CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMATION

A study of the Protagonist adequately illustrates the fact that he is quite often a victim and puts himself inadvertently in a situation leading to his inevitable destruction. Again, he is a tragic hero in the sense that his character only leads to his doom. Consequently, the protagonist withdraws from the world and the most important lesson he learns is the notion of self-annihilation. To put this in the words of David Adams Leeming “we must lose ourselves to find ourselves in the overall patterns of cosmos” (Mythology-The Voyage of Hero 6). Thus heroes, creations of the imagination, embody the unspoken ideals and the mundane existence of their readers.

In fact, such an image of the hero was traced back from myth, religion, and different ages. A careful analysis of the literary heroes confirms the fact that, not only the English writers like Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, but also the American writers have recognized the importance of the Protagonist. They called him by different name: the American Adam, Prometheus, the Rebel-victim, Faust. Indeed, the concept of the protagonist has provoked some of the most exciting criticism within the past generation as they have sought to discover a mythology for America. William Gilman in this regard argues: “A male character in American Literature may be a hero in almost any circumstance; all he must do is struggle, see things as they really are and benefit from his knowledge” (Patterns of Commitment 17).

Just as the civil war served as a nodal point in the sensibility of nineteenth-century writers, the First World War marks a profound ideological


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shift for Americans of twentieth century. The new discoveries in science and economic tensions of the time had cumulative impact on the American mind, compelling an imperative reaction against tradition. The theories of Darwin and Marx introduced an additional dynamic to the intellectual life by unsettling the old ways of thinking. In spite of his conscious rejection of the hypocrisy and snobbishness of the older generation, the hero imbibes its unconscious assumptions and inarticulate hopes. The protagonist, thus, is educated and developed under his hopes and despairs. Also, he becomes a victim to his convictions and confusions representing the tensions and ambivalence of the society. Observant of this, Ihab Hassan rightly comments:

The idea of the victim ... reflects an image of ultimate human isolation and reveals, at the same time, and inescapable social indictment. The idea acquires a religious significance when the victim is conceived both as scapegoat and redeemer (College English 140-146).

Thus, it is quite obvious that the protagonist is one of the sad young men of the twenties. The final outcome of their experience is the destruction of all the illusions and a realization of the futility of all faiths.

Fitzgerald's novels dramatise the change and development, the adjustment and the transformation of his protagonist. He deals with the metamorphic elements in his protagonist in terms of forceful situations, dealt in the preceding chapters, drawn from the American milieu of social change. In fact, Fitzgerald presents the potency of the American dream, which largely depends on the shadings of the urban environment. The American protagonist
poised in his quest for selfhood and self-knowledge is the centre of his vision of the world. In this process of evolution, the limited act of self-exploration becomes the rediscovery of the truth and the meaning of America itself.

The necessity to struggle, the determination to succeed, the old dream of being an entire man, is the motifs of Fitzgerald’s protagonist. They are frustrated men sensing obscurely their potentialities and looking more or less blindly for an object on which they may be worthily expended. Fitzgerald embodied, almost too perfectly, the psyche of his own generation. He was born of second generation Americans who were bitten by the bug of money and success, he brought his awe of rich to Princeton, to Long Island, to the Rivera, and even to Hollywood. He wrote about the corruption of money and revealed his emotions through his protagonists--Amory Blaine is condemning the old order and Anthony Patch is declaring the meaninglessness of life; obviously in Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald makes the rich hopelessly irresponsible and in Dick Diver, he makes the rich ineffectual parasites who have lost the capacity to love, finally in creating Monroe Stahr the novelist makes the materialist defeat the idealist.

Fitzgerald can think of his protagonist as more sinned against than sinning. The very rich betray his protagonist’s sense of commitment-- betray Amroy’s sense of history and challenge Anthony’s faith in the beautiful and destroy Gatsby and Dick. The image of betrayed commitment is manifested in this theme of lost youth. It is the persistent theme of lost opportunity a failure of permanent achievement. The object of achievement is the splendid life, which only the very rich can afford. So, the very rich are both the models of an
idealized experience and the agents who prevent Fitzgerald’s protagonist from realizing that experience.

