability may be compromised if one of their own is publicly revealed as a violator of the code of gentility that is the very foundation of the moral and social superiority affected by the rich. Anson Hunter is also careless, “self-indulgence” is his favored pastime (324), but he is not indiscreet. He understands implicitly that his position in New York depends almost entirely on his maintenance of his superior standing. He knows that other people must view him as superior to themselves in taste, breeding, wealth and even moral stature if he is to enjoy their respect and obeisance. Anson’s idea of a party, explains the narrator of “The Rich Boy,” “was an adjusted thing--you took certain girls to certain places and spent just so much on their amusement; you drank a little, not much, more than you ought to drink, and at a certain time in the morning you stood up and said you were going home. You avoided college boys, sponges, future engagements, fights, sentiment, and indiscretions. That was the way it was done. All the rest was dissipation” (342). Anson is the very model of the callous and aloof New Yorker and he is just as hard on the indiscreet members of his own family as he is on the “unstable women” he “despise[s]” (331). Anson “grant[s]” the indiscreet, no matter who they happen to be, “no place in the social edifice in which he believe[s]” (331). When he learns that his aunt Edna is “carrying on an open intrigue with a...young man named Cary Sloane” (336) he confronts the lovers:

“Either you break it off--or I will.’’
“What God damned business is it of yours, Hunter?”
“Don’t lose your temper, Cary,” said Edna nervously. “It’s only a question of showing him how absurd--”
“For one thing, it’s my name that’s being handed around,” interrupted Anson. “That’s all that concerns you, Cary.”
“Edna isn’t a member of your family.”
“She most certainly is!” [Anson’s] anger mounted. “Why--she owes this house and the rings on her fingers to my father’s brains. When Uncle Robert married her she didn’t have a penny.” (338)
Anson “never blame[s] himself for his part in this affair” (340). Even after Cary Sloane, his will to live crushed by Anson’s insistence that he and Edna part (339), jumps to his death from the Queensboro Bridge (340), Anson feels no remorse. The Hunter family name must be maintained, unsullied, at all costs, even at the cost of Anson’s “most precious friendship” with his Uncle Robert (340), because that name is all that separates the Hunters from the tens of thousands of other families who, because they were not “rich before 1880,” did not “hel[p] to build up New York.” The New York rich guard their names and their neighborhoods jealously because they are surrounded by millions of people who have been promised all that the rich possess, and the rich know that there is not nearly enough of what they possess to go around. Even the once-poor-but-now-rich-by-association like Edna are permanently branded as outsiders who must play by the rules and be grateful for what little they have been allowed.

Tom Buchanan, who has no New York family name to protect, knows nothing of how “it” is “done” in New York. When he goes to see his mistress he all but forces Nick, his own wife’s second cousin once removed (8) and a man he “scarcely” knows “at all” (9), to accompany him. Then he lets Myrtle invite her sister and her neighbors over to the apartment he has taken for her so that they can watch while he smashes her face (31). Jordan is “honestly surprised” when Nick, visiting the Buchanans for the first time, allows that he has no idea why everyone should be so excited about a phone call from New York. “‘You mean to say you don’t know?’” she asks. “‘I thought everybody knew’” (15).

Tom’s lack of discretion would alone be enough to brand him as no more than a pretender to New Yorker status, but he also identifies himself as an outsider, as a Chicago boy out of his element, in other ways. In Fitzgerald’s holograph draft of the novel, Tom, Jordan, Nick, Gatsby and Daisy go to a baseball game at the Polo Grounds before moving on to a café in Central Park where Tom confronts Gatsby. “The Chicago Cubs were the visiting team and Tom applauded with perfunctory patriotism whenever they hit safely or
pulled off a good play. But when he urged Daisy to do likewise she answered that she and Gatsby were for New York—after that he took no interest in the game” (The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile of the Manuscript 183). Neither Gatsby nor Daisy is any more of a New Yorker than Tom is, but they are willing to root for the Giants, for New York’s team, if only to spite Tom. Near the end of the published novel, Nick sees Tom one afternoon in late October, more than a month after Gatsby’s death. “He was walking ahead of me along Fifth Avenue in his alert, aggressive way, his hands out a little from his body as if to fight off interference, his head moving sharply here and there, adapting itself to his restless eyes” (139). Tom is walking along Fifth Avenue, a street on which he, as a rich boy, should feel comfortable, but he is evidently very uncomfortable. His eyes are as restless as a tourist’s. Alert, anything but nonchalant, the former football player seems sure that he is about to be tackled or maybe mugged. Even after he eliminates Gatsby, the New York gangster who tried to steal his wife, Tom cannot so much as walk up Fifth Avenue without feeling threatened.

