CHAPTER III
FAILURE AND DISENCHANTMENT

I sigh the lack of many I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.
(William Shakespeare)
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More than a lament for the lost youthful innocence and exhausted moral resources in futile material pursuits, The Beautiful and Damned (1922) is a scathing satire on a society shamelessly climbing a climbing wave; wealth seems to be the magic key that will unlock all doors. Thus the novel is a statement of slow and painful but irreversible disintegration of youthful American expectations as represented in "the activities of actually or potentially wealthy wastrels", the pathetic protagonists, Anthony and Gloria Patch. The severe indictment is not simply inspired by a fear of "an atavistic return to a cruder era of capitalism" but the cultural facade that it has corrupted and vulgarised, making the cultural affinities superficial and innocent expectations insubstantial. Profligacy of the youth was symptomatic of a deeper malaise. The novel is an indictment of a ruthlessly acquisitive business civilization thrown off its balance by disquieting tremors of socio-economic upheavals. His second novel was pruned and shaped by his vision of waste added to his intellectual and artistic maturity. It provides the most significant commentary on the American Twenties, its contemporary social milieu and the idle rich without any obligations and responsibilities. For all its intellectual resolutions, The
Beautiful and Damned was an exploration of failure and "meaninglessness of life", a different, more serious and less ebullient theme than that of his first novel:

Since writing This Side of Paradise on the inspiration of Wells and Mackenzie -- Fitzgerald has become acquainted with a different school of fiction: the ironical pessimistic.¹

The exuberance and confidence of his early stories the questing for meaning of life and its beauty had now yielded to a more sombre mood of failure and decay.

Paradoxically it was Fitzgerald's sense of richness of American society that set him on his voyage of exploring the individual and social experience and making persistent efforts to write a great novel. He expressed to Edmund Wilson at Princeton his ambition to be one of the greatest writers that ever lived. He realised it by examining contemporary experience and its relation to values of the past and to the American Dream:

"The best of America was the best of world.... France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea was harder to utter.... It was a willingness of the heart".2

The novel becomes a cogent examination of self and society:

My new novel, called The Flight of the Rocket concerns the life of one Anthony Patch between his 20th and 33rd years (1918 - 1921). He is one of those many with the tastes and weaknesses of an artist but with no actual creative inspiration. How he and his beautiful young wife are wrecked on the shoals of dissipation is told in the story.3

Anthony Patch begins his journey from the gates of Paradise that Amory Blaine had found shut and proceeds through "the shoals of dissipation" "because he could not hope to attain


the next things". Fitzgerald had earlier accepted the painful truth that just as the world of expectation existed in the imagination of the artist, as a transcendent embodiment deluding social reality, thereby bringing disenchantment, his fictional material, the American youth and wealth could never transcend the American social conditions and circumstances of history. In this sense, The Beautiful and Damned looks "in its paralysis of hope and action .... to the literary hero's existential resignation from society altogether". Anthony Patch makes a symbolic exploration back into the world of paradisiacal conditions without the possibility of redemption because that world is lost. The course of the journey is from the golden West to eastern New York, probing a rudderless society, steering for nowhere and going down the rapids of catastrophe. It is the picture of a gorgeous applecart upset by modern living which is intense and irresponsible. There are layers and layers of social observation but the perception of social change portrayed in This Side of Paradise is missing. The Beautiful and Damned deals with the period 1912 - 1920, and claims to being a social criticism of the American business civilization with its prodigals indulging in unconscionable acts for social elevation, betraying their placelessness and lack of identity in society.

This drift into cultural disaster and personal and moral decay of the rich was at the root of disillusionment; but the tragedy has no redemptive value as it fails to illumine the understanding of the characters involved. The older order of traditionally established morality had a durable certainly as compared to the imaginative potentiality of "new freedom" and new values ushered in by commercialism, hedonistic cynicism and ethical dilemma:

What most distinguishes the generation [of the Twenties] who have attained maturity since the debacle of idealism at the end of the war is not their rebellion against the religion and the moral code of their parents but their disillusionment with their own rebellion. It is common for young men and women to rebel, but that they should rebel madly and without faith in their rebellion, and they should distrust the new freedom no less than the old certainties --- That is something of a novelty.5

Inspite of these moral irritants in the American dream of innocent expectations, it is money that ultimately creates the material conditions of wealth which the Fitzgerald hero aspires for; this golden decay is repeatedly dramatised in the novels.

The American metropolitan consciousness is the area explored by Fitzgerald. American cities were the arenas of dramatic conflicts: a clash between the possibilities of imagination and the realities of commonplace metropolitan life; the promises of life, great expectations' were not realised; instead the quester is destroyed like Gatsby when he over-reaches to realise the vision of his ideal self. The Beautiful and Damned is representative of this heightened sensibility and becomes a searching analysis of the lost generation's most disillusioning years, the modes and manners of urban sophistication and its social significance. This society Fitzgerald knew, understood and identified with so that it became the material he dealt with.

Fitzgerald did not show much concern for contemporary world events so that Dos Passes wrote to him:

I've been wanting to see you, naturally, to argue about your Esquire articles -- Christ, man, how do you find time in the
middle of the general conflagration to worry about all that stuff?... Most of the time the course of world events, seems so frightful that I feel absolutely paralysed.... We're living in one of the damndest tragic moments in history....

However, when critics accused him of using fictional material that was just personal and single dimensional, he retorted, "But, my God: It was my material, and it was all I had to deal with". Besides, later he recalled the 20s with nostalgia:

It was borrowed time anyhow the whole upper tenth of a nation living with insouciance of grand ducs and the casualness of chorus girls. But moralising is easy now and it was pleasant to be in one's twenties in such a certain and unworried time.


This nostalgia became a form of artistic consciousness for him. He maintained a delicate tension between his own personally felt experience and the social circumstances that impinged upon his artistic consciousness, "The ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function". His delicate perception apprehended the very complexity and dichotomy of the privately cultivated, intensely personal consciousness and the traditionally inherited customs and conventions of society. This conflict is uniquely American and typical of the Jazz Age.

New York of the 1920s was the centre of American cultural change:

The playground of a younger generation that was tired of Great Causes, at odds with its elders, full of energy stored up by the war, and determined to be amused. Fitzgerald's blend of flippancy and glamour caught the mood of the moment, and so he became, in the words of a contemporary, "our darling, our genius, our fool".  

