

THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE: SATIRE IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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DEFINING the art of Fitzgerald in *The Far Side of Paradise*, Arthur Mizener calls attention to "an important insight for an understanding of Fitzgerald the talented novelist." He says: "His [Fitzgerald's] nature was divided. Partly he was an enthusiastic, romantic young man. Partly he was what he called himself in the 'General Plan' for *Tender Is the Night*, 'a spoiled priest.'¹ Fitzgerald himself wrote to his daughter about a year before he died: "Sometimes I wish I had gone along with [Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hart and that gang], but I guess I am too much a moralist at heart, and really want to preach at people in some acceptable form, rather than to entertain."² Four decades after the age which he labelled "The Jazz Age," Fitzgerald can probably be enjoyed best and his stature and dimensions as a writer be defined with justice if we look at his works in terms of his criticism of his age.

A writer who expects to live beyond his age and be read by the future with both seriousness and delight must be able to give a sense of having captured the totality of his world in particular moments, individuals, and places with their distinctive sounds and gestures. If Fitzgerald thrives today more securely than he did at the time of his death, it is because he succeeded in capturing in his works and in his life the distinctive spirit of his age. Neither his life nor his performance was consistently distinguished, but probably his vision of his age in his works is more honest and moving than that of any of his contemporaries because he saw and remembered with more compassion. There is a "deeply felt quality" in all his works which creates in readers an awareness of his world not only in terms of its "hum and buzz" but also its heartbeat. His characters are "hauntingly and embarrassingly real,"³ and if we feel that they are "exas-

¹ Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise* (New York, 1959), p. 65.

² Mizener, p. 67.

³ Mizener, p. 116.

perating poseurs" (*The Times Literary Supplement*, June 23, 1921) or phonies as we would say today, we accept them nevertheless because they are real phonies" like Truman Capote's Holly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. No matter how immature or melodramatic his major characters are they all live and never fail to attain an intimacy with our intense experiences whether remembered or imagined. This intimate reality of his characters is probably the result of Fitzgerald's writing out of his immediate experiences. No American writer of this century was probably more involved in his characters than he was, and it is a wonder how he succeeded in creating individuals in spite of his apparent and acknowledged lack of distance from his characters. "You've got to sell your heart," he wrote Frances Turnbull on November 9, 1938, ". . . In 'This Side of Paradise' I wrote about a love affair that was still bleeding as fresh as the skin wound on a haemophile."⁴

His criticism therefore of his world with tenderness and compassion beyond that of any other writer after 1914 gives Fitzgerald a unique satirical voice in contemporary American literature and marks the brilliant verisimilitude of his style. That he was a romantic in the peculiarly American sense and tradition of romantic can be easily discerned,⁵ but that he was an important critic of his age is often not realized and therefore should be made more evident. As J. B. Priestley observes in his introduction to *The Bodley Head Scott Fitzgerald*: ". . . his unique talent is very difficult to describe, classify, assess. As so many good American critics have proved to us, Fitzgerald's an elusive subject for just criticism. Too many things, including his own legend, get in the way. . . . But in truth all his best writing is about something else, something a long way removed from his legend and popular reputation: it is about 'wanting better bread than can be made out of wheat' and then finding each loaf rotten with decay, about the corruption beneath the glittering surface, about the soul of man in a society bent on dissolution."⁶

The glittering surface of the world of the rich is Fitzgerald's major theme and object of satire from *This Side of Paradise* to

⁴ Mizener, p. 68.

⁵ Richard Chase in his *The American Novel and Its Tradition* gives special attention to *The Great Gatsby* as a notable book in the American tradition of romance and pastoral in American novels. We might add that all of Fitzgerald's novels have the romantic quality in them.

⁶ J. B. Priestley, introduction to *The Bodley Head Scott Fitzgerald* (London, 1932), pp. 10, 13-14.

