Chapter VI

THE TRAGIC VISION OF FITZGERALD

In spite of the jazz times, the gay flappers and the glamorous rich Fitzgerald is generally associated with, his vision manifests the tragic awareness of life. His keen observation and the discerning eyes went far beneath the superficial charm and glitter of the comparatively easy-looking twenties and brought out the moral chaos and spiritual bankruptcy that had replaced the traditional values of life. His penetrating insight gauged that the money that was regarded as the mainstay of the glamour and progress of the modern civilisation, had actually become a source of corrupting the fundamental innocence and garden-like purity of the generations whose ancestors had dreamt of a moral and spiritual perfection of man in this new-found land. The Edenic purity of the American civilisation and the American Adam who had promised to salvage the suffering humanity were the things of the historical past, and the gross materialism had choked the American dream before it could ever be realised. "By connecting his tragedies", writes Gross, "to a past that broods over the present action and by informing the present with the unhealthy atmosphere of uncertainty, Fitzgerald is able to describe the decline of the heroic and idealistic posture in his generation." The concept of the American dream that had inspired the first immigrants to envisage an ideal fusion of the material prosperity and the mor

and spiritual purity had in itself a potential tragic element. The realisation of the American dream was based on certain conditions and implied more or less perfect human beings. As has been shown in the second chapter of the thesis, the conditions in America went on changing rapidly, making the Dream more and more utopian. But it always remained the guiding ideal and the inspiring force for the generations of sincere young men who were brought up on the assumption that the Dream was still realisable. As the outlook of people grew more and more materialistic, remote became the possibility of realising the Dream. But the dreamy individuals and idealists, dedicated to the realisation of the Dream, continue striving and struggling to realise the inspiring ideal, but failure is inevitable; they are broken against the hard core selfishness, materialism and vast carelessness of the society. The tragedy is inherent in the very Dream they aspire to realise because the new forces that have changed the entire social outlook have no respect for the Dream with which the nation was founded; their defeat is thus the natural outcome of their faith. Referring to Jefferson's Declaration of 1776 which largely drew upon the concept of the American dream, Allen finds it containing the "built-in contradictions" because, he feels, it is "the expression of a dream almost in the classic Freudian sense, in that it is the fulfilment of wishes that can probably never be fully realised in actuality." In his innocent or deliberate attempt to realise

---

2 Allen, *The Urgent West*, p. 4.
his high ideals, the seeker of the self vainly tries to transform the entire structure of the society, but as his credo holds no validity in the altered conditions, he meets his inevitable doom. This is the general pattern in which the Fitzgerald protagonist, in his vain but sincere attempt to realize the American dream, meets his tragic fate. In his mature novels, the failure of the protagonist does not remain on the individual plane; it transcends time and space and comes to stand for the tragedy of the nation whose people failed to live up to the promise they had founded themselves on. The tragic failure of the protagonist signifies the death of the American dream, and thus acquires a national and universal meaning. Leslie Fiedler also indirectly relates the possible emergence of tragic literature in America to the American dream when he says:

Only where there is a real and advancing prosperity, a constant effort to push beyond all accidental, curable ills, all easy cynicism and premature despair toward the irreducible residuum of human weakness, sloth, self-love, and fear; only where the sense of the inevitability of man's failure does not cancel out the realization of the splendor of his vision, nor the splendor of his vision conceal the reality and beauty of his failure, can tragedy be touched. (3)

Kazin too subscribes to the same view when he remarks that "in a land of promise, 'failure' will always be a classic theme." Failure of man in America became for Fitzgerald the failure of the culture of the nation and its hopeful promise. It is not


true that Fitzgerald transcribed his own failure to his art; rather, we feel with Friedrich that disillusion was "Fitzgerald's first and most deeply felt sense of the world, long before he had anything to be disillusioned about." Failure and Disillusionment were not the literary cliches borrowed by Fitzgerald from the general mood and temperament of the post-war era, but were the outcome of his deep understanding of the national culture, its bright promise and the perverted forces nipping it before it could ever be realised. Mizener aptly points out that Fitzgerald "had a kind of instinct for the tragic view of life," and he gradually perfected his view in the novels, dealing with the fundamental questions of good and evil. His instinctive feelings of futility and frustration are also revealed through his letter to President Hibben of Princeton who had complained to Fitzgerald of damning Princeton in *This Side of Paradise*: "That the picture is cynical is the fault of my temperament. My own view of life, President Hibben, is the view of Theodore Dreiser's and Joseph Conrad's—that life is too strong and remorseless for the sons of men."

Fitzgerald, thus, right from the beginning of his literary career, was concerned with the tragedy of the self—the aspiration

---


of achieving an ideal of the self coming in conflict with the various social and historical forces which ultimately become responsible for frustrating the aspiration. The tendency on the part of certain critics to characterise the disenchantment or disintegration of the protagonists of Fitzgerald as merely pathetic self-indulgence or a pseudo-serious pose of self-pity and despair reflects the prejudiced view, and lacks the proper perspective. The tragic view of Fitzgerald is implicit in all of his writings and forms the core of his great works of art. "For the beautiful", comments Aldridge, "there is always damnation; for every tenderness there is always the black horror of night; for all the bright young men there is sadness; and even Paradise has another side." And this is no literary pose for Fitzgerald; it is a deeply felt conviction arising out of his keen observation of his times. It is true that no reality could hope to correspond to the idealised abstractions of the American dream but the thwarted ambitions and the blunted aspirations convinced Fitzgerald of the nightmarish horrors and disintegrations of the ideal self which he attempted to express through his novels. The American dream seemed to him a glittering mirage, and he was aptly describing the plight of a sensitive aspirant of the Dream when, explaining his later reaction to the city of New York, he said that the "whole

shining edifice that he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground." We find that from the very first novel he was endowed with the ability to create this atmosphere of impending doom, but as he progressed beyond *This Side of Paradise*, he found adequate motivations which provided his sense of disaster a tragic validity. At a later stage, recapitulating the working of his mind, Fitzgerald said: "All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them—the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Thomas Hardy's peasants." The tendency on the part of certain critics to characterise this sensibility of Fitzgerald as contrived is linked up with their general tendency to dismiss him as a frivolous writer. He was not concerned simply with the fashionable portrayal of the general decadence of the post-war era, but his conscience was deeply involved in the moral problems of the society and the general predicament of man in America.

