CHAPTER III

INTELLECTUAL VERSUS SEXUAL CONFLICT

The study of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* revealed the conflict between the intellectual and the sexual in the mind of the protagonist. Here too we find that Amory Blaine is tormented with the same kind of conflict. But his intellectuality is more shaped by his puritanical beliefs and thereby the guilt associated with his sexual thoughts is heightened. In this novel, we do not find a broad demarcation between his intellectuality and spirituality. For both are inter-related. His intellect is shaped by his puritanical mode of thinking. It is because of this he is prevented from swaying towards the sexual. This is evident in almost all of Fitzgerald's heroes from Amory Blaine to Dick Diver. Sy Kahn observes that are "men concerned with fashioning a code or sustaining a belief," and that they "all feel the restraints of the American Puritan heritage."

He also remarks that Amory remains a "conscience and guilt ridden character" (Kahn: 177).
Amory’s puritanical conscience shaped his imagination and his vision of reality. It made him associate evil with sex and where the devil exerted his greatest power. In many instances we find that he is caught between his “puritan distrust of sex and the body and the relaxed social and sexual rituals of his time” (Kahn: 178).

He is not able to follow his sexual instincts because he remains a “guilt-ridden character.” Amory’s feelings for the women he comes into contact with cannot be expressed because his puritanic conscience prevents him from fulfilling those desires. This ambivalent feeling is dramatized when he goes to a party and finds himself alone with Myra and on the verge of his first kiss:

Sudden revulsion seized Amory, 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 and hide somewhere safe out of sight up in the corner of his mind.

“Kiss me again”. Her voice came out of a great void, “I don’t want to” he heard himself saying. There was another pause. I don’t want to! he repeated passionately (T.S.O.P: 14).
His youthful dilemma is aptly portrayed and Syed Khan feels that Amory Blaine is the spokesman of the youth of his age, just as Holden Caulfield speaks for the questing youth of the 1950’s and 60’s. His rationalization is deeply embedded in his puritanical faith. During his Princeton days he carries a romantic and sentimental correspondence with Isabelle Borge. Thus in his relationship with women his egoistic nature is revealed. He learns that his image of himself as a conquering lover has enchanted him and not his love for Isabelle. So the romance breaks when he learns “that he had not an ounce of real affection for Isabelle.” It is seen that he connects the physical and the sexual elements with the forces of Evil and death. This death is accentuated when he views the death of Dick Humbird. One evening when Amory and his friends are returning to Princeton they see that a “carload of students has overturned” and Dick Humbird, one of the promising men of Princeton has been killed. This incident breaks his illusion that youth is permanent and indestructible.

What is to be noted is that whenever Amory Blaine is in the midst of sensuous elements, the forces of evil are simultaneously present. For instance, soon after Dick Humbird’s death, Amory and his college friend, Fred Sloane, escort two chorus girls during an evening in New York. The two couples go to a cafe where Amory is being watched by a middle aged faintly smiling man in a brown sack suit. Then Amory and the others go to upper Manhattan where the girls have an apartment
among the "tall white stone buildings dotted with dark windows that stretch endlessly "flooded with bright moonlight that gave them a calcium pallor" (T.S.O.P: 112).

From the moment the mysterious pale- faced man scrutinized Amory, the party developed a sexual and evil atmosphere. He is reminded of the arc - light above Humbird’s dead body. Fitzgerald here creates an eerie atmosphere to show Amory’s plight. For instance, while Amory sat on the sofa with Axia,

“There was a minute while temptation crept over him like a warm wind, and his imagination turned to fire and... that was all” (T.S.O.P: 112).

At this point Axia looked up and he is astonished to discover the same man who had been in the cafe.

“There the man sat half leaned against a pile of pillows in the corner of the divan. His face was cast in the same yellow wax as in the cafe, neither the dull, pasty color of a dead man-rather a sort of virile pallor” (T.S.O.P: 112).

This image of the devil is a symbol of shock, born of the impact of sexuality upon his puritan conscience and a catholic sense of sin.
Fitzgerald continues to build Amory’s terror by accentuating the images of evil. He continues to focus on the appearance of the man. How his shoes were pointed like those that “they wore in the fourteenth century with the little ends curling up.” It is unutterably terrible, that the toes seem to fill them to the end. At first Amory is transfixed by this vision of evil but then he bolts.