The Last Tycoon. It is his territory as Oxford, Mississippi is Faulkner's. He peopled his territory with characters from real life as Faulkner did and located them with an "acute sense of time and place."⁷ While Faulkner portrayed the decay of the old South, he portrayed the faults and frivolities of the rich and the aspirers after or pretenders to riches. Faulkner however achieved his purpose in involved and obviously mannered prose while Fitzgerald achieved his with a simple, scintillating language very complementary to the concept of the world he sought to dissect and understand. Yet while Faulkner's most memorable characters brood in timeless tides of consciousness and speak with oracular wisdom as they move "with movements and knowledge older than themselves,"⁸ Fitzgerald's representative characters seem to be strictly Ivy leaguers incapable of existing without having gone to Princeton or Paris, the Riviera and Hollywood, and always remind us in their thoughts, speeches, and songs of a world with the "strains of 'Charleston' in the background."⁹ In spite of this initial impression of being dated, the works of Fitzgerald as a whole and on second reading achieve a criticism of life which, as Max Perkins probably would have said it, "should not belong to any particular time, but to all time . . . (they) transcended what (Fitzgerald) called the Jazz Age, and many people did not realize this because of the very success with which he wrote of it."¹⁰

The source of Fitzgerald's strength in transcending the age which he wrote about with success is the spirit of satire and comedy that informs all his works. It was the spoiled priest in him and not the romantic young man that gave his works roots in great literature and vitality to survive the songs and clichés of his age. If half a million readers fell in love with *This Side of Paradise* when it appeared,¹¹ it was mainly because probably it was the best satirical novel on the younger generation in America since Mark Twain. *Main Street* which appeared in the same year (1920) is a more artistic novel, more complete in its satire, but comparatively sluggish. *This Side of Paradise* still charms readers today because of its delightful

⁷ Priestley, p. 14.

⁸ The quotation is from Faulkner's "The Bear."

⁹ Frances Fitzgerald Lanahan, introduction to *F. Scott Fitzgerald, Six Tales of the Jazz Age and Other Stories* (New York, 1952), p. 9.

¹⁰ Lanahan, p. 11.

¹¹ John O'Hara, introduction to *The Portable F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1949), p. vii.

criticism of the young in love and in college in eastern America during the first quarter of this century. The other novels of Fitzgerald, no matter how seriously he took himself and his craft while he envisioned them, contain comic characters, scenes, and situations which add dimension and life to the totality of each work. *The Beautiful and Damned* glitters with some of the wittiest dissections of a "literary man" in an obviously literary manner, in spite of its failure to achieve its avowed purpose of revealing "with devastating satire a section of American society which has never been recognized as an entity—that wealthy, floating population which throngs the restaurants, cabarets, theaters, and hotels of our great cities."¹² *The Great Gatsby*, aside from its compelling and controlled comment on a way of life that was truly a great dream, is rich in satirical descriptions of the people and vices of a society which makes possible such a romantic as Gatsby with his gaudy and essentially vulgar dream. *Tender Is the Night* may give the impression of sustained seriousness lacking in Fitzgerald's earlier works, but it also has sharp if brief pictures of denizens of Paris night life (especially the expatriates) and of mental patients and their parents—all of whom give the novel a roundness in tone and feeling which it lacks in point of view. In the finished parts of *The Last Tycoon* Fitzgerald achieved his best balance in tone and language, an achievement shaped in large measure by the expression of his satire in two dimensions. In it he satirized in both the level of representative reality, seen in the descriptions of characters who live and have their being in Hollywood, and the level of symbolic reality portrayed in the relationships among the characters because of Hollywood—relationships which echo the bases of human tragedies in all forms of empire building. Probably it was his seriousness of purpose, his belief in himself and his craft which made Fitzgerald write of his life and the people he knew as if he wanted to say, "This is fun, so what?" or "This kind of life could be great, it makes one live to the hilt, but it inevitably leads to a crack up." Beneath the captivating brilliance of his works which never fail to entertain us because of the precision with which he captured the nuances of loving and wanting to be loved and of the suffering involved in the process there is a conscience that makes us look and learn after we laugh.

Fitzgerald acknowledged the influence of Compton Mackenzie

¹² Mizener, pp. 152-153.