Fitzgerald himself defined "the wise and tragic sense of life" as "the sense that life is essentially a cheat and its conditions are those of defeat, and that the redeeming things are not 'happiness and pleasure' but the deeper satisfactions that come out of struggle." He was aware that

---

9 Fitzgerald, *Crack-Up*, p. 32.
10 Ibid., p. 87.
tragedy in the Aristotelian sense was hardly possible in the contemporary milieu and, therefore, his conception of tragedy—"the deeper satisfactions that come out of struggle"—was apt and appropriate to the quality of strife in his protagonists. Matthiessen has given a fuller and more comprehensive definition of the modern tragedy. Examining the breadth and complexity of the tragic vision of Hawthorne and Melville, Matthiessen observes:

The creation of tragedy demands of its author a mature understanding of the relation of the individual to society, and, more especially, of the nature of good and evil. He must have a coherent grasp of social forces, or, at least, of a man as a social being; otherwise he will possess no frame of reference within which to make actual his dramatic conflicts. For the hero of tragedy is never merely an individual, he is a man in action, in conflict with other individuals in a definite social order. (12)

Matthiessen aptly demands that the author of tragedy must have "a profound comprehension of the mixed nature of life, of the fact that even the most perfect man cannot be wholly good", because in the absence of this mature understanding of human nature, "any conflicts that he creates will not give the illusion of human reality." He further adds:

Tragedy does not pose the situation of a faultless individual (or class) overwhelmed by an evil world, for it is built on the experienced realization that man is radically imperfect. Confronting this fact, tragedy must likewise contain a recognition that man, pitiful as he

13 Ibid., pp. 179-80.
may be in his finite weakness, is still capable of apprehending perfection, and of becoming transfigured by that vision. (14)

Fitzgerald was aware that every sensitive man lived with a dream and his failure acquired tragic proportions only when he struggled hard to achieve the dream. Talking of his own dream of achieving literary excellence and his struggle, he wrote to his daughter:

When I was your age I lived with a great dream. The dream grew and I learned how to speak of it and make people listen to it. Then the dream divided one day when I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me.... She realized too late that work was dignity ... and tried to atone for it by working herself, but it was too late and she broke and is broken forever. (16)

In this connection Schorer observes: "As a man he Fitzgerald was at last overwhelmed by the struggle, as who is not? But as a writer, he won it more often than the quality of our age has led us to hope men frequently can." His mature novels prove that Fitzgerald was concerned with the fundamental questions of good and evil. Through his deep knowledge of the society he found that goodness always suffers a crushing defeat at the hands of intriguing and wicked forces; he felt convinced that in the altered conditions of the American society only an

14 Ibid., p. 130.
15 Fitzgerald, Letters, p. 32.
animal-existence was possible, and anyone who strove to realise the Dream was doomed to fail. The failure of the Fitzgerald protagonist acquires tragic significance when, in order to uphold the traditional moral values and live by his dream, he wages a lone battle against the whole lot of corrupt and immoral social forces. Though we feel convinced that his struggle against the selfish and irresponsible society will prove futile, yet he wins our admiration and sympathy for his sustained but fruitless efforts for upholding the moral principles and values by which America had committed itself to recreate a glorious world. Fitzgerald's preoccupation with the examination of the fundamental bases of the American society upon which it was raised reveals that he found the plight of the individual insufferable in a society where all the traditional values had collapsed. The tragic awareness of the futility of his vision in the corrupt society that ultimately dawns upon the protagonist is a bit too late when he has already reached the dead-end of his physical, emotional and spiritual vitality. Gatsby, Dick Diver and Stahr are great tragic characters who have a heightened sensitivity, believe in the infinite possibilities of life and weave their lives around the American dream. They struggle and fight a heroic battle throughout, but their struggle fails not owing to the lack of intensity or determination on their part but because the time is out of joint, the very bases of their dream are non-existent. They are in
fact misfits in the society in which they fight their heroic battle as its values have undergone a radical change and are entirely different from what they had been brought up on as young men. They aspire to realise an ideal of the self and wish to transcend the ignominy of the environment, but in the process they are broken against the hard and malicious rocks of the society. Piper suggests that for the writer "preoccupied with the creation of new values, the most appropriate literary form is that of tragedy. Tragedy creates a value by showing us a hero who believes in it intensely—so intensely that he may even be destroyed by this belief. Tragedy convinces us of the truth of a value not by demonstrating it objectively, but by convincing us of what it feels like to believe in it as the tragic hero believes." To a large extent Fitzgerald succeeds, in most of his novels, in creating protagonists with whom we identify ourselves and, therefore, feel extremely moved by their undeserved sufferings and ultimate failure.