8. Ibid, p.69.
It was a fairyland, unspoilt and untainted with all the iridescence of the beginning of the world. But it was also "fatal to the imagination" and became a living symbol of the brutalisation of the dream of innocence, "of undergraduate dissipation... alcoholic mist... (and) a betrayal of a persistent idealism".\textsuperscript{10} Even though it turns into a nightmare, it could not dissipate his youthful dreams:

\begin{verbatim}
This midnight I aspire
To see, mirrored among the embers, curled.
In flame, the splendour and the
sadness of the world.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{verbatim}

It is in this world that Anthony Patch meets his dreams of success, beauty and wealth; and it is here that he drifts into disaster and doom. Thus there is a disparity between dream and expectation and the harsh actuality of social circumstance. Fitzgerald's glamourisation of New York was his effort to burnish the image of the emerging cosmopolitan sophistication of a city as a symbol of national cultural aspirations where the self-deluded romantic egotists, the elite were forlorn and disillusioned. Three years after the

publication of The Beautiful and Damned, Fitzgerald wrote to
Maria Mannes:

You are thrilled by New York --- I doubt you will be after five more years when you are more fully nourished from within. I carry the place around the world in my heart but sometimes I try to shake it off in my dreams. America's greatest promise is that something is going to happen and after a while you get tired of waiting because nothing happens to people except that they grow old, and nothing happens to American art because America is the story of the moon that never rose....

The young people in America are brilliant with second-hand sophistication inherited from their betters of the war generation who to some extent worked things out for themselves. They are brave, shallow, cynical, impatient, turbulent and empty. I like them not. The 'fresh, strong river of America'! My God, Marya, where are your eyes --- or are they too fresh
and strong to see anything but their own
colour and contour in the glass? America
is so decadent that its brilliant
children are damned almost before they
are born.12

New York had come to stand as a symbol of his own youth and
intense longing in Anthony - Fitzgerald's adolescent
imagination. The way Anthony plunged into its superficial
brilliance and essential futility, and proceeded to conjure
up every enticing vision, seemed like a cavalcade of dreams
that beguiled his fitful hours offering an escape from
reality into the sinister streets of a world of fantasy. He
ransacked his imagination for fierce and illicit pleasure.
The very "East" of his imagination on which he had lavished
such fervent hopes and such gorgeous dreams was no anchor
against the shifting tides of his romantic illusions for he
continually drifted away in delightful perspectives --- the
New York cultural environment which he observed and absorbed
and recreated in his fictional imagination. More than that,
his observed pattern of unreflecting normality of New York
metropolitan scene was only a personal reality of his
conscious, earnest contemplation.

The very tensions of his age and its intrinsic restlessness focused onto his anguished sensibility and imagination. His personal disequilibrium incarnated and condensed in the general disequilibrium of his American generation. This almost abnormal acuity of response to the social and cultural malaise of his age was the result of his sharply focussed sensibility to the movements of his time. The edge of his romantic perception, of what money and beauty could symbolise, was sharpened by his intensely nature ennui for inspite of his festering discontent he realised the futility of rebellion even aesthetic rebellion, which assuaged his desires by a despairing compensation of an indefinite gesture of revolt.

Fitzgerald had resolved to embody in his fiction the despair and disillusionment of the youth of his generation. He reconstructed those adolescent desires and aspirations in his fiction by taking the richest episodes of personal experience. He linked them with the lives of those he watched at close quarters and wove these into private family histories as they looped and twisted in the complex fabric of New York society, the very social milieu that nourished his young years and which are recaptured and relived in his memory and imagination. But what he recaptured was the reality of his own imagination and memory, the flamboyant years of wealth and luxury that he and Zelda squandered. He
was attracted by the orgy of glittering allurements of the rich leading futile, meaningless lives of self-indulgence, and New York evolving into a cynosure of social climbers, profiteers, instant millionaires as also vampires and courtesans, the uneasy confusion and dark sombre reality beneath the glittering surface, the lush prosperity that subverted the perennial solidity and traditional superiority of the pre-entrepreneurial American aristocracy. With his involved insight into the life of this American commercial capital, Fitzgerald saw with alarm the headlong rush for easy money and quick rising fortune of amassing wealth only to dissipate it with hereditary restraints being nonexistent. New York had become a "Lost City", of men and women with rootless lives.

The "meaninglessness of life" is the backdrop to the lives of Anthony Patch-Scott Fitzgerald and Gloria -- Zelda. What Hemingway called "festival conception of life" was true of their frivolous, pleasure-seeking pursuits and their tremendous vitality to carry it through. Their existence is silhouetted against:

The houses gathering and gleaming in the sun, which was falling now through wide refulgent skies and tumbling caravans of light down into the streets. New York,
he supposed, was home -- the city of luxury and mystery, of preposterous hopes and exotic dreams.\textsuperscript{13}

Poised in cool unreality is the very symbolism of its deepening twilight mystery --- a tremendous perspective of low, abominable life, a life smothered by the bars, restaurants and sickening noises:

The soft rush of taxis.... and laughter, laughter hoarse as a crows, incessant and loud, with the rumble of the subway underneath -- and over all, the revolutions of light, the growings and recedings of light -- life dividing like pearls -- forming and reforming like bars and circles and monstrous grotesque figures out amazingly on the sky.\textsuperscript{14}

And all the depressing and stilling sounds of:

The ebbing, flowing, chattering, chuckling, foaming slow-rolling wave effect of this cheerful sea of people as

\textsuperscript{13} The Beautiful and Damned, p.282.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p.26.
... it poured its glittering torrent
into the artificial lake of laughter.\textsuperscript{15}

The life of New York, with its nocturnal distractions in the
snare atmosphere of the salons of the rich, house-parties
and hotel dances was all set for self-indulgent dissipation.
In the faces of the beautiful bright, intimate and damned,
Anthony saw the city decked for an eternal carnival; the
jostling evening mass in Time Square was:

Faces swirled about him, a kaleidoscope
of girls, ugly, ugly as sin --- too fat,
too lean, yet floating upon this autumn
air as upon their own warm and
passionate breaths poured out into the
night. Here for all their vulgarity he
thought, they were faintly and subtly
mysterious.\textsuperscript{16}

Anthony's hazy mind was incapable of registering real
emotions which became more elusive and evanescent as he came
to identify himself with this metropolitan crowd. He made
feeble endeavours to graft that social experience on the
stock of his own emotions which for all his self-mocking,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.24.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.25.
ironic enthusiasm became the distorted echo of his own desires.

