
THIS SIDE OF PARADISE – THE ECHO OF AMERICAN YOUTH’S TURBALENT EMOTIONS

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Abstract: F.Scott Fitzgerald was the towering personality in the annals of the American Fiction of the 19th Century. A true representative of the American youth and through his most successful novel *This Side of Paradise* he established his image as the youth triumphant. The novel is the record of the social revolution and American youth that are beautifully and frankly depicted by Fitzgerald. *This side of Paradise* was established as the hand book of the new generation. Menken rightly ranked Certainly, Fitzgerald was the first author, who minutely portrayed the life of the American adolescent representing his activities as “new daring and admirable”. *This Side of Paradise* chronicles the life of Amroy Blaine from his childhood up through his early twenties. *This Side of Paradise* retains importance in literary history. It stands at the beginning of a decade famed for its 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.” With all its flaws, it is magnificent in its assurance, its buoyant lyricism, and its sublime disregard for the laws of literature.

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Introduction: F. Scott Fitzgerald was one of the most promising and brilliant members of the younger generation of writers, and his *This Side of Paradise* 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 that are 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. “Fitzgerald is the most famous young writer in America today. Read his article if you want to understand youth’s point of view”.

This side of Paradise was established as the hand book of the new generation. Menken rightly ranked 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 Harward 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, in as much 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.

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. *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. It 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 shake”.

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 *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’Inviliers, 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 clean 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 all 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 disparate 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.

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.

This Side of Paradise retains importance in literary history. It stands at the beginning of a decade famed for its 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⁽²¹⁾. In spite 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.

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 view point 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.”

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