If any of the characters in The Great Gatsby “embod[ies] the very meaning of the East,” that character is Meyer Wolfshiem, “‘a denizen of Broadway’” (58), not Tom Buchanan. Wolfshiem is obviously at home in New York, probably because he is a thoroughly practical man, a man who cherishes no illusions. “He becomes very sentimental sometimes” (58), but only when he thinks of fellow gangsters now deceased, “faces dead and gone... friends gone now forever” (56). He is, of course, a social pariah, but one imagines that a man capable of fixing the World’s Series would be a self-sufficient man with little need for the approval of other people, and that he would find the strictures of New York society confining in any case. Wolfshiem knows what New York is for: it is the best place on earth to make money and “gonnegtions,” and he is content to make both from his office on Broadway. “‘When a man gets killed,’” however, Wolfshiem “‘never like[s] to get mixed up in it in any way’” (133). “‘I keep out,’” he tells
Nick when Nick asks him to attend Gatsby’s funeral (133). Like Anson, Wolfshiem is discreet. Business connections are one thing, but emotional connections are quite another. One’s friends, friends like Rosy Rosenthal, tend to get murdered in a town like New York, and a New Yorker only makes things worse for himself by dwelling on such distressing but inevitable occurrences. “‘Let us learn,’” suggests Wolfshiem, “‘to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead. . . . After that my own rule is to let everything alone’” (134).

Actually, however, none of The Great Gatsby’s characters can “embody the very meaning of the East,” for the East of The Great Gatsby is ultimately a place that is devoid of whatever meaning it once had. The East Nick decides to leave is a dead end, a bad dream that signifies nothing. “Even when the East excited me most,” he admits,

even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling towns beyond the Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old— even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg especially still figures in my more fantastic dreams. I see it as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over her side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a house— the wrong house. But no one knows the woman’s name, and no one cares.

After Gatsby’s death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes’ power of correction. So when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and the wind blew the laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back home. (137)

Nick’s nightmare about West Egg is Fitzgerald’s boyhood dream of New York gone bad. The scene is not New York, but a Long Island suburb, a place “begotten” on the now-defiled country by the overflowing city (The Great Gatsby 84). The rich boys are there in their dress suits but they are acting more like stretcher bearers on the Western front or pallbearers than ivy leaguers out for a good time. The rich girl is there too, clothed in a dress of the color that the city uses to hide its corruption, but she is dead drunk. No one
knows her name, she is one of the many anonymous New Yorkers who drive out to the suburbs each weekend in search of a party, anyone’s party (34). The East of The Great Gatsby is “haunted” by the ghosts of Fitzgerald’s dead dreams, “poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air” (126), dreams which, unlike real air, provide no nourishment to the breather. The East was “distorted” beyond Fitzgerald’s “eyes’ power of correction” because what he saw in New York was not what he wanted or expected to see and his middle-western, Catholic background prevented him from adjusting his way of seeing the world to a New Yorker’s way of seeing the world. The city Fitzgerald found when he got to New York was “material” (126), it was definitely a metropolis and it was definitely where New York was supposed to be, but it was not the city he had read about as a boy, it was not the city he had seen in his imagination, and it was therefore never “real” (126) to him.

The fact that “no one cares” in the East is finally what bothers Nick most about the East. He, like Fitzgerald, found the West’s “interminable inquisitions” to be tiresome so he “decided to go east” (The Great Gatsby 6) in search of love and money, but love is impossible without inquisitions, without difficult questions and honest answers, and love cannot flourish in a place where no one cares enough to ask questions. People do ask questions in Fitzgerald’s fictional West. “‘Do you want to go to confession?,’” asks Father Schwartz who, crazy though he is, believes that he can only help Rudolph if he “tr[ies] to act like God,” if he tries to comfort him with the age-old promise of forgiveness (“Absolution” 260). “‘Nobody really cares, do they?,’” asks Basil of his mother.