He caught the glance of a dark young beauty sitting alone in a closed taxi-cab. Her eyes in the half light suggested night and violets, and for a moment he stirred again to that half forgotten remoteness of that afternoon.¹⁷

Such fatuous superficial glances symbolised lonely, lost souls thrown into the whirlwind of the metropolis looking for distractions. Anthony too looked for a safe niche, away from "The threat of life" that haunted his vacant house.

Anthony Patch whose middle name, Comstock recalled his illustrious name-sake, Anthony Comstock (1844-1915), a crusader against vice and obscenity in American life and literature who was the founder of the society for Suppression of Vice. Anthony himself was nurtured to emulate and "to consecrate the remainder of his life to the moral regeneration of the world" in the line of his grandfather, Adam Patch. This moral earnestness towards "Comstockery" seemed not too immoderate an ambition. While Adam Patch's

¹⁷. Ibid., p.25.
money could be used for the sense of safety that its mere contemplation gave to Anthony as it reminded him of his grandfather's "moral righteousness".

While this money downtown seemed rather to have been grasped and held by sheer indomitable strengths and tremendous feats of will; in addition it seemed more definitely and explicitly money.\(^{18}\)

But it seemed as if Anthony was preparing himself for this high task of reforming society setting his own house in order, before he could undertake to change the murky material of his own surroundings. It was a symbolic orientation of what he wished to escape from in the New York, Fifty-Second-Street apartment:

In its appointments it escaped by a safe margin being of a particular period; it escaped stiffness, stuffiness, bareness and decadence. It smelt neither of smoke nor of innocence-- it was tall and faintly blue. There was a deep lunge of the softest brown leather with

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., p.17.
somnolence drifting about it like a haze.19

Anthony makes efforts to achieve the essential conditions for this possibility which would help him fight evil that was antagonistic to social amelioration, but there's a vast gulf between desire and its fulfilment. He has the resources and also constantly tries to preserve his innocent illusions from being shattered but is reduced by his own debauched fantasy of pallid ethereal creatures with their lush attractions:

He felt persistently that the girl was beautiful --- Then of a sudden he understood; it was her distance, not a rare and previous distance of soul but still distance, if only in terrestrial yards. The autumn air was between them and the roofs and blurred voices. Yet for a not altogether explained second posing perversely in time, his emotion had been nearer to adoration than in the deepest kiss he had ever known.20

19. Ibid., p.10.
20. Ibid., p.18.
His reactions are convincing of the New York high life of the affluent with his background of a dilettante just out from Harvard, now moving into the bye-lanes of metropolitan culture, to gain experience of the "American show" before he becomes a full participant; this must wait till his grandfather's death leaves him a millionaire.

Certainly, Fitzgerald is not celebrating as rejecting New York and its post-war American culture and values. It is represented through Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert who reflect what they cannot redeem, and end up helpless victims in ruinous despair and disillusionment. It was a curiously typical dilemma of the younger generation of Americans, and the ironical pessimistic tone of the book underscores this. The epigraph, "The victor belongs to the spoils" has the unmistakable irony and could serve as a motto for Fitzgerald's life as well. Edmund Wilson made a penetrating incisive comment on the deeper significance of the novel:

There is a profounder truth in The Beautiful and Damned than the author perhaps intended to convey. The hero and heroine are strange creatures without purpose or method, who give themselves up to wild debaucheries and do not from beginning to end, perform a single
serious act; but you somehow get the impression that in spite of their madness, they are the most rational people in the book. Wherever they touch the common life, the institutions of men are made to appear contemptible farce of the futile and the absurd; the world of finance, the army, and finally the world of business are successfully and casually exposed as completely without dignity or point. The inference is, that, in such a civilization, the sanest and most creditable thing is to forget organised society and live for the jazz of the moment. And it is not altogether a personal confusion which has produced the confusion of such a book. It may be that we must not expect too much intellectual balance of young men who write books in the year 1921; we must remember that their environment and their chief source of stimulation have been the war, the society, and the commerce of the Age of Confusion itself.21

The novel opens when Anthony Patch at twenty-five has already had two years "since irony, the Holy Ghost of this later day, had, theoretically, at least descended upon him. Irony was the final polish of the shoe. The ultimate dab of the clothes-brush, a sort of intellectual 'There'! -- Yet at the brink of this story he has gone no further than the conscious stage".  

Perhaps the most scathing and biting touch that Fitzgerald wished to convey occurs at the end of the novel, when, with a telling finality and impact, the authorial ironic recognition is forced on the reader: Thirty million dollars that Anthony and Gloria had spent years waiting for in order to fulfill their dreams, comes at a time when the former loses all interest in the inheritance and is concerned not with money but:

With a series of reminiscences, much as a general might look back upon a successful campaign and analyze his victories. He was thinking of the hardships, the insufferable tribulations he had gone through. They had tried to penalize him for the mistakes of his youth. He had been exposed to ruthless misery, his very craving for romance had

22. *The Beautiful and Damned*, p.3.
been punished, his friends had deserted him --- even Gloria had turned against him. He had been all alone --- facing it all.23

The American decadence which Fitzgerald delineates as the theme of the novel permeates the pathos and grandeur of Anthony's tragic mask. Perhaps it may have been a re-enacting of the personal tragedies of the Fitzgeralds though it could not be a literal rendering of their own muddled lives as he confessed to his daughter:

Gloria was a much more trivial and vulgar person than your mother. I can't really say there was any resemblance except in the beauty and certain terms of expressions she used, and also I naturally used many circumstantial events of our early married life. However, the emphasis was entirely different. We had a much better time than Anthony and Gloria.24

23. Ibid., pp.448-49.

Even Anthony's eventual sinking into alcoholism and Gloria's fading out of existence as it were --- all are painful echoes of the Fitzgeralds; besides, although the verve which Scott had loved so much in Zelda was gone, she was still his dream girl:

