CHAPTER THREE

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Fitzgerald viewed the problem of the American individual as one of defining human selfhood. In this process he sought ways and means of suggesting fresh areas of perception and insight into human condition. In the twenties, the novel was fast becoming a mirror of the crisis in contemporary life and of a historical process moving towards new frontiers of human selfhood. Therefore, the American self had to discover new avenues of perception of reality and also bring about the appropriate adjustments between the individual and his environment.

By the end of the First World War, the American novel had reached a new expressive self-sufficiency, eager and ready to absorb and project the complexity of American life. Fitzgerald started writing when the young generation had just returned from the First World War. Distrustful of the past and disillusioned with customs and conventions, the young people had nothing to fall back upon except their own experience. R.W. Horton, observing the impact of war on the Victorian values, says “The war acted merely as a catalytic agent in the breakdown of Victorian social structure” (Background of American Literary Thought 316).

A reaction against Puritanism was also a major cause of Post-war degeneration and a change in social structure. The argument was that Puritanism had suppressed the pursuit of pleasure in favour of things and ultimately had diverted American energy to technology and utilitarianism.
William E. Lechtenburg, recording the intellectual’s argument about prosperity and success of the Puritans, proclaimed:

They despised capitalism as the foul offspring of Puritanism .... The United States, they argued, was gadgetry, mechanistic culture, a place where people were bent only on getting a living, a country hostile to leisure and to art (The Perils of Prosperity 145).

Thus the war had unprecedented effects on the economy of America making the post-war decade a period of prosperity and industrial growth. Installment buying and stock market speculation gave fresh impetus to prosperity. The gap between the elegant and not so elegant, between the working class and the leisure class became wider and wider, Michael Spindler, in this regard, observes:

The emergence of the leisure class in the early 20th century was a social development of major ideological significance. Its aristocratic features belied the image of the republic as a fluid democratic society and led to propagation of luxury, idleness, pecuniary emulation and conspicuous consumption as honorific pursuits in contradiction to the Protestant ethic of work, thrift and abstinence (American Literature and Social Change 150).

The revolution in manners and morals of the younger generation was one of the major signs that reflected a social change in the Twenties: “It was the decade when youth rejected every social, and moral code of the past and became a social problem” (Fass 3). Revolution in dress, bobbed hair, smoking and drinking by women, freedom and equality for women, freedom of sex before
and after marriage and rejection of all the established codes—all these became a part of the general stance of subversion adopted by this generation. As Mark Sullivan has observed “the twenties reversing age – old customs, Biblical precepts and familiar adage, was a period in which, in many respects, youth was the model, age the imitator” (Our Times 385-386).

Fitzgerald focuses on the relationship between individual and society as a struggle between the irreconcilable. Fitzgerald too vouchsafes the same: “I am interested in the individual only in his relation to society” (qtd. in Henry Dan Piper F.Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait 227). The Fitzgerald’s hero begins his quest for values in a society disturbed by the grim realities of the First World War. The hero does not actually participate in World War, but he is physically present in the society.

Fitzgerald’s treatment of the revolution of young flappers reveals his romantic attitude towards his characters quick to realise its shattering effect on the edifice of human faiths and conventions. He is one of the sad young men of the Twenties who were born and bred up in the genteel tradition of the hopeful nineties. In spite of his conscious rejection of the hypocrisy and snobbishness of the older generation, the hero imbibes its unconscious assumptions and inarticulate hopes. In his hopes and despair and in his convictions and confusions, the Fitzgerald’s hero represents the tensions and ambivalences of the Twenties. Experience becomes a process of educating himself, in a negative way, through divesting himself of all the futile illusions of his age. Hence the hero, who is the repository of the private illusions of the individuals and the public illusions of the age, finally comes to realise the falsity of the old faiths. Moreover, Fitzgerald’s protagonist stands completely
disillusioned and withdraws into his own shell and sinks into obscurity, since he is completely disgusted with the sophisticated rich. He finally leaves the corrupt society of the rich, exploited, chastened, subdued and less sure of himself.

This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald’s first novel is a quest, portraying in its protagonist, Amory Blaine a generation of young people transforming the society in which they have grown up. The youths begin to question “aloud the institutions that Amory and countless others before him had questioned so long in secret” (131). Amory emphatically tells: “My whole generation is restless” (299). He involves himself fully in life and learns about it not from the past experience of others, but from the consequences of his own. Fitzgerald makes his protagonist pass through this side of Paradise, the society in the Twenties, to record his mistakes and failures. Amory Blaine embraces the conventions of the society only to find them without value. Consequently his withdrawal from society is a temporary retreat to find a new and firmer foundation within himself, to build his own society again. Alfred Kazin was right when he said “This Side of Paradise announced the lost generation” (On Native Grounds 16).

In the early part of the novel, Amory is full of youthful idealism and enthusiasm and he is an aristocratic American Hero, the spoilt darling of a wealthy mother who has “A culture rich in all arts and traditions, barren in all ideas, in the last of those days when the great gardener clipped the inferior roses to produce one perfect bud” (14).

His mother, Beatrice O’ Hara is a Renaissance figure, a great humanist, who always wanted Amory to attend Eton and Oxford. A great admirer of European culture, not yet ravaged by the First World War, presumably she takes
some solace in the hope that America may be “the great coming nation-yet”(22). Stephen Blaine, Amory’s father “grew wealthy at thirty through the death of two elder brothers” (3). But the steadily dwindling Blaine’s family fortune gives testament to the fact that for Amory’s generation even established birthrights cannot be assumed simply as a matter of course. But in reality, the world known to Amory’s parents has been lost forever, revealed by Amory’s eventual realization that “modern life has begun to change year by year ten times faster than it has ever before” (272).

Fitzgerald’s protagonist Amory Blaine is his mother’s son. He is a charming boy with a lot of glamour inherited from his mother. From her, he had inherited every trait except the stray inexpressible few, which had made him worthwhile. She considers it fashionable to be ill and she hates the provincialism of the philistine Westerners. She also possesses the Easterner’s aristocratic contempt for the cultural pretensions of the Westerner.

Gradually the aristocratic code of egotism evolves in Amory and he begins to pass through the shaping hands of society. In the beginning, Amory Blaine makes a sincere attempt to come to a compromise with society. But, he is frequently upset by the actualities of American life which do not square up with his intensely personal and idealised view of the world. Amory is shocked to find that “None of the Victorian mothers and most of the mothers were Victorian – had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to be kissed” (58).

The flappers or undergraduate Madame Bovaries as Maxwell Geismer christens them, lazily remarks that she had kissed dozens of men and that she
might kiss dozens more, is engaged in “that great current American phenomenon, the petting party” (58). Fitzgerald’s youthful hero is shocked to see the degeneration of the new generation:

Amory saw girls doing things that even in his memory would have been impossible: eating three O’clock after dance supper in impossible café, talking of every side of life with an air of half earnestness, half of mockery, yet with a furtive excitement that Amory considered stood for a real moral letdown. But he never realized how... spread it was until he saw the cities between New York and Chicago as one vast juvenile intrigue (58-59).

