Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven.
(William Wordsworth)
CHAPTER II

The Vision of Paradise

As the centre of energy shifted from an agrarian to an industrial society, from American prairies to the city, the lonely independence of the former yielded to the solitary dependence of the latter. In this solitary dependency novelists ... found ... [a] motive for their commitment to the adolescent whose voice was in resonance with all that was most strident in their shared experience of American life.1

In This Side of Paradise (1920), Fitzgerald tried to recapture a lost childhood beside exploring the tribulations of late adolescence. Being the most articulate writer-spokesman of his generation and its gilded youth he rightly admitted to Edmund Wilson:

I really believe that no one else could have written so searchingly the story of the youth of our generation.2

He was aware that his vision of the young showed them in a hundred poses, from ludicrous to pathetic, and explored thoroughly every conceivable issue, trait and dilemma of the young. The Fitzgerald world has a complete hold upon the mind and imagination of the characters. It controls and shapes ambiguous attitudes and approaches to life, resulting from the conflicting dilemmas and deviations that his generation experienced.

The thematic and structural design of the novel, This Side of Paradise pertains to an extended symbolic world, an aesthetic imitation of an ordered, conventionalised abstraction into which the characters, beautiful and wealthy young men and women try to adjust in search of a quest for life and meaning. They have not compromised with life and act in accordance with their imaginative perception and moral insight. The world is one of innocence, impervious to adult responsibility, placid enchanting, untramelled by passions and pursuits of ambition; it is a world of one vast juvenile intrigue when all things seemed larger than life and purer than childhood dreams. Amory Blaine, the hero-protagonist is the "romantic egotist" whose fascinating tale glows with the glorious spirit of the abounding contemporary youth. It is an epic of American adolescence with its immature and morbidly tantalising passions and ridiculously

exasperating poses and exploits. Amory's exuberance of imagination and sparkling enthusiasm and zest for living, for all its gay and youthful abandon, has, nevertheless, a quality of an after-glow of his burnt-out dreams. He and all others are like clustered islands, isolated from one another. In his Paradise he is an "enchanted voyager".

Paradise is a very powerful symbol in the novel. It connotes an easy ambience in which Amory's dreams float in sheer abandon. But that is only at the superficial level because there is the 'double irony', and beneath his vision of paradise lies self delusion which is pernicious and sinister moreso because it is impenetrable and undetected. He seems oblivious to the brooding horrors that stock the surface calm of his elysian dreams, and could turn them into haunting nightmares. The other side of Paradise thus is the hell of despondency in which he will languish and linger after disenchantment and disillusion. He is the American Adam.

The myth is equivalent to that of the American Dream, a gilded world of golden promise of wealth and the imaginative possibility of its fulfilment, emotionally sterile and spiritually poor, turned into a Valley of Ashes, a Wasteland. This aspect of American wealth, its cultural ramifications and corrupting influence are amplified through
various episodic events and adventures of Amory and the golden girls who have unbounding faith in the inexhaustibility of romance. America thus is a:

Whore to the prototypical, romantic Columbus of the imagination.... She leads him on, and in betraying his expectations destroys his Adamic, redemptive identity.\(^3\)

Fitzgerald projects Amory through the image of the "brummelegem god", a symbol for the resplendent, burnished golden image of American sophomoric adolescence. He precedes Jay Gatsby in forming a platonic conception of himself; his imaginative ambition and moral puritanism are essential and fundamental to him. His constant impassioned strivings keep his adolescent yearnings, his gestures of certitude and self-adulation in an unceasing spin of the youth's quest for his fundamental self. His experiences acquire an imaginative actuality and through it Amory evolves his code of adolescent values and egotism, the "aristocratic egotism" to which his family name became a symbolic tag. Thinking this code befits his fortunate youth, capable of infinite expansion for good or evil, nobody seems to dissuade him

from reaching the heights within the permissible limits of the code. Even his "puritan conscience" made him realise the feasibility of his social and mental capabilities, his poise, his animal magnetism and charisma. However, his conscience has estranged him both socially and morally from his cultural environment:

Vanity, tempered with self suspicion if not self-knowledge, a sense of people as automatons of his will, a desire to 'pass' as many boys as possible and get to a vague top of the world.... With this background did Amory drift into adolescence.

It is "a state of superloneliness" in which he finds himself in a peculiar "lethargic content" and suspects "how superficially was the over-lay of his own generation ... that the old cynical kinship with his mother had not been broken." Such euphoria of dissipation is a legacy of the Blaines' that shapes his early impressions and perceptions. His mother, Beatrice, opens up the glamourised world of "wonderful visions" and dreams:

5. Ibid, p.22.
bronze rivers lapping marble shores, the great birds that soared through the air, parti-coloured birds with iridescent plumage.... strange music and the flare of barbaric trumpets... gardens that flaunted coloring against which this would be quite dull, moons that whirled and swayed, paler than winter moons, more golden than harvest moons.6

Such dreaming lyricism reveals Beatrice's mental and spiritual vacuity and tragic passivity. It is the very ambience of glitter and glamour which is stifling, reversing values, prohibiting virtues, and promoting barrenness. It is a culture rich in arts and traditions, no doubt, but barren of ideas. She is a product "of those days when the great gardener clipped the inferior roses to produce one perfect bud."7 She is the privileged one of society to blossom forth while the less fortunate are pruned and sacrificed. It is her symbolic detachment culturally. (she is placed in a gilded age, a distanced era) that helps create a peculiar nostalgia:

6. Ibid., p.23.
7. Ibid., p.4.
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.\(^8\)

She is beautiful, young, sad, disengaged, aristocratic, surpassing the conventional upper middle-class values. Her contempt for the Mid western American society in which Amory must carve a niche for himself, her" egotistical disdain" for prevailing social mores and manners makes her indispensable for him. However, he does perceive the futility of her affectations but then they are a part of her atmosphere.

Beatrice is symbolic of the shaping hand of society that must mould Amory's "aristocratic egotism", his self-awareness.

Amory 's heightened sense of his own early desire and necessity to adopt established values lays the foundation

\(^8\) Ibid., p.4.
for the significance of the novels social observation.9

His social superiority is not as much an aspect of his adolescent vision as the imaginative reality of the superior world of his mind, of his ideal world. Like the author, whom he represents, he is more truly a representative of his inner self. Values of his immediate shaping social environment are sifted as he is exposed to the early "learning experience"; his "education" is a goal and continues beyond his schooling and Princeton. Thus he lifts the veil of illusion from his mother's life. She gradually shrinks into the background having provided the essential cultural staple for his adolescent imagination. However, her cultural veneer is only obscured, not hidden.

Beatrice's presence is indispensable to Amory because it prepares him for the "preliminary skirmishes with his own generation". His desperate, unbearable, loneliness colours his mood of romantic despair. The symbolic figures of golden girls loom larger but are illusive. He is unable to shoot out of the world of cramping inhibiting possibilities and so gets more and more isolated. However, the real Amory must emerge:

The Minneapolis years were not a thick enough overlay to conceal the 'Amory plus Beatrice' from ferreting eyes of a boarding school so St. Regi's had very painfully drilled Beatrice out of him, and begun to lay down new and more conventional planking on the fundamental Amory.  

His eccentricities make him lapse into reveries of "dreamy content". He began to discover himself, exploited his talents for poetry and read whatever pandered to his "languid interests". His philosophical progress in his abstract posturing and intellectual self-analysis brings new dimensions to his sense of what he must resist in his cultural environment. The "slicker" is his coinage for what can acceptably proclaim his superiority beyond the reach of social conventions for he has aspired for a scintillating heroism that projects his adolescent dreams and expectations.