“About what?”
“About anything.”
“Everybody cares about different things. I care about you, for instance.” (“The Captured Shadow” 120)

The five main characters in The Great Gatsby are “all Westerners” and they are all “subtly unadaptable to Eastern life” to the same degree to which they care about other people. In
other words, “carelessness,” even “vast carelessness” (139), is the Fitzgeraldian Easterner’s defining characteristic. The Westerners in *The Great Gatsby* who care the most about other people, the Westerners most “deficient” in “carelessness,” are also the most “unadaptable to Eastern life.”

Gatsby, of course, cares only about Daisy, Daisy who “gleam[s] like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (117), because his ability to care about anything else was entirely subsumed by his interest in Daisy when he first kissed her and she became the “incarnation” (87) of all his cares, desires and ambitions. “Some complication or misunderstanding” sent him to Oxford after the war instead of sending him home to Daisy (117-118), so he was hundreds of miles away from her when she decided to marry a rich boy, when she decided not to wait any longer for him, but when he got home he made “a miserable but irresistible journey to Louisville” (119), Daisy’s hometown. Unable to find either Daisy or their shared past in that city, Gatsby, the boy who once left “the small Lutheran college of St. Olaf in southern Minnesota” because he was “dismayed at its ferocious indifference to the drums of his destiny, to destiny itself” (77), entrained for New York to seek and find his destiny.

Gatsby receives no job offers from rich businessmen when he gets to New York. Nor can he rely, as Yanci Bowman does, on his looks and his charm to get ahead in the city. He has no Yale education, no millionaire grandfather, no connections of any kind. He is on his own. So when Wolfshiem buys him a meal and suggests that he might pick up some money by doing “‘some work for a client of mine up to Albany’” (133), Gatsby sees a way out of the poverty that has cost him his girl and he becomes Wolfshiem’s trusted protégé. The only avenues open to the poor boy in New York are criminal avenues. The ultimate Alger boy is a gangster, and a successful gangster at that. Gatsby is good at being a criminal because he is essentially unscrupulous. His weakness is his love for Daisy and his willingness to do anything to please or protect her. Daisy kills Myrtle but Gatsby is
eager to take the blame (112). In New York a man who insists on making sacrifices for others is no more than a sucker, and Gatsby pays for his provincial gallantry, for his refusal to abandon the woman who has already abandoned him, with his life. The Fitzgeraldian “moral” of Gatsby’s story is painfully clear: “Poor boys from the middle-west shouldn’t think of marrying rich girls or of conquering New York.” Gatsby, notes Lehan, “never realizes how tenuous his relationship with Daisy really is, how much it depends not just on money but the right kind of money. He never comes to understand what West Egg stands for or how it is an extension of the city’s underworld. As a Westerner, he has brought a frontier sense of self to New York and played it out destructively in. . .the world of the city whose function it is to process money” (The Limits of Wonder 57).

Nick goes to New York with all of the advantages Gatsby lacks, a Yale education, the financial backing of a wealthy father (6), and an opportunity to learn “the shining secrets” of “Midas, Morgan and Mæcenas” in a legitimate brokerage house (7). He spends his evenings in Manhattan at the Yale Club, Anson Hunter’s favorite club. He likes to “walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd” (46), and he likes to think of New York as the very city of romantic readiness: “Over the great bridge with the sunlight through the girders making a constant flicker upon the moving cars, with the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of non-olfactory money. The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world” (54-55). “‘Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge,’” he tells himself, “‘anything at all. . .’” (55). He even finds a girl, Jordan Baker, who, though she is actually a Westerner, might be mistaken for a real New York rich girl, so closely connected is she in his mind with money: “For an instant while the sunset was warm upon her golden arms I thought that I loved her and I wanted money with a sudden physical pang” (The Great
Gatsby: A Facsimile of the Manuscript 123).