¹³ Mizener, pp. 107-108.

and Wells and Tarkington in *This Side of Paradise*.¹³ But we can go back as far as Fielding and the sentimental novelists and find roots of his comic methods, attitude, and vision in their works. This is not to claim that he actually read and was influenced by them. Probabilities in such a conjecture are less important than the fact that he possessed and used skillfully the weapons of satire which never change even if they vary in material and form. To relate Fitzgerald to Fielding may sound strained if not risky. But as in Fielding, one of the springs of Fitzgerald's comedy, especially in his early works, is "affectation" which according to Fielding proceeds from vanity or hypocrisy. "From the discovery of this affectation arises the ridiculous, which always strikes the reader with surprise and pleasure."¹⁴ Amory, Beatrice Blaine, Isabelle, and Eleanor in *This Side of Paradise* amuse us with their "affectation" even as we see in them a criticism of life.

Aside from affectation, however, the satire of Fitzgerald had other springs and expressed itself in various forms like invective, irony, parody, and travesty. He can also caricature with a line or burlesque with a few well-turned phrases and metaphors, and when necessary, he could employ melodrama with devastating effect. (It is in melodrama however where he also fails most often as an artist—failing in it by abundance.) In at least one instance, in "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," he raised his satire to almost the proportions of a myth.

A pleasant passage to begin a consideration of satire in Fitzgerald's works is the first two paragraphs of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*:

Amory Blaine inherited from his mother every trait except the stray inexpressible few that made him worthwhile. His father, an ineffectual, inarticulate man with a taste for Byron and a habit of drowsing over the *Encyclopedia Britannica* grew wealthy at thirty through the death of two elder brothers, successful Chicago brokers, and in the first flush of feeling that the world was his, went to Bar Harbor and met Beatrice O'Hara. In consequence, Stephen Blaine handed down to posterity his height of just under six feet and his tendency to waver at crucial moments, these two abstractions appearing in his son Amory. For many years he hovered in the background of his family's life, an unassertive figure with a face half-obliterated by lifeless, silky hair, continually occupied in "taking care" of his wife, continually harassed by the idea that he didn't and couldn't understand her.

But Beatrice Blaine! There was a woman! Early pictures taken on her

¹⁴ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (New York, 1948), pp. xxi-xxii.

father's estate at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, or in Rome at the Sacred Heart Convent—an educational extravagance that in her youth was only for the daughters of the exceptionally wealthy—showed the exquisite delicacy of her features, the consummate art and simplicity of her clothes. A brilliant education she had—her youth passed in renaissance glory, she was versed in the latest gossip of the Older Roman Families; known by name as a fabulously wealthy American girl to Cardinal Vitori and Queen Margherita and more subtle celebrities that one must have had some culture even to have heard of. She learned in England to prefer whisky and soda to wine, and her small talk was broadened in two senses during a winter in Vienna. All in all Beatrice O'Hara absorbed the sort of education that will be quite impossible ever again; a tutelage measured by the number of things and people one could be contemptuous of and charming about; a culture rich in all arts and traditions, barren of all ideas....¹⁵

Beginning with direct ridicule in a tone of sophisticated boredom consistent with his satiric intention, Fitzgerald introduces his hero and gives his family history and cultural heritage. After a quite obvious caricature of the father by both direct and indirect invective, he rises to irony as he shifts to Beatrice Blaine, the mother. This shift to irony, a more subtle and deadly satiric device, prepares us in a way for the major role which Beatrice plays in the novel and in her son's life. Stephen, "the ineffectual, inarticulate man with a taste for Byron and a habit of drowsing over the *Encyclopedia Britannica*," is battered into shape with the club of less artistic satire—invective. Badly bruised at the start, he is left to bleed his ineffectual life away while his protagonist son and "brilliantly educated" wife move on into a life of the rich, full of confusion, deception, and emptiness, acquiring whatever natural growth comes after the pains and blunders and disenchantments of youth as well as the exaggerated fears of useless middle age.

Fitzgerald does not have a memorable travesty that can compare with Hemingway's travesty of The Lord's Prayer in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place," a stroke of genius indeed in the latter artist. But in *This Side of Paradise* he has a number of attempts at travesty especially in his verse interludes, like Amory's poem on the Victorians which is a travesty of Swinburne¹⁶ and the couplets before that poem which are travesties of Tennyson. I have a suspicion that Monsignor Darcy's "A Lament for a Foster Son, and He going to the War Against the King of Foreign"¹⁷ is a take-off on Mac-

¹⁵ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise* (New York, 1920), pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁷ Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, pp. 173-174.

pherson's *Ossian*, and Amory's poem on his going off to war is a parody of some Georgian war poets.¹⁸ But whether it be form or content that Fitzgerald ridicules, he succeeds with ease and delight. We might even say that all of *This Side of Paradise* is an exercise in various forms of satire and Amory Blaine its hero a splendid achievement in caricature narrowly escaping from being a grotesque because of our knowing him not only in terms of externals but also in terms of his inner life.

