VII. CONCLUSION

Sometime during 1940, Fitzgerald walked into a city bookstore and was horrified to find that his books were no longer on sale and that people had forgotten him as a writer. During his lifetime he tasted success in patches. As the wait between the novels was too long, the mark he had made in the literary field with his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, did not have a sustained impact. His novels were seen as stories about men and women of the Jazz Age and his short stories, in particular, were viewed as material churned out to meet his constant need for a quick financial return. The high-living of the Fitzgeralds drew more attention than their creative, literary output and this biographical interest carries on even today.

Fitzgerald's lost reputation was restored and carried to new heights in the 1960s when a lot of critical interest was evinced in his works. A close reading of his works reveals that he was no mere chronicler of his times. His works deal with the complexities of human relationships, more particularly the tensions that arise among incompatible couples.

Although Fitzgerald is identified with the Jazz Age, Lee, in his Introduction to *Scott Fitzgerald: The Promises of Life*, writes, “his claims have come to be seen as infinitely more various [. . .] He has brought a genuine sense of history to his themes, be they those of romance, glamour, human fecklessness and breakdown or loneliness” (15). Fitzgerald’s rise in
popularity is evident in the fact that four of his novels—barring *This Side of Paradise*—and six of his short stories have been made into successful movies.

Fitzgerald’s age, the ‘Roaring Twenties’ or the ‘Gilded Age’ has evoked a lot of interest among literary writers and sociologists. It was an age, according to Hoffman in his 1949 article “Philistine and Puritan in the 1920s,” when “middle class men and women were disgusted with their cultural heritage and viewed the guardians of middle-class morality and culture as hopelessly stupid and comical parodies of human nature” (253). Thus we have young men and women giving into behaviour that was considered odd—the ‘petting parties,’ for instance—and also experimenting in sexual matters. His fictional characters are a product of their *Zeitgeist* and the women, in particular, are in keeping with the image of the New Woman and that of the flapper.

As mentioned earlier, interest in Fitzgerald’s works was largely from a biographical point of view. This is because Fitzgerald wrote from his personal experiences and almost all the main characters turn out to be Zelda, King, Graham or Fitzgerald himself. Commenting on the fact that Fitzgerald has so faithfully recorded his age in his works, Mayfield writes, “the self-revelatory writings of Scott Fitzgerald constitute one of the most significant contributions to the understanding of the first half of the twentieth century” (199). Hence the bulk of critical material available till the 1970s has adopted a biographical or sociological standpoint.
From 1970, with the publication of Milford’s and Mayfield’s biographies on the Fitzgeralds and with the feminist movement gaining ground, Fitzgerald’s works came to be scrutinized by feminist critics. Millet’s *Sexual Politics* formed the theoretical base from which gynocritics like Fetterley, Hardwick, Fryer, Petry, to name a few, have examined the fictional characters of Fitzgerald, especially the women characters. The Fitzgerald-Zelda relationship was also taken up by the feminist critics and most of them defended Zelda and berated Fitzgerald. They projected Zelda as a victim of the brand of American patriarchy practised by Fitzgerald. It was he, they concluded, who was responsible for her mental breakdown, as he did not give her the freedom of expressing herself as a writer. But the fact is that it was Fitzgerald who arranged for the publication of Zelda’s short stories and an exhibition of her paintings.

Hardwick, who has otherwise championed Zelda’s cause, has exonerated Fitzgerald from the charge of being the direct cause for her mental imbalance. She remarks, “there had always been about Zelda’s collapse [...] something of a reckoning, the price to be paid for recklessness beyond endurance, for drink and arrogance and carelessness with one’s own life and that of those nearest” (87). Milford reveals that Zelda’s mother was responsible for the kind of woman she grew into. Mrs Sayre was overindulgent and “excused all Zelda’s faults [...] showered all her affection
on her” (7) and as a result Zelda grew up as “lively but irrepressible and wayward” (7).

The researcher has shown, through a close reading of the texts, that the fictional women of Fitzgerald are arrogant, careless in their dealings with the emotions of men and generally wayward in their behaviour. They are known by their aggressive, bold and calculating nature. Gynocritics contend that the Fitzgerald women lead a kind of half-life as they are completely overlooked by the men they love and by society at large. The present study has attempted to show that these women do not live in the shadow of the men.