Moreover, Fitzgerald’s protagonist was fascinated by “La belle dame sans Merci,” the fair maiden who leads the hero to a destructive end. In *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald brings Dick to the point where he feels a strange and sudden fidelity to his father. Fitzgerald’s hero seems to bend on failure, almost as if the peace of mind or the repose of the father’s soul depended on it. Fitzgerald’s journey is a circular move that begins with the quest for success and ends with the reality of failure. The father embodies the qualities that are destructive to these ideals. The failure of the son becomes Fitzgerald’s way of emotionally rejecting the world of wealth and of accepting the world of the father.

Fitzgerald’s protagonist does not only struggle to get into the adult world but also sets right his ambivalent attitude to sex till he becomes a personage after several abortive sex adventures. Fitzgerald sensed that “the myth of the American Adam and the American Eden was bankrupt, had indeed always been morally indefensible” (Noble 152). Fitzgerald, in fact, fuses love with absolute woe. With his divine delirium, he never lost sight of the golden girl. The American hero experiences adolescent adventures in Mark Twain, and Herman Melville. In Fitzgerald, he stands in an Eden with his women, he daydreams, encounters the female who endows him with experience, only to be followed by disillusionment.

Fitzgerald presented a very impressive illusion of golden innocence in his protagonist. It is not, however, an illusion but a fiasco of reality. Normally
the presence of illusory dimension of a situation invalidates reality, but in Fitzgerald, illusion is a facade of reality. His protagonist hankers after a Platonic dream, but is aware of the Wasteland. The source of Amory's psychological tensions lies in his discursive intellect in conflict with the conventional Christian attitude to sex, deeply embedded in his personality. Nevertheless, his erotic urges, which are central to his experience, are powerful. It pulls him through the confines of a traditional American adolescent. The range of Amory's experience goes beyond the mere romantic yearnings of an immature preserver of innocence. Each of his relationships with the opposite sex unravels a different facet of his personality, thus giving him the scope to realize the various aspects of his self and to live a fuller life. Though Anthony has some of Amory's characteristics, he is a romantic and a scholar. He gets ensnared in the mere illusion of youth and beauty without a sense of responsibility. His existence is retarded since he lacks the strength to liberate himself from a false world.

To Fitzgerald, youth encouraged dreams during a time of hopeful longing, youth excited him and he responded enthusiastically to it. The Fitzgerald hero tries to sustain his youth vision and his sense of expectancy. Thus, he seems to remain innocent even in the face of experience. Gatsby is destroyed as he tries to arrest time. Only when youth faded did he idealize the past and regain to relive it. Obviously, when youth is gone, Fitzgerald's protagonist reveals a fervent longing for the past. Trust in the present is replaced by memory of the past, a characteristic idealised in Gatsby. When the dream gave way to reality, the sense of regret for a faded world is the source of nostalgia in Dick. The Protagonists continued to believe that life divided into
two—one looking forward to an idealized image of himself and the other looking backward to the glamour of older days. Yet escape into the romantic past could never be complete, because the road back was heavily lined with signs of waste and dissipation.

Though man finds himself victimized by his psychological stress, he undoubtedly remains an individual in his society. Thereby, his attempts to identify himself eventually result in alienation or death. G.W.F. Hegel also rightly comments on such a situation;

> It is true that under the present condition of the civilized world a man may not act independently for himself in many directions, the fact remains that in whatever direction he may turn he is still only a member of a fixed order of society and appears as a much limited in his range rather than the vital representative and individual embodiment of society itself (The Hero in Literature 199).

Though remaining an embodiment of his society, unfortunately, man is victimized. Fitzgerald's protagonists live in a society with its impact for good or bad on his character and destiny. The protagonist's education is completed when he enacts his identity through choice from the complex possibilities of life offered by society. The Fitzgerald's hero begins his quest for values in a world disturbed by the grim realities of the First World War. The quest proves futile and the hero moves from involvement to alienation, from return to withdrawal. In the beginning, Amory makes a sincere attempt to compromise with society. But he is frequently upset by the actualities of American life. It does not square up with his intensely personal and idealised view of the world.
He feels that life is a pitiful muddle and a misleading labyrinth. Amory, disenchanted with war and disappointed in love, turns against the Old World, and the older generation that foisted a futile war on an innocent generation. The war ruins the old background and kills the old individualism. Life becomes a succession of quick and unrelated accidents, incidents, meaningless, and patternless. The protagonist Amory, is finally isolated from everyone. He sees the shallowness of the rich and is repelled by the ugliness of the poor. Amory attains self-knowledge though not self-realisation. In fact, he neither learns how to believe nor what to believe in. He miserably fails in seeking the path of his salvation. And after his aimless wanderings, the protagonist comes back to the same point from which he had first started, thus establishing the circular motion of human life.