Fitzgerald's earlier heroes, Amory Blaine and Anthony Patch, are admittedly not tragic characters. At this early stage 'the wise and tragic sense' of Fitzgerald had not formulated itself into a credo which raises the later heroes to great tragic heights. Fitzgerald was young and had already shared

17 Piper, Portrait, p. 299.
the general disillusionment of his generation, but he still lacked that artistic perspective which could invest his protagonist with adequate motivation and the chain of cause and effect. Amory Blaine's disillusionment is characteristic of the contemporary times but cannot be called tragic because, at this stage, Fitzgerald's protagonist is not aware of the complexity of aspiration. Struggle is yet unknown to the Fitzgerald hero, and while Amory Blaine is a very true portrait of the contemporary youth, he really lacks the initiative, energy and drive of the later heroes of Fitzgerald to struggle against the heavy odds for the realisation of the Dream. His extempore speeches on the vicious power of money and socialism towards the end of the novel seem just superimposed and unconvincing because they do not grow out of any fiery passion of the protagonist, nor are they the natural derivation of his intense struggle against the corrupt machinations of the rich, as happens in the case of Gatsby and Dick Diver. Gatsby and Dick, even when they deliver no speeches, arouse that tragic pity and terror at such gross waste of the ideal human material which Amory Blaine fails to evoke in the reader. He fails to show his extraordinary brilliance in the school and in fact fails in the college. The only work worth the name done by him is with an advertising company for a brief period but there too he fails to show his mark and leaves it disgusted. No doubt, he has a grouse against all the social institutions and human
beings because of their ignoble materialistic attitude which stands in his way of attaining his dream. But in this very gross and corrupt system and unethical society, we must remem­ber, Dick Diver rises to become a great psychiatrist and Monroe Stahr, a key-figure in the movie-world. But Amory Blaine merely grumbles without making any serious efforts to transcend the social limitations. He, therefore, fails to move the reader about his sufferings, and can hardly claim his sympathy and pity for his failure to realise his dream.

Misunderstanding the intentions of Fitzgerald, critics have charged that he failed to create a convincingly tragic character in Anthony Patch. Fitzgerald had never intended to make him one, and hence there is no fault in his execution. Through Anthony, he in fact wants to show the disintegration of an aesthete who is not dedicated whole-heartedly to the achievement of his aesthetic ideal. We may initially share the cynical opinions of the young Anthony about the "meaninglessness of life", but we soon realise that he is self-contradictory and his philosophy, a pose. His philosophy might have been tenable had he renounced the materialistic world with its gross and corrupt institutions. He is crazy for all the charms of the world while at the same time expresses his world-weariness and hatred of all the unartistic, down-to-the-earth activities of man. His conception of an ideal life does not exclude the comforts of the materialistic world which he
otherwise detests. Added to this contradiction is his utter lack of efforts to achieve his dream. His day-dreams about his own intellectual and artistic capacities, in the absence of any effort on his part to transcribe them into concrete achievements, become mere self-indulgence. One after the other, he goes on criticising every institution and foolishly convinces himself that as the institutions are not to his liking he can waste himself away in idle and apathetic self-indulgence. His disintegration is caused not by his attempts to act against a hostile society and pre-determined fate, but because he chooses not to act at all. He fails to realise the Dream not because his struggles are in vain, but because he considers all struggle futile, all life meaningless. His failure to realise a life of his dreams thus results from his own inability to provide a meaningful basis for his existence, and we thus fail to identify ourselves with his cause. Fitzgerald, even at this early stage of his career, had realised that true human happiness does not lie in just idly gliding through life, but arises from certain creative actions and consistent struggle to achieve one's dream. Anthony fails to grasp the fundamental aspect of the American dream—hard work and devotion to the ideal—and cherishes love of idleness which alone is responsible for his self-destruction. Those critics who accuse Fitzgerald of contradictions in Anthony's character, fail to realise that he was satirising the self-
indulgent, pleasure-seeking youth of his times who in fact imagined to lead a free, grand and ideal life without anyway struggling for it. If they were horrified to find the society wedded to gross materialism, their complete withdrawal from it was also no solution of the ills infesting it. A discriminat­
ing critic like Mizener also fails to grasp the real inten­
tions of Fitzgerald when he says that "the quality of charac­
ter which would make Anthony a man more sinned against than sinning, is almost wholly lacking." He finds that although Fitzgerald makes us feel the grief Anthony and Gloria suffer, "he is able to provide neither an adequate cause for their suffering nor adequate grounds in their characters for the importance he gives it.... They are pitiful, and their pathos is often overwhelmingly convincing; but they are not tragic and damned as Fitzgerald meant them to be." It was in fact not the intention of Fitzgerald to make Anthony a tragic character, because he actually wanted to expose the philosophy of futility of efforts. Astro's contention clearly brings out the intentions of Fitzgerald:

What Mizener apparently fails to realize in his apprai­
sal of Anthony and Gloria is that Fitzgerald never intended them to be more sinned against than sinning, nor did he intend to endow them with the lofty character traits that Mizener seems to desire. In other words, Anthony and Gloria are not tragic figures (in either the traditional or modern sense of the word) because Fitz­
gerald never intended them to be tragic. In short, The

---

18 Mizener, *Far Side*, p. 156.
Beautiful and Damned is a successfully conceived moralistic tract against self-indulgence, not an imperfectly drawn tragedy of the twentieth century intellectual. (19)

Those critics who are prone to assess Fitzgerald's novels in the light of his personal life and literary associations fail to appreciate the profundity of his ideas expressed through his novels. Even his life-long friend, Edmund Wilson, in his famous and oft-quoted criticism of the novel, merely associated him with the popular contemporary fad of the 'meaninglessness of life' that was fathered by George Jean Nathan; thinking that Fitzgerald had idealised the inert and self-indulgent sophistication of Anthony, he was attacked for preaching contemptuous apathy to all types of struggle. This is how biographical criticism tends to cloud the real merits and intentions of the writers. In fact Fitzgerald always disapproved of the glamorised idleness that is Anthony's credo. He is shown utterly pathetic in the end when, though he has inherited millions and thus fulfilled his foolish desire, he is mentally deranged and thus incapable of putting the inheritance to any meaningful purpose. It is with a touch of irony that Fitzgerald disapproves of Anthony and his kind who have no stature at all, least of all tragic.

