This Side of Paradise - a Novel of Current American Style in Young Life
This Side of Paradise deals with his first published novel and its immediate success. Glenway Wescott rightly praised "the novel which haunted the decade like a song popular but perfect. In the novel, Fitzgerald shows how a young American of his generation discovers the sort of figure he wants to cut, what modes of conduct gotten out of books as well as out of a keen sense of his contemporaries, he wants to imitate. The real story of This Side of Paradise is a report on a young man's emotional readiness for life. Through the novel, Fitzgerald established his image as youth triumphant. The novel is the record of the social revolution and American youth is beautifully and frankly depicted by Fitzgerald. It reflects the sexual, social and literary restlessness of younger generation came through clear enough to capture the imagination of decade and it retains importance in literary history due to the vague rebelliousness or restlessness in it.

It is quoted in St. Paul paper, "He is a young man less than 24 years old, but inspite of his youth, he has written a serious book of more than 100,000 words, which has gained the recognition of the big New York publishing concern. Scott Fitzgerald, the successful personality, was a mixture of flamboyance and sincerity. His wisdom was defined at that of a shallow and perennial youthfulness. Undoubtedly he was a part of a second great wave of romanticism in the world within a century and went far beyond his predecessors in defying reason and good sense. This side of Paradise was established as the hand book of the new generation. Fitzgerald's thunderous success was quite a
victory of his will. An article in the American magazine in 1922 declared.

"Fitzgerald is the most famous young writer in America today. Read his article if you want to understand youth's point of view".

Menken rightly ranked Fitzgerald one of the most promising and brilliant members of the younger generation of writers just coming into power at the beginning of the decade. Certainly, Fitzgerald was the first author, who minutely portrayed the life of the American adolescent representing his activities as "new daring and admirable". The novel gives an impression of a genius who is producing literature. According to David W. Bailey "the story is a little slice carved out of real life, running over with youth and Jazz and sentiment and romance and virile American humour everything in short that is dear to a Princeton man or a Yale man, or a Harvard man, or just any kind of a man".

The first and second version, which was rejected, of the novel was titled as The Romantic Egoist. Its greatest artistic flaw was the first person narrative story and the lack of proper dramatization. It appeared to be dull and garrulous monologue. The last version of This Side of Paradise written in the summer 1919 needed the complete over hauling of The Romantic Egoist. The third person narrative view was selected and above all the autobiographical material was shortened. Inserting impressive dramatic scenes instead of boring monologue. Thus, the final shape of the book turned out to be a two part novel. Book I The Romantic Egoist Consisted entirely the material salvaged from his two earlier attempts and Book II. The Education of a Parsonage contained the heavily revised chapters.
This Side of Paradise was greeted at its publication as The Collected Works of Scott Fitzgerald. In reality, its organization was not dependent on his fragmentary early works: rather, he subordinated these to it. The book remains uneven and structurally uncertain, but it provided a frame in which pre-existing material found its natural place and blended harmoniously with the general theme. Its purpose was to give a comprehensive picture of college life, and the experiment can be said to have been successful, inasmuch as the best achievement of the novel is in its uniformity of tone and atmosphere. But it must be admitted at once that the success of the novel at the time of its appearance was due not so much to its artistic worth, as to a series of external circumstances that helped to make it celebrated for the wrong reasons. Fitzgerald himself told about the success of This Side of Paradise

..... and really if Scribner takes it (TSP) I know I will wake some morning and find that the debutantes have made me famous over night.

By happy coincidence, Fitzgerald unconsciously suited the Public taste. As he himself said later, the generation for which he wrote "bore him up, flattered him, and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did (1)". He found an immediate response in his readers because of his own sincerity and open-mindedness matched their desire for utter intellectual and emotional clarity. This Side of Paradise became at once in the readers minds, a book of protest and revolt in the name of liberty as a generic principle: it seemed to advocate freedom from money, from bourgeois
morality, from Victorian hypocrisy from religion, and above all from conformity. The book stripped the idols prejudices and lies of society at the very moment that it felt an awakening need to examine all the conventions on which it was based. In a society in which anti prohibition feelings were increasing, in which the discussion of woman's suffrage and emancipation began to spread, in which it became popular to talk of sex. Fitzgerald's novel with its open references to petting and necking, to the unconventional behaviour of the youngsters with its amusing descriptions of 'egotists' and 'debutantes', was bound to cause a sensation. His denunciation of the vulgarity of the new rich, his social criticism and his frankness made Fitzgerald the mouth piece and the leader of a revolution in customs and manners which was open to any suggestion and which was later to exceed the positions he had taken in the novel(2). If it did not capture the elusive spirit of the times the book reproduced instinctively the moment of transition from one generation to another and bore witness a radical change of attitude among the young and so it was that Fitzgerald came to be greeted as the herald of a new age.

This Side of Paradise went through two incomplete drafts before acquiring its final form. The first draft was "completed" at the end of Fitzgerald's college years and given to Christian Gauss, who refused, as has been noted, to pass it on to a publisher. No trace remains of this version. According to Gauss's recollection, the first part was not very different from the first part of the published novel, while the second part was made up of a series of
unconnected episodes, anecdotes, satirical pieces, and poems about Princeton, including the story then incorporated into the book — "The Spire and the Gargoyle". His recollection was not, perhaps, as exact as we would like, because the second draft, known as "The Romantic Egotist," differs in many places, especially at the beginning, from This Side of Paradise.

Of "The Romantic Egotist", "completed" at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1918, only five manuscript chapters (I, II, V, XII, XIV) and a description in a letter to Edmund Wilson remain. In his letter Fitzgerald spoke of twenty-three chapters in all, a mixture of poetry, vers libre, and prose, and added:

"It purports to be the picturesque ramble of one Stephen Palms (Dalí) from the San Franscisco fire thru school, Princeton, to the end where at twenty-one he writes his autobiography. It shows traces of Tarkington, Chesterton, Chambers, Wells, Benson (Robert Hugh), Rupert Brooke and includes Compton — McKenzie-like love-affairs and three psychic adventures including an encounter with the devil in a harlot's apartment... I can most nearly describe it by calling it a prose, modernistic Childe Harold.... (CU, p.252).