It is in characterization therefore where the satiric gift of Fitzgerald rises to its best in *This Side of Paradise*. The following passage, for instance, shows double characterization in the best satiric tradition. While telling about Amory's growing pains and peccadillos, Fitzgerald also characterizes Beatrice with trenchant satire:

She fed him sections of the "Fetes Galantes" before he was ten; at eleven he could talk glibly, if rather reminiscently, of Brahms and Mozart and Beethoven. One afternoon, when left alone in the hotel at Hot Springs, he sampled his mother's apricot cordial, and as the taste pleased him, he became quite tipsy. This was fun for a while, but he essayed a cigarette in his exaltation, and succumbed to a vulgar, plebian reaction. Though this incident horrified Beatrice, it also secretly amused her and became part of what in a later generation would have been termed her "line."

"This son of mine," he heard her tell a room full of awe-struck, admiring women one day, "is entirely sophisticated and quite charming—but delicate—we're all delicate; *here*, you know." Her hand was radiantly outlined against her beautiful bosom; then sinking her voice to a whisper, she told them of the apricot cordial. They rejoiced, for she was a brave raconteur, but many were the keys turned in sideboard locks that night against the possible defection of little Bobby or Barbara....¹⁹

As Fitzgerald draws his characters and holds them up to ridicule, however, we sense that beneath the smile (often turning into a sneer) that he wears as he writes he has the greatest sympathy for his characters. This sympathy makes his characters live. It makes them attain life and breath, dream our dreams, and suffer our defeats and pains. And if Amory, Son of Beatrice, lives and grows in our consciousness as we read, grows from a caricature into a fellow human being with wounds and scars of living and becoming, it is because Fitzgerald had the capacity to love his characters first of all, to feel and to love them deeply, and when he laughed at them it was with the clearest understanding. When Amory cries defiant-

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, p. 174.

¹⁹ Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, pp. 5-6.

ly at the "Crystalline, radiant sky" at the end: "I know myself . . . but that is all," we feel that we too have known him, and as Clifton Fadiman said of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, "that rare miracle of fiction has again come to pass: a human being has been created out of ink, paper, and the imagination."²⁰ Amory Blaine and Holden Caulfield are basically the offsprings of similar bewilderments and environments. They both are indictments of the milieu that creates and confuses them. In both, the satiric attitude, the essence of which is style and idiom, generate that sense of life which comes from a cry of protest and despair.

Aside from characterizing in the satiric vein through direct description, Fitzgerald is often at his satiric best in dialogue. The following passage etching Isabelle and Amory with the acid diction of young people playing adults by talking "smart" is a brilliant piece of dialogue:

(. . . ROSALIND finished her hair and rises, humming. She goes up to the mirror and starts to dance in front of it on the soft carpet, she watches not her feet, but her eyes—never casually but always intently, even when she smiles. The door suddenly opens and then slams behind AMORY, very cool and handsome as usual. He melts into instant confusion.)

HE: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought—

SHE: (Smiling radiantly) Oh, you're Amory Blaine, aren't you?

HE: (Regarding her closely) And you're Rosalind?

SHE: I'm going to call you Amory—oh, come in—it's all right—mother'll be right in—(under her breath) unfortunately.

HE: (Gazing around) This is sort of a new wrinkle for me.

SHE: This is No Man's Land.

HE: This is where you— you— (pause)

SHE: Yes—all those things. (She crosses to the bureau.) See, here's my rouge—eye pencils.

HE: I didn't know you were that way.

SHE: What did you expect?

HE: I thought you'd be sort of—sort of—sexless, you know, swim and play golf.

SHE: Oh, I do—but not in business hours.

HE: Business?

SHE: Six to two—strictly.