Though Amory and Anthony are representative figures of

the contemporary society and, to a limited extent, succeed in expressing Fitzgerald's ideas in their own way, yet it seems his tragic vision achieved its true perspective and maturity only when he went to create Gatsby. There is a vital difference between his earlier heroes and the later ones. While his earlier protagonists, Amory and Anthony, lack the creative spirit and dedication to their ideal, his later heroes, Gatsby, Dick Diver and Monroe Stahr, consider struggle an essential element for the achievement of their dream, and they fight hard against the tremendous odds. They seem determined to transform life according to their heightened imagination, but their moral battle against the corrupt and wicked forces fails and the tragic reality that dawns upon them in the end, fills them with awe and disgust at the enormous failure of man in comprehending the magnanimous vision of America. They are great tragic characters because they not only possess a higher vision of their dreams, but have the capability of struggling hard to achieve them even in the face of their inevitable failure. The consequences are invariably disastrous, but their heroic fight for the realisation of their dream glorifies them and invests them with tragic dimensions.

Fitzgerald's long literary apprenticeship, his two full-length novels and his diverse experiences in the fast changing American society came to his aid in creating a memorable tragic character in Gatsby. The Great Gatsby is one of the greatest
modern fictional tragedies, and Gatsby, symbolic of the aspirations of the devoted and sincere young men, is really 'great' in his intensity of commitment, and rises far greater in his undeserved but noble death. His "heightened sensitivity" and the concept of the infinite possibilities of life that the American dream promises to enterprising and sincere young men enkindle the fire of his dreams. The intensity of his passion for Daisy is matchless; he transcends the stage of hope and despair and unswervingly dedicates himself completely to the achievement of his ideal. Emulating his great models, Benjamin Franklin and others, he knows no compromise, and his imagination goes even beyond the effect of time and space. His mind is set on repeating the past with Daisy, and he is unique among the Fitzgerald heroes because he does not admit even the barrier of age and youth. From the moment he feels wedded to Daisy, all his efforts are directed to only that goal to which he attaches significance unproportionate to any human imagination. The "colossal vitality" of his dream is equally matched by his endeavours to be worthy of Daisy. Once he learns that his poverty was the chief impediment in the way of his union with Daisy, he is practical enough to realise that he can acquire huge wealth only through illegal and corrupt means. But whatever be the means, his imagination remains pure and his dream fundamentally "incorruptible." Daisy, however, is not at all able to comprehend the depth and the purity of Gatsby's feelings
and the dreamy significance he has all these years attached to her. She is momentarily fascinated by the gigantic and fabulous world that he has created for her, and Gatsby seems to be on the verge of his well-deserved victory, but she tumbles far short of his dream. Gatsby, in spite of his service of "a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty", has looked upon his money only as means of getting 'his' Daisy back. Notwithstanding his visible corruption, his loyalty to his fantastic vision mainly springs from the fundamentally moral outlook as against Tom's "hard malice" which is both calculated and inhuman and is inseparably bound with the underlying corruption of the "secret society", the "foul dust" that "floated in the wake of his dreams." Daisy has since been corrupted by the social forces characterised by Tom and has become a part of the callous, essentially corrupt and "incurably dishonest" class of the society. She cannot rid herself of the security and social distinction that Tom's money provides to her, and ultimately sides with him when he attacks Gatsby for his shady deals and questionable associations.

Mizener points out:

Until he wrote The Great Gatsby Fitzgerald's ability to evoke the nightmare terror of disaster was greater than his ability to motivate the disaster. It is different at the moment in The Great Gatsby when we are confronted with Daisy's prepared betrayal, seeing her sitting with Tom at the kitchen table over a late supper with "an unmistakable air of intimacy" and then find Gatsby watching the house from the driveway, imagining that he is guarding Daisy from Tom. (20)

Daisy reveals the basic nature of the corrupt and immoral forces which defeat the emotional and moral struggle of Gatsby. No doubt he pays "a high price for living too long with a single dream", but meets his tragic destiny because his efforts to achieve the dream are thwarted by the organised social forces represented by Tom and Daisy. His apotheosis of Daisy may look childish but with him it is an article of faith; his sentimentality of devoting his life to the realisation of his dream may look foolish but with him it is sincerity to the commitment. No doubt, he lives in the gorgeous world of his heightened imagination, and lacks the intelligence and mental maturity to make a cool and accurate judgement of the insincere and selfish Daisy and the callous and immoral "secret society" she forms a part of. What Nick or any other man with elementary common sense can judge and analyse through his discerning eyes and intellect, Gatsby, with his coloured imagination fails to judge. Gatsby has been presented by Fitzgerald with all his "insecure grasp of social and human values, his lack of critical intelligence and self-knowledge, his blindness to the pitfalls that surround him in American society, his compulsive optimism", and these are some of his deficiencies which are, to a large extent, responsible for his ultimate failure. "Gatsby's guilt, insofar as it exists", observes Bewley, "is radical failure--a failure of the critical faculty that seems to be an

inherent part of the American dream—to understand that Daisy
is as fully immersed in the destructive element of the American
world as Tom himself." Perhaps, more than anything else, his
"deficiencies of intelligence and judgment bring him to his
tragic death...." On the contrary, Nick has a sharp under-
standing and mature perception and is baffled by Gatsby's fan-
tastic vision and his almost impossible and naive expectations.
He too, however, cannot help being impressed by the grandeur of
his vision, his unswerving commitment to it, and his matchless
devotion to its realisation. But Gatsby does not seem to be
living in the real world; Daisy for him seems to be an idealised
abstraction, symbolic of his ultimate hope. He lives with
boundless faith in Daisy and dies in defence of that. What is,
therefore, admirable is the quality of his faith, not the
object of his faith. But his blindness to the reality does not
make him a pathetic figure, as contended by certain critics,
including Bicknell who considers him simply a victim, not a
hero. If he is a victim of his illusions, as contended by
the critics, then every dreamy individual is a victim; commit-
ment to a dream itself is then impliedly a foolish pursuit which
makes every dedicated man a victim. It is eventually a defeat