It seemed to him that "no one else could have written so searchingly the story of the youth of his generation"; but two points are here worth noting. The name of the hero seems clearly to be derived from that of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man; on the other hand, the
fictional conception of the book is completely disorganic. From the very beginning, that is, we must take into account the model provided by Joyce's book, and the opposite tendency to the "picaresque ramble," which can easily dispose of any plot restriction.

In spite of what is stated in the letter, however, "The Romantic Egotist" begins in a first-person narrative. In Chapter I the protagonist is in an officers' training camp. He speaks with boring insistence of himself and of the book that he is writing (and which he should have already written), repeating slavishly, often with bad taste, the concepts expressed in the letter\(^4\). This "egotist, romanticist, and loiterer on the border-land of genius," marvels greatly at the very things he is relating; he has probably forgotten that they are supposed to be autobiographical, and thus he hands out counsels and admonishments, insists on statements of purpose, and end up by tiring everyone, himself included \(^5\). If the critic reads these pages now it is because they reveal the intentions and designs of the young author and the fictional ideal that he wanted to pursue: his aim was to strike an unconventional attitude, to excel with a brilliant and original tone, to be amusing and revolutionary. At this stage, however, his surprising self-assurance does not hide the fact that he has very little to say.

After the stage has been set, Stephen's "picaresque ramble" is related in a long flashback. The youth with his parents changes residence continually; he reads, goes to school, and performs one after the other all the exploits of young
Fitzgerald himself, from the writing of stories and plays to the first tentative love affairs (Chapters I and II). As these events seem to precede the “San Francisco fire” of which he wrote in the letter, we may assume that this part comes without change from the first draft. If this is true, a faint but revealing echo of Joyce that can be discerned in these pages is of the greatest interest. Says Stephen in “The Romantic Egotist”. I'm trying to set down the story... of my generation in America [...] and put myself in the middle as a sort of observer and conscious factor” (p. 18 of the MS). This is not exactly the ambition of Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce’s Portrait, “... to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race,” but the undertone, at least, is analogous. And if we remember that Amory Blaine in This Side of Paradise thinks that he has been preserved “to help in building up the living consciousness of the race,” we can assume with safety that the influence of Joyce played an important part in the preparation of the novel from the very beginning(6) We shall see in a few pages the implications of this fact.

Chapters III and IV must have continued with the youthful adventures of the precocious “conscious factor,” because with Chapter V we reach the university years (“Spire and Gargoyles”). Fitzgerald tried to give a faithful documentary picture of college life, going so far as giving a list of words typical of the place. The jump in the manuscript to Chapter XII brings us to the Eleanor episode (Part II, Chapter III, in This Side of Paradise), and we can again assume that the intermediate chapters went substantially as they were into the novel. But
in "The Romantic Egotist" this episode seems to have a different thematic value than in the completed novel. It is the first conscious encounter of Stephen with evil, which presents itself under the guise of the dark beauty" and is identified with the problem of sex. This same experience is repeated, but in a more vulgar key and without the pseudo literary implication of the Eleanor episode, in Stephen's encounter with the devil in a New York apartment, where he had gone with two questionable girls and a college friend, as related in Chapter XIV.

In This Side of Paradise the original plan is broadened, although many episodes are included from The Romantic Egotist, and the whole subject matter is divided into two parts, separated by an interlude. The story is told in the third person, thanks to a happy suggestion of the publisher, and it follows a certain line of development, even if the thematic difference between the two parts is a clear indication that the material was not completely unified in the author's mind. Fitzgerald seems to have faltered between two thematic possibilities which he was not able to reconcile in full. In the first part we are given a rather static portrait of the hero, Amory Blaine, who is a direct projection of the author himself and is contemplated in the ideal perfection of the author himself and is contemplated in the ideal perfection of his egotism, more or less as Oscar Wilde had done in The Picture of Dorian Gray. In the second part the protagonist is carefully followed through an education, according to the imperfectly understood scheme of the Bildungroman, of which Joyce's Portrait provided a late and artful example. Of course, this second part develops hints and germs already
present in the first, but it centers on the thematic development of the episodes and on the inner development of the character itself. The general tone of the book, therefore, is much more unified than the episodes in the two parts; and if the theme is not properly focused, this is due partly to the author’s inexperience and partly to an unresolved duality or plurality of models.

At the outset Amory Blaine is in the protective shadow of his mother, who instills in him a dangerous form of egotism, a tendency to dreamy sentimentalism, and a good deal of romantic restlessness. The idyllic and effeminate atmosphere in which he lives reminds us of the graceful and secluded world that Melville’s Pierre inhabited before his tragic encounter with experience. But while Pierre seemed to be perfectly satisfied with his condition, Amory is already preparing himself for the “great adventure” which awaits him at college and in the world. In each case the protective and dominating presence of the mother is to be replaced by other women or girls, whose influence will be of a different nature and will bring the hero to an awareness of evil and of human suffering.

In Chapter II we are already at the university. The egotist becomes, by a natural transition, an aesthete. The first literary discussions and the first cultural contacts alternate with the first petting parties and the first sentimental love of Amory for Isabelle. “The leading character” wrote Fitzgerald in a preface to the book “loved many women, and gazed at himself in many mirrors”; one is tempted to say that even his loves are so many meetings before the familiar face.
of Narcissus in the mirror and aim only at a definition of his many-faceted portrait. An emotional and financial crisis (the death of his father) overtakes the aesthete, who reacts according to his nature, by settling down “to consider” (Chapter III); and his encounter with the devil (Chapter IV) has the same effect on him. After all his “considerations,” he can do nothing but take a new course in love. Clara, the new girl, or the new mirror, represents for Amory an encounter with ethereal and supernatural beauty, with ideal and aesthetic perfection. With a kind of Pre-Raphaelite sensibility, one might call it, he sees himself in front of her as Joseph before the eternal significance of Mary. And such is the power of this deforming mirror that Amory remains for awhile “Narcissus off Duty” (Chapter IV). This is almost the beginning of the end: and it is significant that this first part closes with an elegiac note on the fleeting moment and the approach of new dangers:

No more to wait the twilight of the moon in this sequestered vale of star and spire, for one eternal morning of desire passes to time and earthly afternoon. Here, Heraclitus, did you find in fire and shifting things the prophecy you hurled down the dead years; this midnight my desire will see, shadowed among the embers, furled in flame, the splendor and the sadness of the world (TSP, p.168)

The interlude follows – a kind of shadowy period during which Narcissus is not only off duty but also out of sight (as was the case with typical Celtic heroes from Parsifal to Tristan), preparing himself for new trials to come. The new “adventures” force him to go through a painful “education.” War has “spoilt
the background” and “killed individualism”: Amory has to come to grips with experience. The death of his mother has left him in a world turned upside down: It is now his task to keep or to deepen his character. It is no longer sufficient, as Monsignor D’Arcy had warned him, to be simply a “personality”: the aesthete must recreate himself, must become a “personage,” or be lost.