“Look at the man!” cried Amory, pointing towards the corner divan.”

“You mean that purple Zebra!” shrieked Axia… Amory’s got a purple zebra watching him” (T.S.O.P: 113).

Thus, because of his fear, Amory becomes the subject of ridicule. Axia even begins to suspect that Amory had been drinking. But Amory was blank to all the happenings around him. For him the divan was important for it held the man,

“The man was alive, alive like heat waves over asphalt, like wriggling worms” (T.S.O.P: 114).
Amory now begins to flee from the place, he cannot bear it anymore. He begins to run and he wonders, “Was everyone followed in the moonlight?” (T.S.O.P: 114).

He felt that the footsteps were almost beside him and he thought he heard a quiet breathing.

“Suddenly he realized that the footsteps were not behind... They were ahead and he was not eluding but following” (T.S.O.P: 114).

It is here that he realizes that he had fallen into the hands of evil.

He had “now moved in a region where the feet and the fear of white walls were real, ewing things, things one must accept” (T.S.O.P: 115).

We find that because Amory was about to submit to the sensuous forces, his puritanical conscience tortures him by bringing in the evil elements. In other words, it is his guilt-ridden conscience, which brings shape to his fears, and it increases as time goes on. For, towards the end of the chapter, we find that Amory comes across a pale face, which flashes at him, but he knew “for the half instant that the gong tanged and hummed that it was the face of Dick Humbird” (T.S.O.P: 116).
Thus the death of his friend haunts him and it does not leave him, even the next day. In the morning, Amory forces Fred Sloane to leave the street because it's "filthy" and "ghastly". But Sloane does not agree to it. So, Amory who is in the grip of fear, says:

"I'm going Fred, ... His knees were shaking under him, and he knew that if he stayed another minute on the street he would keel over where he stood" (T.S.O.P: 117).

Thus Amory escapes his sexual encounter with Axia, "but his flight down the moon drenched streets... makes him psychologically experience what he had physically avoided" (Kahn: 181).

John Alridge in his After the Lost Generation states that what Fitzgerald tells us of Amory is true because for Amory the problem of evil had solidified into the problem of sex. The sexual overtones in the evil images do indicate Fitzgerald's preoccupation with guilt. It has something to do with the "tragic sense of life of his tissue." For, according to Fitzgerald, "for the beautiful there is always damnation, for every tenderness, there is always the black horror of the night, for all the bright young men, there is sadness and even Paradise has another side" (Mizener: 33).
We find that the major themes of sex, evil and death are intertwined. Even on the train to Princeton a woman with a painted face brings on a new wave of nausea and he changes car. Later, on reaching Princeton, Tom and Amory settle down and are trying to study when “the wet branches moved and clawed with their finger nails” (T.S.O.P: 119). Both of them are suddenly electrified by the presence of evil. Tom also says that he saw a face at the window looking at Amory. Thus the lure of the physical is always there. The sexual forces signified by Evil do not allow them to pursue their intellectual process. Amory knows that only the “spires of Princeton” are an abode of “sanity and safety” and only his Intellectual pursuits can give him strength & support. For he feels that:

Here there is no phallic thrust of dark - windowed pale buildings but rather steady lights, green spaces and chaste spires of sanctuary. For Amory Blaine transplanted from Minnesota to Princeton, the University is his stronghold, the monastic fortress for his Catholic-Puritan conscience, this side of paradise (Kahn: 183).

During the last years of his college life, Amory’s encounter with sexuality and evil does not allow him pray. That is why we find that though Amory is disillusioned by Axia, he is happy to discover Clara, a distant cousin, a woman he
can idealize. He feels that in Clara, sex has been translated into intelligence and vitality. William A. Fahey describes her as “a soft-bellied virgin, capable of smoking and of discussing sex, she is a safe nod in the direction of the emancipated woman, insulated... for Amory by her precious babies” (Fahey: 39).

It must be noted here that Amory is attracted to Clara because she has a “very cerebral and indeed spiritual aura.”