Another character that shapes Amory's early responses, and of whom Amory cannot but be a shadow is Monsignor Thayer Darcy, who symbolises Catholicism, "the gorgeous adolescent

10. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, p.35.
dream world of rich appearances". Beatrice sends him to Monsignor because she wants him to talk to Amory, "I feel he can be such a help". As a matter of fact:

When she had first returned to her country there had been a pagan, Swinburnian young man in Ashville, for whose passionate kisses and unsentimental conversations she had taken a decided penchant. They had discussed the matter pro and con with an intellectual romancing devoid of soppiness. Eventually she had decided to marry for background and the young pagan from Ashville had gone through a spiritual crisis, joined the Catholic Church, and was now Monsignor Darcy.11

He lived like an "exiled Stuart king waiting to be called to the rule of his land". When Amory first met him, he was forty-four, "intensely ritualistic, startlingly dramatic, loved the idea of God enough to be a celibate, and rather liked his neighbour".

11. Ibid., p.7.
Children adored him because he was a child; youth revelled in his company because he was still a youth and couldn't be shocked. In the proper land and century he might have been a Richelieu at present he was a very moral, very religious (if not particularly pious) clergyman, making great mystery about pulling rusty wires, and appreciating life to the fullest, if not entirely enjoying it.12

They maintain contact through letters and otherwise, Monsignor giving him "more egotistic food for consumption". Amory acknowledges that Monsignor can make things clear. Once when he felt his career had gone up in smoke and he was beginning to think he was growing eccentric he went to Monsignor who asked him to make a clean start and do "the next thing".

The priest seemed to guess Amory's thoughts before they were clear in his own head, so closely related were their minds in form and groove.13

13. Ibid., p.114.
Its a father and son relationship:

"Don't let yourself feel worthless.... An idealisation of some such man as Leonardo da Vinci would be a more valuable beacon to you at present.... do keep your clarity of mind, and if fools or sages dare to criticise don't blame yourself too much.... it's that half miraculous sixth sense by which you detect evil, it's the half realised fear of God in your heart.... Whatever your metier proves to be religion, architecture, literature I'm sure you would be much safer anchored to the church, but I won't risk my influence by arguing with you...."

Monsignor had made religion "a thing of lights and shadows, making all light and shadow merely aspects of God" so that people felt safe when he was near; they depended on him. After his death Amory "found something that he wanted, had always wanted and always would want":

not be to admired, as he had feared; not to be loved, as he had made himself believe; but to be necessary to people to be indispensable.... Amory felt an immense desire to give people a sense of security.15

Thus in Monsignor Darcy the glory and splendour of Catholicism is worldly and material shorn of its spiritual colour. He represents an urbane, sophisticated glittering figure of a resplendent power more cosmopolitan than theologically orthodox. Amory's world is enlarged to conform to a public conduct which Monsignor never demands; Amory's social brilliance sparkles. It is Monsignor who asks him as a favour to meet Clara Page his third cousin widowed six months and very poor; he further adds that she's rather a remarkable woman, and just about Amory's age. Further, Amory is also taught the symbolic import of his experience in distinguishing between the "personality" and the "personage", of social puritanism which reflected an insistence on social manners in terms of social propriety and moral puritanism of deep ethical responsibility which sanctions what is the ethical notion of "good", a meaningful distinction in middle-class culture paralysed by hypocritical commercialisation. Amory must seek his

15. Ibid., pp.286-87.
glittering ornaments in his accomplishments and achievements.

Amory's entrance into Princeton University pertains to his symbolic search for self-identity which he would discover during his escape from adolescence into maturity. For him Princeton was "good-looking aristocratic.... like a spring day .... Oxford might have been a bigger field". In 1939 Fitzgerald wrote, "You see, I.... announced the birth of my young illusions in This Side of Paradise". And certainly, Amory-Fitzgerald does develop out of these "young illusions" and comes to occupy the centre of the golden dream-like world. He emerges when "The Fgotist Becomes the Personage". Later from the vantage point of actuality Amory could observe and evaluate the merger of his own adolescence into experience, the "personality" into the "personage". He looks round to find:

. a new generation shouting the old cries;
learning the old creeds, through a reverie of long days and nights;
destined finally to go out into the grey turmoil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods
At the end of the book, he would learn that what his fundamental self-recognised as the new values was something other than what his own generation approved. The emergence of real personal identity comes with the blending of his imagination and his experience which brings into contact two different sets of materials. But having a singular focus on evil which is the moral centre of the novel and which Amory must realise in his self in order to achieve his personage, his fundamental self. He meets them both while at Princeton.

The essential moral meaning of This Side of Paradise lies in this quest and discovery that makes the novel a serious, earnest book more than just a contemporary, popular novel; he accepts:

If living isn't a seeking for the Grail
it may be a damned amusing game.17

In its symbolism of evil, the novel reaches out to the very indictment of the American moneyed society. The essence of evil lies "in the spurious beauty of American wealth", not

16. Ibid., p.304.
17. Ibid., p.300.
money itself, but something unidentifiable that makes the "very rich" different. The adolescent American dream is a Utopian quest for freedom and release from the constraining social, economic conditions and circumstances which have been beautifully illustrated in the story "The Diamond As Big As The Ritz" and "The Rich Boy".

Dick Humbird, Amory's Princeton contemporary, symbolises that evil whose corrupting tentacles have spread out to keep Amory locked out of paradise, in a "great labyrinth":

> He was where Goethe was when he began "Faust"; he was where Conrad was when he wrote "Almayer's Folly". 18

But this is a later realisation. In his first juvenile enthusiasm Amory had regarded Humbird, as one epitomising his adolescent aspirations, fancies, intellectual passions and philosophical ideals. It was always "The quiet Humbird, with his impatient superciliousness" who was the centre towards which Amory's social fancies gravitated:

Dick Humbird had, ever since freshman year, seemed to Amory a perfect type of aristocrat. He was slender but well-

18. Ibid., p.284.
built — black curly hair, straight features, and rather a dark skin. Everything he said sounded intangibly appropriate; He possessed infinite courage, an averagely good mind, and sense of humour with a clear charm and noblesse oblige that varied it from righteousness. He could dissipate without going to pieces, and even his most bohemian adventures seemed running it out: People dressed like him, tried to talk as he did. Amory decided that he probably held the world back, but he wouldn't have changed him....

Humbird, the paragon of social virtues and graces, symbolised the middle-class urge for snobbishness that his personality calmly exhibited:

He differed from the healthy type that was essentially middle-class — he never seemed to perspire. Some people could be familiar with a chauffeur without having it returned; Humbird could have lunched at Sherry's with a

19. Ibid., p.86.
coloured man, yet people would have somehow known that it was all right. He was not a snob, though he only knew half his class. His friends ranged from the highest to lowest but it was impossible to "cultivate him". Servants worshipped him, and treated him like a God. He seemed the eternal example of what the upper class tries to be.20

Amory gradually learned the "shocking truth" that Humbird's father was a classic American nouveau riche who had acquired his wealth not through real estate speculation but who had started as a grocery clerk and had moved to the Eastern United States, New York when his rising fortune could give him a new social identity. Amory had felt a curious sinking sensation hearing this for the social pretences nostalgically recall. The golden past that lies in the future which is imagined and typical of the American relationship of time and identity. However, when Humbird is killed in an automobile accident, his image changes and appears to be entirely different:

he was this white mass. All that remained of the charm and personality of

20. Ibid., pp.86-87.
the Dick Humbird he had known — oh, it was all so horrible and unaristocratic and close to earth. All tragedy has that strain of the grotesque and squalid — so useless, futile .... the way animals die .... Amory was reminded of the cat that had lain horribly mangled in some alley of his childhood.21

Humbird symbolically stands for what the Amory-Fitzgerald personality would have chosen to be, the American artist coming to grips with his American material of adolescence, the brummagem image of the egotist Fitzgerald learnt that the artist could only emerge when the author subordinated his "personality" to his "personage". Thus Humbird's death symbolises the conflict, tension and terror involved in this triumph. But Humbird is hard to kill and later reappears as the devil.