Nick is, as Donaldson points out in “The Trouble with Nick,” essentially a selfish snob. He tells the reader that he is “inclined to reserve all judgements” (5) but “he judges and condemns practically everyone he meets in the course of the novel” (“The Trouble with Nick” 132). Like Anson and Wolfshiem, he is discreet to a fault. “Decorum ranks extremely high on his scale of values—certainly higher than honesty” (“The Trouble with Nick” 134). In the end, though, Nick cares too much about others to stand by unmoved while people are shot and betrayed and run over. His “provincial squeamishness” (140) prevents him from spending the rest of the evening with Jordan, Daisy and Tom after Myrtle’s death. He knows in his heart that the party must eventually end:

“Won’t you come in, Nick?”
“No thanks.”
I was feeling a little sick and I wanted to be alone. But Jordan lingered for a moment more.
“It’s only half past nine,” she said.
I’d be damned if I’d go in; I’d had enough of all of them for one day... (111)

This is not to say that Nick is some kind of moral giant standing alone in the decadent East. He does, after all, help Gatsby to cuckold Tom. His time in New York makes something of a moralist out of him, though, and the man who is telling Gatsby’s story is a man who “wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever” when he “came back from the East last autumn” (5). Fitzgerald toyed with the idea of allowing Nick to at least think of himself as a New Yorker when he was writing his holograph draft of the novel, but he finally cancelled what would have been the key words: “‘Anything can happen here,” I thought exstaticly, “I’m a New Yorker. “Now that we’ve rolled over this bridge, and Anything can happen here--anything at all....’” (The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile of the Manuscript 77).

“Many critics,” says Lehan, “read Nick’s leaving the East for the West as a moral triumph on his part. But Nick’s ‘what’s the use’ attitude that he displays with Tom [“I
couldn’t forgive him or like him but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. . . . I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to. . . .” (139)] gives the impression of someone more beaten down by his experience than in moral control of it” (106). Nick’s decision to leave the East is certainly not “a moral triumph,” but it is the decision of a man possessed of enough social acumen to know when he does not “belong,” to know when he is not wanted. He is sophisticated and snobbish enough to be comfortable in the city, but he is just conscientious enough to be uncomfortable there too, so he goes back to what he calls “my middle-west” (137), the very thought of which he finds comforting.

As Westerners, Jordan, Daisy and Tom are all capable of caring for others, but they are all careless at heart and they all stay in the East when Nick goes home. Jordan liked or even loved Nick, at least in part because she thought he was not a careless person (48), but she takes his rather clumsy attempts to avoid her after Myrtle’s death as evidence of incipient meanness and carelessness. Thereafter, she goes out of her way to convince him of her lack of interest in him. “‘You threw me over on the telephone,’” she insists. “‘I don’t give a damn about you now but it was a new experience for me and I felt a little dizzy for a while’” (138). Jordan is so self-obsessed that it never occurs to her that Nick might have been unsettled by the events they both witnessed. She takes his behavior personally because she makes every situation into one which revolves around her. Jordan never seems particularly uncomfortable in New York, and one imagines that she will only be more comfortable there after she forgets about Nick and marries an Easterner.

Daisy, like her husband, is out of her element in New York. She “was popular in Chicago” (61) and was evidently hurt and angry when Tom’s indiscretions forced her to accompany him East. She was once capable of intense and genuine love. She loved Gatsby so much that she almost left Tom at the altar (60-61) and she took “‘unfathomable delight’” (61) in Tom when they were first married, but her husband’s infidelities seem to
have destroyed most of her emotional capabilities. She skitters back to Tom immediately upon perceiving Gatsby as a social liability who threatens her self-interest. Daisy is no different from most of Fitzgerald's other rich girls, meaning that she cannot separate love and money in her mind or her heart. Daisy is miserable in New York but one imagines that the combination of her husband and her own weaknesses will make her miserable wherever she goes. She will, perhaps, be able to stay in New York because, in Donaldson's words, adultery "is rather the expected thing among the idle rich" ("The Trouble with Nick" 134) and no one in East Egg or New York will probably care enough about Tom Buchanan's extra-marital affairs to go to all the trouble of hounding him out of the East. As for Tom himself, he tells Nick "And if you think I didn't have my share of suffering--look here, when I went to give up that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on the sideboard I sat down and cried like a baby. By God it was awful--" (139). One finds it difficult to have much sympathy for him, and cannot help wondering if he has found a new mistress yet. Tom is utterly self-centered and, though he will never be "popular" (101) or comfortable in New York, he will be able to do what he wants there and that will be more than enough to satisfy him.