Gloria without her arrogance, her independence, her virginal confidence and courage, would be the girl of his glory the radiant woman who was precious and charming because she was ineffably, triumphantly herself.25

Fitzgerald himself was only twenty-five, young, glamorous, emancipated -- "lived selfishly and hedonistically after the mode of the rebellions youth and ended up desperate and degraded" like Anthony Patch. Referring to the use of this very personalised artistic material, Paul Rosenfield remarks:

The world of his subject matter is still too much within Fitzgerald himself for him to see it sustainedly against the universe. Its values obtained too strongly over him, and for that reason

25. The Beautiful and Damned, pp.201-2.
he cannot set them against those of high civilization and calmly judge them so. Hence, wanting philosophy, and a little over-eager like the rest of America to arrive without having really sweated, he falls victim to the favorite delusions of the society of which he is a part, tends to indulge in its dreams of grandeur, and misses the fine flower of pathos.... By every law The Beautiful and Damned should have been a tragedy, the victims damned indeed: Yet at the conclusion Fitzgerald welched, and permitted his pitiful pair to have the alleviations of some thirty million dollars, and his hero tell the readers he had won out.26

Years later Fitzgerald seemed to explain the price for professional work:

You've got to sell your heart, your strongest reactions, not the little minor things that only touch you

lightly, the little experience that you might tell at dinner. This is especially when you begin to write... when ... you have only your emotions to sell. 27

As a conscious artist, Fitzgerald was not endeavouring just to identify his own emotions completely with his artistic material as presented in the novel but using the ironic symbolism in evoking glitter and fascination of wealth as the eternal promise of the golden moment ---- money that allures and fascinates, and is "the next thing" to aristocracy for the Americans who loved and enjoyed Fitzgerald's mythic heaven of money and gave him the place of "our darling, our genius, our fool". However, the Fitzgerald with a mature aesthetic sensibility and ethical code would have scorned and repudiated the magic and spell of thirty million dollars for he had intended in the deterioration of both Anthony and Gloria to make them appear not as individuals but as representatives of their particular culture and way of life. He wrote to Edmund Wilson:

Gloria and Anthony are representative. They are two of the great army of the rootless who float around New York.

27. Letters, p.598.
There must be thousands. Still I didn't bring it out.  

Many years later, when his own daughter grew up and would have followed the debutante route to New York high society, he warned her with an artist's censure:

These debutante parties in New York are the rendezvous of a gang of professional idlers, parasites, pansies, failures, the silliest type of sophomores, young customers' men from Wall Street and hangers on --- the very riff-raff of social New York who would exploit a child like Scottie with flattery and squeeze her out until she is a limp colourless rag.

Fitzgerald could recall Zelda and how the tinsel splendours that allured her and betrayed her dreams had submerged her into eternal depth of despair. The whole tragic pathos is all the more intensified because both Anthony and Gloria as they believe, all clean, pure, without defects, immaculate people who are free of all defilement:

28. Ibid., pp.351-52.
"Tell me all the reasons why you're going to marry me in June", asks Anthony. "Well", Gloria replies, "because you're so clean ... You and I are clean like streams and winds. I can tell whenever I see a person whether he is clean"....

"We're twins", answers Anthony.30

In Gloria's mind, goodness equates itself with cleanliness. In the horror-filled house during that summer when their marriage had all but survived the impending doom, the rustling curtains of their bedroom whisper the disappearance of all that is good:

Ah, my beautiful young lady, yours is not the first daintiness and delicacy that has faded here under the summer suns .... generations of unloved women have adorned themselves by that glass for rustic lovers who paid no heed. ... Youth has come into this room in palest blue and left in grey garments of despair, and through long nights many girls have lain awake where that bed

stands pouring out waves of misery into the darkness.31

Sun and light are symbols of that cleanliness which defines beauty, youth, goodness, health, life — the shrine of love; what defines it causes the death of love. "Cleanliness" confers solidity and strength, and neatly divides good and bad. Sex too becomes identified with the horror of evil as Amory Blaine too had discovered:

Always intensely sceptical of her sex, her judgements were not concerned with the question whether women were or were not clean. By uncleanness she meant a variety of things, a lack of pride, a slackness in fibre and, most of all, the unmistakable aura of promiscuity.32

This fresh, clean glow of her beauty reflects her soul and expresses that "incomprehensible... soul and spirit were one — the beauty of her body was the essence of her soul". It is an essence of Gloria, "a flash back in Paradise" about to enter "the most opulent, the most gorgeous land on earth"

31. Ibid., p.234.
32. Ibid., p.194.
and to be transformed into a "society girl" in the midst of "bogus aristocrats":

The Voice: That, too you will discover in this land.
You will find much that is bogus...

Beauty: (Placidly) It all sounds so vulgar.

The Voice: Not half as vulgar as it is.
You will be known during your fifteen years as rag-time kid, flapper, a jazz-baby, and a vamp. You will dance new dances neither more nor less gracefully than you danced the old ones.\textsuperscript{33}

For Gloria the loss of beauty, innocence and cleanliness is the loss of romantic expectations, of the golden moment in which her youth and happiness are inter-twined with her beauty. All the while that Anthony and Gloria have together longed to be rich after the inheritance, they have created illusions for themselves, but in the process they have ruined and debased their chances of happiness by disfiguring their physical appearance and conditions; they have irretrievably lost youth, beauty and cleanliness -- everything is gone which money could adorn and grace. When they didn't have the money atleast they had each other but

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.29.
when they get the money they lose contact. She had yearned for a gray squirrel coat; they couldn't afford it and it "gradually began to stand as a symbol of their growing financial anxiety". However, after winning the suit, she gets a Russian sable coat and is on deck with Anthony; a girl comments:

"That [coat] must have cost a small fortune.... I can't stand her .... she seems sort of --- sort of dyed and unclean, if you know what I mean. Some people just have that look about them whether they are or not".34

They are on their way to Europe to live their futile lives in search of nothingness. After his first visit to Europe, Fitzgerald had written to Edmund Wilson:

God damn the continent of Europe. It is of merely antiquarian interest. Rome is only few years behind Tyre and Babylon. The Negroid streak creeps northward to defile the Nordic race. Already the Italians have the souls of the blackmoors. Raise the bars of