A year after, Amory encounters the devil with Sloan who also was "the centre" with Humbird. What attracts the devil is not petting or drinking. Fitzgerald himself had been the eponymic figure and critic of the "flaming youth". He indicted the fascinating, alluring self-destructive transcendence of life that gay irresponsibility in youthful

21. Ibid., p.96.
adolescence symbolised. Humbird too epitomised the way of life that devours the personage, that can be known and exorcised by repudiation, participation and living. Evil is thus inherent in character and not in the manner. So Amory is pursued by the shadow of the devil, feeling like the scene that Fitzgerald would re-sketch in the El Greco landscape of Nick Carraway's dreaming at the end of *The Great Gatsby*. The Humbird landscape of Amory's flight is a world of anonymity, the impersonal, mobile and flighty world of transitory birds of passage, the inhuman urban world of the evil of facelessness, of depersonalisation, where one's transcendent identity loses its human image. This is New York and Princeton. Those streets are unforgettable for Amory fled those streets and down:

The long street came the moon, and Amory turned his back on it and walked. Ten fifteen steps away sounded the foot steps [of the devil]. They were like slow dripping, with just the slightest insistence in their fall. Amory's shadow lay, perhaps, ten feet ahead of him, and soft shoes were presumably that far, behind. With the instinct of a child Amory edged in under the blue darkness of the white buildings cleaving the
moonlight for haggard seconds, once bursting into a slow run with clumsy stumblings....

Was everyone followed in the moonlight. But if he met someone good who'd know what he meant and hear this damned scuffle.... Then the scuffling grew suddenly nearer, and a black cloud settled over the moon.... Suddenly he realised that the footsteps were not behind had never been behind, they were ahead and he was not eluding but following....

The devil forewarns Amory from sleeping with the chorus girl and has sexual implication in the pursuing, haunting figure. But it is something present within him, a demon of personality, and is repeatedly identified with the faceless white buildings that symbolise spiritual inertia and desiccation. These visions have obvious sexual overtones and indicate sexual guilt. For Amory "the problem of evil had solidified into a problem of sex". But the disturbance has deeper implications for the whole of "paradise" itself. The evil that Humbird epitomises is the evil of false adolescent

22. Ibid., pp.125-126.
23. Ibid., p.302.
pretensions a world to which Amory makes an absolute surrender, and with it the fallaciousness of the dream, his self, his personage.

Only far inside his soul a little fire leaped and cried that something was pulling him down, trying to get him inside a door and slam it behind him. After that door was slammed there would be only footfalls and white buildings in the moonlight, and perhaps he would be one of the foot-falls. 24

Such were the haunting echoes of Amory's conscience where the Humbird devil deracinated his imaginative innocence, and the hot pursuit of the devilish footsteps made him cry out, "I want someone stupid. Oh, send someone stupid!" 25 Perhaps in his mind the association of good with simple native stupidity became a tag of innocence different from the clever, glittering world that had become identified with Humbird the face of personality and therefore evil:

Then something clanged like a low gong struck at a distance; and before his

24. Ibid., p.126.
25. Ibid., p.127.
eyes a face flashed over the two feet, a
face pale and distorted with a sort of
infinite evil that twisted it like flame
in the wind; but he knew, for the half
instant that the gong tanged and hummed,
that it was the face of Dick Humbird.26

The face of Humbird gave him a sense of security. He felt
safe in the recognition of this personage-idol, whose
impeccable social virtues Amory emulates in his self-
surrender. Humbird is the true stamp of American
aristocracy. The perfect model of the upper middle-class
gentility. But Amory was disillusioned after he learned the
truth. He himself was a member of this elite aristocracy and
his experience would keep him free from falling into the
pattern of false upstarts like Humbird. Yet the truth of
Humbird's background fails to tarnish his image as a man of
exceptionally fine qualities of mind and heart and his
character thus remains unquestioned. The reasons of his
death, however, evidence excessive pride and inordinate
stubbornness as his reckless irresponsibility which
eventually destroyed him. He is betrayed by his inner
falsity. He dies inevitably as an anachronism, as the values
of a dying order that could not survive the onslaught of
change.

26. Ibid., p.127.
The reappearance of Humbird in the devil episode with the symbolic images of death and decay — fire and Hell — the white calcium pallor of the streets and houses where the show girls live, where temptation and seduction move like warm winds, where the divan is "alive like heat waves over asphalt, like wriggling worms". Gradually there builds up the climactic moments in the deathly face of Humbird which Amory sees and which symbolises a facial expression "pale and distorted with a sort of infinite evil". For his recklessness and irresponsibility Humbird gains his hell. Amory is saved this fate by knowing the face of evil in Humbird's distorted visage, but he suffered a hard fate in having been denied what he conceived to be the ideals of "aristocratic egotism."

There are varied interpretations of the "devil" episode. Milton H. Sterne thinks it to be a remnant of Fitzgerald's Catholic sensibility or of his Irish mysticism. He goes on to argue that if seen in its proper function as an attempt to dramatise rather than merely sermonise the theme of evil in the novel, the episode is perfectly explicable. It is not only Amory who sees the devil; Tom D'Invilliers too sees it; thereby the presence is externalised into the literal narrative where it does not really belong either in event, attitude or tone. It is symbolic and an example of surrealism. His use of fantasy or the fabulous has either
been neglected or misinterpreted. He used it in a number of short stories: "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button", "Tarquin of Cheapside" "A Short Trip Home", "O Russet Witch'", "One Trip Abroad", "The Adjuster", "The Conquest of America", "The Room With Green Blinds", "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz". There is an interplay of tension between the sense of a real world and an anti-world of the implausible or outlandish often grotesque and bizarre. There is a compulsion to arrest, rearrange or alter time whereby his vision is imposed upon reality. This hyperbolic treatment or mimesia can also induce temporary euphoria. Seen in the light of Freudianism, it can be day-dreaming:

dreams of a metamorphosed reality are emotional and social necessities which we cannot help but indulge, and that they are in another sense insubstantial, ludicrous, pathetic. In this respect fantasy was well-suited to mirror Fitzgerald's complex attitude towards his time.27

Buell further calls him the forerunner from Nathanael West to Donald Bathelme:

who have established what mail well come
to be recognised as the main current in
late twentieth century American
fiction.28

Thus Fitzgerald is not only recognised as a novelist of
manners, a faithful chronicler of his times, a highly
sensitive writer with deep moral convictions but also a
confirmed fabulist of his age. It has now been generally
acknowledged that he used surrealism as early as 1920. This
he called his "second manner" or "new manner". However, it
turned out to be a catastrophic failure so he gave it up,
rather sublimated it.

