CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
In the foregoing chapters, a study of Scott Fitzgerald's novels has been made to show that they express Fitzgerald's romantic vision of life. As the romantic vision is expressed and explored in and through the life of the hero, the novelist should be considered the hero in the novels of Fitzgerald. It is commonly accepted that Fitzgerald's life and work are inseparably connected and that each of them throws light on the other. It is also equally true that Fitzgerald used a lot of biographical material in his novels. But, the main objective of the foregoing study is not to trace the biographical element in the novels of Fitzgerald, but to show how his novels are a close expression and also a critical examination of his romantic dream of life.

Fitzgerald had deeply read the Romantic poets and writers, and naturally, his own romantic vision was greatly influenced by them. It is well known that he had a lifelong and deep response to Keats. Like all Romantics, Fitzgerald was strongly affected by the inescapable factors of time and mutability, perennial youth, charm and joy, which are an essential part of any romantic vision are under the pitiless sway of time and mutability. Money or
wealth alone seemed to have the power to hold out, however ineffectively, against their ravaging influence. This view is one of the main reasons for the sense of tragedy in the lives of Fitzgerald's heroes.

Fitzgerald's romantic vision was part of the larger American dream which was made possible by a basic historic attitude to life. American dream mainly represented the romantic enlargement of the possibilities of life. But the material and the spiritual aspects of the dream got inextricably confused. The American dream eventually failed and withered away as a result of this confusion. Also, there arose no distinct line in American consciousness, which would help to distinguish between the reality and the myth in the American dream. It was, perhaps, a tragic misapprehension that led the American society to consider the material aspect to be the reality, whereas reality is a matter of the spirit and the hard, tangible material aspect is the myth. Fitzgerald's romantic vision had to encounter a world corrupted by a fallacious consideration of the myth for the reality. Naturally, Fitzgerald's romantic vision had to encounter a world corrupted by a fallacious consideration of the myth for the reality. Naturally, Fitzgerald and his heroes, whom he called his brethren, proved themselves authorities of failure.

Fitzgerald was very true to life and he tried to understand, integrate, and interpret the American experience from his own romantic vision. But, when "This Side of Paradise" was published, he was young and inexperienced and the novel attracted much adverse criticism. Yet, even Edmund Wilson, who had declared that "This Side of Paradise" committed almost every sin that a novel could possibly commit, went on to admit that the
novel did not fail to live and that it embodied a gesture of indefinite revolt in graceful and vivid prose. In young Amory Blaine’s emotional readiness for life, Fitzgerald’s romantic vision expresses itself as a heightened sensitivity to the promises of life. But, a certain puritan conscience is at work in Amory, as in Fitzgerald which gets him often caught in a dilemma between his distrust of sex and the relaxed social and sexual practices of his time. Amory’s puritanical sensibilities prepare him for a series of disillusionments, especially with women, and his romantic imagination and idealism prevent him from falling into a state of total despair. Talking about the immediate success of “This Side of Paradise” Sy Kahn observes,

It may never have been the revelation of youthful manners, however, that accounted for the book's popularity; it may well have been Fitzgerald’s manipulation of the puritanical Amory Blaine that wrenched the conscience of his readers and dramatized their own youthful dilemmas in much the same way as Salinger’s Holden Caulfield speaks for the questing youth of the 1950’s and 60’s.”

In the novels that followed, Fitzgerald continued to question his own romantic dream more and more seriously. In fact, Fitzgerald possessed the rare faculty which enabled him to look at the current American life from his own romantic vision and also regard it with a satiric detachment.

Fitzgerald’s life and opinions are very closely connected and they cannot be completely separated from his work. His romantic vision, which had as its basis a life of infinite possibilities, the magical charm of wealth, and the possibility of halting the inevitable process of time, underlies all his novels.
Besides, Fitzgerald was keenly aware of the times and the society in which he lived. This has led some critics to consider Fitzgerald's novels as authentic social history. But, Fitzgerald's work cannot properly be regarded as social history. As Arthur Mizener rightly remarks, "Fitzgerald's works express the history of a consciousness." Much of Fitzgerald's work remains fresh even now not so much because it is so specially conscious of its time, but because it grasps a moment in history as a great moral fact. Fitzgerald lived at a time when America had a gorgeous romantic dream in its collective consciousness and naturally he shared the dream himself. But Fitzgerald's romantic vision was subjected to a severe critical examination by himself. Hence his novels present the contemporary life as a moment in history along with a moral evaluation of it. The vision of Fitzgerald attained gradual maturity in the novels that followed *This Side of Paradise*. Meanwhile Fitzgerald went on improving upon his fictional technique. *The Beautiful and Damned, which followed This Side of Paradise*, is a technically better novel as it shows greater orderliness and organization of the material. Despite Fitzgerald's mixed purposes and ambiguous sympathies for Anthony and Gloria, the novel does mark an advance in technique so far as it represents the subjection of method to action, motivating purpose or action. As James E. Miller observes,

In the representation of events, as in the handling of point of view, Fitzgerald was confronted with a more complex problem in *The Beautiful and Damned* than in *This Side of Paradise*. In addition to dealing with not one but two major characters, he was dramatizing a more unified line of action. Whereas in *This Side of Paradise*
there was no 'story in the regular sense' in that there was no single 'plot' with a beginning, middle, and end, in *The Beautiful and Damned* there is a central line of action: the moral and physical disintegration of Anthony and Gloria through their ruthless search for pleasure and, more particularly, through the failure of the fulfillment of their 'great expectations'.