As spokesperson for his generation Fitzgerald dared to question the moral assumptions of the established order. He loudly proclaimed the emancipation of twentieth-century American youth from the inhibiting restrictions of the past. Fitzgerald himself says that “a lot of people thought it was a fake, and perhaps it was, and a lot of others thought it was a lie, which it was now” (The Crack-Up 88). Through his protagonist Amory Blaine he records the beginning of a conspicuous social revolution.

In Amory, Fitzgerald pictures a temperamental inability to adjust himself to the New World. His irritating superiority complex lands him in all sorts of scraps and difficulties. At St. Regis he claims that he belongs to a superior class of slickers: “A Slicker has a clever sense of social values, and his primary goal, in life was worldly success” (36). Amory coins the social distinction only to set apart his form of self-proclaimed superiority from the conventions of preparatory school popularity. Amory’s attitude reflects the
social fluidity of the Twenties. To quote Milton R. Stern “Amory’s qualities are not an inheritance from an established past and present, but are sign of deliberate calculus at succession the future” (The Golden Moments: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald 25-26).

During his education at Princeton, Amory comes to know about the air of struggle that pervaded his class and the breathless social system of the campus. “Oh, it isn’t that I mind the glittering caste system, admitted Amory, I like having a bunch of hot cats on the top” (45). Here Princeton becomes a miniature America involving the individual in an endless struggle for social superiority. But this social struggle results miserably in failure and distress. William Goldhurst rightly says in this regard: “Fitzgerald’s eager protagonists suffer the consequence of their self-imposed social displacement; they lose dignity and youthful optimism, or vitality, or life itself” (F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Contemporaries 131).

Amory’s affair with Isabella follows the courting ritual of the day keeping things on a very superficial level. The society they live in approves more of young men’s physical drives than of young women’s. While Isabella worries about being hurt by gossip about her tentative sexual experimentation (kissing) Amory soon begins to worry about the potential damage to his own social standing as if he is unable to score with (kiss) a speed. But Amory’s romance collapses with her fit of pique. Amory leaves Isabelle realizing that she had represented for him just another conquest. At the same time his failure to pass a mathematics examination causes his removal from the Princetonian board and the slaughter of his chances for the senior council. Unable to bear
the pressure of reality Amory’s illusion breaks down and Princeton fails to sustain the enthusiasm of Amory Blaine.

The deficiencies of his aimless youthful behaviour are suggested by two events peripheral to Amory, the death of his reckless classmate Dick Humbrid, and the intellectual growth of his close colleague Burne Holiday. Dick Humbrid is the perfect upper-class young gentleman, whose impeccable virtues conclude with the final stamp of true aristocracy—servants worshipping him and treating him like a god. Humbrid’s unusual and attractive personality should lead to different judgements about the qualities of social classes in America. Two months later Humbrid lies dead in a shabby New Jersey parlor. Fitzgerald places Humbrid as an aristocratic member of a dying order, an anachronism too fine to survive in the swift violence of a changing world and describes his death as unaristocratic and squalid.

The death of Dick Humbrid gives greater meaning to the next phase of development in the fundamental Amory. The young college leader to whom Amory next gives allegiance is the class revolutionary, Burne Holiday, who had begun a campaign to abolish the Princeton eating clubs. Burne was interested in economics and he was on the way to becoming a socialist and pacifist. When Amory split with Burne it was over the question of will. Burne equates a strong will with good, a weak will with evil. Amory believes that a strong will may lead a man to evil so Fitzgerald says in this context:

It seemed to him that life and history were rife with the strong criminal, keen, but often self-deluding; in politics and business one found him and among the old statesmen and kings and generals;
but Burne never agreed and their courses began to split on that point (131).

Amory sees materialism and tremendous licentious force in war. Amory Blaine goes off to war, not to help preserve the old, but to clear away all obstacles of the new. The war as well as the events connected with it had deprived Amory of his precarious ties to the American aristocracy. During the war his mother died and the family fortune had melted away. Amory is now a poor relation of the genteel world that must work for his living with no prospects of sudden wealth ahead. Amory works in an advertising agency, but quits it in frustration, remarking that an education that cost “about ten thousand dollars has prepared him for nothing more than a job that earns thirty five dollars a week” (206). In Amory’s increasingly astute judgement, the very cornerstones of American life are in danger of crumbling. Monsignor Darcy, Amory’s father figure and spiritual guide, observes that Amory’s “generation is growing hard” (157). He, again, takes refuge in his pose as “a cynical idealist” (84). His frustration over his financial situation is aggravated by his unhappy romance with Rosalind Connage. She needs wealth to create a sphere in which she can use them. This affair is destined from the beginning to destruction by the cold facts of economics. When Rosalind tells her mother that Amory “has a little income – and you know he’s earning thirty – five dollars a week in advertising” (190), Mrs.Connage replies dryly: “And it wouldn’t buy your clothes. I have your best interests at heart when I tell you not to take a step you’ll spend your days regretting” (190).

Rosalind, who quickly comes to share her mother’s opinion as to the sensible thing to do in the situation, says about Dawson Ryder, her would-be-
husband: “He’s so reliable, I almost feel that he’d be a background” (193). A financial background of the kind he offers is quite essential to a girl who confesses:

I like sunshine and pretty things, and cheerfulness 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 (196).

The portrayal of Rosalind and her world is cruel. Disenchanted with war and disappointed in love, Amory Blaine turns against the Old World and the older generation, which had foisted a futile war on an innocent generation. Amory does not actually take part in the war. Yet its effect on him is decisive. The war ruins the old background, and kills the old individualism. On seeing the world in the wake of the war Amory tells that “there were no wise men, there were no more heroes” (262). The war serves to confirm his belief that “no man can stand prominence these days” (214).

The turning point in Amory’s life comes at the funeral of Monsignor Darcy. It is an experience from which Amory identifies the romantic self, that is to help him through the labyrinth of life, the confusion of progress: The reader is told that Amory views a romantic person: “as one who has a desperate confidence that things will not last” (229). After the death of Darcy, Amory arrives at the conclusion that he must resolve to embrace and accept changes and most importantly, try to fashion something positive from the resulting chaos. In this way Amory can assume “the eternal attempt to attach a positive value of life” (264), which Darcy had tried to teach him years before. It is a conclusion that foreshadows the theme of Fitzgerald’s fiction. Amory feels
that he has escaped from a small enclosure into a great labyrinth. He finally pronounces the judgement on the new generation:

Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through a revere 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 the fear of poverty and the worship of success (282).