The Devil Episode is primarily important not only "for its
warning against the sexual enticements of show-girls like
Axia Marlow.... [but] for its effort to exorcise the appeal,
and the threat of Dick Humbird's wealth, personality and
charm".29 In the final analysis, it must be retrieved from
its allegiance and an image both complementary and opposite
must replace the one of Humbird. That image of the good
angel is provided by Burne Halliday. He was:

28. Ibid., p.37.
broad-browed and strong-chinned with the fineness in the honest gray eyes that were like Kerry's, Burne was a man who gave an immediate impression of bigness and security ... stubborn, that was evident, but his stubbornness wore no stolidity, and when he talked for five minutes, Amory knew that his keen enthusiasm had in it no quality of dilettantism.

The intense power Amory felt later in Burne Halliday differed from the admiration he had for Humbird. This time it began as purely a mental interest. With other men whom he had thought as primarily first-class' he had been attracted first by their personalities, and in Burne he missed that immediate magnetism to which he usually swore allegiance.30

Burne not only symbolises the new social change overtaking America in the aftermath of the War, but also provides a fresh perspective into the perniciousness of American wealth, its "meretricious beauty", its deadly thrust of

30. F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, pp.134-35.
pushing the possessor, onto the precipice from where he must fall and perish. Humbird was that victim of ill-begotten wealth and sudden social transcendence. Burne belongs nowhere; the centre of his life is not the top, reaching which the person is destroyed; he is a personage, a non-personality: this is his identity and his "sanity that enabled [him] to stand against all traditions".  

31 Burne's scorn of the establishmmentarian prestige and status, his urge for social service, reform and chance, all help him to remain firm and unbroken to the end. Through him we are made to realise that goodness is not stupidity, and the sham and hypocrisy of status-seeking is the real evil.

But Burne slips out of Amory's memory. It is the Humbirds who linger and return repeatedly but in various metamorphoses. Burne splits with Amory for he rejects the superman Nietzschean dynamism which Amory applauds and thinks of Allied effort in the war "as the great protest against superman". Though Amory fails to realise it, the entire social and moral order, the Victorian values and arrangements were questioned by the War; far from preserving the old values, Amory's going to war would only remove the obstacles to the new and emerging social and moral change. Monsignor had perceived it and in "a letter dated January, 1918 .... to Amory, who is a second lieutenant in the 171st

31. Ibid., p.136.
Infantry, Port of Embarkation, Camp Mills, Long Island" he wrote:

This is the end of one thing: for better or worse you will never again be quite the Amory Blaine that I knew, never again will we meet as we have met, because your generation is growing hard, much harder than mine ever grew, nourished as they were on the stuff of the nineties.  

The war to which Amory and his generation had gone, presaged a time of anarchy and disorder. The America that they return to is not the one they had left. During Amory's interlude overseas American society had been altered. War serves as a step in Amory's education to make his experience more authentic though it does not shape that experience.

War stands as a symbolic intermission between Amory's deprivation of his place in American aristocracy and what had given him his exceptionally superior attitude, his "aristocratic egotism". It has taken away the already melting family fortune. He is now poor and belongs to the petite bourgeois world. All the prospects of wealth having

32. Ibid., p.171.
been wiped out with the death of his mother during his European sojourn. He attempted:

to put the blame for the whole war on the ancestors of his generation.... all the people who cheered for Germany in 1870.... All the materialists rampant, all the idolizers of German science and efficiency.....Tennyson....a representative of the Victorians.... Victorians who never learned to weep. Who sowed the bitter harvest your children go to reap.33

However, after Amory goes to the war, no exploits, skirmishes are mentioned so that Edmund Wilson rightly criticised him in a letter:

If you thought you couldn't deal with his military experience you shouldn't have had him go abroad at all.... I really think you should cultivate detachment and not allow yourself to drift into a state of mind where, as in the later part of the book, you make

33. Ibid., p.164.
Amory the hero of dramatic encounters with all the naive and romantic gusto of a small boy imagining himself as a brave hunter of Indians.34

In the new world order, the advantages and expensive proposition that wealth could command, are losing their hold and their lustre. The young debutante must marry wealth which her imagination needs to create a sphere in which she can use it. Rosalind Connage pushes that harsh reality in the face of Amory when she decides to give him up for Dawson Ryder who says she'd learn to love him. Ryder was "reliable" and she felt he'd be a "background"; he was a good man and a strong one. He had promised to give a poor little boy an Indian suit and had kept his promise. That made her realise that he'd be nice to their children, take care of them, and she wouldn't have to worry.

The Humbird image reappears with a more intense insistence in the image of the Golden Girl ... Isabelle, Rosalind, Eleanor and their later descendants, Daisy in The Great Gatsby and Rosemary and Nicole in Tender Is The Night. All like Humbird have their immediate acceptance in being the centre of adoration of beauty and youth, of adulation and emulation, but equally of destruction. The quest of romantic

wonder, of the pursuit of happiness and the very capitulation to the American Dream, tend toward imaginative transcendence of the harsh actuality, of the constrictions put upon by death and temporal fate. But the possibility of perpetual damnation looms perilously close, linked to the very objects of romantic quest:

The Fitzgerald hero is destroyed by the materials which the American experience offers as objects and criteria of passion and is reduced by his capitulation to them and is chastened and subdued.35

The objects of passion, the beautiful and young golden girls, are creations of Fitzgerald's imagination which through a complex alchemy of transmutation, has retrieved Ginevera king and Zelda Sayer from the oblivion of the adolescent fascination into the eternally beautiful and desirable femme fatale, a source of emulation and inspiration but equally of inescapable destruction. Though the object, like the quest itself, is a perennial illusion, it is an inherent privilege of those in the American society who have the required leisure through wealth, and who feel

aesthetic longing, but pursue what will inevitably delude and betray. The disenchantment itself connotes vacuity and irresponsibility on the part of those who have willed themselves to be deluded by such an escape and destruction. James E. Miller thinks that the quest of Amory Blaine is one of the search for "social ideals with an attempt to saturate the novel with glimpses of "the way it really is". This quest motif follows on Compton Mckenzie's Sinister Street, H.G. Wells' The Search Magnificent and Robert Hugh Benson's None other Gods.

A prerequisite of this fairyland is wealth, success in terms of money. Without this glitter of wealth, diamonds and material splendour, the earthly beauty is unimaginable. The dazzle and the glamour are the very symbols of the desirable. Money attains both aesthetic and social connotations. It alone can make the dream possible, the dream of eternal youth and beauty, and can arrest them from possible disillusionment and decay. But in Fitzgerald's imagination what belongs to the aesthetic realm of contemplation is now subjected to corruption through commercialised vulgarity. The kind of "symbolic social novels" that he wrote are different in aim and execution from the naturalistic social novels of Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser; his are closer to Edith Wharton; even the subjects they deal with: the relationship of beauty and
wealth, the displacement of values, the corruption of American expectations when they shift from social meaning to society. However, the sense of history in Wharton is far denser in form though the substance of history and its imaginatively realised meaning are firmer and more coherent in Fitzgerald. His fictional material is not just autobiography but the appropriate contemporary expression of ancient possibilities and desire. Money, while changing hands, changes class relationships and human values, changes old graciousness for new ostentation; from rags to riches goes beyond the superficial level and affects man's psyche and entire ethos. It is a historical perspective which has meaning and substance. His use of symbols is deliberate and purposeful. An aestheticism of materialistic hedonism, cultural cleavage of American society with its insistent fatality and pervasive spiritual malaise were all tangibly present in the glitter of American wealth as the sense of illusion of its felicity was never absent from his imagination:

All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them ... the lovely creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Thomas Hardy's peasants. In life these things hadn't happened yet, but I was
pretty sure living wasn't the reckless, careless business these people thought.  