As in the first part, to a certain extent, the education of the character begins with an emotional crisis, which is represented by “The Debutante” – an episode completely set in dialogue. His love for Rosalind, no longer idyllic or idealized, but deeply suffered, provided no polite mirror to reflect the handsome image, but a polished stone that darkens the reflection. Rosalind abandons the aesthete (no longer an “egotist”) for the same reasons that a whole series of Fitzgerald’s heroines will later share, because she could not be “shut away from trees and flowers, cooped up in a little flat, waiting for him; and Amory discovers that his own life is empty. His “experiments in convalescence” (Chapter II) mark the beginning of his inner growth. His uninterrupted drunken sprees do nothing but further break the cherished image of Narcissus, proud as he was of his isolation and aloofness. His flight from reality into literature – he gets involved in endless discussions of books and attempts to write is only a means to confront in better awareness his own existence, to come to terms with his own experience: and, in fact, now he attempts to reconsider his whole life (“Looking Backward”).
The next step of his education, or of his initiation to life, is bound to be his initiation into sex. This seems to be the purport— in this specific context, and in contrast with the probable meaning of its first draft— of the Eleanor episode (Chapter III). If Clara had been the daughter of light, Eleanor is at the same time the archetypal dark woman (born and educated in France: one is reminded of Isabella, again in Melville’s Pierre), who is the symbol in so much of American literature of the complexity of experience and of the profane eros (from Hawthorne to James and to the modern novelists), as well as the fille du feu of Nerval. There is a spark of divine madness in her, and at the same time the sense of worldly materialism. Thus, Amory’s worldly education is completed only after his encounter with Eleanor.

There is an initial danger in his relationship with Eleanor Savage (her last name is also significant), and that is a kind of aesthetic involution. Amory is attracted by some lines of Verlaine that she recites, enacts “the part of Rupert Brooke” with her, calls her Ulalume, reads Swinburne to her, allows her to play with the idea of being “Psyche, his soul,” and so on. But Eleanor, even though a romanticist, is also “a small materialist” who does not believe in immortality; she gives herself to Amory on a summer’s night. In this way she removes Amory from the bounds of adolescence, breaks the bonds of his aesthetic religiosity, and, above all, as Fitzgerald says, takes away his ability to regret. Their relationship ends as suddenly as it began, with a kind of “last ride together” in which the touch of divine folly deranges the mind of the heroine. Amory feels
hatred for the girl and realizes that he has come to hate himself; the break with his exclusively narcissistic love is now complete. The original "portrait" is denied, and Amory's detachment from his former self is completed in Chapter IV, when he renounces his own social respectability with a gratuitous act and lets himself be discredited in public. The old ideal of the aesthete is shattered - the "collapse of several pillars" is an accomplished fact. As T.S. Eliot was later to say in *The Waste Land*, Amory has to shore up his fragments against the ruins.

In one of the last episodes he gives himself up to an endless "picarosque ramble," which has no possible outcome. Discovering now that he is a socialist, Amory starts an inconclusive denunciation of the capitalistic world, and the book closes with a whirlwind of revolutionary ideas. His long monologue is surprisingly ingenuous and is motivated more by a dissatisfaction with himself than with society. The socialism of Amory - Fitzgerald remains basically of an individualistic and sentimental kind(7) and it is clearly the symptom of a psychological malaise which has more to do with le mal du siecle than with the exploitation of capitalism. It is the result of a typically decadent attitude toward the world and society; nevertheless, Amory's education has reached its end. If nothing else, it has brought Narcissus to disillusionment and to self-knowledge. "I know myself, but that is all," says Amory in the end. And it is already a great deal to say-and to achieve - for someone who had begun with complacent, aestheticism. Amory's education does not leave him much on which to build, but it at least had the effect of liberating him from a superstructure of egotistical complacency and of reawakening his sense of humanity:
He found something that he wanted, had always wanted

and always would want: not to be admired, as he had feared:

not to be loved, as he had made himself believe: but to be

necessary to people, to be indispensable. (TSP, pp. 286-87)

There is still a trace of illusion and of egotistical complacency in the word “indispensable” – but in the wish to be necessary” there is the whole sense of Amory’s achieved education.

When This Side of Paradise was published in March 1920, Fitzgerald found himself a celebrity at the age of twenty-three. His brash statement to Edmund Wilson, made two years earlier, had provide to be prophetic:

This Side of Paradise is, without question, a searching, vivid portrait of American youth in those years preceding and following World War I. Fitzgerald presents, with rare intimacy, the turbulent emotions of his generation – a generation whose adolescent years were shaped by the war, whose coming of age coincided with that unprecedented phenomenon in American history, the Jazz Age. 