22 Ibid., p. 285.
23 Ibid., p. 287.
24 See John W. Bicknell, "The Waste Land of F. Scott
Fitzgerald", Virginia Quarterly Review, 30 (Autumn
1954), 561.
of Gatsby's romantic hopes against a relentless and unromantic reality which turns him into a tragic figure. Nick Carraway who, throughout the novel, wavers between his disapproval of and fascination for Gatsby ultimately sheds his ambivalent attitude, and realising the greatness of Gatsby's romantic sensibility and his total commitment to it, openly sides with him. Despite his conscious moral instinct and training, he is at last overcome by Gatsby's unwavering faith which "has to break in the end, against a reality radically incompatible with it. But in so breaking, it makes him a tragic figure; and unites him symbolically with many men more worthy than himself--with, indeed, the general lot of mankind." Moved by warmth and pity, a little before Gatsby's death, Carraway pays him his only compliment: "They're a rotten crowd. You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." The tragic fault of Gatsby is that his imagination is too high and knows no bounds of time and space and that the object of his dream--Daisy--is too small for the "colossal vitality of his dream." His choice is rather petty but that does not make his faith, sacrifice or struggle trivial. Elmore's argument does not seem to be convincing when, after admitting that "Gatsby has, perhaps, sufficient greatness for a tragic hero, and he has a flaw which prepares him for a fall", he denies him the stature of a tragic hero.

25 Dyson, "The Great Gatsby: Thirty-Six Years After", 44.
because he feels that the fall is not directly caused by the flaw. His commitment to "the following of a grail", his unwavering devotion, his basic sincerity and his constant struggle, both overt and psychological, undoubtedly make him a tragic hero. He is not a victim merely of his imaginative conception of the self or of his foolish day-dreaming, as is the case with Anthony Patch, but his attempts to achieve his dreamy ideal are thwarted by the organised social forces, the ruthless and malicious rich who had by then acquired a social distinction and had organised themselves in a distinct class, opposed to the fundamental concept of the American dream. Richard Chase feels that "Gatsby has a tragic recklessness about him, an inescapably vivid and memorable destiny. He has something of that almost divine insanity we find in Hamlet or Julian Sorel or Don Quixote." Talking of his tragic greatness, another critic suggests:

His "heightened sensitivity to the premises of life" is but one half of his energy; the other being passionate denial of life's limitations. Gatsby's devotion to Daisy is an implicit assault on the human condition. His passion would defy time and decay to make the glorious first moment of wonder, which is past, eternally present. His passion is supra-sexual, even superpersonal. ... Intensity of will makes Gatsby a great man. Despite the barrenness of his beginnings, despite the evil world of Dan Cody which was his first reward,

despite Daisy's selfish denial and final treason, Gatsby believes in the promise of life. He will believe—this is his tragedy and vindication—despite his knowledge that life cannot repay his devotion. (28)

His fight at the moral and emotional plane becomes insignificant once the acquisitive power of the rich asserts its traditional maliciousness and carelessness against the sincere and dreamy individuals. Gatsby is crushed and his tenderness and moral superiority break against the hard rock of selfishness of the "very rich." His failure symbolises the death of the American dream, and he becomes a mythical hero meeting his tragic death. Tracing the source of Gatsby's tragedy Mizener suggests that "the American imagination seems to combine a powerful idealism with a passion for the actual, and, indeed, the peculiarly American actual. It is this insistence on having both the dream and its realization that makes Jay Gatsby's life tragic, and no less so because he is innocently unaware of how much he is asking for.... It is, indeed, the source of tragedy for American life in general." His great dream turns into a horrible nightmare, and when Fitzgerald likens his dream to the quest of the Founding Fathers, the Dutch sailors, Gatsby's fate no longer remains the fate of an individual but it signifies the failure of a nation and the Dream with which it was founded.


Trilling appropriately suggests that Gatsby "comes inevitably to stand for America itself."

Dick Diver is probably the most moving tragic character of Fitzgerald. Unlike Gatsby who is, till the end of the novel, unaware of the potential dangers of his quest, Dick Diver is fully aware of his predicament and the inevitable result of his quest. He not only knows that in taking up Nicole as his wife, he is subjecting himself to the strictest discipline but also realises the dangerous course his life may take with Nicole. He is a great psychiatrist and is not unaware of the risk involved in the marriage, but as he is a conscientious human being he deliberately opts to sacrifice all his professional ambitions for the sake of Nicole. Once he is emotionally involved with Nicole, even when he is fully aware of the terrible consequences, he cannot think of belittling his great love by withdrawing as is suggested by his senior colleagues. He has the youthful vitality and the burning flame of idealism that inspire him to sportively take up the challenge, and thus the germs of the tragedy are sown right from the beginning. He sincerely feels that his great love for Nicole, his sacrifice and his youthful vitality will surmount all the impediments, and that he would make schizophrenic Nicole regain her real self and lead once again a normal healthy life. Once he decides to

30 Trilling, "F. Scott Fitzgerald", in Critical Essays, p. 17.
take up the challenge, the fear of the terrible consequences cannot detract him from his chosen ideal. He devotes himself completely to the cure of Nicole, and her problem becomes the sole preoccupation of his life. His boundless love for Nicole inspires him, and the self-sacrifice and self-denial that characterise his life with Nicole during the first few years of their married life, drain out steadily the abundant vitality he possesses in the beginning, leading to what Mizener calls his "emotional bankruptcy." The dilemma of his double role, that of a husband and a doctor, which he is fully aware of from the beginning, leads ultimately to a battle between his reason and emotion and eventually to his final crack-up.