Anson Hunter remains happy and comfortable in New York only so long as he does not care about anyone but himself. His Aunt Edna and Cary Sloane take "the desperate step" of telling Anson "the truth--" about their affair when he intimidates them, about "Robert Hunter's neglect, Edna's empty life, the casual dalliance that had flamed up into passion" (339). "But," says the story's narrator, "like so many true stories it had the misfortune of being old, and its enfeebled body beat helplessly against the armor of Anson's will" (339). Anson could not care less about other people or their problems. He always gets what he wants and what he wants always takes precedence over other people's needs and wants. When Anson does finally force Edna and Sloane to bend to his will he is elated and feels that all of New York is within his grasp:
It was almost four; there was a patient flow of cleansing water along the ghostly pavement of Fifth Avenue, and the shadows of two night women flitted over the façade of St. Thomas's church. Then the desolate shrubbery of Central Park where Anson had often played as a child, and the mounting numbers, significant as names, of the marching streets. This was his city, he thought, where his name had flourished through five generations. No change could alter the permanence of its place here, for change itself was the essential substratum by which he and those of his name identified themselves with the spirit of New York. Resourcefulness and a powerful will—for his threats in weaker hands would have been less than nothing—had beaten the gathering dust from his uncle’s name, from the name of his family. . . . (340-341)

Anson has reason to be impressed with himself. Armed with his will and the threat of financial and societal extinction he wields as a chosen son of New York society, he has single-handedly destroyed two lives in one night. But the city he has won in the process of destroying those lives is not a particularly appealing trophy. “Cleansing water” might flow along the pavements of Anson’s New York, but those pavements are ghostly, “material without being real,” and peopled by prostitutes. The churches of his city are dark and Central Park, the only remotely “fresh, green breast” left in this old new world, is “desolate.”

By section VII of his story Anson’s “chief concern [is] his own growing loneliness” (341). The satisfaction he takes in telling people what to do is waning as he gradually discovers that “resourcefulness and a powerful will” are of no comfort to a man when he is alone late at night. He is also distressed to find that genteel New York society’s influence in the city is eroding: “He still felt that there was a norm, a standard of society. But there was no norm, it was doubtful if there had ever been a true norm in New York. The few who still paid and fought to enter a particular set succeeded only to find that as a society it scarcely functioned—or, what was more alarming, that the Bohemia from which they had fled sat above them at table” (341).

One “hot Friday afternoon in May” the “last of Anson’s early and intimate friends” marries (342). Anson acts as best man but finds, after he sees the happy couple off at the
pier, that he has “for almost the first time in his life...nothing whatever to do” (343). The Yale Club and the city in general are “unpopulated” (342). Everyone, it seems, is either at a baseball game in New Haven or gone to the country for the weekend. Anson walks over to Fifth Avenue and happens to look up: “From the broad window of one of his clubs—one that he had scarcely visited in five years—a gray man with watery eyes stared down at him. Anson looked quickly away—that figure sitting in vacant resignation, in supercilious solitude, depressed him” (342). The New York of section VII of “The Rich Boy” was Fitzgerald’s last great depiction of the city he loved as a boy and mistrusted, loathed and still loved as a mature artist and a mature man. It is a city bereft of hope and possibilities and scattered throughout it are references to the New York of Fitzgerald’s early works, works in which New York was a city of limitless possibilities.

The scene in which Anson looks up into the window of his Fifth Avenue club recalls the scene near the end of This Side of Paradise in which Amory Blaine remembers seeing a young man looking down on Fifth Avenue from the window of his club (256). Amory remembers how well-dressed the man was and how he looked at his companion and made a comment with a look of disgust on face. Amory could not hear what the man was saying because he was out in the street and not a member of the club anyway, but he imagined that the man was probably saying “‘My God! Aren’t people horrible!’”. Amory Blaine, outsider, becomes Anson Hunter, club member, in the final pages of “The Rich Boy.” Anson, of course, has always been a member of the club, but as a lonely man of thirty he finds himself looking into that club from the street. The man who looks back at him, “a gray man with watery eyes,” has somehow found his way to Fifth Avenue from the valley of ashes, that combination of crematorium and dump where “ash-grey men swarm” (The Great Gatsby 21). Anson looks away, frightened and depressed, because he recognizes in the gray man his own lonely, supercilious self.