Amory discovers that what he really wants is neither to be admired nor to be loved but “to be necessary to people to be indispensable Amory felt an immense desire to give people a sense of security” (255). Most of Fitzgerald’s heroes share this desire, but unlike them Amory sees in socialism a way to attain it. When a millionaire gives him a lift Amory snatches the opportunity to expound socialist doctrines to him:

I’m sick of a system where the richest man gets the most beautiful girl if he wants her, where the artist without an income has to sell his talents to a button manufacturer.... A social revolution might land me on top. Of course I’m selfish. It seems to me I’ve been a fish out of water in too many outworn systems (277).

In the end, Amory’s social stand can be seen as a rekindling of the traditional liberal fascination with the ideals of socialism and it reaffirms Amory’s belief in the power of “the will of man” (276) as a tool for reform. The little ray of hope in the enveloping darkness is the Protagonist’s defiant cry, “I know myself, he cried, but that is all” (282). Amory’s conclusion is in line with the broader pre-war liberal conviction that the individual citizen could do much to reshape mankind. Amory’s attitude suggests that at present it would be naive
for him to speculate on the reform of the entire post-war world, but he is perceptive enough to recognize that the realisation of the self is the first step in redeeming the world around him. Like Amory Blaine, Anthony Patch, the protagonist in *The Beautiful and Damned*, has a romantic conception of life, but as the novel progresses, the pressures of the society nullify this attitude of the protagonist. Anthony justifies his way of life, his doing nothing by his philosophy of meaninglessness of life. Anthony, secure in the knowledge that he is to inherit his grandfather's millions, sets out to prove that it is possible for an American to be gracefully idle. Once he had succumbed to the meaninglessness of life, it became the justification for his indolence, "I do nothing, for there's nothing I can do that's worth doing," (65). He would wait for "some path of hope, some purpose yet be born" (55-56). Meanwhile he could be aimless and depressed:

> A self-absorption with no comfort, a demand for expression with no outlet, a sense of time rushing by, ceaselessly and wastefully - assuaged only by that conviction that there was nothing to waste, because all efforts and attainments were equally valuables (93).

When he first went to work in a broker's office, he recognized that strength lay in ignorance: "He felt that to succeed here the idea of success must grasp and limit his mind. It seemed to him that the essential element in these men at the top was their faith that their affairs were the very core of life" (231).

Here Fitzgerald catches the feverish atmosphere of the stock market speculation, which marked the decade of the twenties. Though he has no impressive ideas of his own to put in the place of the contemporary American
notion of what constitutes success, he effectively demolishes this notion with his ridicule. Anthony, considering the members of his college class who had become successful, remembered “the day of his integrity” (285) when “he would have cried that to struggle was to believe, to believe was to limit” (285). But he preferred, instead, to build his life on “the old illusion that truth and beauty were in some way entwined” (417). In Anthony Patch, Fitzgerald represents the literary genre of the meaninglessness of life, fashionable in the early twenties.

Incapable of making money Anthony detests his grandfather Adam Patch a financial-wizard-turned-social-reformer, and he seeks to suppress “liquor, literature, view, art, patient, medicines and Sunday theatres” (12). Old Adam and his grandson Anthony are the two faces of a single coin. The image is an exact one, for both are creatures of a material, money-centered society. Empty of real values, both are given to proclaiming their whims as gospel. They are complementary versions of a decadent capitalist economy and an individualist ethic. Adam Patch disinherits his grandson, because he chances upon a drunken party Anthony is giving in his house. Anthony and his wife Gloria contest the will, but they suffer a complete mental collapse. William Troy in this regard comments:

*The Beautiful and Damned* is not so much a study in failure as in the atmosphere of failure, - that is to say – of a world in which no moral decision can be made because there are no values in terms of which they may be measured (*Accent* VI 21).
Anthony has an immature grasp of human and social values. For Anthony, the pursuit and achievement of personal meaning is contingent upon a life of leisure and mobility. Moreover, money and a beautiful young lady, Gloria Gilbert, share his romantic idealism. They are essential means to the heightened world and his unlimited imagination has created with the help of the strongly reinforcing stimuli the promise of the American society.

Anthony appears to be the victim of a corrupt and money-dominated world, which has rejected the values of the past, but found nothing with which to replace them. Through Anthony, Fitzgerald articulates a general sense of a society, lacking direction or purpose, morally confused, potentially violent. Anthony does make several attempts to rescue his position by succeeding as a writer. But Amory’s hopes of helping to create the living consciousness of the race find no fulfillment in the work of Anthony Patch. At first Anthony believes he can become a gentlemanly historian with a history of the Renaissance as his subject. Later he thinks he will be able to raise cash by turning out short stories for the popular magazine makes his attempt a dismal failure. For most of the novel, Anthony’s writing exists as an unrealizable dream. It is something he is always about to do. Anthony exposes the careless and useless lives of the hollow characters, which make up Jazz Age society.

Anthony is endowed with beauty, charm and wealth. His life initially seems to be full of promises eminently attainable. With his marriage to Gloria he seems to have made it and his addiction to Gloria is even more than his addiction to alcohol. Anthony was blinded by love. In Gloria, Fitzgerald tried to portray the apotheosis of the post war debutante. Gloria is equally dedicated to a life of gracious ease and the proposition that life is meaningless. Her sole
concern is with her own youth and beauty. 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" (73).

Gloria’s fundamental sophistication is illustrated by such outbursts as this: "Millions of people swarming like rats, chattering like apes, smelling like all hell, ... monkeys’ or lice, I suppose, For one really exquisite Palace ... I’d sacrifice a hundred thousand of them, a million of them" (226).

In the characteristic preoccupation of a material--centered society, Gloria Gilbert with her romantic guise became the beautiful lady without Mercy: "He who fell in love with her now was dismissed utterly ... She went listlessly with the most indifferent men. She continually broke engagements .... She rarely stormed at men anymore – she yawned at them. She seemed ... to her mother to be growing cold" (81-82).

Seen as perfectly matched, their marriage rapidly deteriorates as each discovers imperfections in the other. Anthony and Gloria appear as merely pitiful figures, quite incapable of ever forming the cultural aristocracy to which they aspire. They frequently go to many of those disastrous parties of the Twenties. The climax is reached when Grandfather Patch pays an unexpected visit during one of their mild parties. Outraged by their drunken excess, he cuts Anthony out of his will, plunging him into poverty and alcoholism.