Fitzgerald was thus trying to comprehend the deeper meaning of the American experience even as he was indicting the Jazz Age and a whole race gone hedonistic with a trivial and immature lust for pleasure, spelling the end of Columbus' dream, the very doom of the voyage of discovery. The imagery is persistent and compels into submission the very ruinous quality of American life because of its plutocratic ambitions that Fitzgerald found reason to despise and reject even though he himself was lured by its false but dazzling facade. The imagery from an early story "May Day" has deep symbolic import and was to be followed up in The Great Gatsby:

The great plate-glass front had turned to a deep creamy blue.... Dawn had come up in Columbus Circle, magical breathless, dawn silhouetting the great statue of the immortal Christopher, and mingling in a curious uncanny manner

with the fading fellow electric light inside.\textsuperscript{37}

The brutalization of the dream in a rage for disorder is made clear by this powerful image. The ironic contrast of the quest that urged Columbus to this "new world" and what the inheritors of that dream turned it into, the meretriciousness and sheer vacuity, the vast and vulgar shallowness is glaring and compelling.

Such are also the implications of the pursuit and wooing of the golden girl, of the charisma of love, beauty and youthful innocence. The quest and the attainment are imperative even when the winning becomes a destructive triumph; the efforts reduced to ashes; the absorption of the seeker into the ideal, the ritual must be undergone for winning of the golden girl is symbolic of the winning of America; it is a symbol of the golden west, the Frontier the receding ideal' though to Fitzgerald's generation, the "Westward Ho" had begun to absorb the Eastern cities, New York with its desiccated streets, pallour of death and destruction (This Side of Paradise), housing the Eastern Princess of the golden American West: high in "the white

palace is the king's daughter, the golden girl" (The Great Gatsby).

In Fitzgerald's world the golden girl never stands for sexual triumph. She symbolises status and being. His novels are conspicuously free from erotic fantasies. This is remarkable in an age which was celebrating sexual freedom with great exuberance and he was its most vocal spokesman. The golden girl lures her lovers on, like America itself, with a "voice.... full of money".\(^{38}\) She is "the phallic woman with a phallus of gold".\(^{39}\) Even though her fairy glamour is illusory she remains magical to entice and lure; she is the golden idol, the soul of wealth as well as of America, and both are no longer innocent. This lost innocence is what leads to corruption and ultimate destruction. Possession of wealth makes her aggressive for like the wealthy she can retreat into her money once the devastation is complete. The moment of beauty and illusion can be kept alive, and indefinitely extended because wealth gives a sense of "raw ostentation.... of privilege existing outside the reach of moral responsibility [and confers a freedom] beyond any moral calculations".\(^{40}\) The rich were responsible for the decline of national morality. Fitzgerald

38. F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p. 91

had transmuted them into that symbol of the decade's incredible truth.

Fitzgerald did not worship riches or the rich; he merely lived in their golden eye.... they became for him what war became for Hemingway, or the anarchy of modern society for Dos Passes ... the pattern of human existence, the artist's medium of understanding.41

The golden girl legend found its most appropriate expression in the "flapper" of Fitzgerald's generation which almost became a myth. The post-war American "La belle dame sans merci" who became a dispersive social force, insolent and full of Amazonian energy was impelled by her new desire to reject the traditional institution of marriage which she found futile; she found motherhood also inane intolerable, a menace to her beauty. Her sense of freedom, informality and existential urge for experience made her more audacious, capricious and extravagant. The golden girl in This Side of Paradise attains a generic role. Fitzgerald carefully sets


her with a surface froth of emotions but lacking in depth with an inability for a meaningful, permanent relationship. Amory had wanted something lasting. He knows:

The "belle" had become the "flirt", the "flirt" had become the "baby vamp". The "belle" had five or six callers every afternoon. If the P.D. (Popular Daughter), by some coincident, has, two it is made pretty uncomfortable for one who hasn't the date with her.... Try to find P.D. between dances, just try to find her.

The same girl.... deep in an atmosphere of jungle music and the questioning of moral codes. Amory found it rather fascinating to feel that any popular girl he met before eight he might quite possibly kiss before twelve.

"Why on earth are we here?" he asked the girl with green combs one night as they sat in someones's limousine, outside the Country Club in Louisville.
"I don't know, I'm just full of the devil".

"Let's be frank ... we'll never see each other again. I wanted to come out here with you because I thought you were the best-looking girl in sight. You really don't care whether you ever see me again, do you?"

"No .. but is this your line for every girl? What have I done to deserve this?"

"And you don't feel tired dancing .... You just wanted to be .... "

"Oh let's go in", she interrupted, "if you want to analyse. Let's not talk about it".42

With his moral earnestness Amory recoils from mere promiscuity. Henry Dan Piper comments that he suffers from an inability to cope with the feminine mind inspite of his outward sophistication; and never is a situation as complicated as it is when a sexual relationship gets involved. This is portrayed through the dramatic renderings

42. This Side of Paradise, p.66.
in the scenes involving heightened emotional situations like Amory's meeting thirteen year old Myra St. Claire.

The girl of Amory's dream is personified in Isabelle:

She had never been so curious about her appearance, she had never been so satisfied with it. She had been sixteen years old for six months.... Isabelle had been for sometime capable of very strong if transient emotions.... All impressions and infact, all ideas were extremely kaleidoscopic to Isabelle. She had that curious mixture of the social and the artistic temperaments found often in two classes, society women and actresses. Her education or, rather, her sophistication, had been absorbed from the boys who had dangled on her favour; her tact was instinctive and her capacity for love affairs was limited only by the number of the susceptible within telephone distance. Flirt smiled from her large black-brown eyes and showed through her intense physical magnetism.43

43. Ibid., pp.67,70.
Isabelle is incapable of love and lasting passions. For Amory this "orgy of sociability" is an initiation into the new ambience of his ideal contentment. He is not in love with her but his pretentious, conventionalised behaviour is a poseur necessary for his adolescent role-playing as an armour against a world that least comprehends Amory Blaine "shorn of illusion and finished with poses".