As Zelda was the model for most of the fictional women of Fitzgerald, it is not surprising that they exhibit marked tendencies of incompatibility. Domestic bliss has certainly been a much-desired state both in the fictional works and in the personal life of the Fitzgeralds. Feminists harp on Fitzgerald asserting himself and squashing all of Zelda’s desires. Hardwick gives us an inside view of the life of the Fitzgeralds, and the picture painted by her is certainly not encouraging. She reveals that Zelda’s “mental confusion was sometimes alarming; she suffered disorientation, hallucination, great fears and depressions, even to the point of a number of suicide attempts” (93). Given such a turbulent home front, Fitzgerald could certainly not have concentrated on his writing. His notebook entry number,
Feminists have also attacked Fitzgerald for his protective attitude towards Scottie and have criticized him for inundating her with letters of advice. Fryer, commenting on Fitzgerald's constant monitoring of both Zelda and Scottie, argues that, "in his writings as in his life, Scott clung tenaciously to the old standards that denied women the rights to work and love as they pleased" (59). But a scrutiny of the letters of Fitzgerald, especially those written to Scottie, contradicts this argument. Turnbull clearly states: "No American author of his [Fitzgerald's] stature has put so much of himself on paper for the sake of his offspring [...] His sternness sprang from an excess of love and anxiety lest Scottie repeat his mistakes and fall short of her potential" (11). Thus it is evident that Fitzgerald's letters are those any sane parent would write and most of them encouraged Scottie to do her best. For instance, in a letter to her dated July 5, 1937 Fitzgerald advises her: "I don't want you to do anything inappropriate to your age for premature adventures one pays an atrocious price" (Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald 30).

In Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale," the Knight is asked: "What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren?" (905) and his answer is: "Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee as wel over hir housband as hir love" (1038-39). This sums up the attitude of the Fitzgerald women. The researcher has pointed out that the fictional women of Fitzgerald are not
passive figures who are subjugated by men, but are assertive and
domineering characters who give in to their heart's desire. Their tough,
uncompromising stance causes enough damage to their relationship with
men.

Discussing the maladjustment between the sexes, Sukrita Paul Kumar
claims that "with the coming of the New Woman, the male did have to
readjust his natural and compulsive need for a communion with the opposite
sex" (66). The men in Fitzgerald's works are unable to come to terms with
these demanding women and find their personality swamped by them. Yet,
they are irresistibly drawn to these women as moths are to tapers but are
certainly not canonized for love. The men are completely taken in by the
radiance and charm these women exude, considering them to be exceptional
and ideal. They realize very late that the women are far from what they have
made them out to be. Amory, Anthony, Gatsby, Dick, Dexter and Jim are
among the victims of these New Women.

Amory realizes in time the unprincipled nature of the women before
he commits himself to any of them. Anthony finds Gloria's demands and
marital tensions unbearable and is reduced to an incoherent zombie.
Gatsby's love leads him to his death. Dick, after a brilliant start, is reduced to
a pathetic state with his personal, marital and professional life in shambles.
The plight of Dexter or Powell is the same. Dexter is left disillusioned while
Powell is reduced to being a jelly bean. The women are so absorbed in
themselves that they do not bother about the damage they cause to their men. The men bear the brunt of shattered relationships and hence they are the ones who crack up.

Fryer, who is the only feminist critic who has done an exhaustive study of all the five novels of Fitzgerald, argues that "Fitzgerald's women suffer manipulation, betrayal, abandonment. They endure the backlash of men who are confused in their own right about lives that have been altered irrevocably by world war" (17). A close analysis of the works of Fitzgerald presents a different picture. In This Side of Paradise, Eleanor takes it upon herself to be the spokeswoman for all suffering, victimized women. She speaks very forcefully about all that women in general have to endure at the hands of men. But her own behaviour, which is far from being conventional, horrifies not just the men she comes in contact with but other women as well, particularly mothers, who would certainly not like to see their daughters imbibe Eleanor's qualities.

In The Beautiful and Damned, Gloria plays havoc with her numerous male admirers. She practices her charm to perfection and avoids men who would sense her hollowness. She is not 'manipulated' or 'betrayed' or 'abandoned' simply because she has a strong hold over Anthony and it is Anthony who is manipulated by her. She keeps her wits about her, for she has set her heart on old Adam Patch's millions and knows that the only way
she can lay her hands on them is through Anthony. Hence her marriage to Anthony is for the wrong reasons.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy crushes the romantic yearnings of Gatsby with her materialism. She resumes her affair with him when she is bored with her marriage to Tom. At the moment of crisis when she runs over Myrtle, she lets Gatsby take the blame and deserts him. In the end, she does not even condole the death of the man to whom she had once professed undying love.

In *Tender is the Night*, Dick is used and discarded by Nicole and her family. She manipulates the emotions of Dick using her illness as an instrument but when she wearies of her game she finds another man. She exhibits no qualms in severing her ties with a man who nourished her with his love. She does not suffer abandonment or betrayal. Nor is she a victim of patriarchy, except in the case of incest. It is Dick who, after being manipulated, is abandoned.

In the first four novels, we find relationships disintegrating because of the canker called disillusionment which firmly sets in. Fitzgerald was deeply influenced by the way Zelda treated him and although he never quite got out of her hold he never really forgave her for her initial injection of him. Zelda, when she first accepted, then rejected and then again accepted Fitzgerald, she, observes D.S. Savage, "implicitly rejected the potential
principle of meaning and truth and enthroned the pleasure-principle at the heart of their relationship” (156).

Only in The Last Tycoon do we get a picture of romantic love that is reciprocated. Stahr and Kathleen take delight in each other’s presence with no conditions attached. Both know that they would eventually feel the pain of separation, but make the most of it while they are together. One does not see them haranguing each other. They complement each other. But Feminist critics fault Kathleen for giving in to Stahr and romantically getting involved with him.