Anthony spends his days and nights drinking, while waiting four and a half years for the court to make a decision about his challenge of the will. Gloria, humbled by financial insecurity and marital frustrations, goes secretly
to Joseph Blockman, seeking a screen test. Blockman had begun his career as a peanut vendor. His wealth is the consequence of nagging financial ambitions. He is Jewish. So Anthony sees him as an undergone man “boiled looking” (211). When Blockman offers Gloria the possibility of a glamorous movie career, she is tempted to accept. Anthony refuses, and she reluctantly declines the offer. But the ultimate sign of his degeneration is his request that Gloria goes to Blockman for money to satisfy his craving for alcohol. As Gloria has begun to show signs of age, she is offered a character part. Anthony traces Blockman, accuses him of having kept his wife out of the movies. Blockman upbraids him for his drunken insolence and Anthony calls him a “Goddam Jew”(437). This is a sign of Anthony’s ultimate decline and a signal for Blockman to assert his new-won authority. Thus the society, which he changes his name to become a fixture in, is anti-semitic in tone. In the eyes of Anthony, and Gloria, the successful Jew has become the symbol of their contempt for all the stupid, unsophisticated Americans who aspire to become aristocrats, a contempt saturated with racism. In the increasingly tortured thoughts of Fitzgerald’s aristocrats, the American alien assumes a new perspective. Earlier Anthony Patch sees the Jewish men with their fatuous glances and tight suits. Anthony perceives that people are becoming at once “the maggots, and the rulers of his country” (220).

Fitzgerald gives ample expression to the sterility and loss of values of the post-war world through his protagonist. In his wasteland novel The Beautiful and Damned, he had developed a sense of the undercurrent of violence and danger in the booming America of the 1920’s and he goes on to
say that “he was pretty sure living wasn’t the reckless, careless business these people thought this generation just younger than me” (The Crack-Up 59-60).

The relationship between the process of social change and Fitzgerald’s effort to discover some acceptable form of moralizing is illustrated in the two liaisons sustained by Anthony Patch in The Beautiful and Damned. The first of these, predating Anthony’s marriage to Gloria is with Geraldine Burke, an usher at Keith’s motion – picture theatre. Geraldine ministers to Anthony’s sense of superiority by her very being and to his pleasure as the gentleman’s stereotypical casual sex object. She represents Anthony’s liberation from conventional middle-class attitudes toward sex, the only manifestation of this liberation being an occasional exchange of fairy like kisses between the two. Fitzgerald’s attitude toward sex is ambivalent, as revealed in the story our Anthony tells Geraldine of the gallant Chevalier O’Keefe, whose amatory successes cause him to retire to a monastery to be free from sex. O’Keefe tumbles to his death and eternal damnation, by plunging from a fanciful, monkish tower of chastity while trying to observe a peasant girl adjusting the garter. Attempting to celebrate the cavalier libertine, Fitzgerald is haunted by middle class Puritanism.

Fitzgerald captures the essence of an entire generation that embraced the Republican Party and a return after the war. While Maury, Anthony’s friend, is able to disperse shattered ideals in the search for personal gain, Anthony finds his disillusion paralysing. He regrets “the collapse of an insufficient and wretched idealism” (56) which leads him to despair: “he seemed to have inherited only the vast tradition of human failure – that the sense of death” (218). Gloria believes that Anthony’s story of kicking a helpless cat represents
all: “the pain, and bitterness, and cruelty of all the world” (291). Although Gloria and Anthony realize the inheritance of thirty million dollars, it comes at the cost of their basic human dignity.

While the illusions of Amory Blaine had the freshness of adolescence, the disillusionment of Anthony Patch represents the settled gloom of a defeated protagonist who has lost the life-giving naivete of youth. The disillusioning realization that there are limits to human accomplishment was the lesson learned by all Liberals as the lasting realities of the post war period became manifest. This growing sense of pessimism sets the stage for the celebrated literary achievement of Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.

In *The Great Gatsby* the protagonist Jay Gatsby is not only a representative of the roaring Twenties in which he lives. According to Lionell Trilling Gatsby “comes inevitably to stand for America itself” (*The Liberal Imagination* 251). It is the story of a gross materialistic society of coarse wealth spread on top of a sterile world. Gatsby is a self-made man, a nobody from nowhere. This ideal of the self-made man is one of the powerful thrusts behind American culture. In Fitzgerald’s portrait of the Twenties the dream of limitless possibility becomes the inherited property of the ruling class. Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who manipulate the American promise, represent the dream and are its destroyers as well. Their wealth and power are manifested in manners and smiles.

Fitzgerald approaches the human problem of the individual illusion typical of the common American dream, corrupting the innocent American and reducing him to a sinner. The hands of an indifferent outside force, crushes
him to tragedy and death. A bird’s eye view of world literature will also prove that quest for the self is a recurrent motif. In Tennyson’s Ulysses, again, the protagonist’s motto is ‘to strive, to seek, to find and to yield.’ In American literature this quest becomes the American dream. The innocent, poor man affected by the stories of instant success and the glamour of the rich around him became an aggressive dreamer, dreaming of what in reality was a freak chance. In The Great Gatsby Gatsby is a scapegoat of the American dream “standing in the moonlight watching over nothing” (117).

The world of Gatsby is shaped and sustained by romantic illusions. The fascination for money and the rich girl as the dream girl was the result of that romantic illusion. Gatsby’s life of success begins with a lie and James Gatz metamorphoses into Jay Gatsby. Gatsby’s desire for becoming rich has its roots in the poverty of his parents, who were unsuccessful farmers. Significantly, his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. At the age of seventeen he had invented for himself the name, Jay Gatsby – a future inhabitant of a wealthy area like West Egg, Long Island. He starts his life with a false name, which was a small, casual episode in his journey towards materialistic success.

Gatsby’s career begins at seventeen when he climbed aboard the yacht of millionaire Dan Cody “the pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and Saloon” (106). From him he found out money. Fitzgerald is acutely aware of a significant aspect of the life of the Twenties where pursuit of money is the new religion. Many of the people, celebrated in politics and society, are invariably connected with shady business deals. Unquestionably,
Gatsby is corrupt. His wealth is derived from such shady operations as bootlegging. He involves in one of the biggest scandals of the 1920’s the Teapot Dome affair, in which enormous profits were made by the secret and illegal sale of oil – rich public land to private operations. Gatsby’s exhibitionism of the huge mansion, the enormous car, the vast crowds who flock to his parties, the plenitude of silk shirt and the huge gothic library are extensions of the life of the glamorous Twenties.

The most apparent symbol of the Jazz age is the party that captures the mood of carnival. Significantly, the parties index the riches of the wealthy, the frustration of the poor and expose the boredom, fear and inevitable crack-up of the post-war generation. The long catalogue of names that Nick Carraway, the narrator, records on the empty space of a timetable at a party given by Gatsby, highlights the impact of social mobility in the years of social change. The party indexes the social chaos that has resulted from social mobility:

The names and scraps of rumor are interwoven to show how people are being hurried indiscriminately together in a frantic pursuit of money and pleasure ... the wealthy, the criminal, the disreputable, the pretensions, the showy, the frivolous, the rootless and vulgar civilization drift towards their inevitable crack-up (Way 104).