Amory is a match for Isabelle's "narcissistic poses" and vanity. He can wear a mask of innocence for this world of superficiality and transience:

Isabelle and Amory were not innocent, nor were they particularly brazen. Moreover, amateur standing had very little value in the game they were playing ..... She had begun as he had with good looks and excitable temperament and rest was the result of accessible popular novels and dressing room conversation culled from a slightly older set ..... Amory was proportionately less deceived. He waited for the mask to drop off, but at the same time he did not question her right to wear it. She, on her part, was not
impressed by his studied air of blase' sophistication.44

His mask serves him well, for he measures up to the shallow world of superficial vanity:

He had arrived, abreast of the best in his generation at Princeton. He was in love and his love was returned. Turning on all the lights, he looked at himself in the mirror, trying to find in his face the qualities that made him see more clearly than the great crowd of the people, that made him decide firmly, and able to influence and follow his own will. There was little in his life that he would have changed.... Silently he admired himself. How conveniently well he looked.45

Amory believed he was in that magic moment when "he was enjoying life as he would probably never enjoy it again", that his self-adulation and romantic egotism had coalesced in such a moment when:

44. Ibid., p.73.
45. Ibid., p.98.
Everything was hallowed by the haze of his own youth.... "Isabelle", he cried half involuntarily' and held out his arms. As in the story books she ran into them, and on that half minute, as their lips first touched, rested and the high point of vanity, the rest of his young egotism.46

Amory is deeply aware of the evanescence of passionate, overpowering moments, a nostalgia consciously identified with youth and beauty and the transience of youthful fantasies. Amory also became aware of the "one vast juvenile intrigue" which had inflicted the youth's morale for ethical rejuvenence. He found girls doing incredible things:

eating three O'clock, after-dance suppers in impossible cafes: talking of every side of life with an air half of earnest and half of mockery, yet with a furtive excitement that .... stood for a real moral let-down.47

46. Ibid., p.98.
47. Ibid., p.65.
His relationship with Isabelle ends while he rides high on "the crest of young egotism", and that is a moral triumph for him.

Isabelle's spoilt-child behaviour seems undoubtedly outrageous when as the "baby" she embarks upon the adventures of a "vamp". But her seductive designs fail to entice or sway Amory. What Fitzgerald is portraying here is the moral repulsion and horror of the life as emerging in the American city ... the cultural centre ... where the vortex of social life is veering round to the "belle", the "flirt" and the "baby vamp". He is pointing to the contrast, which he stresses in the reversal of values.

In Rosalind, the golden girl "debutante", there is another intellectual and emotional phase in Amory's life. There are her natural prerogatives and her.

fresh enthusiasm, her will to grow and learn, her endless faith in the inexhaustibility of romance, her courage and fundamental honesty ... these things are not spoiled.48

48. Ibid., p.183.
But she too bears the poisonous fangs of evil, and the quester's enchantment would be short-lived; she would prove an "expensive proposition" for Amory. Her social preferences put a premium on the value of man .... she would marry tons of money someday out of sheer boredom, perhaps because she is "Rosalind Unlimited". This implies retreating into her wealth as Amory doesn't have those resources; he lacks the power to lead her to the emotional paroxysms she is looking for.

Rosalind's passionate love epitomises her desire for a "male to gratify one's artistic taste". Their love too passes through breathless, anxious moments "that any minute the spell would break and drop them out of this paradise of rose and flame". She is a creature of moments and Amory is important for the future of the "next things" only. She represents the Twenties that have lost their moorings. The traditional home has been washed away, and with it the lasting riches of love and spiritual communion which transcends all human passions and ephemeral allurements. She thinks she would fail if she married Amory; she hates the "narrow atmosphere" shut away from the larger world. She gives him up for someone "floating in money":

I like sunshine and pretty things and I dread responsibility. 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 the summer.\textsuperscript{49}

Thus there is a drifting away from the mainstream; what was once sacrosanct has turned into a sham and humbug; older, gracious living has been devastated and with it the serenity of life. Though she willingly sacrificed him, her feelings at the end are:

\begin{quote}
    Oh, Amory, what have I done to you? (And deep under the aching sadness that will pass in time, Rosalind feels that she has lost something, she knows not what, she knows not why.)\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

In his romance with Eleanor Savage it was the "last time that evil crept close to Amory under the mask of beauty". But the veil of evil was misconstrued in the context of "flaming youth"; Fitzgerald's sophomorism seemed dramatised in such an attitude. With Eleanor, Amory's

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p.120.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 210.
imagination ran riot and that is why they rode to the highest hill and watched an evil moon tide high, for they knew then that they could see the devil in each other. 51

Amory's romance resounds with echoes of Byronic symbolism of the assertion of the romantic will. She appears like "dim phantasmal shapes expressing eternal beauty in curious elfin moods". She betrays a temperament of fierce and disenchanted disposition, contemptuous of mere innocence:

She had lived in France with a restless mother whom Amory imagined to have been very like his own, on whose death she had come to America, to live in Maryland. She had gone to Baltimore first to stay with a bachelor uncle, and there she insisted on being a debutante at the age of seventeen. She had a wild winter and arrived in the country in March having quarrelled frantically with all her Baltimore relatives and shocked them into fiery protest. A rather fast crowd had come out, who drank cocktails

51. Ibid., p.238.
in limousines and were promiscuously condescending and patronising toward other people, and Eleanor with an esprit that hinted strongly of boulevards led many innocents still redolent of St. Timothy and Farmington, into paths of Bohemian naughtiness. 52

Thus she too manifested the malaise of the age, women seeking fulfilment of the flesh. Fitzgerald fails to articulate his moral puritanism and exhibits social puritanism.

If Isabelle appeared balmy and serene, then Rosalind was wild and aggressive, and Eleanor is intellectual and emotional energy sexualised. But at the bottom the instinct is the same; the same drive and motive which are "evil". Her devilish behaviour and "Bohemian naughtiness" seemed the obvious consequences because she herself admits that she is hipped on Freud .... but its rotten that every bit of real love in the world is ninety nine percent passion and one little soupcon of jealousy. 53

52. Ibid., p.249.
53. Ibid., p.255.
This is the rebellion of the flapper and her reptilian devouring power. She assumes the contemporary symbol of disenchantment, and with her blasphemy tears to shreds the thick cloak of his materialism:

That's your panacea [the catholic church or the maxims of Confucius], isn't it?.... Oh, you're just an old hypocrite too. Thousands of scowling priests keeping the degenerate Italians and illiterate Irish repentant with gabble about sixth and ninth commandments. Its just all cloaks, sentiment and spiritual rouge and panaceas. I'll tell you there is no God, not even a definite abstract goodness; so its all got to be worked out for the individual by the individual here in high white foreheads like mine, and you're too much the prig to admit it". She let go her reins and shook her little fists at the stars.54

No wonder then that the next moment she is prepared to jump off the cliff and while she is saved her horse dies. She is

54. Ibid., p.256.
the externalised personality of Amory; their backgrounds, tastes and temperaments are the same:

They seemed nearer, not only mentally, but physically, when they read, than when she was in his arms and this was often, for they fell half into love almost from the first.  

Like Amory, she too considers herself an intellectual on the brink of destruction. Meeting her is like coming to realise his own self:

He had never met a girl like this before .... He didn't at all feel like a character in a play, the appropriate feeling in an unconventional situation ... instead, he had a sense of coming home.  

For Isabelle he was too much of an "analyser" a thinker; for Rosalind he was too "romantic", for Eleanor, he is:

55. Ibid., p.248.
56. Ibid., p.245.
Stupider than I am .... I'm too bright for most men, and I have to descend to their level and let them patronise my intellect.... I'm not sentimental .... I'm as romantic as you are. 57

This in itself is fatal because as the "fundamental" Eleanor emerges which is the personality of Amory, things change:

Their love waned slowly with the moon.... For a minute they stood there, hating each other with a bitter sadness. But as Amory had loved himself in Eleanor so now what he hated was only a mirror. Their poses were strewn about the pale dawn like broken glasses. 58

The figures of Isabelle Rosalind and Eleanor are all transfigured evils of the gilded world of false appearances, shorn of all moral commitment and unfettered for taste of impulsive moments. They symbolise a distillation of their own personalities in Amory's self. They represent the very moral puritanism that "provincial squeamishness" which

57. Ibid., p.256.
58. Ibid., p.258.
anticipates the Buchanans and their golden, irresponsible world of impulse rejected by Fitzgerald:

They were the 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.59

In its ultimate symbolistic significance, the very diabolical beauty and malevolent irresponsibility, and, in its devilish savagery and lack of conscience, Eleanor, the golden girl, is the vampire in the ghostly figure of Humbird who inhabited "the dark night of the soul" that Amory tries to exorcise. But she is also the most alluring vision on the American social landscape ... the corrupting annihilating vision that has shattered all hopes of Columbus' brave new world.