Clara being a widow, he is freed of the compulsion to try to conquer her. Amory enjoys Clara’s charm and sophistication as well as her beauty. Despite her poverty and responsibilities to her children, Clara can attend to her household chores effectively and entertain guests graciously as if “she has not a care in the world” (Fryer: 23).

Moreover, she can “make fascinating and almost brilliant conversation out of the thinnest air that ever floated through a drawing room” (T.S.O.P: 138).

Amory finds Clara’s companionship, delightful, partly because of her “golden radiance” (T.S.O.P: 139).
Her ephemeral quality poses no sexual threat to him. Thus he is freed of the conflict between the intellectual and the sexual in his relationship with Clara. He can clearly engage in an intellectual conversation with her. He idolizes her and equates her sense of spirituality with that of an untouchable virgin. "He longed only to touch her dress with almost the realization that Joseph must have had of Mary's eternal significance" (T.S.O.P: 145).

Walking with her, he finds that the joy of youth filled his soul and he says in a trembling voice. "If I lost faith in you, I'd lose faith in God" (T.S.O.P: 144).

She looked at him with such a startled face that he asked her the matter. "Nothing", she said slowly. "Only this, five men have said that to me, and it frightens me" (T.S.O.P: 144).

Thus we find that either by resorting to sensual means (as in the case of Isabelle) or by resorting to spiritual means (as in Clara's case), Amory must satisfy his "patriarchal fantasies of male supremacy" (Fryer: 23).

He can't resist trying to capture Clara for himself and so he proposes to Clara quite mechanically: "And I love you-any latent
greatness that I’ve got is... oh I can’t talk, but Clara If I come back in two years in a position to marry you” (T.S.O.P: 145).

This reveals that Amory is not sincere in his love. It also reveals his immaturity. He is further stressing her status as a widow and her need to be attached to a financially sound person. On the other hand, Clara knows that Amory has no genuine appreciation of the qualities that make her unique and so she wants to stick to her determination not to re-marry, for she states:

“I’d never marry again I’ve got my two children and I want myself for them” (T.S.O.P: 145).

She further taunts him by saying that he is not in love with her and that he never wanted to marry her. When he declares that he really loves her, she replies with contempt:

“There you go - running through your catalogue of emotions in five seconds” (T.S.O.P: 145).

Clara stresses Amory’s immaturity and points out to him that he is immature and not so sure of his feelings towards her. She is so courageous as to even tell him point blank that what he has for her is not the feeling of love but one of possession. By choosing not to remarry,
Clara reveals that “she wants to protect her own personal identity by limiting the demands that are imposed on her by others” (Fryer: 24).

She also explains that:

“If it weren’t for my face, I’d be a quiet nun in the convent” (T.S.O.P: 146).

This reveals that she is free to pursue her own intellectual and spiritual ambitions without having to marry or nurse children.

But Amory is not thwarted in his second earnest attempt to possess a beautiful woman. Unlike Clara who has a spiritual aura, Isabelle’s compelling qualities were physical and sexual. Isabelle, his so-called first love, possessed “an intense physical magnetism” (T.S.O.P: 63). And they both meet at a “pelting party” (T.S.O.P: 58). She belongs to the category of the “popular daughter”-P.D. of the flapper era who spends her time between dances in some private corner kissing, necking or petting one of her dance partners. She has the reputation of being a “Speed” (T.S.O.P: 62).

At the party, where Amory and others wait, she descends the stairway and she is aware of being in the colour rising in her cheeks. Her silent thoughts about Amory center on his dancing ability and his
physical appearance, which suggest more sexual than intellectual or emotional curiosity. She has a reputation of loose morals but she is determined not to let young men take her kisses for granted. That is why she pulls herself back when Amory tries to kiss her in the upstairs den. Amory lives in a society, which considers expression of “Sexual interest as the norm for men but an aberration for women” (Fryer: 21).

Isabelle resents being treated as a sex object and when Amory carelessly bruises her with his shirt stud by trying to force her into kissing him, she bluntly refuses him saying - “I’ll, be anything I want” (T.S.O.P: 93).