This Side of Paradise was acclaimed as their book by Fitzgerald’s Enthusiastic youthful readers. The novel dramatizes the restless groping of a generation “grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken…”
Elated by his success, Fitzgerald was nonetheless uncomfortable in the new role thrust upon him by his audience:

For just a moment, before it was demonstrated that I was unable to play the role, I ...... was pushed into the position not only of spokesman for the time but of the typical product of the same moment.\(^{(11)}\)

This statement articulates one of the chief weaknesses of the novel. Fitzgerald is both spokesman for and typical product of his time. The author of *This Side of Paradise* is too close in age to his fictional character, Amory Blaine, to do much more than present the circumstances of Amory's "picaresque ramble" through his youth and early manhood. The principal concern of the novel is Amory's quest for selfhood, but Fitzgerald does not himself possess the maturity of judgment to evaluate the quality of Amory's experiences.\(^{(11)}\)

Amory Blaine is introduced in the first chapter as the "son of Beatrice." His father, Stephen, having sired his only son, disappears from the action until he dies, "quietly and inconspicuously," when Amory is an undergraduate at Princeton. Beatrice Blaine, the daughter of a wealthy family, is an affected woman who takes refuge from her boredom by having periodic nervous breakdowns and mild attacks of consumption. A handsome, wealthy young man, Amory is encouraged by his doting mother to indulge all his whims. At an early age, Amory "formulated his first philosophy, a code to live by, which as near as it can be named, was a sort of aristocratic egotism."
At fifteen Amory goes to a “Gentleman's school” – St. Regis in Connecticut. During his first unhappy year at school the young egotist is “universally detested” by his classmates. In his second year Amory is completely changed. He had brought to St. Regis his arrogant, conceited “Amory plus Beatrice” personality St. Regis “had very painfully drilled Beatrice out of him and begun to lay down new and more conventional planking on the fundamental Amory.”

During this period of his life Amory acquires a surrogate father – Monsignor Darcy. This jovial prelate had been one of Beatrice’s suitors, “a pagan, Swinburnian young man.” When Beatrice decided to marry Stephen Blaine for his social position, the “young pagan.... Had gone through a spiritual crisis, joined the Catholic Church, and was now – Monsignor Darcy.” The Monsignor becomes the guiding spirit of Amory’s young manhood, encouraging his desire to go to Princeton.

Amory arrives at Princeton, determined to “be one of the gods of [his] class.” He becomes involved in the Triangle Club, a campus organization that produced a yearly musical comedy, and \textit{The Daily Princetonian}, the university newspaper. Amory succeeds in his ambition to become one of the “hot cats on top” at Princeton. Neglecting his course work in the process, Amory is placed on the list of “conditioned men.” Failure to pass a mathematics examination causes “his removal from the Princetonian board and the slaughter of his chances for the Senior Council.”
Amory is also unsuccessful in his romantic involvements. His first is Isabelle Borge, a flighty girl, for whom Amory is only one attractive man in an “unending succession of romantic interludes.” Amory leaves Isabelle, realizing that she, too, had represented for him just another conquest.

Amory’s next attachment is to his distant cousin, Clara Page, a beautiful young widow with two children. Monsignor Darcy asks Amory to visit Clara because she is poor and alone in the world. Amory falls in love with Clara because “she was the first fine woman he ever knew and one of the few good people who ever interested him.” Clara refuses his proposal of marriage, declaring she will never marry again. “I’ve got my two children,” she explains, “and I want them for myself.”

While Amory is at Princeton, the United States becomes involved in World War I. Book One of This Side of Paradise, entitled The Romantic Egotist, closes with Amory’s final day at Princeton, as he prepares to leave for officer’s training camp.

Book Two, The Education of a Personage, resumes the narrative after Amory returns from service overseas. He joins two Princeton friends, Alec Connage and Tom D’Invilliers, in New York City. Amory’s father has died while he is in service, leaving him very little money. Thrown on his own resources, Amory goes to work for an advertising agency. His frustration over his straitened financial situation is aggravated by two more unhappy romances.
Rosalind Connage, Alec’s sister, is a lively, spoiled debutante, “who wants what she wants when she wants it.” Even though Rosalind appears to love Amory, she breaks their engagement because of his poverty. “I don’t want to think of pots and kitchens and brooms,” Rosalind explains. “I want to worry whether my legs will get slick and brown when I swim in the summer.”

Eleanor Savage, Amory’s next love, is a brilliant, unstable beauty of nineteen, who recites Verlaine and Poe. Amory is bewitched by the “gorgeous clarity of her mind.” Reciting poetry and discussing metaphysics, they begin to fall in love. Amory questions the sincerity of Eleanor’s avowed atheism, stating that “like most intellectuals who don’t find faith convenient... you’ll yell loudly for a priest on your death-bed.” Eleanor announces that she will prove herself by riding her horse over a cliff. Ten feet from the edge, she jumps from the horse who plunges over the cliff to his death. As Amory takes her home, Eleanor sobs that she has a “crazy streak.” Her mother, she explains, had gone mad when Eleanor was eleven. When Amory leaves Eleanor at her home, he realizes that his “love (had) waned, slowly with the moon.”

The futility of Amory’s life is redeemed by one heroic act that he performs to save his friend, Alec Connage from disgrace. Amory is sharing a hotel suite with Alec, who brings a young woman, Jill, to his room to spend the night. Amory is in his own room when the police come to raid the suite. Amory smuggles Jill into his section of the suite and declares to the police that she is his guest. The laws against cohabitation of unmarried men and women were stringently enforced at this time (Mann Act). Amory is saved from arrest by the hotel management’s wish to avoid unsavory publicity.
During this incident Amory senses the presence of two antithetical forces in the room: one is the aura of evil that broods over the three of them (Amory, Alec, and Jill); the other, is a presence, “featureless and indistinguishable, yet strangely familiar.” A few days later Amory is informed of Monsignor Darcy’s sudden death on the night of the hotel episode. Amory is convinced that it was the benevolent spirit of Monsignor Darcy, urging him to renounce evil, that he had sensed in the hotel room.

In *This Side of Paradise* Amory Blaine embodies the hopes, fears, struggles, aspirations of his generation. Amory is guided in his quest for selfhood by Monsignor Darcy, who urges Amory to become a “personage”. The prelate makes a rather obscure distinction between a personality and a personage. A personality, he explains, is recognizable by flashy, superficial qualities that originate almost entirely in physical energy. A personality, involved in restless activity, flits from the endeavor to another. A personage, on the other hand, gathers experience. He proceeds logically, deliberately, to “the next thing:” gathering “prestige and talent.” Amory, the quester who hovers between a personality and a personage, must shed his undesirable “personality” traits – his overweening self-concern, his insatiable ambition.

The concluding chapters of *This Side of Paradise* deal with Amory’s attempts to reform his life. In one clan sweep Amory renounces his “old ambitions [the pursuit of beauty, of literary fame] and unrealized dreams.” It is “so much more important,” he decides, “to be a certain sort of man.” In his desire to become a personage. Amory acknowledges his consummate selfishness.
By transcending that selfishness, he resolves to bring poise and balance into his life. His second attempt to "attach a positive value to life" leads to his equation of sex with evil, and his conclusion that "inseparably linked with evil was beauty.... Amory knew that every time he had reached toward (beauty) longingly, it had leered out at him with the grotesque face of evil."