When Nick is first invited to one of Gatsby’s parties, he finds no one to tell whom Gatsby is. Gatsby’s alienation in contemporary America assumes the proportions of an outlawed protagonist, the Jimmy Gatz of North Dakota who looked as if he had killed a man. For Gatsby, once branded with the rags to
riches bootlegger myth, there is no entry back into either the public space or the private realm.

The alienation is the result of the tension between Gatsby’s private and social self. In society, man strives for reputation and glory as the basis of their self-respect. The desire to be admired by others results in deceiving others and one’s own self, because vanity requires that constantly one have to be what one is not. It introduces the craze for property, and destroying fraternity in the society. This self-constitution is more obvious in Jay Gatsby. The Jimmy Gatz of North Dakota with the schedule scribbled on the back cover of *Hopalong Cassidy* is the typical American innocent lured by the great American dream.

To Gatsby, Daisy represents the American dream itself. In possessing her, he will have the golden girl, every man’s ideal, plus all the wealth that America, the golden land has promised. By whatever corrupt means he has acquired money, Gatsby’s impossible determination is the one thing left in America, commensurate with that continents’ capacity to engender belief in a limitless possibility. Eble Kenneth asserts, in this regard that “By making the American dream a metaphor for the essential human ambition to transcend limitations, Fitzgerald makes Gatsby, a twentieth century version of Icarus” (*The Craft of Revision: The Great Gatsby* 115).

Gatsby has made money and moved into the rich society of Long Island in the hope that somehow he will continue to meet Daisy Fay. She lives there and he had loved her before the war took him away from America. He imagines that the relationship can be re-created, and sustained. But Gatsby fails to realise the corruption of the woman whom he worships and idolises.
Daisy and her husband Tom Buchanan are meant to represent an American class. Nick Carraway in this connection says:

They were 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 (180-81).

Nick finds the Jeffersonian dream of aristocracy and success crumbled under the feet of Tom and Daisy – the representatives of the rich. He records the directionless drift of Tom and Daisy “They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there” (127).

The indirection of these two characters suggests the indirection of a whole civilization. In sharing the values of the Buchanans, their carelessness and crudity, Gatsby becomes their thematic polarity. The Buchanans reside in East Egg, a land of traditional wealth and West Egg the ostentatious showcase of the newly rich, where Gatsby displays his wealth. It is in an effort to win back Daisy by demonstrating he has arrived at her social level. Beyond the rich Long Island Eggs lies the valley of ashes, a lower middle class wasteland “a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills ... ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades” (27). It is symbolic of corruption and sterility in the lives of sophisticated rich. Here Buchanans display their indifference to human values in sexual exploitation, and careless violence. The principal victims of their moral indifference are Wilson, an automobile mechanic and his wife Myrtle, Tom’s mistress. Ultimately, Gatsby falls a victim to the train of violence and their careless behaviour set off and is shot.
down by Wilson. He mistakenly believes that Gatsby, rather than Daisy, has killed his wife and shoots him. Daisy remains with Tom, indifferent to Gatsby’s death, as she had been to Myrtle’s. The Buchanans, standing for the modern American upper class, embody materialism, which is totally cynical. The potential violence of the rich class is suggested through the physical brutality of Tom: “It was a body capable of enormous leverage, a cruel body” (11). The class to which the Buchanans belong has completely lost touch with the transcendental spirit which once shaped American history and which renders Gatsby’s materialism tragic rather than being shallow. Although Nick deeply disapproves of Gatsby, a sense of the transcendental emotion at the bottom of Gatsby’s materialism makes Nick stop and call out: “They’re a rotten crowd ... You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together” (162). Even Daisy senses the tragic nature of Gatsby’s impossible transcendental – materialism when he displays his shirts for her, heaping them in a luxurious pile until she cries because she has: “never seen such-such beautiful shirts before” (98), moved not so much by the shirts themselves as by the intense emotion with which Gatsby has invested them. Gatsby’s display of shirts is not a flamboyant gesture or an advertisement of his incredible wealth. But he finds an awed pleasure in the contemplation of his wealth. For Gatsby, she represents cultural possession, the security that is being rooted to American soil. She is indomitably fascinating, but she lacks the capacity to imagine or with the radical re-creation of her life. She is as insubstantial as the ballooning white dresses she would weave, as shallow as her white powder. She says: “God, I’m sophisticated’ (22) and sophistication for Fitzgerald is an index to the decade’s false values. If Gatsby is attracted by Daisy whose identifying tag is “a voice full of money” (127) his romantic dream exceeds what Daisy stands for. The
original idealistic determinants of the American Dream are juxtaposed with their contemporary distortion, greed and acquisitiveness. Daisy represents for Gatsby the twin ideal of eternal youth and that opulent American touch, money. In fact both are inseparable in the present case for it is affluence that for Gatsby is the means to achieve the dream. Gatsby’s dream represents “a quest to recover the object of his vision and a quest to recover the vision in its God-like imperishable form” (Sklar The Temper of the Twenties 121). Gatsby has a faith in life’s boundless possibilities, a belief in an idealized moment and the memory of a glamorized past. Before he met Daisy, he dreamed great dreams, his mind romped like the mind of God, but when he kissed her, his conception of beauty was fixed and he eternally yearned for that beauty. All his visions and dreams became reduced to one dream, Daisy. He creates in his imagination a world that could never exist in reality. Forgetting that time is the real enemy in the romantic world, he tries to perpetuate the moment and enjoy the splendour of youth forever.

For a brief period, there is the prospect of the dream coming true, but Daisy cannot deny her early love for her husband. At the Plaza hotel Tom bursts the bubble of Gatsby’s success by exposing his past, which is woven with lies. Daisy feels distressed and distanced from Gatsby. She is unable to say that she never loved Tom. Her words make Gatsby shudder and his dream begins to fall apart.

Gatsby stands alone, without parents, heritage or tradition behind him. He has cut himself off from his old roots and established a new cultural orientation for himself. He dedicates himself to the American dream of accumulating great wealths and from his wealth, a personal recognition. His
desire for money is supposedly not an end in itself, but a means towards winning Daisy. He is perfectly ready to throw it away along with his life when Daisy destroys his faith in her as the incarnation of his dream.

The dream so greatly colours Gatsby thinking that he regards Daisy as the human embodiment of an ideal beauty, but in the last moment of his life, when daisy decided to stay with Tom, Gatsby realises that the material world is sadly different from the world of his dreams:

He must have looked upon at the unfamiliar sky, through frightening leaves and shivering as he found what a gorgeous thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon a scarcely created grass. A New World, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted foruitously about (253).