But his motives for his self-sacrificial love for Nicole are not purely altruistic, for that would make him a god and not a tragic human character. We must understand that his impulsive and emotional actions are motivated by something very deep in his nature, what we can call his tragic flaw. Fitzgerald brings it out clearly when we are told that "he wanted to be good, he wanted to be kind, he wanted to be brave and wise, but it was all pretty difficult. He wanted to be loved too, if he could fit it in." It is not an accidental revelation about his eagerness to be loved wherever he could manage, but we learn about this fatal weakness in him again towards the end of the novel when he is called upon to help Mary North and

31 Fitzgerald, Tender, p. 23.
Caroline Sibley-Biers. It is essential to realise that these two ladies have publicly insulted him and have contributed to his ultimate disintegration. But in order to earn gratification and love from people, he is always willing to be helpful; that is the reason he comes to the rescue of these ladies:

He got up and, as he absorbed the situation, his self-knowledge assured him that he would undertake to deal with it—the old fatal pleasingness, the old forceful charm, swept back with its cry of "Use me!" He would have to go fix this thing that he didn't care a damn about, 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. On an almost parallel occasion, back in Dohmer's clinic on the Zürichsee, realizing this power, he had made his choice, chosen Ophelia, chosen the sweet poison and drunk it. Wanting above all to be brave and kind, he had wanted, even more than that, to be loved. So it had been. So it would ever be. . . . (32)

This fatal yearning in him makes his character more complex and human. His selfless idealism and his selfish motives mingle to complicate the situation and this fatal weakness in his character ultimately becomes responsible for his tragic fate. While he is aware of his great potentialities, he is also not unaware of his own "incompleteness"; rather he knows that the "price of his intactness was incompleteness." Dick's courage in accepting the formidable challenge and ignoring altogether or discounting heavily the inherent dangers has been given by Fitzgerald a wider meaning by relating it to the peculiar American culture where children are brought up with the

32 Ibid., p. 321.
"illusions of eternal strength and health, and of the essential
goodness of people—they were the illusions of a nation, the
lies of generations of frontier mothers who had to groan falsely
that there were no wolves outside the cabin door."

Dick's choice may be motivated by his inherent weakness,
his destruction is, however, caused by the various social forces
that prey upon him. In his attempt to actualise the Dream of
the pioneers he carries the message of an ideal life to Nicole
and others surrounding him, and thus symbolises the aspirations
of all devoted idealists. But his efforts to raise the greedy,
selfish and careless people above the vulgar materialistic
level are frustrated because the hard-core selfishness of the
moneved class has vitiated and corrupted the atmosphere com-
pletely. He succeeds in his mission of curing Nicole, but his
failure is contained in his success. While he succeeds as a
doctor in curing the mentally deranged Nicole, he fails as a
human being in effecting the change in her mental outlook. She
belongs to the "secret society" which has no respect for the
values that Dick represents. His predicament, therefore, is
not the predicament of an individual; it symbolises the defeat
of a set of values. He dedicates his whole life to the cure
of Nicole, but she is interested in him only as long as she
needs him. The moment she feels that she is complete in herself,
he is discarded for another adventure by her. She has the

33 Ibid., p. 5.
purchasing power and man is meaningless before the power of money. Sapped of all the vitality, completely disintegrated and disillusioned of his idealism, Dick wanders from place to place, representing the "dying fall" of the American dream. His failure thus epitomises the doom of all idealists who are inspired by the Dream but whose values have lost their meaning in a society infested with the vast carelessness and irresponsibility of the "very rich." The tragic fate that Dick Diver meets in his futile search for the lost values is thus brought about by contrasting the divergent ethical and social forces symbolised by various characters. His consideration, his grace and his sensibility to the feelings of others, the virtues that he inherited, seem outmoded in the world where vulgarity and corruption reign supreme. It is not the fate of an individual, but the fate of certain values that the failure of Dick Diver represents. Dick can measure, remarks Gross, "the deteriorating American society around him ... and his judgements give greater scope to his personal tragedy: for Fitzgerald wants us to feel that Tender Is The Night is not only the decline of an idealistic American in Europe but the death of American idealism itself."

Critics who deny Dick Diver the stature of a tragic character seem to regard the motivation of his disintegration

as inadequate or contrived. Manning, the representative critic of this school of thought, complains that "there is never any really satisfactory reason given for Dick Diver's break-up in Tender Is The Night. But Fitzgerald's clearest implication is that Doctor Diver breaks up because he has cured Nicole by an almost physical transference of his own balance and will." As compared to the medical theory of 'physical transference', Mizener's theory of 'emotional bankruptcy' seems to be more convincing in literary terms. Man is a very complex being and it is extremely difficult to define him in concrete arithmetical terms. Fitzgerald admitted that he was unable to provide cohesion to Dick's character because he had been unable to identify any one reason for his disintegration: "I did not manage, I think in retrospect, to give Dick the cohesion I aimed at... I wonder what the hell the first actor who played Hamlet thought of the part? I can hear him say, 'The guy's a nut, isn't he?' (We can always find great consolation in Shakespeare)." By invoking comparison with Hamlet, Fitzgerald, in fact, admits the complexity of a sensitive human being who cannot be comprehended through certain formulae. Different psychological and social forces work upon him and a clear analysis of his mind at any given time is quite difficult. Referring to the critical controversy about the real causes of Dick's

35 Andrew Wanning, "Fitzgerald and His Brethren", in Critical Essays, p. 61.

36 Fitzgerald, Letters, p. 567.
disintegration, Mizener opines:

What destroys Dick is something far more obscure and difficult to grasp, some spiritual malaise that is anterior to any rational cause and is--as has become much plainer since Fitzgerald noticed it--as widespread among sensitive people in our time as was accidie in the middle ages or melancholia, the "Elizabethan malady", in Shakespeare's. Dick Diver is, as Fitzgerald put it in one of his notes for the book, not simply an *homme manqué* but an *homme enrubisé*. He is in a state of terrible spiritual ennui that is without visible cause and yet makes men like him--talented, attractive, successful--feel quite literally that all the uses of the world are weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.... Perhaps he [*Fitzgerald*] did not manage to give Dick all the cohesion he might have, but the real difficulty is that the source of Dick's disaster is indescribable. It can be shown and felt, but it can no more be analyzed than Hamlet's disaster can. (37)

Hamlet has puzzled the critics for over four hundred years and yet he remains a mystery, but it does not debar him from being a great tragic character. The same argument can hold good in Dick's case as well.