If indeed the beautiful is evil, as Amory intimates, then the seeker of the beautiful courts his own destruction. A man who would achieve greatness, Amory decides, must abjure all manifestations of beauty, which is so often associated, he believes, "with license and indulgence." Amory's distorted apprehension of the beautiful leads him to an untenable position. On the one hand, this attitudinizing young iconoclast decrees that selfhood is contingent upon renunciation of the "beauty of great art, beauty of al joy, most of all the beauty of women"; on the other, he concedes that the essence of beauty, abstracted from its various forms, is harmony.

The contradiction rises from Amory's failure to comprehend that selfhood cannot be achieved without the harmonious balance of the desperate elements within the human person. Amory mistakenly perceives as beautiful and desirable that which, in essence, is distorted and ugly: the insipid Isabelle, the mercenary Rosalind, the half-mad Eleanor, the licentious Jill.

In the concluding chapter of This Side of Paradise Amory rejects, in one grand gesture, the "generalities and epigrams" of his youth, derived from "a thousand books, a thousand lies." By the conclusion of the novel, Amory's
transformation from an egotist to a personage, we are told, is complete, Fitzgerald does not reveal by what means Amory has attained the wisdom to justify his triumphant claim to self knowledge.

The epigraph of the novel announces that on This Side of Paradise one finds "little comfort in the wise." For Amory's rebellious generation, Fitzgerald suggests, there is little comfort to be derived from the wisdom of their ancestors. The legacy of those wise ones consists of "old cries" and "old creeds." Wisdom, like paradise, cannot be gained by bequest, just as life cannot be lived vicariously. The wisdom that ensures selfhood must be attained by each individual by going out into "that dirty gray turmoil" of life, of experience.

One of the most perceptive studies of This Side of Paradise is Edmund Wilson's sharply critical analysis. The novel, he comments, is "really not about anything: its intellectual and moral content amounts to little more than a gesture — a gesture of indefinite revolt(12).

In 1938, years after the book was published, Fitzgerald evaluated his first novel with commendable frankness and objectivity:

Looking it over, I think it is now one of the funniest books since Dorian Gray in its utter spuriousness — and then, here and there, I find a page that is real and living(13).

This Side of Paradise is not a good novel. Its crude, episodic structure is held together only by its central character. Unable to restrain his creative
whimsy, Fitzgerald mixed a variety of genres in the book. The novel, he confessed while he was writing the first version, includes "poetry, prose, verse libre and every mood of a temperamental temperature. One of his Princeton friends described the novel as the "collected works of F. Scott Fitzgerald published in novel form under the title of This Side of Paradise, adding, however, that the potpourri of almost every scrap of writing that the ebullient Fitzgerald had ever composed made "an astonishing and refreshing book"(14)

This Side of Paradise is "refreshing" because, even in its most bathetic, its most ludicrous situations, the novel compels our interest. Despite Wilson’s criticism that This Side of Paradise "commits, almost every sin a novel can possibly commit," he admitted: "it does not commit the unpardonable sin: it does not fail to live".

This Side of Paradise, admittedly autobiographical, should dramatize himself as a series of characters in Compton Mackenzie's autobiographical novels. Fitzgerald's off hand remark suggests the manner in which he perhaps unconsciously 'borrowed' form Mackenzie. This Side of Paradise, the authors he read, studied, and worshipped the most were saturation novelists: Wells and Mackenzie-Wells, who had become the spokesman and theorist for the 'discursive' novel, and Mackenzie, who had been analyzed at some length by James as one of the out standing practioners of the novel of "documentation".
Edward Wilson, a close friend of Fitzgerald from their Princeton days and in a position to be familiar with Fitzgerald's literary enthusiasms, said in 1922 that Fitzgerald, when he wrote *This Side of Paradise*, was drunk with Compton Mackenzie, and the book sounds like an American attempt to rewrite 'Sinister Street'. Mackenzie, said Wilson, "lacks both the intellectual force and the emotional imagination to give body and outline to the material which he secrets in such enormous abundance". Some of the reviewers of *This Side of Paradise* noted its resemblance to *Sinister Street*. The reviewer for *The New Republic* said that Fitzgerald wrote his novel with an acquisitive eye on *Sinister Street* and *The Research Magnificent*.

Fitzgerald once referred to an early version of *The Side of Paradise* as a "Picaresque ramble" on a Prose, modernistic *Childe Harold* terms which well describe the episodic nature of his novel. There is no continuous line of action but rather a series of episodes related one to the other by Amory Blaine, the central character. The Story is the biography of Amory Blaine during the formative years of life. The episodes are related in that they constitute collectively the education of the hero, but there is no single plot line to unify the novel. Such a loose structure lends itself to documentation; an abundance of detailed incidents may be included so long as they revolve around the hero. As the reviewer for the publisher's weekly said - "It isn't a story in the regular sense: there is no beginning, except the beginning of Amory Blaine, born healthy, wealthy and extraordinarily good looking, and by being spoiled by a
restless mother when he quaintly caller by her first name, Beatrice. There is no middle to the story, except the eager fumbling at life of this same handsome boy, proud, clean minded, born to conquer yet fumbling, at college and in love with Isabelle, then Clara, then Rosalind, then Eleanor. No end to the story except the closing picture of this same boy in his early twenties, a bit less confident about life, with not God in his heart... his ideas still riot(18) with no central action, the book can have no beginning, middle, or end in the conventional sense. In short. This Side of Paradise is really not about anything, intellectually it amounts to little more than a gesture – a gesture of indefinite revolt(19) Fitzgerald once remarked. "I really believe that no one else could have written so searchingly the story of the youth of our generation"(20). To this "Story of the youth of our generation might be added Wilson's phrase, "a gesture of indefinite revolt". "If we acknowledge that This Side of Paradise is about the obscurely motivated and vaguely directed rebellion of the youth of Fitzgerald's generation, we may not have discovered a precise and lucid "Pointed intention". Fitzgerald was, of course, young and immature when he wrote his novel, and in writing about himself, was frequently unable to see his material objectively. The critical problem, however, is to discover what, in the book, betrays Fitzgerald's moral position. Fitzgerald's inability to remain detached and uninvolved interfered, naturally, with the development of the theme of This Side of Paradise. In order that the revolt of his generation be made comprehensible and convincing, it was imperative that Fitzgerald present his youth objectively. The precise nature of
the revolt undertaken by the youth never clearly emerges. There is, presumably, a “questioning aloud the institutions” of all phases of American life, including educational, religious, political, and moral. But the questioning remains submerged, only half orientated, lost in a multitude of cross purpose.