Anson calls on some friends and finds that they have left town without telling him. He
considers going to the country himself but decides against it. This is, after all, his town, and it is impossible for Anson to even imagine that he could ever be driven from it by loneliness. He goes to the Plaza, young F. Scott Fitzgerald’s favorite place in all of New York, and strikes up a conversation with the bartender who, interestingly enough, is named Nick. “What’s happened to everything?” asks the rich boy. “Dead,” replies Nick (343). Shaken, Anson leaves the Plaza and walks “toward the blood-red sun over Columbus Circle” (344). The sun that rose over Columbus Circle in “May Day” (135) is now setting over Columbus Circle in “The Rich Boy.”

Suddenly, desperate for company, Anson goes back to the Plaza, finds a telephone booth and calls “every one who might be in New York” (344). He calls the story’s narrator three times, girls he has not seen since he was in college and a host of friends who have left town for Connecticut. No one is home: “It was intolerable that he should pass the evening alone... There were always women of a sort, but the ones he knew had temporarily vanished, and to pass a New York evening in the hired company of a stranger never occurred to him—he would have considered that that was something shameful and secret, the diversion of a travelling salesman in a strange town” (344).

On his way out of the Plaza Anson sees Paula Hagerty, née Legendre, the woman who once shocked Anson by marrying another man after Anson decided to satisfy his pride by taking her love for granted and refusing to propose to her. His heart “turn[s] over” (345) when he sees that she is pregnant, content and deeply in love with her second husband. She takes his hands, and he sees “in the freedom of the gesture” that her memories of him have lost their poignancy (345). Paula is a happy woman with a wealthy husband and children while Anson is a lonely, prematurely old man with nothing to call his own but his pride and his deserted city.

Anson becomes depressed and distant after this incident and his Wall Street colleagues notice that he is acting “as a drag and a strain” on the firm (348), so they suggest that he
take a vacation. They are fond of Anson and they want him to be the jovial, confident man he once was. “If I go,” he tells them, “I won’t come back any more.”

“That’s absurd old man. You’ll be back in three months with all this depression gone. Fit as ever.”

“No... If I stop, I won’t go back to work. If I stop, that means I’ve given up—I’m through... If I go I’ll never come back.” (347-348)

When Anson finally does sail for Europe, the story’s narrator sails with him: “Three days before he sailed Paula Legendre Hagerty died in childbirth. I was with him a great deal then, for we were crossing together, but for the first time in our friendship he told me not a word of how he felt, nor did I see the slightest sign of emotion... Like his partners, I was amazed at the change in him, and I was glad when the Paris moved off into the wet space between the worlds, leaving his principality behind... We walked into the bar... After one cocktail a change came over him—he suddenly reached across and slapped my knee with the first joviality I had seen him exhibit in months” (348).

The Anson Hunter who leaves “his principality behind” is still the uncaring, emotionally sterile New Yorker he has been throughout the story, a man who is never happy “unless some one [is] in love with him” (349), but who is incapable of loving “some one” in return. Anson has been hurt, first by Paula’s happiness and again by her death, and has decided never to be hurt again. He will not betray his emotions, he will have a few drinks, and he will find some new girls, girls willing to “spend their brightest, freshest, rarest hours to nurse and protect that superiority he cherish[s] in his heart” (349). Ultimately, Anson will return to New York, for he is a careless man and New York is a city of “vast carelessness.”
VII: “So I never saw it before now.”