Some critics have also charged that Dick Diver's struggle lacks the natural resistance he should offer to his inner weaknesses or to Nicole when she drifts away from him to Tommy Barban. They do not seem to properly understand his character and the nature of his struggle. Blacknoll complains: "He [*Dick*] goes down to defeat without struggling against his inner weakness or against the forces that have capitalized on it. Although Dick Diver recognizes what has happened to him, as Gatsby does not, his surrender makes him no less a victim. *L'homme enrubisé*'

may well be one we can pity or one through which we can see predatory forces at work, but his unwillingness to resist them, whatever his anterior dignity, robs him of heroic stature."

He knows as a doctor that Nicole's complete recovery can be effected only after she stands alone, independent of him, and thus when the chance comes, he has to make the inevitable sacrifice which is in consonance with his real character. This has been vividly brought out by White by tracing the various steps in this inevitable tragic break-up between Nicole and Dick Diver. Talking of his tragic awareness, Gross writes: "Unlike Gatsby Dick is by training and by temperament self-conscious, morbidly aware of his developing tragedy, although he can do nothing to prevent it; unlike Gatsby, his tragedy is not only symbolic in its significance but personal as well ... the haunting aspect of his deterioration is that he can diagnose it so accurately, he can bring to bear the sensitivity of the psychiatrist and yet remain impotent." His failure lies in his very success, and with the last self-sacrificial act, he achieves great heights. His tragedy epitomises the tragic doom of an idea, the American dream.

Monroe Stahr, as he emerges from the unfinished pages of

the novel, Fitzgerald's notes and other documents, has a promise
of being a far greater tragic character than either Gatsby or
Dick Diver. His virtuosity, profundity and idealism, though
similar to other great tragic heroes of Fitzgerald, are in a way
unique. His imbibing of the concept of the American dream at a
very early age and the infinite possibilities of life that he is
ingrained in, have inspired him in the way of other Fitzgerald
heroes. His experiences and struggle, however, are definitely
more varied than those of Gatsby and Dick Diver. Unlike Dick
Diver, he hardly got any education, but he had a good grinding
in the school of practical experience from the age of twelve,
and, steadily rising to the higher rungs of the social ladder by
his resolutions and schedules, he ultimately comes to possess
a very prominent position in the movie-industry. He is more
practical than both Gatsby and Dick, and has, through hard work
and intelligence, created a unique world of his own, an empire
in itself. But unlike Gatsby, he has not soiled his hands in
the process, nor, like Dick Diver, has he allowed his brilliance
to be overshadowed by lethargy and self-indulgence. A man of
initiative and drive, he, in his efforts also, is true to the
heroic conception of himself. His boundless faith in the Ameri­
can dream and his unwavering commitment to individualism do not
recognise the potential dangers of the fast changing industrial
scene of America. He is admired for his intelligence, wisdom
and physical capacities both by his workers and his business
partners, and is usually regarded as "the only sound nut in a hatful of cracked ones." He is a moving figure of individualism and believes in the infinite heights that an individual can aspire to and achieve. He is not only a dreamer but also a man of action, and whatever he has achieved is through his unfathomable faith in himself and his potentialities. But his unique position in the movie world has also made him overconfident of himself, and this is precisely what we can call his tragic flaw or ἰμαρτλία. He is the unchallenged master and rules supreme over everything which makes him utterly indifferent to the social changes taking place in the world and in America. Like Julius Caesar, his wisdom is also consumed in his overconfidence, and, believing in the old-fashioned values and the concept of the American dream, he totally disregards the dangers engulfing the individuals like him and therefore falls a prey to them. An embodiment of individualism, Stahr's egotism stands in his way of making compromises with the forces opposing him. He in fact over-estimates his own strength and under-estimates the strength of his enemies who have grown stronger with the evolution of the times turning against Stahr. Over-confident of his own capacities and leadership, he refuses to read the writing on the wall, and with his dominating character fails to recognise the dangers that threaten his empire.

Like Dick Diver, Stahr is also attacked by the outer forces when his will and resistance-power have been weakened by
his inner conflicts and psychological tensions. His erratic love affair with Kathleen and his unsuccessful attempt, like that of Gatsby, to repeat the romantic past, his failing health due to excessive work and his increasing doubts about the artistic purpose set in motion by the negro on the beach, have made a deep dent in his mind and rendered him vulnerable to any outside pressures. He can start a new life with Kathleen who can revive and revitalise him, but as she is just a normal and a 'middle class' girl with a poor background, she does not fit in the 'grandeur' he demands of life. More probably he is caught in a dilemma, and the indecision snatches an opportunity from him for an emotional relief which is very essential if he is to save his inevitable disintegration. Torn by the inner conflicts, he is thus not strong enough to face the combined challenge represented by the unholy connivance of the selfish and greedy Brady and the ravaging wave of unionism. Brady who has always been jealous of the enviable position of Stahr in the company is purely a businessman and has no appreciation for the artistic purpose of Stahr. He represents a large class of the producers, gross businessmen, who are in Hollywood just for the sake of minting money, and therefore cannot understand the creative and artistic individuals like Stahr. Stahr who is the "production genius" must be dethroned for grabbing power, and, finding an easy opportunity, Brady lends his support to the Writers' Union. Stahr who recognises the relationship of personal
loyalty and responsibility between an employer and his employee, opposes the union on the basis of principles. Brimmer, the union leader, while appreciating his exemplary sense of responsibility and fair-play to his employees, cannot stand Stahr's despotic individualism on the basis of the principle of unionism then sweeping the whole country in which individual identity must be submerged in the group identity. Unfortunately, Stahr, feeling outraged by the foolish wave of mob-rule threatening to destroy the Emersonian man, instead of compromising, is blinded by his over-confidence in his own strength and antagonises Brimmer by resorting to physical violence. The union thus recognises in him a tyrannical individual who, despite his generosity and enlightened objectives, must be crushed in order to establish the supremacy of unionism. Stahr struggles and fights a heroic battle against the brutality and ruthless machinations of Brady and the opposition of the unions representing the various social forces. His values and higher objectives, his idealism and individualism, are rooted in the concept of the American dream but the dream has lost its validity in the changed social milieu. Individuals like Stahr, despite their hardest struggle against the wicked and disrupting forces, must face their inevitable defeat as their credo is outdated. Despite "the obvious flaws in a novel so far from completion", Piper finds The Last Tycoon quite satisfying "as a formal tragedy." We tend to agree with his observation that Stahr is "Fitzgerald's most fully rounded tragic hero, seen 'simultaneously from within
and without'," even greater than Gatsby, because Stahr "has identity of his own independent of his relationship to Cecilia, the narrator, whereas Gatsby exists only because of Nick Carraway's tragic sensibility."