Money and wealth are an essential part of Fitzgerald's romantic vision. Yet, *The Beautiful and Damned* poignantly presents the decline of Anthony Patch who is spoiled by the presence of promise of wealth. Anthony and Gloria are shown to indulge excessively in illusions and dreams which leads inevitably to the dissipation and deterioration of the inner self. As Sergio Perosa remarks:

*Anthony and Gloria were victims of a romantic perception of the world. But the main theme of the dissipation of the two characters remained as it had been conceived originally all the more painful because their ruin is the result of an apparent, but deceptive material victory. Anthony and Gloria struggle against philistimism and hypocritical morality so as to be able to prolong their dissipation but their victory, reached when it is too late, only serves to make the feeling of incurable defeat the more terrible.*

Fitzgerald meant *The Beautiful and Damned* to be a tragedy but it falls short of being one because its theme is not rigorously focussed and consistently developed to its logical conclusion. Also, Fitzgerald could not give the amount of objective treatment that the theme required. He was able to
detach himself from his characters, Anthony and Gloria, to the extent that he was able to pass a moral judgement on them. But, he also sympathized with them and shared some of their attitudes and illusions. Thus he ran himself into a contradiction by exposing and denouncing the two characters who in fact appealed to him. *The Beautiful and Damned* lies half-way between the youthful success that came with *This Side of Paradise* and the achievement of maturity in *The Great Gatsby*. It is a transitional novel from the point of view of fictional technique also. The spoiled priest in Fitzgerald is seen to be seriously concerned with the suffering and the bitter aspects of the playful, attractive, romantic experience.

*The Great Gastby*, which followed *The Beautiful and Damned*, is considered Fitzgerald's best work. The novel clearly brings out Fitzgerald's masterly control over his material and his superb fictional craftsmanship. *The Great Gatsby* is, at the core, a severe critique of the American experience and it powerfully delineates the ultimate failure of the American dream. The novel is also an exploration of Fitzgerald's romantic dream as it exists in a world corrupted by brutal materialistic forces. Gatsby represents the conflict between illusion and reality at the heart of American life. Gatsby's romantic vision is the reality though it may remain undefined and unmanifest, but Gatsby also suffers from the illusion that materialistic achievement and abundance will help him realize his vision. Tragedy follows from this illusion and also from Gatsby's failure to see through the spiritual wasteland created by corrupt materialism and inhabited by Daisies and Buchnans. As Marius Bewley rightly observes,
Gatsby never succeeds in seeing through the sham of his world or his acquaintances very clearly. It is of the essence of his romantic American vision that it should lack the seasoned powers of discrimination. But it invests those illusions with its own faith, and thus it discovers its projected goodness in the frauds of its crippled world. *The Great Gatsby* becomes the acting out of the tragedy of the American vision. It is a vision totally untouched by the scales of values that order life in a society governed by traditional manners; and Fitzgerald knows that although it would be easy to condemn and 'place' the illusions by invoking these outside values, to do so would be to kill the reality that lies beyond them, but which can sometimes only be reached through them.  

At the thematic level *The Great Gatsby* gives a powerful expression to the eternal attractions and delusions of the romantic vision. As Fitzgerald, like Romantics, was basically a moralist, he treated his own romantic vision from a severely critical point of view. In fact, it is this critical questioning that brings profundity to Fitzgerald's romantic vision. Again, it is a mark of great achievement that Fitzgerald was able to come upon the most suitable and effective form for expressing his maturing romantic vision in *The Great Gatsby*. This did not happen by accident and *The Great Gatsby* was an achievement consciously arrived at because Fitzgerald had announced his intention of writing "something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned". Critics are sometimes puzzled, of course, at the excellence of *The Great Gatsby* when they place it beside *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and..."
Damned. But we should remember that Fitzgerald always wanted to prove himself a serious writer and that he continuously strove to perfect his craft of fiction. He was aware of the controversy between H.G. Wells and Henry James with regard to the art of narration. In *The Beautiful and Damned* we find Fitzgerald making a shift from the “saturation method” towards “mode of selection”. In *The Great Gatsby* he achieved the highest watermark of success in adopting the Jamesean technique.