HE: I'd like to have some stock in the corporation.

SHE: Oh, it's not a corporation—it's just "Rosalind Unlimited." Fifty-

²⁰ Clifton Fadiman, from the blurb on the dust jacket of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (New York, 1951).

one shares, name, goodwill, and everything goes at \$25,000 a year.

HE: (Disapprovingly) Sort of a chilly proposition.

SHE: Well, Amory, you don't mind—do you? When I meet a man that doesn't bore me to death after two weeks, perhaps it'll be different.

HE: Odd, you have the same point of view on men that I have on women.

SHE: I'm not really feminine, you know—in my mind.²¹

One of the talents of Fitzgerald is picturesque description of character with startling metaphors that invariably ring with satire. Maury Noble in *The Beautiful and Damned* is introduced to us with devastating diminution as follows:

Maury Noble is like nothing so much as a large slender and imposing cat. His eyes are narrow and full of incessant, protracted blinks. His hair is smooth and flat, as though it had been licked by a possible—and, if so, Herculean—mother-cat. During Anthony's time at Harvard he had been considered the most unique figure in his class, the most brilliant, the most original—smart, quiet and among the saved. . . . Maury Noble behind that fine and absurdly catlike face is all but purring. . . .²²

Fitzgerald has a penchant for epigrammatic pictures of prematurely decayed women ("She was a faded but still lovely woman of twenty-seven"²³) and ineffectual husbands whose greatest tragedies are the infidelities of their insatiable wives like Mrs. Wilson in this scene from *The Great Gatsby*:

His voice faded off and Tom glanced impatiently around the garage. Then I heard footsteps on a stairs, and in a moment the thickish figure of a woman blocked out the light from the office door. She was in her middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her surplus flesh sensuously as some women can. Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crepe-dechine, contained no facet or gleam of beauty, but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smoldering. She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye. Then she wet her lips, and without turning around spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice:

"Get some chairs, why don't you, so somebody can sit down."

"Oh, sure," agreed Wilson hurriedly, and went toward the little office mingling immediately with the cement color of the walls. A white ash dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity—except his wife, who moved close to Tom.²⁴

²¹ Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, pp. 186-187.

²² *The Bodley Head Scott Fitzgerald*, Vol. 4, p. 25.

²³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack Up*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York, 1945), p. 88.

²⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York, 1953), pp. 25-26.

The epigram could be a very effective weapon in the arsenal of satire. Fitzgerald does not indulge in epigram for its own sake in his novels, but in his notebooks he does, as if he hoped or enticed people to quote him. Many of his individual sentences in his novels and short stories can be quoted easily for their terse and pungent wit and imagery. As we can see in his revisions of his novels and in his notes for *The Last Tycoon*, he labored hard over the image and flavor and sound of his sentences. He worked on his prose like a careful poet which he was in a very real sense. (He himself declared that "the talent that matures early is usually of the poetic [type], which mine was in large part."²⁵) He first started out as a poet and went into the short story, the play, and then the novel only afterwards. It was the poet in him that took care to make each chapter, episode, or even sentence or word²⁶ ring original and true. He might have been careless in his spelling, punctuation, and grammar but he certainly was a careful craftsman in the sound and image of his sentences. His notebooks give us a glimpse of his passion for collecting and polishing sentences, sentences that were his own and which occurred to him at odd moments. These he preserved in his notebooks for their own individual sakes or to be used later on in his novels and stories. If we try to note the individual sentences in his notebooks that ring with satire as they capture a face, a moment, a feeling, a situation, or an idea, we will find out that the satiric sentences are more in number than any other kind of sentence. C. E. Vulliamy in *The Anatomy of Satire* contends that "the primary intentions of satire are purely descriptive." If we accept this statement, we can say that such intentions are always present in Fitzgerald's satire of manners and men, whether in a sentence or a whole novel. The following excerpts from his notebooks give an idea of the satirical voice in his epigrammatic sentences:

(From Epigrams, Wisecracks and Jokes)

"Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy."

"Optimism is the content of small men in high places."

²⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Crack Up*, p. 305.