34. Ibid., p.448.
immigration and permit only Scandinavians, Teutons, Anglo-Saxons and Celts to enter. France made me sick. Its silly pose as the thing the world has to save. I think it's a shame that England and America didn't let Germany conquer Europe. Its the only thing that would have saved the tottering old wrecks. My reactions were all Philistine, anti-socialistic, provincial and racially snobbish. I believe at last in the White-man's burden. We are far above the modern Frenchman as he is above the Negro. Even in art! Italy has no one. When Anatole France dies, French Literature will be silly, jealous rehashing of technical quarrels. They are thru' and done. You may have spoken in jest about New York as the capital of culture but in 25 years it will be just as London is now. Culture follows money and all the refinements of aestheticism can't stave off its change of seat. (Christ! What a metaphor) We will be
Romans in the next generation as the English are now.35

However, before the close, there is "a pitiful retching of the soul" at the dread of lost innocence. In the closing scene of the novel, Fitzgerald dramatically refocusses his irony lest reality be distorted:

The exquisite heavenly irony which has tabulated the demise of so many generations of sparrows doubtless records the subtlest verbal inflections of the passengers of such a ship as the Berengaria. And doubtless it was listening when the young man in the plaid cap crossed the deck quickly and spoke to the girl in yellow.

"Thats him", he said, pointing to the bundled figure seated in a wheelchair near the rail. That's Anthony Patch. First time he's been on deck'.36

The Beautiful and Damned is essentially a study of American social life at the cross-roads of post-war cosmopolitan

36. The Beautiful and Damned, p.447.
consciousness with Anthony Patch as the representative American:

a distinct and dynamic personality, opinionated, contemptuous, functioning from within outward --- a man who was aware that there would be no honour and yet had honour, who knew the sophistry of courage and yet was brave. 37

The family background entails aristocratic pretensions to social snobbery and sophistication:

Anthony drew as much consciousness of social security from being the grandson of Adam J. Patch as he would have had from tracing his line over the sea to the crusaders. This is inevitable; Virginians and Bostonians to the contrary, not withstanding, an aristocracy founded sheerly on money postulates wealth in the particular. 38

37. Ibid., p.3.
38. Ibid., p.4.
Such an aristocracy founded on money, without hereditary restraints and culture, is not an aristocracy but a plutocracy. This throws into suspicion the aristocratic virtues shaping characters in the novel, which may have been Fitzgerald's ironic intention. For all his wealth and Harvard education, Anthony emerges as a mere dabbler in aesthetic dilettantism and sentimental pleasure in eroticism. His two friends also betray the same tendencies. Richard Carmel who is a pretentious writer and is a symbolic reflector of Anthony's artistic ambitions; and Maury Noble who is a hopeless cynic. Both have symbolic significance in representing Anthony's passion for creativity and his passive cynicism which tears him apart and fails to resolve his intellectual dilemmas. But as if in answer to his grandfather's subtle and sanctimonious "accomplish something", Anthony believes he can, that:

he would one day accomplish some quite subtle thing that the elect would deem worthy, and, passing on, would join the dimmer stars in a nebulous, indeterminate heaven half-way between death and immortality.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p.3.
Paul Rosenfield rightly diagnosed that he wants "to arrive without having really sweated" for it.

The interim of Anthony's life is a lingering limbo between a past that his family would like to impose but to which he is indifferent except for his grandfather's money that he might inherit, and a future which is negligible in its promise. The feeling of financial security keeps him adrift on his dream and sweat in the routine boredom of the bourgeois and proletarian worlds. The promised millions may further immune him to drudgery from which he has been protected so far but the looming anxiety often blurs that promise. The future inheritance established a mental association of the subtle intellectual accomplishments that Anthony's lofty and delicate sensibility hopes to achieve; its once again the pursuit of imaginary goals and taking away the very consciousness of emancipation.

Money and its appurtenances become a mask for the virtual Edenic fall of the American aspirants for wealth. This is where the amassed riches of Adam Patch became defiled and debased. His wealth was predatory, what had been seized ruthlessly. Adam was an unscrupulous opportunist a veritable robber-baron:
Early in his career Adam Patch had married an anemic lady of thirty, Alicia Withers, who, brought him one hundred thousand dollars and an impeccable entre into the banking circles of New York.... more popularly known as 'Cross Patch', having left his father's farm in Tarry-town early in sixty-one to join a New York cavalry regiment.... came home from war a major, charged into Wall Street, and amid much fuss, fume, applause and ill-will... gathered to himself some seventy-five million dollars.40

His later philanthropic mask exposes his hypocrisy, at least to himself, after he had grabbed his fortune in the actualities of American moneyed society. His pious pomposity reeks of the falsity of typical American "patriotic gore" in the Horatio Alger myth of success, from rags to riches where wealth becomes a reward for virtue and where the spoils subsume the victor. The American Eden with its pioneering innocence in a state of sinlessness is the symbolic past of Anthony Patch. His grandfather would like to relive the American myth, to preserve and defend the pioneering efforts that have founded and sustained the American dream of

40. Ibid., p.5.
wealth; he wishes that Anthony would persevere and accomplish something.

Adam Patch who is a depraved and unclean debauch leaves and unclean debauch leaves a legacy of the vicious law-suit which in its bitter contest in the law-courts loses its upper crust respectability. It is reduced to sham and degradation, the actual ugly nuance of how the fortune was grabbed for self-aggrandisement and personal glory. But the myth finally shatters the innocent expectations and becomes a nightmare. When Anthony finally inherits the money it is too tarnished and soiled; like the dirt and debauchery that submerges him nothing can remain sacrosanct which the myth contaminates. However, the truth should only remain an enticement of the imagination and not face exposure. Fitzgerald knew what his disillusioned generation wanted: not the story of America where the moon never rose, but the moon, though it wanes and recedes, perpetually glows with a tremulous haze when about to emerge beyond the horizon. Nowhere in Fitzgerald does the dream turn to what it promises, the glitter into gold and the myth into reality but nevertheless the glow of gilded splendour keeps the dream alive; in the final analysis it is only the after-glow which survives in the memory and imagination.
Anthony's ascetic detachment like his aesthetic dilettantism is a strategic camouflage, masking the deep unknown fear of the uncontrollable forces, "the threat to life". It is this vague fear and meaninglessness which are at the core of his deliberate dissipation; the filth and debaucherie that he recoils into are the projections of his inner discontent. In such moments of self-annihilation Maury Noble provides a sense of security amidst the suffocating pressures of life. He could provide the key to life's puzzles and dilemmas:

"I could quote you the philosophy of the hour --- but for all we know, fifty years may see a complete reversal of this abnegation that's absorbing the intellectuals today, the triumph of Christ over Anatole France ---". He hesitated and then added, "But all I know --- the tremendous importance of myself to me and the necessity of acknowledging that importance to myself --- these things the wise and lovely Gloria was born knowing, these things and the painful futility of trying to know anything else".41

41. Ibid., 257.
Like Amory Blaine at the end of *This Side of Paradise*, Gloria confesses to Maury Noble, "There is one lesson to be learned from life.... That there's no lesson to be learned from life". But Maury Noble is concerned with self-knowledge as the only knowable object, which by implication, reduces all external values, derived from social experience, to being futile, even non-existent and meaningless. Anthony and Gloria have no imperative moral and social selves as they are characters in decay. In a meaningless world their quest for meaning is impossible; there is neither ecstasy nor agony in their pursuit; nor is their despair tragic.

Anthony's congenital indolence is not the burden of experience but his inexplicable fear of absolute knowledge as meaningless. He expresses this apprehension to Richard Carmel, "I can imagine a man knowing too much for his talents.... It would tend to make me inarticulate". He is aware of what he succumbs to:

Say I am proud and sane and wise --- an Athenian among Greeks. Well, I might fail where a lesser man would succeed. He could imitate, he could adorn, he could be enthusiastic, he could be hopefully constructive. But this hypothetical me would be too proud to
imitate, too sane to be enthusiastic, too sophisticated to be Utopian, too Grecian to adorn.\textsuperscript{42}

He thus finds justification for his inability and indolence: "I do nothing, for there's nothing I can do that's worth doing... [but wait for] some path of hope... some purpose yet to be born". He is damned and doesn't belong.

His despair seizes upon the illusions of the glamorous moment of youth and beauty; his falling in love with Gloria is his symbolic escape from his sheer incapacity to resolve his emotional and intellectual dilemmas:

He no longer craved for the warmth and security of Maury's society which had cheered him no further back than November. Only Gloria could give that now and no one else ever again .... He had realised at last what he wanted --- to kiss her again, to find rest in her great immobility. She was the end of all restlessness all malcontent.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p.36.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp.121, 107.
Gloria Gilbert is Fitzgerald's most complete and energetic debutante, the post-war female apotheosis, the Jazz baby, "the beauty of succulent illusions", the dazzling dream creature fluttering on golden wings, the golden girl free from her impositions and dependence on the male heroes. She is "the radiant woman.... dazzling alight; it was agony to comprehend her beauty in a glance". She is no shadow like Isabelle, Rosalind, Eleanor who impinge on Amory's consciousness which is their sole relevance. She is fully developed and assumes a centrality, becoming more the focus of a point of view than Anthony.

Just as Anthony suffers the authorial damnation of not-belonging to the rich world that had so fascinated Fitzgerald, that had been gaily portrayed by him and that had brushed him aside with indifference, Gloria is idealised to her last possibility as Zelda was. Her total self-centredness, overwhelming instinct for conquest and extraordinary spirit matches Zelda to the last specifications. Fitzgerald endows her with lavish care to redeem and arrest for a moment his dreams for success and happiness he built into the Zelda-Gloria image of glamourised youth and beauty. Zelda's own unwillingness to part with her dazzling irrevocable dreams, her magnificent obsession that made marriage a circumstance for altering the scope of her life have been moulded into the golden image of
Gloria. Two months before the publication of the novel, he wrote to Edmund Wilson, confessing the influence Zelda exercised on him, making it clear how much he owed her for the image of Gloria:

Now your three influences, St. Paul, Irish (incidentally, though it doesn't matter, I'm not Irish on Father's side --- That's where Francis Scott Key comes in) and liquor are all important grant. But I feel less hesitancy asking you to remove liquor because your catalogue is not complete anyhow --- The most enormous influence on me in the four and a half years since I met her has been the complete, fine and full-hearted selfishness and chill-mindedness of Zelda.44

He thus tried to immortalise Zelda in his works. In his debutante (Gloria), Fitzgerald had admired her zest and courage to be, to seize the moment and live the life of gay irresponsibilities, to have material convenience to fulfil the desire for a life of youthful ease, love and fun --- just what Zelda had written to him before their marriage:

44. Letters, p.351.
I don't want to be famous and feted ---
all I want is to be very young always
and very irresponsible and to feel that
my life is my own --- to live and be
happy and die in my own way to please
myself.45

Fitzgerald had fallen in love with her courage, her
sincerity and her flaming self-respect, and that was the
beginning and end of everything.

Gloria "the Beautiful Lady without Mercy" is pampered and
childish to the extent of demanding absurd things to satisfy
her whimsicalities:

Because she was brave, because she was
'spoiled', because of her outrageous and
commendable independence of judgement,
and finally because of her arrogant
consciousness that she had never seen a
girl as beautiful as herself, Gloria had
developed into a consistent practising
Nietzschean.46

46. The Beautiful and Damned, p.161.
It is this self-indulgence this wanton willfulness that sustains and nourishes her profusely expansive enthusiasm and grand sweep of her glorious and golden radiant moment. Her assertion of virginal independence makes her beauty more charming and desirable to Anthony:

She was a sun, radiant, growing, gathering light and storing it --- then after an eternity pouring it forth in a glance, the fragment of a sentence, to that part of him that cherished all beauty and all illusion.\(^{47}\)

Her beauty transcends time and nature. The symbolic imagery of the sun makes the illusion more pervasive in the nebulous world of outer existence into which Anthony seeks solace. The sun is constantly and unfailingly there. It breaks "in yellow light through his east window, dancing along the carpet as though the sun were smiling at some ancient and reiterated gag of his own" on the morning of their wedding. Even the gigantic aftermath of their marriage brings in "the loveliness of the June sunlight flooding in at the window", lending colours of delirious excitement to the wild passionate moment of which they are oblivious. In the hour of bliss, Gloria "hung like a brilliant curtain across

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p.73.
[Anthony's] doorways, shutting out the light of the sun". At the end too when he is in the centre of the labyrinth of moral and physical dissolution, the floodgates to wealth open in sunshine. Anthony glances "mechanically out of the window" when asked by Gloria if he would go to the courts. The room was "full of sunshine". Anthony was reluctant, and doesn't go but stares "down blindly into the sunny street". Seeing his former flame, Dorothy Raycroft (Dot) suddenly he flies into a rage and the breaking point is reached. When Gloria and Dick Caramel return from the court bringing the good news of the victory, they find Anthony "sitting in patch of sun on the floor of his bedroom".