Clara did not somehow fit into the fabric of evil; her angelic image made her different. Even "Amory wasn't good enough for Clara, Clara of his ripply golden hair, but then no man was". Her harried life from sixteen on may alone have

had an affinity with the golden girls other wiser the movement of her life was contrary to theirs; her convent education is partly responsible for this.

When Amory found her in Philadelphia he thought her steely blue eyes held only happiness; a latent strength, a realism, was brought to its fullest development by the facts that she was compelled to face. She was alone in the world with two small children, little money.... She could do the most prosy things.60

She symbolises that moral still-point from which others can be measured in a world in flux. That compels Amory to confess in a trembling voice, "I think.... that if I lost faith in you I'd lose faith in God". She seems to attain her strength from certain heights: "She drew down to herself when she knelt and bent her golden hair into the stained-glass light". However, she could have joined the "damned" tribe "if the lord had just bent [her] soul a little the other way". She is a perfection unrealised in a material world. Little wonder then that she was introduced to Amory through Monsignor Darcy. She has never been in love, she confesses to Amory who

60. This Side of Paradise, pp.150-51.
realised slowly how much she had told him.... never in love.... She seemed suddenly a daughter of light alone. His entity dropped out of her plane and he longed only to touch her dress with almost the realisation that Joseph must have had of Mary's eternal significance.61

She is a fleshless ideal, an embodiment of the anti-vamp. of moral depth. She is unreal in a world of false appearances and moral vacuum. His ultimate painful realisation is that the "real" is the unreality of the world while foul is fair; perfection is unreal. Such creatures are ethereal and remain part of the unfulfilled promise of that American world.

Amory's search for identity is to be found in his loss of innocence and gain of experience.

The matron doesn't want to repeat her girlhood ... she wants to repeat her honeymoon. I don't want to repeat my innocence. I want the pleasure of losing it again.62

61. Ibid., p.158.
62. Ibid., p.278.
He confesses to being the product of a "versatile mind in a restless generation", "a fish out of water in too many outworn systems", "in love with change [having] killed his conscience", the result being "self-reproach and loneliness and disillusion", a feeling that

Life was a damned muddle .... a football game with everyone off-side and the referee gotten rid of ... everyone claiming the referee would have been on his side .... 63

Thus Fitzgerald the artist faces the moral dilemma of having to champion the youthful rebelliousness of his age, having participated in it and drunk life to the lees with his wife, and yet indict its immoral, hedonistic excesses, repudiating its standards.

He was in an eddy again, a deep lethargic gulf.... For the first time in his life he rather longed for death to roll over his generation, obliterating their petty fevers and struggles and exultations. His youth seemed never so vanished.... Things that had been the

63. Ibid., p.285.
merest commonplaces of his life then....
had all flown away and the gaps they
left were filled only with the great
listlessness of his disillusion.64

As the artist, Fitzgerald's exploration of evil and
detailing of moral responsibility tends to blur the
distinction between what is the real nature of evil and the
mere social excesses of whoring, drinking, parties, petting
... a confusion of ethical judgement, of mores and morality.
Amory confronts this situation in Atlantic city, where he
meets his old Princeton mate, Alec Connage, the brother of
Rosalind. In the hotel he gets up to find Alec sleeping with
a shop girl. In a moment of reflection the perception of the
Humbird -- devil flashes through his mind:

The first fact that flashed radiantly
through his comprehension was the great
impersonality of sacrifice ... he
perceived that what we call love and
hate, reward and punishment, had no more
to do with it than the date of the month
.... Now he realised the truth: that
sacrifice was no purchaser of freedom.
It was like a great eclectic office, it

64. Ibid., p.263.
was like an inheritance of power ... to certain people at certain times an essential luxury, carrying with it not a guarantee but a responsibility, not a security but an infinite risk. Its very momentum might drag him down to ruin ... the passing of the emotional wave that made it possible might leave the one who made it high and dry forever on an island of despair. 65

The act of self sacrifice is seized by Amory. He gallantly saves Alec from the house detective: he could have gone to the penitentiary "for bringin' a girl from, one state to 'nother f'r immoral purp'ses" banned by the Mann Act. He is thus released from the evil that had dogged him, and his personality changes into a "personage"; Monsignor had explained to him the difference between "personality" and "personage":

"A personality is what you thought you were .... a physical matter almost entirely, it lowers the people it acts on ...I've seen it vanish in a long sickness. But while a personality is

65. Ibid., pp.266-267.
active, it overrides 'the next thing'.
Now a personage, on the other hand, gathers. He's a bar on which a thousand things have been hung ... glittering things sometimes, as ours are; but he uses these things with a cold mentality back of them".66

As Amory makes his choice between keeping his public image intact and an altruistic act which might identify him with the sin of Alec, the ghost of Monsignor watches him from "among the curtains in the room in Atlantic city". What saves him is his self-abnegation, and he begins to be aware of the sense of evil as a loss of innocence, not necessarily what goes with "Bohemian naughtiness". But for him.

The problem of evil had solidified into the problem of sex. He was beginning to identify evil with the strong phallic worship in Brooke and early Wells.67

He no longer ferreted out the deeper evils in pride and sensuality. Wealth is cleansed of that sin. It is poverty which is rotten: "Its essentially cleaner to be corrupt and

66. Ibid., pp.113-114.
67. Ibid., p.302.
rich than it is to be innocent and poor". He runs the full circle of his quest to find the wealthy corrupt and corrupting as the most fascinating inhabitants of the golden world ... a story that revolves the thematic wheels of his short stories and novels.

The "romantic egotist" has been metamorphosed into a "personage" and the streets of New York stress the new phase of life he has entered opening new horizons for him. He now wants "to clamor life-ward", and even New York life becomes baptismal for its curative, regenerative powers. As stated earlier the awareness of Monsignor's death gives him a new impetus to act in earnest towards a purpose by giving "people a sense of security". Monsignor had impressed upon him that a personage gathered his accomplishments as possessions, and what constituted self-preservation was order and stability not drifting and chaos.

Amory altered the image replacing it by self sacrifice and altruism, giving a new dimension to his experience: "It is not life that is complicated, it's the struggle to guide and control. That is his struggle". The gesture of revolt is replaced by commitment and he gives a new meaning to social

68. Ibid., p.274.
69. Ibid., p.292.
perspective in terms of human values in order to usher in a social transformation.

Amory had lived in a disillusioned world with the feeling that "life was a damned muddle;" and, in search for values, he knew that "man in his hunger for faith will feed his mind with the nearest and most convenient food". His contemporaries fed themselves on the adolescent dreams culminating in the newly emancipated "flapper", the golden girl with youth, beauty, money, and brains enough to brush the banalities of poverty under the carpet or in someone else's backyard. Fitzgerald sums up the golden girl concept in Amory's innocent dream:

Women ... of whom he had expected so much; whose beauty he had hoped to transmute into modes of art; whose unfathomable instincts, marvellously incoherent and inarticulate, he had thought to perpetuate in terms of experience ... had become merely concretions to their own posterity. Isabelle, Rosalind, Eleanor, were all removed by their very beauty, around which men swarmed, from the possibility of contributing anything but a sick
But the sickness and surfeit of self-indulgence had at its core a moral vacuum equal in proportion to the ethical and emotional repression of an earlier era. After discovering himself, he can authentically proclaim a social puritanism with a moral fervour:

Inseparably linked with evil was beauty ... beauty, still a constant, rising tumult; soft in Eleanor's voice, in an old song at night .... Amory knew that every time he had reached toward it longingly it had leered out at him with the grotesque face of evil. Beauty of great art, beauty of all joy, most of all beauty of women.