²⁶ In his introduction to *Tender Is the Night* in *The Modern Standard Authors* edition of Fitzgerald's works, Malcolm Cowley tells about how Fitzgerald wrote to Bennett Cerf about a new arrangement for the novel and other minor changes in it, for according to Fitzgerald, "sometimes by a single word change one can throw a new emphasis or give a new value to the exact same setting or scene."

"Debut: the first time a young girl is seen drunk in public."

(From Descriptions of Girls)

"Her body was so assertively adequate that someone remarked that she always looked as if she had nothing on underneath her dress. . . ."

". . . They talked from their hearts—with the half truths and evasions peculiar to that organ, which has never been famed as an instrument of precision."

"Women having only one role—their own charm—all the rest is mimicry."

"Men get to be a mixture of the charming mannerism of the women they have known."

Melodrama is one of the major weaknesses of Fitzgerald's works, especially in *This Side of Paradise*. Sometimes it seems as if he could not resist piling on dialogue or action to crush his character to a ridiculous ooze. Often he gives us the impression that he loves doing so like "certain racehorses run for the pure joy of running."²⁷ Amory no matter how convincingly human he finally becomes gluts our palates with his abundant, intense, indeed exhausting performances. The novel itself of which he is the hero finally gives us the feeling that its melodramatic episodes could stand a good deal of pruning. But perhaps Fitzgerald wanted to achieve the effervescence of youth in the profusion of melodramatic episodes in the novel. If that were his intention, he certainly succeeded in producing what he wanted—an adolescent book on adolescence.

The Great Gatsby is more adult in spite of its hero's teen-age idealism. The melodrama in it is more controlled and selected and therefore more successful. Gatsby still walks about as if he were an Amory. He has shaved more, and has been nicked more, but he still is an Amory who always seems to be conscious of people's eyes on him. Sometimes eyes may make him a bit uncomfortable, like the disconcerting eyes of Daisy. Most of the time, however, he struts about as if the world were his stage and it has always a spotlight focused on him. All the scenes where he appears or plans to appear seem to be neatly plotted and controlled by him. When unpredictable circumstances occur, he suffers from stage fright; finally he makes his exit because of the unforeseen entry of a murderous madman into the scene. Nevertheless Gatsby is more mature in his melodrama than Amory and the book as a whole is quite effectively

²⁷ Paul Rosenfield in "F. Scott Fitzgerald," *The Crack Up*, p. 307.

subdued in dramatic enthusiasm because of its rendition through an objective central intelligence.

Tender Is the Night, the novel which Fitzgerald intended to be the best novel of his time²⁸ is not melodramatic and can probably be appreciated more if we think of it as Fitzgerald's noblest and most deeply felt satire. If people did not receive it as they received *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*²⁹ the reason was probably because they did not see in it the flamboyant satirical tone and style of the former and the detached ridicule of idealism and wealth in the latter. But *Tender Is the Night* is Fitzgerald's greatest work and his best satire because it has the greatest compassion for its characters and is the most convincing in its portrayal of life among his novels. The decay of Dick Diver from a young man with the promise of a destiny "like Grant at Galena" to a shiftless, ineffectual husband and alcoholic is one of the most tragic comments on life in American literature. Its tragic roots may be in the Jazz Age but the sour fruit that is its criticism of talent prostituted to wealth and wild parties in the Rivas of life—such fruit is edible for all time. Not *Gatsby*, nor *Stahr*, nor *Amory*, but Dick Diver approaches most closely the dimensions of the classic tragic hero. If he does not attain the proportions of a tragic hero, it is not difficult to see Dick Diver as another *l'homme moyen sensuel*, an ordinary, weak man who "though he did not always act rightly, yet he never did otherwise without feeling and suffering for it," a man who "though his heart is in the right place, his instincts are not always in his control."³⁰

The motley crowd around Dick and Nicole Diver is a caricature of expatriate Americans in the Mediterranean in the 1920's and even today. Expatriates who flock to the sun and the holiday glow of Italian seascapes and landscapes bent only on the pursuit of experiences that titter on the brink of the unconventional or affairs that would be damning back home but exciting and "harmless" in the anonymity of the foreign setting. Most of them are artists newly arrived or drawing on bankrupt reputations, all seeking for "material" and the "proper mood," the inspiration that may come either in the frenzy of illicit loves, the limbo of drink, or the painful awakenings to life's truths after dissipation and regrets. McKisco,

²⁸ Malcolm Cowley brings out this intention of Fitzgerald in the introduction mentioned in Footnote 26.