He held up a handful of stamps and left them come drifting down him like leaves, varicolored and bright, turning and fluttering gaudily upon the sunny air.48

The imagery of the sun is a spotlight on Anthony as the naturalistic irony and symbolism when he "cracks-up" and regresses to his childhood in the face of triumph.

Gloria has the qualities of the life-giving sunshine though it turns into infertility. It is not conducive to creativity, to fecundity and enhancement of larger life:

48. Ibid., pp.447.
She knew that in her breast she had never wanted children. The reality, the earthiness, the intolerable sentiment of child-bearing, the menace to her beauty -- had appalled her. She wanted to exist only as a conscious flower, prolonging and preserving herself. Her sentimentality could cling fiercely to her own illusions but her ironic soul whispered that motherhood was also the privilege of the female baboon. So her dreams were of ghostly children only -- the early, the perfect symbols of her early and perfect love for Anthony.49

She urges no desire; on the contrary she stigmatises life-passion as a sterile and impersonal abstraction, absence of all depth of emotion and voluptuous warmth of feeling. This comes out in what she thinks of her pregnancy:

"I value my body because you think its beautiful. And this body of mine --- of yours -- to have it grow ugly and shapeless? Its simply intolerable. Oh,

49. Ibid., pp.392-93.
Anthony, I'm not afraid of the pain", Gloria wailed.

He consoled her desperately, but in vain. She continued:
"And then afterward I might have wide hips and be pale, with all my freshness gone and no radiance in my hair.
"You'd think you'd been singled out of all the women in the world for this crowning indignity".

"What if I do?" She cried angrily, "It isn't an indignity for them. Its their one excuse for living. Its the one thing they're good for. Its an indignity for me."

When she discovers that she is not expecting afterall she is surprised and elated: "They rejoiced happily, gay again with reborn irresponsibility", and Gloria embraced Anthony "with luxurious intensity, holding it aloft like a sun of her making and basking in its beams". Later, however, when Anthony has recruited and she is alone she hopes that she had had a child. Beauty is unproductive and sterile; it is

50. Ibid., pp.203-4.
illusion and is productive of irresponsibility and sham, and therefore is immoral and evil like Isabelle, Rosalind and Eleanor. Gloria too is beautiful and damned.

She identifies herself with unreal people in that "Brummegem Cabaret" where the women assembled could be "a study in national sociology". Mary Colum wrote that the novel reveals with devastating satire a section of American society which has never been recognised as an entity -- that wealthy floating population which throngs the restaurants, cabarets, theatres and hotels of our great city.51

It is this obsessive attention to her beauty and appearance that keeps Gloria marvellously alive and happy. The hoped for identity, with money and financial security, with youth and beauty is the symbolic centre of the novel and anticipates The Great Gatsby and Tender Is The Night on magnified scales. All the traits of Glorias personality, her egotistical disdain of bourgeois, middle-class life, her continual search for novel means of pleasure, her pampered

childishness and irresponsible behaviour are expressions of what projects her in the social limelight.

Gloria's golden dream of perennial beauty and youth is an ephemeral unattainable hope since Anthony cannot strive and struggle for "next things"; money and more money is all that matters and it in turn blunts and bludgeons man's sensitivity and finer perception of beauty. Lack of money brings hysterical collapse and age, signs of decaying youth. When Bloeckman, the movie director informs Gloria that they need a "younger woman" for the role, she writhes in pain and desolation:

"Oh, my pretty face," she whispered, passionately grieving. "Oh, my pretty face! Oh, I don't want to live without my pretty face! Oh, what's happened?"

Then she slid toward the mirror, and as in the test sprawled face downward upon the floor --- and lay there sobbing. It was the first awkward movement she had ever made.52

52. The Beautiful and Damned, p.404.
Later when Anthony is told about it, he becomes aggressive and wants to hit out at Bloeckman but ends up with a black eye and lost tooth in the bargain. Though, earlier, when the trio were together and the conversation was continuing in "stilted commas", Anthony had been conscious of the throbbing reality that:

Life was no more than this summer afternoon; a faint wind stirring the lace collar of Gloria's dress, the slow baking browsiness of the verandah .... Intolerably unmoved they all seemed, removed from any romantic imminency of action. Even Gloria's beauty needed wild emotions, needed poignancy, needed death. 53

However, with the fading of youth and beauty, the golden splendour grows dimmer, to fade inescapably into futility and meaninglessness of life. Wealth is needed as a refuge from this oblivion and extinction to buttress the fading youthful charm. But what money can preserve, it can also destroy: wealth is its own damnation --- this seems to be Fitzgerald's vision of Paradise and its looming horror. What

53. Ibid., p.214.
is the worth of thirty million dollars after youth, beauty and sanity have gone?

Anthony and Gloria are twins in their unrelieved suffering and loneliness. They both symbolically personify the essence of beauty, and are also its sole betrayers. Love and beauty are incarnate in their figures and there is no alternative to them, to the detached moral perspective which can help clear the debris of this mussed up confusion. But for all its anarchic muddle and disorder they are the most rational people in the novel inspite of their fantastic behaviour.