Gatsby is destroyed not by his dream, but by a corrupt and jealous world. Daisy and Tom are responsible for the death of Gatsby’s smash up lives and retreat into their shells of sophistication. Gatsby’s death is brought about by Daisy, who first lets him shield her and then deserts, him. Tom tells Wilson where to find Gatsby while Daisy remains silent. Wilson is a representative of the ash gray men who comes to Gatsby, in his disillusionment, as a terrible embodiment of the realities, which have killed his dream. The struggle is essentially between life giving illusion and the life destroying sterility of contemporary life and in this conflict the protagonist is not vanquished, but revealed. Gatsby’s vision of a transcendental and spiritual reality is not merely a personal vision. It is the dream of the American nation itself.
Nick also accepts this:

I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch Sailor’s eyes a fresh green breast of the New World. Its vanished trees, the tree that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder (189).

The Fitzgerald’s protagonist is a tragic figure, since he fails to realise that the dream is already behind him, lost in the dim obscurities of the dull cities.

Nick says that “Gatsby’s is a story of the West, and that all the leading characters are westerners who possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly inadaptable to Eastern life” (34). The East destroys the older American qualities with which these Midwesterners have grown up, qualities that only Gatsby manages to restrain. By showing that the early deals of the country ideals inspired by Nature and by an agrarian economy, have almost entirely disappeared in the new urban, industrial society, Fitzgerald warns us that democracy and capitalism are not compatible.

By the time Fitzgerald set out to write Tender is the Night, the Jazz age had completed its youth and was fading into decrepitude. The young generation that danced to the music of jazz, that forgot the social responsibility in the excitement of sex and liquor, was moving towards its disastrous crack up in the
Thirties. The novel relates the collapse of its protagonist Dick Diver on social levels. Dick is Fitzgerald’s portrait of an American gentleman.

Dick learns the manners and code of morality associated with the pre-civil war south. He has been brought up on older American values: “honor, courtesy and courage” (219), values that as an adult he finds manifested in Mrs. Speers, a young Hollywood actress, Rosemary’s mother. These are the values that make him a spoiled priest and a moralist in revolt. The pressures of a materialistic age nullify his beliefs in the essential goodness of man.

It was with great idealism that Dick arrived at the snake pit of historical actualities, epitomized by the operative America and Europe that emerged from the international war. His charm lay in his endless need to serve and be useful, to put into action his desire to redeem, to heal and to create love:

Dick got up to Zurich on less Achilles’ heels than would be required to equip a centipede, but with plenty – the illusions of eternal strength and health, and of the essential goodness of people – illusions of a nation, the lies of generations of frontier mothers who had to croon falsely that there were no wolves outside the cabin door (124).

From the beginning of his story Dick says “the price of his intactness was his incompleteness” (170). If he were to reach the power of his full maturity in the hard actualities of a fallen word, his education required some disillusioning and finishing strokes of experience. In fact, he had been too lucky and “he must be less intact, even faintly destroyed” (122). At the end of the novel, when there
was nothing left to believe in, he responded to the corrupt New World with a deeply instilled exercise:

The old fatal pleasing ness, the old forceful charm (that) swept back with its cry of ‘Use me!’ ... because it had early become a habit to be loved, perhaps from the moment when he had realized that he was the last hope of a decaying clan. Wanting above all to be brave and kind, he had wanted, even more that that, to be loved (324).

Dick’s genuine qualities and transcendent possibilities are used up and thrown away not only by the corrupt world around him, but also by his outworn pre-war romantic idealism. Dick is further incapacitated by his susceptibility to the seductive images professed by the sentimentality of the age.

Dick’s intelligence informs him of the waste and extravagance involved in sustaining his illusion and in making it true for others as well as living by it himself and he looks back: “with awe at the carnivals of affection he had given, as a general might gaze upon a massacre he had ordered to satisfy an impersonal blood-lust” (98). Safe in his Swiss sanctuary, Dick had thought that war could not touch him, but his battles were simply postponed. Love and war are closely related, as he realises when he visits the western front in 1925.

Dick sees in Rosemary a romantic dream of something he has forfeited in marrying Nicole and he also understands that his too has been a love battle: “All my beautiful lovely safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love” (130). The destiny to which Dick is called by his love to Nicole results in a battle from which he retires, utterly spent and defeated.
The title of the novel borrowed from Keats 'Ode to a Nightingale,' focuses on the contradiction between Dick’s idealism and the ugly reality of the age he is living. As the world of the Nightingale lures Keats, the world of the rich lures Dick Diver. On the one hand, the Nightingales’ is a world of fulfilled romance and ecstasy, but on the other it is a world of night, silence and repose. Dick’s decision to marry Nicole represents the attraction of sex and beauty and the deceased state of western civilization.

Nicole Warren, Dick’s wife, is the representative of modern America. At the Swiss clinic she plays for Dick records of American popular songs: “thin times, holding lost times and future hopes in liaison” (215), until it seems to him that “this scarcely saved wait of disaster embodies the essence of a continent” (216). Nicole’s madness is a symptom of the disintegration of American society that has its counterpart in the torn battlefields of Europe. Her father, “a fine American type in every way” (204), has been peasant enough to indulge in an incestuous relationship with her and is thus directly responsible for a characteristic mental disorder. Fitzgerald criticizes that wealthy Americans exercise immense power, but without the moral responsibility. Devereux Warren’s wanton destruction of his daughter’s innocence is the correlative of the barren spiritual inheritance that her generation owes to the rapacious robber barons of nineteenth century America. When Dick first learns her history it is no wonder that Dick wished she had no background that “she was just a girl lost with no address save the night from which she had come” (215).

Before he is fully committed to Nicole, Dick is warned of Nicole’s ruthless sister, Baby Warren, who plans to buy a Doctor for his sister. The
preposterous notion amuses him. Yet his chivalric surrender to Nicole’s helplessness makes him a willing victim of the Warren’s exploitation of his professional skill, which precludes all considerations of him as a human being. Dick against all his discipline and intentions had “somehow permitted his arsenal to be locked up in the Warren safety deposit vaults and his Spear had been blunted” (209). Dick’s eagerness to expand himself for others, decides him to dedicate his life to Nicole, disregarding old Professor Dohmler’s warning that this is “a professional situation” (149).

Once married to Nicole he begins to allow himself to be owned by her, succumbing gradually to her desire that he abandon his practice and live on the Warren fortune. To affect Nicole’s cure, Dick creates for her a stable social environment, which his intelligence knows is belied by the facts. Going against his upbringing and training, Dick finds himself forced for Nicole’s sake to adopt the false values of an aristocracy founded on money, and in the process he becomes himself infected with the rotten softness that attacks the core of a civilization.