²⁹ Mizener, p. 275.

³⁰ Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (New York, 1958), p. 54.

no matter after whom he was patterned in Fitzgerald's life, is a fine caricature of a writer with a meteoric past but is suffering from cramps at the moment (at least at the beginning of Rosemary episode). Abe North is a memorable satiric achievement with his "controlled despair and self-destruction. . . which forms a quiet anticipatory parallel to Dick Diver's destruction."³¹ Tommy Barban whose roundness is in one note is an engaging prototype of the man whose achievements and best offerings can come only from his physical powers and attributes. The minor women characters are caricatures of the predatory, title-seeking or even just soft-bed-seeking females and of women whose existencies depend only on the personalities or achievements of their husbands, women who sap their husband's vitalities with their mediocrity, their gossip, and their possessiveness. Offsprings of these expatriates can be seen today in the more recent works of Tennessee Williams (*The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*) and Irwin Shaw (*Two Weeks in Another Town*) where they are more opulent and daring, hence more intense and vulgar in their lust for life.

The Last Tycoon, after the high seriousness and more diminished melodrama of *Tender Is the Night*, is probably the most un-melodramatic in over-all tone and rendering. This statement may sound false, especially because of the setting and characters in it which is Hollywood and movie people. Yet it is precisely the atmosphere of the setting and the preconceived ideas we have of the characters in such an atmosphere that make us accept melodrama in the novel as the norm. Even the earthquake fails to jolt us to a melodramatic plane. After all, natural calamities are expected to be rather strange and unpredictable. And certainly a flood that comes after an earthquake and carries away a Hollywood idol with two women on it, floating down the current of "an impromptu river," is not very spectacular compared to other Hollywood extravaganzas. Neither can it be really melodramatic satire because it is not intended to be so in its context. Both the earthquake and the flood are intended to advance the action of the novel, not to satirize any character or idea. The only truly melodramatic scene in *The Last Tycoon*, as Fitzgerald has left it, is that where Cecilia discovers Birdy Peters, her father's secretary, stark naked in a closet of her father's office. The scene is satirical melodrama because it comments on the dege-

³¹ Mizener, p. 265.

nerate and confused life of Hollywood tycoons which is the main theme of the novel.

Upon further consideration therefore, *This Side of Paradise*, even if it shows Fitzgerald as failing sometimes in his use of melodrama because of excess of it, is paradoxically the same novel where he uses melodrama most effectively as a weapon for satire. All Fitzgerald novels because of their preoccupation with the rich are generally more melodramatic than those of his contemporaries. But it is only he who has succeeded because of and in spite of his melodramatic quality. What to others was a curse became almost a blessing to him, and *This Side of Paradise* illustrates his rare success in handling that capricious daughter of satire—melodrama.

The greatest satirists, like Rabelais, Voltaire, and Swift used fantasy to communicate their best and most universal and enduring satire. Fitzgerald in "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" used fantasy to express his major theme—his awe as well as his criticism of the rich and riches. The story is successful as a story but a failure as satire in the level of fantasy. It shows quite pointedly that Fitzgerald was not primarily a satirist but a story teller. He tried his best to be the spoiled priest, but the romantic young man in him refused to kneel before he went to sleep after a great dream. "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" fails as satire because the symbolic elements in it are confused and not realized. The twelve men of Fish, very promising as symbolic vehicles at the beginning of the story are completely forgotten after their meaningless observation of the hero on his way to diamondland. Other elements in the story—the characters and their names, the town, Hades, and the school, St. Midas, the imprisoned pilots, the destruction of the diamond mountain, the diamond mountain itself—these do not attain the symbolic dimensions they promise. And since satire rendered through fantasy succeeds only if it attains symbolic dimensions, the failure of these elements to grow into symbols makes the story fail as satire in its genre.