But the aspect of the revolt best remembered is the “questioning of moral codes”. Fitzgerald wrote of his generation, None of the Victorian mothers – and most of the mothers were Victorians – had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to be kissed” “The revolt” seldom goes much beyond the Kiss. When Amory goes on his trip with the Princeton musical comedy, he sees girls doing things that even in his memory would have been impossible”. And what are these acts that seem so shocking? “Eating three o’ clock, after – dance suppers in impossible cafes, talking of every side of life with an air half of earnestness, half of mockery, yet with a furtive excitement that Amory considered stood for a real moral let down.

At one point in his story, Amory cries out, “my whole generation is restless,” The novel is more a representation of that restlessness than it is a coherent assertion of revolt. Perhaps that is why Edmund Wilson characterized the novel as a “gesture of indefinite revolt”. Just what constitutes the revolt is not readily apparent; what is being revolted against does not clearly emerge. But it is because of the vague rebelliousness or ‘restlessness’ in it that, This Side of Paradise retains importance in literary history. It stands at the beginning of a decade famed for it’s literature of revolt. It is the first of the post – war novels by
the then new generation of authors, the generation which had grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in may shaken:" As Alfred Kazin has said This Side of Paradise announced the lost generation. Inspite of the apparently blurred and mixed purposes in the novel, the sexual, social and literary restlessness of the younger generation came through clear enough to capture the imagination of a decade.

One aspect of the point of view in This Side of Paradise has attracted the attention of a number of the books critics. The reviewer for The Nations referred to "impressionistic episodes" in the book, while the reviewer for the New Republic said that the novel follows "in general technique what we might call the impressionistic Novel shadowed forth in James Joyce’s portrait of the Artist as a Young Man".

The techniques Fitzgerald uses in the representation of events are in one sense as conventional as those he uses in manipulating point of view. The happenings are related chronologically, not in a tightly Knit plot sequence but, in the tradition of the saturation novel, in a series of independent scenes only loosely related. Reviewers of the book noted the lack of plot when they made much remarks as that of the reviewer for the New York Times - "The whole story is disconnected more or less". The reviewer for The New Republic referred pointedly to "the collected works of F. Scott Fitzgerald published in
novel form under the title of *This Side of Paradise* (25) The fictional technique in *This Side of Paradise* is the technique of the “Slice – of life” Novel.

In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald can state Amory’s feelings but he cannot convincingly dramatize them; and while the novel was read as a statement of the new morality, it is really much more a sentimental story about youth’s attempt to commit itself in a changing world. Fitzgerald was obsessed with three events in his life when he was writing *This Side of Paradise*: his failure to win the loves of Ginerva King and Zelda Sayre; his failure to get a Princeton degree; and his romantic fascination with the perils of war.

Fitzgerald rehearsed his hurt over losing Ginerva King in his early writing. The apprentice pieces *Babes in the Woods* and *The Debutante* depict this romance – first the young love and the petting parties, then the cool dismissal. Both these pieces were used in *This Side of Paradise* – Isobelle Borge (Ginerava King) is the Isabelle of *Babes in the woods*. What is of interest is that Roslaind (zelda syre) in *This Side of paradise* is substituted for Helen Halycon in *The Debutante* who was originally modeled on Ginerva (26). Fitzgerald fused the experience he had with Ginerva and Zelda, welding his hurt over losing Ginerva with his hurt over losing Zelda who did not marry him until after *This Side of Paradise* was published. Similarly in the novel, Fitzgerald fused and combined many desperate elements of his experience. His imagination would continue to function in this way throughout his career, and in *The Great Gatsby*, he again fused Ginerva and Zelda in the Character of Daisy Fay.

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In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald preserved the dynamics of this story. Princeton remains the romantic setting—Gothic buildings bathed in moonlight; the administration becomes the gargoyle; and the young hero continues to feel self-pity. The trouble with Fitzgerald's handling of the Princeton experience is the same trouble he had with handling his love affairs. He is unable to assimilate the experience dramatically, to find an objective correlative to convey his feeling, and the novel is distorted by Amory's self-pity. Fitzgerald is fighting his own emotions when he expresses Amory's disillusionment in war and life. The puritan shock at relaxed morals is Fitzgerald's, but the sense of disillusionment—the feeling of meaninglessness—is not. Fitzgerald wanted more than anything else at this time in his life to get overseas; the war was part of the heroic mode, along with football, and he remained true to this rather extraordinary view his whole life. The felling of disillusionment in this fiction are thus not his; they are instead the clichés of the smart set.

While much of Fitzgerald's own personal experience is rendered unconvincing in *This Side of Paradise*, the expression of postwar despair is even less convincing because it is the least sincere. In his later fiction Fitzgerald would make use of his genuine belief in the promise and possibility of life, and he would counterpoint this heightened view against opposed states of mind and emotion, creating an ironic complexity. There is no such complexity in *This Side of Paradise*, and the first with the novel is that the emotions of his
characters are not controlled – they are heightened to the point of outrageous sentimentality or they are cynical to the point of outrageous sentimentality or they are cynical to the point of pretension. In This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald was unable to assimilate his emotions convincingly. The reasons for this is that Fitzgerald's novel is really very derivative, and the limitations of This Side of Paradise are, in part, the limitations of Compton Mackenzie's Sinister Street. Perhaps the most important point of comparison between sinister street and This Side of Paradise is the attitude that both Mackenzie and Fitzgerald take toward youth. Like Amory, "Michael only demanded the courage not to waste youth while it was his to enjoy." And he goes in search of new experience expecting each adventure to unlock the mysteries of life. What Michael discovers is that such a quest is useless, that it leads to continued disillusionment, and that it stems from the false idealism of youth. Michael finally arrives at a kind of peace; he looks forward to the future; he only regrets that he spent so much time on what now seems "the pettiness of youthful tragedies". The situation is completely different in This Side of Paradise. Amory does not think of youth as only an avenue to maturity. He does not question the idealism of youth – only the ideals; and he feels that he sacrificed his youth to dead Gods, to the false ideals of the past. Unlike Michael Fane, Among Blain finds no peace, looks forward to no future, and his youthful tragedies do not seem significant to petty.