That Amory wants to appease his sexual instincts is evident because he says “that he had not an ounce of real affection for Isabelle… He wanted to kiss her, kiss her a lot, because then he knew he could leave in the morning and not care. On the contrary, if he didn’t kiss her, it would worry him… It would interfere vaguely with his idea of himself as a conqueror” (T.S.O.P: 92).

This statement on Amory’s feeling towards Isabelle reveals that he is a male chauvinist. The two women with whom he comes into contact before his participation in the war show him that they will not lose there identify at any cost. His next relationship is with Rosalind… For Amory, she is the first real woman to combine the apparent “physical
accessibility of Isabelle with the intellectual sparkle of Clara” (Fryer: 25).

While Amory is involved in his romantic associations, he neglects his studies. Amory had arrived at Princeton, determined to “be one of the gods of his class. He becomes active in the Triangle club, a campus organization that produced a yearly musical comedy and ‘The Daily Princetonian,’ the University newspaper. Amory succeeds in his ambition to become one of the “hot cats on top” at Princeton. Neglecting his course work in the process, Amory is placed on the list of “conditioned men” (T.S.O.P: 94). Failure to pass a mathematics examination causes his removal from the Princetonian board and the slaughter of his chances for the senior council. Amory Blaine is clearly an idealized projection of the young Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald’s academic accomplishments at Princeton were similar to those of Amory.

He was from the beginning a poor student in the classroom for he was busy at almost everything else but his studies. Early in his first term, he was called in because of low grades, at mid year he had failed three subjects, had the lowest pass mark in three others and had managed to get by in English. His average was 5.17 on a grading system in which 5 was the lowest passing mark, By June he had raised it by 4.97. From that time on he was never out of
academic difficulties though he managed average grades in English and just below average in philosophy. When he returned to Princeton after dropping out in 1915-16, he did somewhat better work (Eble: 39).

The Princeton failure was one of a number of experiences which helped to create the pattern to be found in Fitzgerald's fiction—"success coming out of abysmal failure or failure following hard upon success" (Eble: 41).

The gradual change in the mental make up of Amory is to be noted. Earlier Amory's attitude to sex was shadowed by puritanic thoughts. But now as he outgrows its influence, there is a marked change in his character.

His knowing of self is not an appreciation of his or mankind's metaphysical nature but of his social nature. His awareness is not directed towards recognizing an abstract evil but towards understanding the distinction which mark one man, one portion of society off from another (Eble: 45).

Amory receives an education in "manners" which is very much different from the one at college. This he learns in his relationship with
Rosalind. She refuses to marry Amory for the reason that she cannot be content without fame or fortune at her disposal. His affair with Rosalind is destined for destruction, because of the solid fact of economics" (Hindus: 24).

When Rosalind tells her mother that Amory “has a little income - and you know he’s earning thirty five dollars a week in advertising. “Mrs. Lonnage replies dryly: “And it wouldn’t buy you clothes. I have your best interests at heart when I tell you not to take a step you’ll spend your days regretting” (Hindus: 25).

Rosalind quickly shares her mother’s opinion and she tells Amory: “But I can’t marry you and ruin both our lives” (T.S.O.P: 195). She also adds: “Cooped up in a little flat; waiting for you you’d hate me in a narrow atmosphere. I’d make you hate me.” Amory is not convinced and so she reinstates her point: “I don’t want to think about pots and kitchens and brooms. I want to worry whether my legs will get slick and brown when I swim in summer” (T.S.O.P: 196).

Rosalind is being very practical in the above utterance but she is at the same time very brutal, for instead of rejecting him, she has the audacity to tell him that he should never forget her.
After his break up with Rosalind, Amory resorts to drinks and he utters these words:

"Such pleasure where find it for tomorrow are "At’s philosophy for me now" (T.S.O.P: 199).

The three weeks following his break-up with Rosalind, Amory describes an “arabesque nightmare”. He was emotionally worn out and he began to read enormously. Hence we find that only when he pushes the sensuous aspect of his feelings to the background does he concentrate on the intellectual.