Dick, the protagonist of Tender Is the Night, searches for values in a corrupt society devoid of values. He tries to create personal values but fails and Europe does not save him either. On the contrary, it damages him beyond repair. It accelerates his steady disintegration. Sadder, but not very much wiser, the Fitzgerald’s hero returns to his country, which he had rejected. He is wearyly sinking back into the now happy anonymity of the undistinguished and mediocre life of rural America.

The social interest is reflected in Fitzgerald’s essay on the Jazz Age, which clarifies the portrait of Amory’s generation as the greatest, gaudiest space in history. Fitzgerald was able to tell the story of the Jazz Age because he stood at the dividing line between the two generations. It is self-consciously drawn to the riotous excesses of youth but mature enough to think that “living wasn’t the reckless, careless business these people thought this generation just
younger than me” (The Crack-Up 87). It was a society of flappers and sheiks bent on corrupting its elders. Fitzgerald felt it less through back of morals than through lack of taste. Thus, he portrays the contemporary milieu—the shattered, demoralized civilization.

Fitzgerald’s self-pity forced him to write against the grain of his own experience. He defines his selfhood in terms of his fictive creations. His craft was a means of flight for him, where he could relieve his hurts and people would act as he could expect. As an artistic creating and peopling a fictional world, Fitzgerald allowed the dimensions of his own responsive openness to life, and experience to emerge in what he wrote. He was trying to work out his own problems through his protagonists. He depicts his protagonist, while often self-indulgent, was usually the victim of cruel and careless people. Fitzgerald in living up to a dream and ideal of dramatic selfhood, merged both his personality and society in which he lived into his artistic representations. Sometimes the protagonists started as very different persons and were transformed imperceptibly into an image of the author. Fitzgerald seems to have summed up his character in his Notebooks: “I am an only child. Gatsby my imaginary eldest brother, Amory younger, Anthony my worry, Dick my comparatively good brother ...” (The Crack Up 78).

Fitzgerald points to the tragedy of his protagonist at the moment of its decline. The authority with which he writes of the failure of the protagonist is to record his personality through the work of art. It gives permanent meaning and beauty of being an American in the twentieth century and also of being a man unable to find grandeur except in memories. His novels are full of surmises and speculations regarding the nature of man and society and the
complex patterns of relationship by means of which they are joined to the forces of ultimate destiny.

Fitzgerald came to the conclusion that he has something of a forlorn hope. The protagonist had come out of nowhere in the beginning of his life and he was destined to plunge into nothingness at the end. Thus illustrates the philosophy of nihilistic existentialism in his quest that life at best is merely a trajectory between zero and zero. Fitzgerald describes the education of his protagonist through the chances and choices that society offers as interments of his growth and change. His protagonists are great because in their hearts the private individual dream melts and merges into the archetypal visions that anguished humanity craves for.

The creative output of Fitzgerald underlies the distinct variations of man's universal longing--the quest for the Platonic ideal, the high romantic aspiration, the sense of moral destiny. Ultimately, Fitzgerald's reputation rests upon his intellectual achievement--to have made the American myth of success the basis for high tragedy, to have transformed the self-made man into a tragic hero, to have exposed the moral limitations of established social values as charm, popularity and good taste, and to have reaffirmed the moral value of the individual imagination while at the same time revealing its tragic limitations.

Thus, viewing Fitzgerald's work, one detects an ultimate unity of theme that might be interpreted as a philosophical perspective. He recreated his own world in his novels. Then, he stepped back from the fictive world to reevaluate his position and ultimately, to formulate a metaphysical attitude towards the
conditions of his own life. To sum up, the preceding chapters present the evolution of Fitzgerald’s protagonist under various circumstances.

The First chapter traces the concept of the protagonist from myth to the modern age. In myth, the protagonist follows the formula of the nuclear unit, the Monomyth. But, slowly the dream – web of myth fell away and the writer’s mind is opened to full waking consciousness. The modern protagonist emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cacoon. Therefore, the hero-cycle of the modern age is the wonder story of mankind’s coming to maturity. This chapter analyses how the Literary heroes change according to the author’s point of view, and the social milieu in general and particularly in American Literature. The crisis in the contemporary life and the historical process moving towards the new frontiers of human selfhood are pictured in the novels of American Literature, but more in Francis Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald’s wanderings in his fiction form a pilgrimage, which springs from the protagonist consciousness of guilt and his need for expiation. Thus, through his wanderings, he experiences some emotional crisis under the contemporary society to attain maturity, in other words, Evolution.