This Side of Paradise reveals that Fitzgerald handled his theme of youth as something very personal and not as a matter of convention. In fact, if there is
a conventional way of looking at youth it is Compton Mackenzie's view that maturity begins when the fires of youth recede, Compare, for example, Stephen Vincent, Stephen Vincent Benet's The Beginning of Wisdom. "He [Philip Sellaby] saw where often he had mistaken the mere hardness and shelliness of youth for strength and its bluster for logic.(28)"

This Side of Paradise is a novel about youth lost to misplaced ideals, which explains why, from the moment we first see him, Amory Blake Puzzles about what he wants to be. He has a romantic conception of himself - a sense of his own immense possibilities - that goes with Fitzgerald's concept of youth. "Amory wondered how people could fail to notice that he was a boy marked for glory.... Amory marked himself a fortunate youth, capable of infinite expansion for good or evil" Amory wants one experience to build on the next so that his life will have a sense of continuity. This makes him according to Monsignor Darcy, a personage - not a personality. One must look ahead and see what he can be, and then life becomes "Possibility" as he moves forward the goal. The personage is the youth buoyed up by a sense of purpose, the personality, on the other hand, is the youth who floats like a wind drift balloon. The personality draws upon the energy of youth indiscriminately. The personage draws upon the energy of youth with a sense of mission,

Amory's long talk about the old creeds is a mere device to give This Side of Paradise a thematic importance it would not have otherwise. Edmund Wilson gives Fitzgerald too much credit when he says that intellectually. This Side of
Paradise amounts to little more than a gesture - a gesture of indefinite revolt\(^{(29)}\). The objects of Amory’s revolt are not indefinite – they are inconsequential – and James E. Miller, Jr. does not really clarify the matter when he says that “The novel is more representation of restlessness than it is a coherent assertion of revolt. What is being revolted against does not clearly emerge\(^{(30)}\). The trouble with the novel is that the objects of Amory’s revolt do clearly emerge – but they are sophomoric and Amory’s sense of youth wasted by false commitment is more melodramatic than tragic. The theme of the novel may be in adequately dramatized, but it is not as vague as the critical commentary suggests. Amory has paid for his “Knowledge” with his youth, and for Fitzgerald it was a bitter price, “All a poor substitute at best,” as Amory puts it.

This Side of Paradise is both a novel of youthful disappointment and disillusionment, and of youthful longing and hope. The sense of promise and the sense of loss, the capacity of wonder and the belief that life is a cheat. These feelings exist side by side in this novel, Compete with one another, become contradictory, and tear the novel in two. Fitzgerald is unable to make dramatic use of Amory’s states of mind, and Amory moves back and forth between contradictory positions in a world that does not exist. The themes in This Side of Paradise that stayed with Fitzgerald are those of the power of the imagination, the possibilities of youth, the tragedy of misguided commitment and the destructive nature of time.

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The novel with which Fitzgerald won Zelda, This Side of Paradise, is usually praised for qualities that pin in closely to an exact moment in American life. Later readers are apt to come to it with the anticipation of an archeologist approaching an interesting ruin. Its publication is always considered to be the event that ushered in the Jazz Age. Glenway Wescott, writing for his and Fitzgerald's generation, said that it had "haunted the decade like a song, popular but perfect." Social historians have pointed out that the college boys of the early twenties really read it. There have been public arguments as to whether or not the petting party first occurred when Fitzgerald's novel said it did or two years earlier. Anyone reading the novel with such interests will not be entirely disappointed. One of the responsibilities it assumes, especially in its first half, is to make the hero, Amory Blaine, report like a cultural spy from inside his generation "The 'belle' had become the 'flirt,' the 'flirt' had become the 'baby vamp.' The "moral let-down" enjoyed by the postwar generation has given the work its reputation for scandal as well as for social realism.

Today, the novel's young libertines, both male and female, would not shock a schoolgirl. Amory Blaine turns out to be a conspicuous moralist who takes the responsibility of kissing very seriously and disapproves of affairs with chorus girls. (He has no scruples, it must be said, against going on a three-week drunk when his girl breaks off their engagement). At the end of the story he is ennobled by an act of self-sacrifice in an Atlantic City hotel bedroom that no one would admire more than a Victorian mother. For modern readers it is probably
better to take for granted the usefulness of *This Side of Paradise* for social historians and to admire from the distance of another age the obviously wholesome morality of the hero. Neither of these is the quality that saves the novel for a later time. What Fitzgerald is really showing is how a young American of his generation discovers what sort of figure he wants to cut, what modes of conduct, gotten out of books as well as out of a keen sense of his contemporaries, he wants to imitate. The flapper and her boy friend do not actually pet behind the closed doors of the smoking room. They talk, and each one says to the other, unconvincingly, “Tell me about yourself. What do you feel?” Meaning, “Tell me about myself. How do I feel?” The real story of *This Side of Paradise* is a report on a young man’s emotional readiness for life.

The only interesting morality it presents is the implied morality that comes as a part of his feelings when the hero distinguishes, or fails to distinguish, between an honest and a dishonest emotion. The highly self-conscious purpose of telling Amory Blaine’s story was, one suspects, to help Fitzgerald to discover who he really was by looking into the eyes of a girl—there are four girls—or into the mirror of himself that his college contemporaries made. And the wonder of it is that such a self-conscious piece of autobiography could be imagined, presented, and composed as a best-selling novel by a young man of twenty-three.