After all, it had too many associations with license and indulgence. Weak things were often beautiful, weak things were never good.  

70. Ibid., p.283.
71. Ibid., p.302.
He had realised that weak things ought to be transcended, and one can be unselfish and acquire poise and balance in life. He had fallen a victim to his "own pretentiousness of inexperienece".

In the New York reportage Amory seems an indefatigable and fascinated observer of life in its dregs ... poverty and sufferings, the revolutionary mutterings of the poor working classes, simultaneously with the contrasting poles of crass vulgarity of the prosperous upper class and pompous irresponsibility and inefficiency of the American aristocracy. From this small enclosure which he views with dismay and horror, Amory moves to greater labyrinths.

Socialism seems of interest to him because of its unconventionality; its a convenient ploy for asserting his new-found freedom. Also, perhaps, that such ideologies seem attractive to them whom riches have eluded. His militant faith in this ideology is out of sympathy for his American experience:

Even if, deep in my heart, I thought we were all blind atoms in a world as limited as a stroke of a pendulum, I and my sort would struggle against tradition; try, at least, to displace old
cants with new ones. I've thought I was right about life at various times, but faith is difficult. One thing I know. If living isn't seeking for the Grail it may be a damned amusing game.72

But he can no longer be deluded by false sentimentality and his romantic imagination. What he envisions in his vague socialism is that he is a personage among floating personalities. When he looked about him at the spires and Gargoyles there was the shock of discovery and recognition:

The spirit of the past brooding over a new generation; the chosen youth [of Princeton] from the muddled, unchastened world, still fed romantically on the mistakes and half forgotten dreams of dead statesmen. Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds through, a reverie of long days and nights: destined finally to go out into that dirty gray turmoil to follow love and pride: a new generation dedicated more than the last to a fear of poverty and the worship of

72. Ibid., p.291.
success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken. 73

The struggle had been worthwhile and he had also found a substitute though a poor substitute:

There was ever the pain of memory; the regret for lost youth ... yet the waters of disillusion had left a deposit on his soul, responsibility and a love of life, the faint stirring of old ambitions and unrealised dreams. 74

In a dramatic gesture "he stretched out his arms to the crystalline, radiant sky. 'I know myself', he cried, 'but that is all'" This lonely, desperate defiance is an articulate "gesture of indefinite revolt" according to Edmund Wilson. It is a recognition and assertion that in a world absent of all value, art is the only hope of personal salvation. Fitzgerald's generation was uprooted and cut off from the past, "the lost generation".

Wandering between two worlds:

73. Ibid., p.304.
74. Ibid., po.304.
One dead, the other powerless to be born.  

Education should equip them "to think clearly, concisely, and logically, freed of his habit of taking refuge in platitudes and prejudices and sentimentalisms." 

The significance of the novel's quest for Amory and Fitzgerald is the dream of regaining paradise with the knowledge that:

The expected Utopia was lost in the golden moment in which it was obtained, changed a boy brummagem god, through pain and anticipation and nostalgia, into a man and artist.

However, it's only an "awful proposition" because it's doubtful if his self-knowledge will insulate him against his own vulnerability and a spiritually vacuous moneyed culture of his contemporary society.

75. Mathew Arnold, "Scholar Gypsy", Fifteen Poets, ed.
76. This Side of Paradise, p.298.
The relevance of *This Side of Paradise* is its contemporaneity. The content is both thin and derivative. But what Cyril Connoly said of Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* could befit an evaluative assessment of Fitzgerald's first novel:

[it is] important because it is the first of a long line of bad books, the novel of adolescence, autobiographical, romantic, which squandered the vocabulary of love and literary appreciation, played into the hands of.... Literary Puritans.... It popularised .... literature as a pool of Narcissus into which gazes the romance of prostitution, of priests.... It is a pastiche of the Pater, of Marins the Epicurean and the Wilde of Dorian Gray.... it is the prose of Rupert Brooke...."78

It has these elements and more. Its underlying purpose, its prefatorial anticipations set the tone of Fitzgerald's later and more significant works, defining the American quest for identity. Besides the explorations of the American

adolescent experience are not only topical but universal and refreshing. He acknowledged:

My idea is always to reach my generation. The wise writer, I think writes for the youth of his own generation, the critics for the next, and the school masters of ever afterwards. 79

Through his literary imagination Fitzgerald captured and dramatised the fever and fret of his age. It was essential to his perception of reality to apprehend its emotional content and to realise that adolescence was an artistic pose rather than something lacking maturity. Moreover, the sense of nostalgia accompanying innocence added a new dimension to the awareness and reactions of the youth to their experience, and Fitzgerald's achievement as a social critic. This Side of Paradise continues to be a part of the composite maturer novels, The Great Gatsby and Tender is the Night. The motif of Amory as a modern Icarus, overreaching with regard to ambition and disillusion thereby taking the plunge into ruin is the thread woven through Fitzgerald's other novels. His later protagonists are like sphinxes arising out of the ashes of Amory. He continues in

79. Mathew Brucolli:, Some Epic Grandeur, p.140.
the collective consciousness of Gatsby, Dick Diver and Monroe Stahr for his unsuspecting innocence is the adolescent prison within which the entire gamut of American experience is evaluated, in which the present is sifted in the winnowing scales of the past.

The novel thus looks back to the end of an era though it equally stands on the threshold of another, and can be seen as a preface to the novel of ideas which was about to make its mark on the American scene. The quotation from Rupert Brooke suggests the title of the book:

... Well this side of Paradise!...
There's little comfort in the wise.

It is dedicated to Sigourney Fay i.e. Monsignor Darcy who remained a close friend of Fitzgerald's until his early death at forty-three in 1919. Before Fitzgerald enlisted Father Fay had proposed to take him abroad as part of a complicated mission from American Catholics to the Pope.

In the final analysis This Side of Paradise marks Fitzgerald's transition from a short story writer and would be poet to an ambitions novelist. He thought of himself as a novelist and saved his best work for his novels. He:
atleast [took] his scattered literary effusions and his undescribed experiences, sifted them, shaped and reshaped them, often looked at them ironically, and fashioned them into a sustained narrative.... The novel took the bold step that Fitzgerald needed.... It helped.... Thrash out those "ideas still in riot"... his ideas about love and women, about the Church, about his past, about the importance of being as contrasted with doing .... [It] has Fitzgerald's own stamp: The naivete and honesty.... 'that goes into my books so that people can read it blind like Braille'.... Finally, though Fitzgerald places his twin hopes of money and the girl in the books success, the book is not merely contrived to achieve these aims.80

The novel is prefaced with another quotation, and this time from Oscar Wilde, "Experience is the name so many people give to their mistakes", Amory Blaine being no exception to this, struggling to avoid the other side of Paradise.