He read enormously. He was puzzled and depressed by A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man, initially interested by Joan and Peter and The Undying fire and rather surprised by his discovery through a critic named Mencken of several excellent American novels. Vandover and Brute Mackenzie, Chesterton, Galsworthy, Bennett had sunk in his appreciation from the sagacious, life-saturated geniuses to merely diverting contemporaries. Shaw’s aloof clarity and brilliant consistency and the gloriously intoxicated efforts of H.G. wells to fit the key to romantic symmetry into the elusive lock of truth, alone won his rapt attention (T.S.O.P: 209).
It is only now that he gives vent to his ideas relating to success, failure, politics, life, war and other such vital issues.

According to Amory, war has "ruined the old backgrounds, sort of killed individualism out of our generation" (T.S.O.P: 213).

He even begins to philosophize: "Life is too huge and complex, the world is so overgrown that it can't lift its own fingers" (T.S.O.P: 213).

The statement implies that war has completely wiped off individualism and each man has to belong to some group or he has to move with the crowd in order to be popular.

Also he adds that "war used to be the most individualistic pursuit of man, and yet the popular heroes of the war had neither authority nor responsibility... A big man has no time really to do anything but just sit and be big" (T.S.O.P: 214).

What Amory feels is that no man can stand prominence these days. It's the surest path to obscurity. He also feels that popular reformers, politicians, soldiers or writers have been washed by the "cross currents of criticism" (T.S.O.P: 214).
He is of the view that young students try to believe in older authors, countries try to believe in their statesmen. Any popular newspaper is able to win the favor of the people because people are ready to “swallow anything but predigested food” (T.S.O.P: 215).

What Amory wants to put forth is that people do not want to think and bother their heads but what they look forward to, are ideas of some prominent leading news agency. But confusion arises when there is a change in the ownership of the paper and their ideas differ from those of the previous one. As a result there is “more confusion, more contradiction, a sudden inrush of ideas the reaction against them” (T.S.O.P: 215).

Amory cites the instance of the press and its ownership in order to bring out his own ideas of becoming a writer. What he wants to state is that he does not want to create confusion in the minds of the people. He voices his opinion thus:

And that is why I have sworn not to put pen to paper until my ideas clarify or depart entirely, I have quite enough sins on my soul without putting dangerous shallow epigrams into people’s heads, I might cause a poor, inoffensive capitalist to have a vulgar liason with a bomb, or get some
innocent little Bolshevik tangled up with a machine gun bullet (T.S.O.P: 215).

Here, Amory has made it clear that since books have the power to change people's ideas and national opinions, he wants to be very careful before choosing his vocation as a writer.

While this intellectual discussion is going on with Tom, suddenly, Amory sways towards the sexual when he begins to think of Rosalind.

He states that he does not have "the vital urge" and that he "wanted to be a regular human being." He complains that "the girl couldn't see it that way" (T.S.O.P: 216).

Again he stresses the fact that Rosalind was the only girl in the wide world that could have held him. This shows that from time to time Rosalind's thoughts interface and create a kind of void in his life. He has not yet forgotten her for he says that whenever he sees happy families he feels sick in his stomach. Her desertion of his love has created a kind of vacuum in his life and he is left in the dark without being able to progress in life.

That is why his mentor Monsignor Darcy warns him in a letter:
“Beware of losing yourself in the personality of another being man or woman” (T.S.O.P: 220).

Monsignor Darcy wants Amory to enlarge his personality rather than allow it to shrink. He also adds that success comes to a person only when he allows the “mystical element” to flow into him. He also cautions him not to “marry in haste and repent at leisure” because his financial situation is “calamitous” (T.S.O.P: 221).

Though Amory wants to pursue beauty, his puritanical beliefs are so strong that they will not allow him to do so. He is compelled to equate Beauty with Evil for he describes his meeting with Eleanor as,

“the last time that evil crept close” to him “under the mask of beauty” (T.S.O.P: 222).

Further When Eleanor touches his arm, he felt his hands grow cold with “deadly fear lest he should lose the shadow brush with which his imagination was painting wonders of her” (T.S.O.P: 230).

Hence we find that though Eleanor & Amory were trying to make everything fine and beautiful, through his reason he could not admire her: “Their chance was to make everything fine and furnished and...
imaginative. They must bend tiny golden tentacles from his imagination to hers” (T.S.O.P: 231).