The Second chapter highlights how Fitzgerald’s work is distinguished, not by their rising and falling on a tide of self-indulgence, but by the struggle--the collapse of the individual. His fiction shows the education and development of a particularly charming, spoilt, egotistical, lazy and talented young man who journeys through a series of disillusionment about America until he arrives at some self-awareness. His protagonists Amory and Anthony, are altogether too eager to heap the blame for their own failures on to the American social system. The protagonists’ eventual failure takes the form of
either a moment of disillusionment with no energy to continue the battle of life, 
a nearly complete mental breakdown, death or social detachment. Frequent 
references from the text are made to show Fitzgerald’s protagonist’s inner 
conflict in their self-destruction and failure in pursuit of love.

The Third chapter depicts the contemporary American society in a state 
of dislocation where the young in the absence of any convincing moral system, 
have nothing to do but move faster and faster. Amory Blaine, one of 
Fitzgerald’s protagonists articulates the philosophy of young: “I loathed the 
army, I loathed business, I’m in love with change and I’ve killed my 
conscience” (This Side of Paradise 275). This philosophy is given more 
mature consideration in Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald is engaged in a more subtle 
handling of the American dream. In Gatsby, he deals with the effect that 
consciousness of the dream has upon individuals and the breaking up taking 
place in American society, which invalidates the old relationship between 
dream and reality. In fact, he comes back to a disenchanting realisation of the 
impossibility of translating one’s ideals into reality. The chapter highlights the 
view that nothingness had in itself the protective embodiment of society in 
which the hollowmen still continue to live.

The Fourth chapter analyses the multi-faceted dimension of Fitzgerald in 
his novels. It also defines his selfhood in terms of his fictive creations. This 
chapter shows how Fitzgerald’s novel reflects his divided nature and the dual 
mind. Once Fitzgerald wrote to Scottie, his daughter: “I am not a great man, 
but sometimes I think the impersonal and objective quality of my talent and the 
sacrifices of it in pieces to preserve its essential value, has some sort of epic 
grandeur” (The Letters 62). Thus, an attempt is made to see how Fitzgerald in
and through his protagonist evolved into a personage by living a vicarious life of his own, tracing universal patterns, quest and seduction America during the post war decade.

The Fifth chapter sums up the feeling of Fitzgerald’s protagonist that a positive value or an affirmative statement is impossible in a negative world. So, he prescribes for himself a remedial retreat from society in order to make himself safe from its bruising contact. This does not symbolise complete alienation from humanity since Fitzgerald entertains a rather vague and romantic notion that the protagonist may find his roots in the American continents where it is likely that he may finally recover. Therefore, in his search for values, the protagonist wanders through America and Europe. He also labours in the vagueness of his dreams. Only Jay Gatsby has a strong faith in what he so greatly desires. Dick Diver, Amory Blaine and Monroe Stahr never succeed in letting their dreams crystallise into clear vision except in a negative contrasting the dream with the corruption and the emptiness of the world of rich. The protagonist comes of nowhere in the beginning of his life and he was destined to plunge into nothingness at the end. He illustrates the philosophy of nihilistic existentialism in his quest that life at best is merely a trajectory between zero and zero.

One can observe that Fitzgerald’s worldview was dichotomous issuing from his double vision as a romantic as well as a moralist. In the earlier days of his career, he was sustained, on the one hand, by the illusion that life was a romantic business, and on the other, the stern voice of his puritanical self-indulgence was self-destruction. Fitzgerald idealized youth, a splendid moment of imaginative commitment with its sense of wonder and trust in life's
boundless possibility and opportunity. When it is wasted it brings on romantic sadness; when it is remembered it brings on romantic nostalgia. Obviously, the curious excitement of Fitzgerald’s best fiction is generated by the inner tension. In fact, all his male protagonists, from Amory Blaine to Monroe Stahr are projections of this conflict within his own divided self. Such a multifaceted personality that Fitzgerald is that his novels present themselves for a study in vision; in that a dichotomous vision. Future researchers could think of such a study.