The significance of the social vision of the novel lies in its symbolising the decadence of the Jazz Age simultaneously with America's coming of age, the burden of experience and responsibility, the end of innocence and exploration of adolescence. The younger generation in post-war America had only a tangential relationship with contemporary society. Infact, the novel should have taken off from where This Side of Paradise left but Amory's willful and ironic self-vanity and imaginative assertion in defining individualism to a more committed social order remains unexplored. Anthony Patch remains a "graceful outsider" with no transcendent ambitions. But the horizon of his life deepens into a rosy glow when he meets Gloria, falls in love with her and invests everything he possesses, his dreams of a legacy and
romantic sensibility, into his dream of Gloria. The eventual struggles and conflict seem to have no apparent moral context because there is no social dimension which can lend meaning and credibility to their quest. They fail to find more enduring resources within each other than the lurking external horror of diffused demoralisation, symbolic of the prevailing deeper malaise:

Fitzgerald's acute 'environmental sense' has by now become attuned to the destructive impulses of his time, with the result that the internal currents that sweep Anthony and Gloria along to greater and greater dissensions are persistently less important than the disruptive circumstances which surround them.54

Anthony Patch makes no efforts to come to terms with life as he finds it though his moods and moments reflect barometric changes of that society. The novel gains in meaning with the vividly imagined Gloria who, with a child's petulant solitary determined will and a willful egotism evokes greater adulation which she demands and gets. They become

progressively isolated even to the verge of insanity that Anthony lapses into, especially in moments when his being catapulted into a millionaire seems perilously close. Significantly his regression to childhood is his symbolic shrinking from adult responsibility since he is an outsider spiritually, and cannot reintegrate himself into the society with which he should establish meaningful equation and identity.

Anthony and Gloria don't belong to the rich and the world they've dreamed of, and in isolation from their social context they will perish, their damnation being complete. This moral perspective is built into the novel through the use of the devil, this time in the guise of an unclean filthy hag, Joe Hull; his dirtiness is in contrast to the cleanliness that the Patches' cherish and wear as a badge. He is brought in by Maury Noble and Richard Caramel who are "devilish" with drink, and he seems to centralise the consciousness of evil in the meaningless drunken spree. Gloria's repulsion and anger at this unsightly intrusion is justified. His easy informality bordering on cheekiness intensifies her fears, and she retires to bed in disgust, and lying there:

She became rigid. Someone had come to the door and was standing regarding her,
very quiet except for a slight swaying motion. She could see the outline of his figure distinct against some indistinguishable light. There was no sound anywhere, only a great persuasive silence --- even the dripping had ceased .... only this figure, this swaying in the doorway, an indiscernible and subtly menacing terror, a personality filthy under its varnish, like smallpox spots under a layer of powder. Yet her tired heart beating until it shook her breast made her sure that there was still life in her, desperately shaken, threatened...55

It almost seems Gloria's vision of evil is incarnated in Joe Hull as Amory's was in Humbird:

In another instant it seemed that some imaginable force would shatter her out of existence .... and then the figure in the doorway -- it was Hull, she saw, Hull--- turned deliberately and, still slightly swaying, moved back and off, as

55. The Beautiful and Damned, pp.242-43.
if absorbed into that incomprehensible light that had given him dimension.\(^{56}\)

Then menace which Joe Hull symbolises is the threatening terror of the falsity of outward pursuits in which creative energies are absorbed. This is because the characters in this golden world betray themselves by a self-deluding chimera of false glitter and" the heightened sensitivity to the promise of life", that they seek to attain. The horror is of unearthly illumination. But the visitation by this not so explicitly supernatural figure does have a moral impact on the thematic development of the story in that the devil steps into the vacuum of moral alternative that no other character represents.

The social point of view comes to the fore in the distinction between rich and poor. From "a third layer... contiguous layers down to the city's shoes":

Jewesses were coming out into society of Jewish men and women from Riverside to Bronx, looking forward to a rising young broker or jeweller and a kosher wedding: Irish girls were casting their eyes, with licence .... upon a society of

\(^{56}\) Ibid., p.243.
young Tammy politicians, pious undertakers.... And naturally, the city caught the contagious air entree'--- the working girls, poor ugly souls, wrapping soap in the factory and showing finery in the big stores, dreamed that perhaps the spectacular excitement of this winter they might obtain for themselves the coveted male --- as in a muddled crowd an inefficient pickpocket may consider his chances increased.57

The city's "shoes" are the poor ugly souls whom Amory Blaine had wanted to serve but here the attitude is not only indifferent but contemptuous. Work and sweat make the "hot unprosperous poor" old and ugly, crucially different from the rich who are always young, amiable, graceful; they cannot be uplifted without wealth:

A simple, healthy leisure class it was -- The best of the men not unpleasantly undergraduate... The women, of more than average beauty, fragile, athletic, somewhat idiotic as hostesses but charming and infinitely decorative as

57. Ibid., 31-32.
guests. Sedately and gracefully they danced the steps of their selection in the balmy tea hours, accomplishing with a certain dignity the movements so horribly burlesqued by clerk and chorus girl the country over.\textsuperscript{58}

The social snobbery was part of the vision to focus the quest for identity and placement with the rich which would make them different and so more acceptable. Irony is implied here as it indicates the shallowness of the dream. Thus snobbery and class distinction don't exhibit Fitzgerald's prejudice against the poor but they serve a thematic function as well which would become stronger as he matured as an artist. He comes closer to the material he would use in his later novels to signify the values he needed; he seems to have become morally aware of the fact that in post-war America the world of splendour and wealth is no substitute for human failure. Besides, tragic experience is not the privilege of weak characters like Anthony; that is why disillusionment and failure lack intensity and richness.

The "American show" is what the novel is about, and what Mencken had taught him about how to be an American. Fitzgerald was in Europe while the novel was in gestation and he incorporated such ideas and influences as he was

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., pp.191–92.
prone to have been exposed to; in a sense that speaks of its richness and variety. He was working in a dense cultural milieu of both America and Europe: 1922 saw such other momentous works as *Ulysses*, *The Wasteland* and important works of D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Yeats and others. Of course, he chose to write of the society and period he knew best; he exposed and reflected his age which formed and represented the romantic possibilities of the 'Self' of his fictional heroes who are replicas of the modern American society and aspirations; they are both idealised and denigrated. Just as he could write of the emotions he well understood, so also could he use the material that was his own emotions and feelings filtered through the American social experience. The core of this social experience is the conditions created by surfeit of wealth, symbolised in the glamour of New York. It was the unfulfilled dreams and desires and seething decadence which was always so transparent to him. The novel is subtle and more difficult in its imaginative depth marking the culmination of experience over imagination. This reflects an intenser movement towards a complete awareness of his material, away from his youthful passions, self-complacency, eagerness for success and fame; there is a veering away from juvenile endeavours and expectations of the dream towards a profounder and intenser exploration of that dream and its failure.