Fitzgerald stopped writing and rewriting his New York story after he finished “The Rich Boy” in the summer of 1925. Perhaps he felt that he had exhausted it, and he never again used New York as a setting for a novel or a major story. Europe and Hollywood were his favorite settings in the last fifteen years of his life and New York was relegated, for the most part, to the role of an old stand-by Fitzgerald could rely on when he needed a setting for a commercial story. Nevertheless, the city does appear sometimes in Fitzgerald’s post-1925 fiction, and when it does it is often the city of death Fitzgerald knew in the latter years of the boom:

By [1927] contemporaries of mine had begun to disappear into the dark maw of violence. A classmate killed his wife and himself on Long Island, another tumbled “accidently” from a skyscraper in Philadelphia, another purposely from a skyscraper in New York. One was killed in a speak-easy in Chicago; another was beaten to death in a speak-easy in New York and crawled home to the Princeton Club to die; still another had his skull crushed by a maniac’s axe in an insane asylum where he was confined. These are not catastrophes I went out of my way to look for—these were my friends; moreover, these things happened not during the depression but during the boom. (“Echoes of the Jazz Age” 20)

In Tender is the Night (1934), New York is explicitly associated with death:

“What’s this about Abe North? What about him? Is he in a jam?”
“Didn’t you read The Herald this morning?”
“No.”
“He’s dead. He was beaten to death in a speakeasy in New York. He just managed to crawl home to the Racquet Club to die—”
“Abe North?”
“Yes, sure, they—”
“Abe North?” Dick stood up. “Are you sure he’s dead?” (199)

Dick Diver returns to the United States for his father’s funeral and at first “the magnificent
facade of the homeland, the harbor of New York, seemed all sad and glorious to [him], but once ashore the feeling vanished, nor did he find it again in the streets or the hotels or the trains that bore him first to Buffalo, and then south to Virginia with his father’s body” (204).

In *The Last Tycoon* (1941), Monroe Stahr dies on his way to New York. Fitzgerald did not live to finish his last novel, but Edmund Wilson did his best to complete it by turning Fitzgerald’s notes into a skeletal narrative:

[Stahr] evidently fears Brady will murder him, for he now decides to resort to Brady’s own methods and get his partner murdered. For this he apparently goes straight to the gangsters. It is not clear how the murder is to be accomplished; but in order to be away at the time, Stahr arranges a trip to New York. . . . On the plane he has a reaction of disgust against the course he has taken; he realizes that he has let himself be degraded to the same plane of brutality as Brady. He decides to call off the murder and intends to wire orders as soon as the plane descends at the next airport. But the plane has an accident and crashes before they reach the next stop. Stahr is killed, and the murder goes through. (The Last Tycoon 132)

Fitzgerald did not, however, forget that the New York that was “bloated, glutted, stupid with cake and circuses” (“My Lost City” 31) in the late 1920s and 1930s had once, at least in his mind, been a gorgeous white city full of light and promise. In the Basil Duke Lee stories, written in 1928 and 1929, he returned to the magnificent city he had known and imagined as a student at Newman School: “Outside his window the autumn dusk was split with shafts of lights from passing cars. In these cars were great football players and lovely débutantes, mysterious adventuresses and international spies—rich, gay, glamorous people moving toward brilliant encounters in New York, at fashionable dances and secret cafés, or on roof gardens under the autumn moon” (“The Perfect Life” 125).

“Early dark of a December afternoon in 1929,” he wrote in his Notebooks. “Lower New York and all the great blocks still gleaming with light, and after five going out row by row but with many tiers still gleaming out into the crisp dusk” (no. 1763). He even offered a
version of his New York story to Hunt Stromberg, a movie producer at MGM, in 1938:

Let us suppose that you were a rich boy brought up in the palaces of Fifth Avenue.
Let us suppose that--and I was a poor boy born on Ellis Island.
Let us suppose that's the way it was--you a rich boy--me a poor boy, get me?
Well, now, me the poor boy has done a bad thing and I am going to tell you, a rich boy, how it happened, and I am going to say to you: "Picture yourself in my place." (Correspondence 497)

In the last two years of his life Fitzgerald sketched two characters, Louis Trimble, the protagonist of "The Lost Decade" (1939), and Raymond Torrence, the protagonist of "The Woman from Twenty-One" (1940). Neither Trimble nor Torrence is fully realized, but both are older, wiser, sober men, and they come to New York unburdened by the illusions cherished by the young Amory Blaine. Trimble, an architect who once knew New York better than anyone (Short Stories 748), comes to the city after having "been away a long time" (747). Orrison Brown, a young man just out of college shows him around:

"From here you get a good candid focus on Rockefeller Center," he pointed out with spirit "--and the Chrysler Building and the Armistead Building, the daddy of all the new ones."
"Yes--I designed it. . . .But I was taken drunk that year--every-which-way-drunk. So I never saw it before now."
"Oh," Orrison hesitated. "Like to go in now?"
"I've been in it--lots of times. But I've never seen it. And now it isn't what I want to see. . . . "Jesus," [Orrison] said to himself. "Drunk for ten years."
He felt suddenly of the texture of his own coat and then he reached out and pressed his thumb against the granite of the building by his side. (749-750)

Fitzgerald never really "saw" New York, saw it stripped of its romance and its pretensions, until he came home from Europe after the stock market crash of 1929:

From the ruins, lonely and inexplicable as the sphinx, rose the Empire State Building and, just as it had been a tradition of mine to climb to the Plaza Roof to take leave of the beautiful city. . . . so now I went to the roof of the last and most magnificent of towers. Then I understood--everything was explained: I had discovered the crowning error of the city, its Pandora's box. Full of vaunting pride the New Yorker had climbed here and seen with dismay what he had never suspected, that the city was
not the endless succession of canyons that he had supposed but that *it had limits*. 

...he saw for the first time that it faded out into the country on all sides, into an expanse of green and blue that alone was limitless. And with the awful realization that New York was a city after all and not a universe, the whole shining edifice that he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground. ("My Lost City" 32)

Perhaps Fitzgerald, a writer who specialized in lost dreams and loves, finally felt at home in New York when he realized that the city’s boom was over, that it had awakened from its dream of perpetual prosperity and endless good times. Perhaps he woke up in the Plaza with Zelda by his side one morning and felt, if only for a few hours, the mixture of elation and contentment Raymond Torrence feels in the opening scene of "The Woman from Twenty-One": "Ah, what a day for Raymond Torrence! Once you knew that your roots were safely planted outside megalopolitanism what fun it was to come back--every five years. He and Elizabeth woke up to the frozen music of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street, and first thing went down to his publishers on Fifth Avenue. Elizabeth . . . liked it best of all there because her husband's book was on multiple display in the window. She liked it in the store where she squeezed Ray's hand tensely when people asked for it, and again when they bought it" (The Price Was High 782).

When Fitzgerald died, *The New Yorker*, fittingly enough, noted his passing: "He undoubtedly said and did a great many wild and childish things and he turned out one or two rather foolish books; he also wrote, however, one of the most scrupulously observed and beautifully written of American novels. It was called, of course, *The Great Gatsby*. If Jay Gatsby was no more than could be expected of Amory Blaine, Manhattan Island has never quite come up to Peter Stuyvesant's early dreams" (The Romantic Egoists 232; In His Own Time 474). Like Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald saw "that the pursuit of money is a substitute for love" (Lewis 51), and he imagined that he would find all of the love and money he wanted in New York. Fitzgerald’s dream of New York was "a little false," a little banal and never very firmly rooted in reality, and when he finally arrived in New
York, after years of dreaming of it in the middle-west, the city he had imagined
disappeared before his eyes. But in trying to “repeat the past,” in trying to evoke on paper
the glory of the city he had known his mind, Fitzgerald created the magnificent New Yorks
of his stories and novels. Now his readers stand and stare, transfixed by the beauty and
the horror of Fitzgerald’s lost city.
Postscript

In 1935 William Carlos Williams wrote a poem he called “Perpetuum Mobile: The City,” the first thirty lines of which might be read out as a eulogy for Fitzgerald’s lost New York. “Perpetuum Mobile: The City,” believes Paul Mariani, is “really about the dream . . . symbolized by New York: a dream of love and fame, the brilliant but illusory cosmopolis, the white flower shimmering in the east from Rutherford” (William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked 383):

— a dream
we dreamed
   each
separately
   we two

of love
   and of
desire—

that fused
in the night—

in the distance
   over
the meadows
   by day
impossible—
   The city
disappeared
   when
we arrived—

   A dream
a little false
toward which
now
we stand
   and stare
transfixed—
All at once
    in the east
rising!

All white! (The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: Volume I, 1909-1939 430)
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VITA

Kris Robert Murphy


In August 1993, the author entered the Catholic University of America's Columbus School of Law.