By over-drawing upon his intellectual and emotional resources, Dick succeeds for a few years in holding together that idyllic society which enchanted Rosemary. But in doing so, he is engulfed and corrupted by the wealth, which alone makes such a society possible: “Naturally Nicole, wanting to owe him, wanting him to stand still for ever, encouraged any slackness on his part, and in multiplying ways he was constantly inundated by a trickling of goods and money” (253).
The positive values of effort and industry that Dick derives from his Mid-Western forbears are implicit in Fitzgerald’s brilliant portrayal of the selfishness and boredom that underlie the graceful gestures of the elect, who make up Nicole’s world. Rosemary mistakes the futility of their lives for rich and varied experience. Yet clearly, this leisured aristocracy carries within itself the seeds of its own dissolution. The spiritual desiccation of the rich is illustrated as Fitzgerald probes beneath the grace and gaiety to the deadness within: “Dick, swallowed up like a gigalo” (216), and faced with the consequences of his having “chosen Ophelia, chosen the sweet poison and drink it” (324).

Yet, Dick is genuinely interested in the welfare of the people around him and his interest is not entirely selfless. He needs the approval of society as much as society requires his reassurances and guidance. When he is the centre of activity, the person upon whom all eyes are admiringly focused, he feels accepted and loved. This appears to be his desire to regain the lost ‘Haute bourgeois” status which his family has previously occupied. A priest – doctor, he serves the upper classes as consoler and moralist. As consoler, he reassures them that things are not so bad as they seem, and even creates for them a heaven on the French Riviera. There, they can retreat from the turmoil of the outside world. As a moralist he tries to instill in them a system of ethics. When he fails, he says, “I’ve wasted mine years teaching the rich the ABC’s of human decency” (216).

Dick’s affair with Rosemary Hoyt marks the beginning of his moral collapse. She brings from Hollywood to Europe the latest American vision of the dream of youthful innocence. Fitzgerald brings out the ironic tensions
between the richest texture of social appearance and the hidden reality of moral agony in Divers life through her. Immature and egocentric Rosemary:

Naivete responded whole – heartedly to the expensive simplicity of the Divers, unaware of its complexity and its lack of innocence, unaware that it was all a selection of quality rather than quantity from the run of the world’s bazaar (121).

She provides one more symbol of the corruption of imagination in American Civilization. It is Dick who sounds the last important note about her: “Rosemary didn’t grow up” (320).

Just before Dick consummates his love affair with Rosemary, his father dies. His father’s death symbolically parallels his own loss of authority and self-discipline. When Dick takes leave of his father, he puts behind him an old and different way of life:

Dick had no more ties here now and did not believe he would ever come back. He knelt on the hard soil. .... The souls made of new earth in the forest heavy darkness of the seventeenth century. Good-by, my father – good-by, all my fathers (220).

Dick abandoned the old virtues of his father and dissipated his energies, just as western culture had abandoned the old aristocratic virtues for a crass materialism.

Dick’s effort to restore Nicole to health, his struggle to prevent her world from crumbling to nothingness results in an emotional bankruptcy, later his own breakdown. Dick is impoverished and broken by the glittering society
in which he had wandered in his desperate search for grace and sophistication. Even in Europe, the wandering Fitzgerald’s protagonist fails to realise his ambitions. He goes to Europe, a complete individual, refined and strong. His refined sensibilities and his mental powers are deadened and destroyed during his sojourn in Europe. He becomes sexually promiscuous; falling in love with every pretty woman he sees. An argument with a taxicab driver results in a brawl, which lands him in jail. He drinks heavily and develops prejudices. Doctor Diver degenerates from the serious, brilliant profession. He returns to America “to be a quack, only a shell to which nothing matters but survival as long as possible with the old order” (309). Europe does not save the hero; on the contrary, it damages him beyond repair. He searches for values in a corrupt society devoid of values.

Dick is the victim of the very rich. Here we are back with Gatsby theme, the Warrens, like the Buchanans, is a wealthy Chicago family. Dick’s fall is balanced by Nicole’s climb to completeness. Dick had been used by the very rich. With Nicole, it is exactly as though the Warrens had bought a doctor for her and now had no further need of him. Nicole does not allow feelings of gratitude or sympathy towards Dick stand in the way of a complete break with him once he realises that Tommy Barban, the war-hungry mercenary, has more to offer. As Dick prepares to leave his Riviera home, Baby Warren cuts short Nicole’s recital of her husband’s good points: “That’s what he was educated for” (334). Maxwell Geismar points out that the protagonist distinguishes “he from the rich, the class to which he had once belonged. Disenchantment finally changes into disengagement” (The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel 9). A mysterious process transfers the vitality and the strength of the
hero transferred to Nicole, the symbol of the corrupt and exploiting society. Dick deliberately loses his power over Nicole. He regards her as being responsible for the change in his life. He wearily remarks: “You ruined me, did you; then we’ are both ruined” (361). Having taken his final leave of Nicole, the spoiled priest in him prompts him to bless with a papal cross on the beach where he once held court. The novel closes with scrappy accounts of Dick’s undistinguished career as a small town medical practitioner in America. The Jazz Age, days of Promise, and gaiety ended with the depression of 1929 and what Fitzgerald believed to be the pattern of human growth turned out to be the pattern of twentieth-century history. Fitzgerald’s notes in The Crack-Up suggest:

The novel should do this. Show a man, who is a natural idealist, a spoiled priest, giving in for various causes to the ideas of the haute Bourgeoisie, and in his rise to the top of the social world, losing his idealism, his talent and turning to drink and dissipation (307-308).

Tender is the Night, a realistic study of the broken universe of the war’s ending is the tragedy of both an individual and a society. It is the tragedy of an individual, with ones serious flaw, social climbing in a situation where the flaw destroys him. It is many ways the tragedy of a society, the sick upper classes.

The degenerate upper classes among which Dick moves have been replaced by the equally materialistic and degenerate, Hollywood group in Fitzgerald’s last, unfinished novel, The Last Tycoon. It is the story of a superior man in a corrupt society.
The protagonist, Monroe Stahr, is presented as an anachronism in the changing world of Hollywood. A cultural hero Stahr, by the age of twenty-two, has risen from rags to riches from a lower-middle-class background to a position of power and fortune. Stahr learns to live in the world of actuality-perception, the ability to lead men and artistic integrity. He is an obvious leader: “as a rather frail boy, he walked at the head of his gang ... occasionally throwing a command backward out of the corner of his mouth, as a man, almost single handed, he carries on a long war on many fronts to improve motion pictures” (28).

Stahr represents the man, who has risen through his own initiative and energy and yet not forgotten or forsaken his past. Like Gatsby and Diver he has heroic conception of himself, but unlike earlier heroes he is more rooted in the reality of the world. He does not assume the corruption of those people close to him. He protects himself by his great ambition, his capacity for work:

Like many brilliant men, he had grown up dead cold. Beginning at about twelve probably with the total rejection common to those of extraordinary mental powers, the ‘see here-this is all wrong—a mess—all a lie—and a sham,’ he swept it all away, everything as men of this type do and then instead of being a son of a bitch as most of them are he looked around at barrenness that was left and said to himself, ‘This will never do.’ And he had learned tolerance, kindness, forbearance and even affection like lessons (97).