Fitzgerald's tragic heroes, thus we find, are in search of an ideal of the self, inspired by the divine concept of the American dream. They are caught unaware of the corrupting social changes that have rendered their values and credo untenable. Their quest is marvellous and their struggle heroic, but they meet their inevitable defeat which, however, is a foregone conclusion. Their tragic failure symbolises the death of the Dream of the 'Promised Land.' But Fitzgerald does not wish to convey that as the struggle must meet its inevitable failure, the attempt is not desirable. Whatever be the consequences, an idealist, whose quest to realise his dream is pure and honest, derives "deeper satisfactions" from his heroic struggle and rises to the tragic heights. It is not all black as is generally supposed, and, despite the colossal waste, there is a redeeming feature of this quest. Man, despite his erroneous preoccupation with materialistic pursuits, has always been hungry for the spiritual and moral values represented by the American dream. The journey of the Fitzgerald hero is also a part of the eternal quest, and as such, however dismal the situation may seem, it keeps that hunger alive. Nick's withdrawal to the West after

41 Piper, Portrait, pp. 233-84.
Gatsby's death is symbolic of his attempt to reconsider his decision of going to the East, which stands for materialism, and making money and enjoying the fruits of the materialistic civilisation. No doubt he realises that the West has also been somewhat tainted, but he feels that even at this stage there is a chance of retrieving the position, and "the wheat" and "the prairies" still give him a flicker of hope. Similarly when at the end Dick is leaving the Riviera, though physically ruined yet morally superior, he stands for a while and makes the "cross" mark and thus blesses the fallen inhabitants. We can very well suppose that he must have prayed for the good sense to prevail upon those insensitive creatures so that the world might understand the great men better. Stahr's remorse at the end is enough to prove that, despite his tragic failure at the hands of the wicked Brady, he regrets his decision of having stooped to Brady's own methods of dealing with the affairs. His remorseful decision to call off the murder, though not carried out because of the accident leading to his death, is a testimony of his continuous faith in the high ideals which have inspired him throughout his life. He finds no reason why, in the face of failure, one should succumb to the evil ways and lose faith in the high ideals and moral values.

An unprejudiced reading of the novels of Fitzgerald thus belies the contention of Charles Weir that Fitzgerald could not give nobility to his theme of "the futility of effort and the
necessity to struggle" because he was not able to deal with the problem in his own life. Whatever be his personal failures, which, in any case, should not hinder an impartial appraisal of his artistic achievements, in his novels he successfully brings out the significance of the struggle. Fitzgerald is aware of the predicament of man in the waste land, the "foul dust" that floats in the wake of the dreams of his heroes, and it is very difficult to suggest a way out of the dilemma. He is conscious of the bitter reality but at the same time regards the highest human values as the only hope that can save the society from total beastliness. When we respond to the misfortunes of the protagonist with pity, we actually identify ourselves with his normative vision of upholding the moral values which make man a dignified creature. In the ultimate tragic awakening of the protagonist, our feeling of pity for him transcends his personal fate and eventually comes to stand for man in general in quest of the American dream. The Fitzgerald protagonist is fully conscious of the nobility and grandeur implied in his defeat, because he knows that the values that he stands for, though temporarily defeated, will ultimately triumph and be the only hope if the humanity is to be saved. We thus realise that the Fitzgerald protagonist, even while meeting his tragic failure, leaves a flicker of hope for the

And as we measure Fitzgerald's achievement we realize that his special significance lies in his dramatic awareness of those elements that "will not come again into our time": of idealism and hope, of the singular individual fashioning his future as if a future can be fashioned, of the "romantic readiness" that informs his central figures but that inevitably is crushed by the hardness of the very rich, as in *The Great Gatsby*, or by the atrophying will of the idealist himself, as in *Tender Is the Night*, or by the forces of history, grown monopolistic and predatory and increasingly centralized, as in *The Last Tycoon*.... After Fitzgerald the concept of heroism is no longer even suspect.... But Fitzgerald points to the tragedy at the moment of its decline, and the authority with which he writes of failure is the authority of an author who has embodied the complexities of his time and recorded them in works of art that give a permanent meaning and beauty to the burden of being an American in the twentieth century—of being a man unable to find grandeur except in memories. (43)

Fitzgerald could create such great fictional tragedies only through a pure artistic conscience. He might have only a few ideas, but he was a great artist and was able to successfully convey what he wanted to. He was a master craftsman and his language matches the lofty theme of his novels. His aesthetic vision was an integral part of the total perspective he had of the social drama being played in those two important decades of the twentieth century. He was very well equipped to project his imaginative understanding of life in America through his

mastery of the evocative prose that lends brilliance, subtlety and vividness to the characters and scenes that he delineates.