One could say that Amory’s relationship with Eleanor was a kind of compelled relationship and not one of instincts. Amory knew that Eleanor could not “stir that sudden absurd instinct for paternity that Rosalind had stirred” (T.S.O.P: 233).

Eleanor is a foil to Clara. While Clara had been the daughter of light, Eleanor is at the same time the “archetypal dark woman, who is the symbol of profane eros. There is a spark of divine madness in her and at the same time the sense of worldly materialism” (Perosa: 19).

But Amory’s worldly education is complete, only after his encounter with Eleanor. She initiates him in matters of sex. She does not believe in immortality and so she gives herself to Amory on a summer’s night. In this way she breaks the “bonds of aesthetic religiosity” and also “takes away his ability to regret” (Perosa: 21).

Now that the deed has been committed, Amory feels hatred for the girl and for himself and their relationship ends with a kind of “last ride together.” Amory’s education has now reached its end. It has brought Narcissus to disillusionment and self-knowledge. Amory towards the end of the novel says:
“I know myself, but that is all” (T.S.O.P: 282).

Amory through his relationship with other women “gazed at himself in many a mirror” (Perosa: 20).

The women he comes into contact with are only different facets of his own personality. “His loves are so many meetings before the familiar face of Narcissus in the mirror” (Perosa: 20).

It is only in his relationship with Clara that there is a kind of deforming mirror and he remains “Narcissus off Duty” for some time. Amory in his childhood days was in the dominating presence of his mother and it is later replaced by other women whose influence is of a different nature but towards the end it brings him to an awareness of evil and human suffering.

At first he is an egotist. The egotist by slow transition becomes an aesthete and finally the aesthete becomes a humanist. It must be noted here that the transition is a slow process and it occurs only because of his association with various women. Though he does engage himself in intellectual discussions in his Princeton days, yet Fitzgerald has shown that Amory’s literary discussions alternate with his petting parties for he
is a symbol of the English decadence which idealized the figure of man in tired attitudes and base forms” (Perosa: 23).

Earlier his youthful crisis had been disguised under the pretense of his being an artist. Later Amory has to gradually learn from experience. He undergoes a painful education in the background of war. Rosaline abandons the aesthete and Amory takes refuge in literature, he attempts to write. His attitude is to become a personage. This is complete only after his brief relationship with Eleanor, Amory’s personality has developed. “He has moved from his love of himself to the love of humanity. “He had begun with complaiscent aestheticism” (Perosa: 22).

But his education has done the function of accelerating him from his egotistical complacency and of reawakening his sense of humanity.

He found something that “he wanted, had always wanted and always would want. He always wanted not to be admired as he had feared, not be loved, as he had made himself to believe, but to be necessary to people, to be indispensable” (T.S.O.P: 286-87).

Though there is a tint of egotism in the word “indispensable” yet the words “necessary to people,” reveal his urge to be of service to humanity at large.
Thus, Amory’s education is not received from reading books but through his contact with various women. Each of them had taught him something of great value in his life. Clara had enlightened him on the spiritual aspect of life, Rosalind through her refusal of him had taught him the pain and suffering that human hearts have to endure. Eleanor had taught him worldly matters such as initiation into sex. Through Amory’s journey we find that intellectuality and sexuality are not two water tight compartments but both are equally vital and complementary aspects of life and as he also tells Eleanor,

“Intellect is not protection from sex any more than convention is” (T.S.O.P: 238).

Both these aspects can either serve to strengthen one’s personality or weaken it. One should use one’s intellectuality and one’s sexuality for the betterment of one’s race and not for its destruction. There are times when intellectuality and sexuality clash with each other, but it is up to the individual to use his discriminating powers and to find out which is appropriate for that particular point of time. Man’s life is one perennial conflict but it is up to him to resolve these conflicts or at least make attempts to do so, so that his reputation is in act. Amory has learnt from his own experience and not from books. His knowledge is a practical one and it has enabled him to know his self. His self-knowledge is far
superior to that which any literary text would provide. It is this
knowledge that provokes in him the desire to be useful to mankind. Its
has taught him to subordinate his own self and be of use to the society at
large.