We do not quarrel with a writer who entertains us with a story on a fantastic level if he wants to do so; we question his performance however when he makes it obvious that he wants to preach at the same time and then fails to establish meaningful correspondences between his entertaining and his preaching. At the end of the story, Fitzgerald probably realized that he got so carried away by his fantasy that he forgot to say what he wanted to say. He therefore states

neatly through John what he wants to preach: "There are only diamonds in the whole world, diamonds and perhaps the shabby gift of disillusion." In spite of the failure of the story as satire, it contains some of the most memorable scenes in Fitzgerald, such as the bribing of God with a huge diamond by Braddock Washington and the final scene of John, Kismine, and Jasmine, falling off to sleep, penniless and cold with nothing but "the shabby gift of disillusion". If the story is a failure as satire, it is nevertheless a magnificent failure.

In his other stories, Fitzgerald's satire exposes a wide variety of human failings. The objects of his satire in the stories included in *Flappers and Philosophers*, *Tales of the Jazz Age*, *All the Sad Young Men*, and *Taps at Reveille* range from southern provincialism and eastern smugness ("The Ice Palace") to expatriate irresponsibility and dissolution ("Babylon Revisited"), from misdirected mob idealism and individual self-destruction through libidinous indulgences ("May Day") to the prostitution of talent in Hollywood ("Crazy Sunday"). No matter how many facets his satire in his short stories may have, they mirror most often and most sharply the affectations and predicaments of the rich whom he tried to copy and rebuke most passionately. His middle-class stories, however, usually succeed better than those he wrote about the rich. As John O'Hara said, "Actually most of [Fitzgerald's] work was about the middle class, your family and mine."³² So easily does the legend of Fitzgerald's being the "official chronicler" of the rich predetermine our critical expectations that we often forget he wrote more convincingly about "your family and mine" and with the superior and detached sureness that comes from "having been there." What can be more involving than "Absolution" in its portrayal of the confusions and pains of growing up in a highly ritualized world of belief where cruelty is motivated by "good intentions"? And what can be more truthful in its portrayal of unpredictable childish quarrels among the young and the old over trifles than "The Baby Party"? It is in stories like these where we feel that Fitzgerald's genius as a writer derived largely from his fidelity to the usual things like Trollope who, as Henry James said, "felt all daily and immediate things as well as he saw them; felt them in a simple, direct, salubrious way, with their sadness, their gladness, their charm, their comicality, all

³² O'Hara, int. to *The Portable F. Scott Fitzgerald*, p. xiv.

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their obvious and measurable meanings."³³

"Fitzgerald was no satirist," says John O'Hara in *The Portable F. Scott Fitzgerald*. "If he was being a satirist, as has been claimed, I don't get it, and I am no dope."³⁴ John O'Hara is no dope; it is just possible that he has other definitions of satire, a kind of criticism of life which he also dramatizes quite ably in some of his later works. To say that Fitzgerald is an important novelist in spite of his failures and faults is to be trite; but to deny or be unaware of his being a satirist is to be nearsighted. A novelist who tries to capture the sounds and mannerisms of his age cannot escape being a satirist in one form or another. And if he is a novelist who specializes in externals, like Fitzgerald,³⁵ he will be inevitably comic and consequently satiric in his rendition of life. The fact that Fitzgerald also specialized on the young or on adults who somehow never really mature adds vigor to his satire. The young are apt to be comic because their bewilderments and behaviour have not yet mellowed into the tragic awareness and hopelessness of the old. Fitzgerald's characters are as real as martini and onion, sharp and intoxicating, but they lack the tragic soberness of a mind after a hangover.

Satire like comedy attains greatness in proportion to how vividly and meaningfully it illuminates the discrepancy between illusion and reality, between what seems to be and what is. Like great comedy, satire of the finest vintage should have the taste of tragedy with it. Fitzgerald's satire is mixed with romance and served with love and grace. If with a casual sip we do not detect the flavor of tragic awareness of the human predicament, it is there nevertheless, no matter how lacking in age and mellowness. Laugh as we may over his characters, all his stories leave a sad taste in our consciousness, a sadness coming after what Mizener defines as "a feeling of exposure, of a revelation of the commonness and weakness and even smallness of what we all are."³⁶

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³³ Allen, p. 231.

³⁴ O'Hara, p. xv.

³⁵ Mizener, p. xix.

³⁶ Mizener, p. xx.

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