The concept of heroism of Stahr in his relationship to American culture is constantly before us, as we read the novel. Stahr was Fitzgerald’s first attempt
to draw a great man of his contemporary world, but he turns out to be a Hollywood version of a great man.

At the very beginning of the novel, the Hollywood people visit at dawn to the Hermitage, the home of Andrew Jackson. He opposed the national bank and the man who cancelled out his ideals. The hermitage becomes a historical extension of Monroe Stahr’s contradictory nature and of Hollywood where artistic integrity is corrupted by materialism.

Stahr dramatizes the contrast between an American past of rugged individualism and a present that is filled with destructive commercialism. He is rather old-fashioned, and the maker in the industry. His achievements are in the past and he has no future. Like Gatsby, he has risen from obscure and lowly origins to a position of enormous power. The poor ill-educated Jewish boy, who led a street gang in the Bronx, is now the self-made monarch of Hollywood. When the book opens Stahr is at the height of his success.

Stahr seems to align himself with the great American capitalists. As a young man he had been “more than now ... a moneyman among moneymen” (45). Stahr remains a brilliant businessman and stands as the cynosure, the keystone of his world. His decisions are based on a shrewd business sense and an unrivalled knowledge of the film industry.

Stahr’s rule is autocratic, yet paternalistic. He can ruthlessly dismiss an inefficient director, but he listens with infinite patience to the problems of his employees, assisting them in every way possible. Stahr gives a form of new life to Pete Zavras, the Greek cameraman who has attempted suicide because rumours of his impending blindness have black balled him throughout the film
industry. He sends Zavras to an oculist, discovers the cameramen’s eye sight to be perfect and has the report circulated. At one point, Rodriquez, the impotent actor who has sought help widely, but in vain, comes to Stahr for assistance. Stahr, who has been described as an oracle, is able to succeed where others have failed. Within minutes the actor leaves the producer’s office apparently cured. Stahr gives vitality and permanent rebirth to others.

Stahr is basically an artist who lives and works in Hollywood because it is an empire he has created. All his energies are directed to raising the movie industry to an artistic level, not because he wants to make money. Fitzgerald’s other heroes are intricately involved with the very rich in society and the consequences of their lives depend upon how they differ from them. Stahr never seems to be deeply concerned with wealth and he assumes it as part of the grandeur that he demands in life. He experiences a feeling of satisfaction with his own creation, the world of movies. Like Napoleon he has earned his triumph by his genuine abilities. Fitzgerald makes the explicit connection between Stahr and Lincoln: “Stahr like Lincoln was a leader carrying on a long war on many fronts; almost single handed he had moved pictures sharply forward through a decade. Stahr was an artist only, as Mr. Lincoln was a general, perforce and as a layman” (80). Fitzgerald’s central intention is to examine the loss of idealism in America, that Stahr is the last of such heroes as Lincoln.

Stahr is doomed as a consequence of his success as a man of business. He is the self made man whose destruction is brought out by the business organization that his talents and imagination have created. He is caught between the forces that are fighting for domination. They are the New York
financiers and theater owners who provide the capital for Stahr's films. Interested only in profits they see motion pictures solely as commodities to be made as cheaply and sold as dearly as possible. The forces representing these interests are scheming to replace Stahr by his more subservient and less competent rival, Pat Brady.

Stahr finds himself confronted by the ever-growing threat of the labour unions. The union will divert his worker's attention from quality films to extraneous political, social and economic considerations. Stahr, a supreme commander is attacked from both sides. Stahr refuses to relinquish control of his empire, although the time is past when the vast armies employed in filmmaking could be dominated by the wall of a single man. To Stahr, the growing power of the unions constitutes a challenge to his authority. Stahr is far too involved with the running of an industry of which he had been one of the creators to believe that any organisation could take the place of a producer solely and personally responsible for everything. When he brushes aside the demands of the writers one of them tells him: "You're doing a costume part and you don't know it – the brilliant capitalist of the twenties" (141).

Stahr, the last of the medieval princes, confronts Brimmer, the communist labor organizer. During this confrontation, Stahr appears exhausted and drinks too much, makes a fool of himself and ends up shooting ping-pong balls at Brimmer, as if they were stars falling from the sky. Brimmer is surprised to see a giant of the industry so obviously ill. Brimmer wonders. "This frail half-sick person holding up the whole thing in the industry" (128). This scene is the turning point in the novel. Up to this time Stahr had been shown momentarily ill, but he was always in control of himself and others. For
the first him he loses control of himself and Brimmer triumphs over him. Power shifts from the last of the princes to the modern totalitarian. As an individualist Stahr is opposed to the unions, the communists and collectivism.

Stahr’s death in a plane crash comes when he, like Dick, is defeated ill of soul, and corrupted in character, having contracted for Brady’s murder. The plane that crashes to earth at the end contrasts with the plane at the beginning that carries Stahr through the heavens. When Stahr falls from orbit, there passes what Fitzgerald called a lavish, romantic past that perhaps will not come again into our time. Like Jay Gatsby, Stahr had come a long way, he had “managed to climb out of a thousand years of Jewry into the late eighteenth century. He could not bear to see it meet away he cherished the parvenu’s passionate loyalty to an imaginary past” (118).

By indicating the defeat of Stahr at the hands of the monopolists and collectivists, Fitzgerald tells us that it is impossible to combine individualism and social responsibility in modern America. Stahr tells Kathleen, his English girl friend: “Don’t start trusting Americans too implicitly, they may be out in the open, but they change very fast...very fast and all at once, ... nothing ever changes them back” (116). And she responds: “You frighten me. I always had a great sense of security with Americans” (116).

Stahr represents the American business manager, a moral symbol for the Hollywood film community, one of the most romantic cities in the world. He is the individual locked in the struggle with the organization he has created. But he has no longer the power to control. His plight is relevant to our own organized society.
In the course of his quest into the society, the Fitzgerald’s heroes leave a trail of broken illusions and shocked realisations of the emptiness of all traditional values. The protagonist goes on a restless pilgrimage to Princeton, New York, Long Island, Europe and finally to Hollywood. His wanderings follow a pattern of alienation and involvement, of withdrawal and return. In the end, the protagonist comes back home as dissatisfied as he was at the beginning. He comes back to a disenchanting realisation of the impossibility of translating one’s ideals into reality. After a brilliant beginning, he peters out into failure and anonymity. But this might also be viewed as dramatising and transforming of the tragic experience into aesthetic experience. As such nothingness has in itself the protective embodiment of society in which hollow men yet continue to live. It is only the refuge of the past that the Fitzgerald hero is able to find sustenance and strength. As the protagonist take refuge in their past, Fitzgerald longed to escape into a kind of boyhood world where the authority of the father would be a solace. But he was able to escape into his fiction, the most abiding and worthwhile escape, revealing his hopes and despairs, which is the focus of the next chapter.