As Arthur Mizener rightly observes, “The central question about Fitzgerald’s work is probably a question about its maturity of perception”. The novels of Fitzgerald express the gradual maturity of his romantic vision of life. *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night*, which was written after a nine-year long silence, explore critically and express creatively the profounder aspects of Fitzgerald’s romantic vision. During the nine years that followed the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald had to face severe trials of life. Zelda went on ruinously dissipating their resources and finally turned out to be a schizophrenic. Fitzgerald broke down financially and morally, which led to his crack-up. Written under conditions of great emotional strain, *Tender is the Night* emerged to be a scathing critique of Fitzgerald’s romantic vision.

Fitzgerald’s romantic vision of life, characterized by endless possibilities, eternal youth, charm and vitality, had always to consider the supreme power of wealth. His early success with the publication of *This Side of Paradise* gave him the money, which made it possible for him to marry Zelda Sayre, whom he desperately loved. This made him not only realize the sovereign power of wealth, but also develop a lifelong distrust, an animosity,
towards the wealthy, leisure class. A Romantic looks upon things in idealized terms and wealth is valued, not for its own sake, but for the possibilities that it opens up for creating a life of aesthetic sensibilities, beauty, and harmony. But in a world corrupted by rank materialism, wealth and woman become degenerative forces, which destroy the man with the romantic vision. This had been the experience of Fitzgerald in his own life and he express the same with great intensity in the life of Gatsby and with great profundity in the life of Dick Diver. In this sense the novelist is the hero in the novels of Fitzgerald.

*Tender is the Night* is deeply related to Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, from which Fitzgerald borrowed the title for his novel. The nightingale in the Ode, which gives comfort to generations of people, comes to symbolize a romantic ideal in the sense that Dick Diver, as an able and* promising psychiatrist, aspires to bring solace to the aching hearts of thousands of people. Nicole, who is always surrounded with songs and who sings to Dick herself, is, in fact, the anti-thesis of Keats' nightingale in her extreme self centredness and in the way she uses her wealth to destroy Dick Diver's vitality. It is a tragic folly on the part of Dick Diver to think that Nicole's money would help him realize his ideal. He yields to Nicole's money and to her seductive feminine sexuality and sets into motion the degenerative forces that destroy his inner self and eventually lead to his moral and physical downfall. *Tender is the Night* has none of the dramatic characteristics of *The Great Gatsby* and the plot unfolds in such a slow and labyrinthine way that it sounds least romantic. But the technique adopted to narrate the story is eminently suited to explore the
deeper aspects of Fitzgerald's romantic vision and to expose critically how the corrupting influence of wealth destroys such a vision.

*The Last Tycoon* is not included in the present study. Yet it is felt that a reference to the novel, in conclusion, would only be proper because many critics have suggested that *The Last Tycoon* would have proved Fitzgerald's masterpiece but only for its incompleteness. *The Last Tycoon*, which Fitzgerald left unfinished at his death, was edited by Edmund Wilson and published by Scribner's a year after Fitzgerald's death. Soon after its publication, the novel received very enthusiastic reviews. As it had always been with Fitzgerald, he drew heavily on his real life experience for *The Last Tycoon*. The candid way in which Fitzgerald responded to his Hollywood experience gives authenticity to the life presented in the novel. Critics consider the novel to be a departure, in some ways, from Fitzgerald's previous work. The love story of Stahr and Kathleen, and Stahr's personal struggles get overshadowed by the political and ideological overtones of the novel. Technically, Fitzgerald returns to *The Great Gatsby* in the choice of a narrator who remains detached, and at the same time, sympathetic and understanding. But in the explication of details *The Last Tycoon* resembles *Tender is the Night*. As in *Tender is the Night*, there are two lines of story in *The Last Tycoon* in the form of Stahr's love and Stahr's struggles in Hollywood. Fitzgerald himself describes *The Last Tycoon* as "an escape into a lavish, romantic past". In *The Great Gatsby*, we find an intense examination of the attractiveness of the romantic vision and also of the impossibility of an escape into the romantic past. In *The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald tried to give substance to the vision of *The Great Gatsby*. In this
sense, we can say that all the novels of Fitzgerald are an expression and a criticism of his romantic vision, and that he was an inalienable part of the life that he created in his novels.

It is significant that with the passage of time Fitzgerald’s popularity has not shown any signs of waning. It is now seen with reasonable certainty that Fitzgerald will remain with Hemingway and Faulkner as the most influential and impressive American novelist of the twentieth century. Fitzgerald continues to be relevant and his works provide a rewarding experience to the readers because his romantic vision has breadth and depth and his moral awareness has added profundity to his vision. As Kenneth Eble rightly observes,

his work today seems to enjoy great favour, perhaps because he seems less mannered than Hemingway, less tortuous than Faulkner, ...but at least two other matters operate in his favour. The first is the hardcore morality which makes him one with those writers of greatest strength in American fiction : Melville, Hawthorn, and James. Second, unlike a majority of modern American writers, he offers a fiction which is hard to imitate, but from which much can be learned.  

REFERENCES