In the short stories, we have a host of women who are unworthy of the affections of the men. In “A Short Trip Home,” Ellen has Eddie completely “under the spell of her beauty and its success” (The Collected Short Stories 428), but she lets him string along while she carries on with other men. Even when she plays the wrong cards, Eddie can still say, “She belongs to me in a way—even if I lose her she belongs to me [. . .] I’ll also be there” (442).

The women make the first move and entice their men with blandishment and a few kisses. Judy asks Dexter to marry her and when he agrees she leaves him for another man for the thrill of being chased fades out. Yancy, Ardita, Ailie, Nancy are all like Rosalind or Isabelle. Each of them is a romantic egotist, for to each of them the self comes before all else. Even in the stories that deal with married couples, the women show great reluctance in settling down as wives or mothers. They want the life they
enjoyed as a flapper to continue for eternity. Any restraint on them leads to a rebellious outburst.

Fryer argues:

Despite his [Fitzgerald's] reputation for being unsympathetic towards his female characters, young women like Rosalind, Gloria, Daisy and Nicole invariably embody ideals of self-realization that their mothers did not share and confront role conflicts characteristic of women on the threshold of a new era of freedom. (70)

A close reading of the writings of Fitzgerald shows that the feminists do not have much to complain about, for what takes place here is a reversal of roles. In their search for a new role, the Fitzgerald women actually take on the role of the men the feminists have been railing against. The feminists attack men for being indifferent, cold, aggressive and calculative. But the Fitzgerald women themselves have internalized these negative qualities and it passes off for a new kind of aggression with which they take on patriarchy. These women are different from their mothers as they have a new, alluring and seductive look. But all this ultimately turns out to be destructive. Friedan gave a call to the American women of the 1960s to break the shackles of the feminine mystique. But we witness Fitzgerald's fictional women breaking free in the 1920s itself.
In Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," the beautiful "faery's child" (124) lures the knight with "I love thee true" (125). The enticement over, the knight is left sexually and physically devitalized, and we witness a similar devitalization in the case of men in the novels and short stories of Fitzgerald. Tuttleton, who traced the demoniac image of woman, writes:

Fitzgerald’s deep feelings of insecurity as a person [arose] out of the destabilization of ego boundaries as he headed for his breakdown, out of his ambivalence over female sexuality in a newly liberated age, and out of a profound anxiety over his own manliness—castration fears, as Zelda questioned his virility and accused him of homosexuality. (245)

The women in Fitzgerald’s works, save a few like Kathleen and Roxanne, are idlers. This is a quality that Fitzgerald detested and he always held Mrs Sayre responsible for turning Zelda into an idler. McCay adds that “the woman who works, the child who lives up to the expectations of the father and fulfills his long neglected dreams—that is the woman Scott Fitzgerald can love. The others, weak, beautiful temptresses, must be put aside” (321). Fitzgerald could share a fruitful relationship with Graham in his last years and this is reflected in his creation of Kathleen in The Last Tycoon. To him, Graham was a woman of substance, who worked and had dreams and pursued them. Above all, she could love Fitzgerald without destroying him.
It has been the researcher's aim to show that the feminist readings of Fitzgerald's works are skewed. The feminist critics have been greatly influenced by the biographies by Milford and Mayfield and, in challenging what they consider mainstream, traditional, patriarchal readings, have come up with a total justification of all the flaws inherent in the Fitzgerald woman. While it is true that Fitzgerald’s life had a direct bearing on what he wrote, it would not be fair to cloud our analysis with this monistic approach. The feminist critics are so intent on biographical details that they do not go deep into the text but merely comment on it. Thus when one really digs into the text one comes up with evidence which are contrary to the feminist perspectives. The ultimate intention of the feminist critics has been to show that Fitzgerald was sexist in his attitude not only towards his fictional women but towards his wife and daughter as well. These critics have even questioned his relationship with Graham and concluded that it smacked of American patriarchy, while Graham herself cherished it. This is a case of overreading into not only the texts but also the personal life of the author.

Towards the end of her book, Fryer grudgingly concedes, “To be sure, the women in Fitzgerald’s fiction do tend to be more assertive and more sexually active than women in the earlier works of American literature” (104). Critics like Hardwick and Petry, among others, have also acknowledged that Fitzgerald tried to do his best as a writer, as a husband and as a father under the most trying circumstances.
In the final analysis, it is seen that it is the men who bear the brunt of failed relationships and the women wash their hands off the men who no longer satisfy them, and start life afresh. But the men do not get a chance to rectify their errors and begin life anew. "There are," writes Ramachandra Rao, "no second acts in the life drama of the Fitzgerald hero. After a brilliant beginning he peters out into failure and anonymity" (27). The experience that these men undergo at the hands of the women is exhausting and humiliating. Their condition is best summed up in the words of Aldridge: "For the beautiful there is always damnation; for every tenderness there is the black horror of night; for all the bright young men there is sadness and even Paradise has another side" (33).