The novel is very uneven, and full of solemn attempts at abstract thought on literature, war, and socialism. It has vitality and freshness only in moments, and these are always moments of feeling. Fitzgerald said of this first novel many years later, “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 not.” It offers the first evidence of Fitzgerald’s possession of the gift necessary for a novelist who, like him, writes from so near his own bones, the talent that John Peale Bishop has described as “the rare faculty of being able to experience romantic and ingenuous emotions and a half hour later regard them with satiric detachment.” The ingenuous emotions most necessary to the success of This Side of Paradise are vanity and all the self-regarding sentiments experienced during first love and the first trails of pride. The satire visited upon them is often as delicate and humorous as in this picture of Amory at a moment of triumphant egoism: ‘As he put in his studs he realized that he was enjoying life as he would probably never enjoy it again. Everything was hallowed by the haze of his own youth. He had arrived, abreast of the best in his generation at Princeton. He was in love and his love was returned. Turning on all the lights, he looked at himself in the mirror, trying to find in his own face the qualities that made him see clearer than the great crowd of people, that made him decide firmly, and able to influence and follow his own will. There was little in his life now that he would have change. .... Oxford might have been a bigger field.”

The ideas in the novel, unlike the tributes paid to a life of feeling, have the foreign country of origin and the importer’s labels still on them. Toward the end of the novel Fitzgerald’s normally graceful sentences begin to thicken and “sword-like pioneering personalities, Samuel Butler, Renan and Voltaire,” are called in to add the weight of their names to Amory’s reflections on the hypocrisy of his elders. The best pages of the novel come early, where Fitzgerald was remembering in marvelous detail the scenes at Newman School and Princeton. Later in his life he would always find it easy to return to those
adolescent years, when feelings were all in all. Bishop once accused him of taking seventeen as his norm and believing that after that year life began to fall away from perfection. Fitzgerald replied, "If you make it fifteen I will agree with you."

The Fitzgerald novel, then, began in his acute awareness of a current American style of young life and in his complete willingness to use his own experience as if it were typical. The charm of his first stories and novels is simply the charm of shared vanity and enthusiasm for oneself as an exceptional person. Fitzgerald often persuades us that he was the one sensitive person there – on the country club porch or in a New York street – the first time ability to exploit his life began to succeed beyond his dreams, the only next step he could think of was to use it harder.

Fitzgerald was really commenting about his entire life as a writer. Almost no other American writer used so much of himself, his life, his friends and family as did Scott Fitzgerald and no one could have been more aware than he of the self-consuming process that turned out, as final products, a ruined and courageous life, a used-up heart and short stories and novels. What Fitzgerald wished to present was a social character, a national type that fascinated and repelled him, in which he felt his identity as an American, and in which he saw the history of American as it was written, and in which he saw the history of America as it was written meaningfully for him. Fitzgerald’s fiction becomes a story of the extent to which the actual America is a whore to the prototypical, romantic, Columbus of imagination, how she leads him on, and, in betraying his expectations, destroys his Adamic, redemptive identity.
This Side of Paradise is excellent for the historian or sociologist; it is a good book. It is not a good book; it is a silly and adolescent book with many lovely and promising passages. But it is a very significant book for an understanding of the nature of American literary materials and cultural attitudes toward American experience; it is a highly important book for an understanding of the writings of Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald dropped to the deep, dead—end centre of the American mind,... deeper than Hemingway and Mark Twain, deeper than the Mississippi and the Big Town—Hearted River, down to that sunken island that one mystically flowered for Dutch sailor’s eyes”, made and destroyed him. It let Fitzgerald into the secret dream—corners of the great American adolescent soul, and let him down from the fulfillment that success is supposed to bring in the adolescent dream. Let him in and let him down. The adolescent romantic who becomes the disillusioned man of experience can look back most tellingly upon the romantic adolescent, can have the double view, can identify so lovingly and lovingly with the very meritriciousness he repudiates (31).

Inspite of the apparently blurred and mixed purpose in the book, the sexual, social and literary restlessness of the younger generation came through clear enough to capture the imagination of a decade. This Side of Paradise is a very immature novel, but in many ways Fitzgerald rewrote it again and again. What he had to learn was to find the descriptive detail, the objective correlates, to sustain the hightened world of infinite possibility. Inspite of its faults, perhaps
in part because of them, This Side of Paradise continues of appeal. In its very immaturity lies its charm; it is an honest and sincere book by youth about youth, containing the emotions ranging from ecstasy to despiad, of the immature which the mature can neither easily recall nor evoke.

With all its flaws, it is magnificent in its assurance, its buoyant lyricism, and its sublime disregard for the laws of literature. Having structural unity the book is held together – its energy, honesty, self confidence and its wavering moral viewpoint is compensated for by a consistency of mind or feeling which unifies the whole with a keen ear for dialogue. Fitzgerald had already developed his trick of establishing atmosphere with an idiomatic turn of phrases or a snatch of song, and in his first novel, he caught the exact form and pressure of the time.

This is the way This Side of Paradise ends.

"There was no God in his heart, he knew, his ideas were still in riot there was ever the pain of memory the regret for his lost youth – yet the water of disillusion had left a deposit on his soul, responsibility and a love of life, the faint stirring of old ambitions and un realized dreams. But – oh, Rosalind! Rosalind."


4. F. Scott Fitzgerald - From the typescript of “The Romantic Egotist”.

5. F. Scott Fitzgerald - From the typescript of “The Romantic Egotist”.

6. E. Wilson had urged Fitzgerald to read Joyce’s portrait in a letter, dated October 7, 1917.


8. The Letters of F. Scoot Fitzgerald ed. Andrew Turnbull (Scribners New York, 1936) P. 323

9. Echoes of the Jazz Age (The Crack -Up) (Scribner’s Magazine November 1931), P.146.

10. “My Lost City” – (The Crack-Up) (Scribner’s Magazine November 1931). PP.27


13. Letters, P.277


17. Fitzgerald “Letters to Friends” (The Crack-Up) P.252

18. R.S.S. Ernest Poole and Tarkington at Their Best The publishers weekly XC VII (April 17, 1920) 1289.


21. Alfred Kazin, on Native Grounds (Reynal & Hitchcock, New York, 1942) P.316

22. “Reforms and Beginnings” The Nation. LX (April 24, 1920) P.558


25. RVAS. This Side of Paradise op. cit. P.362


27. In “The Crack-Up” (The Crack-Up). P.70 also P.84.


