

**F. SCOTT FITZGERALD: THE AUTHORITY OF FAILURE**

**Thesis**

**Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Southwest Texas State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements**

**For the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**by**

**Jenny Lee Wilson, B.A.  
(Dripping Springs, Texas)**

**San Marcos, Texas  
May 1975**

## APPRECIATION

Writing this thesis would have been impossible without the help of my director and the other members of my committee. I would like to thank Dr. Jerome Stone and Dr. Jack Meathenia for their help and cooperation in the preparation of this paper. I would especially like to thank Dr. Dalton Gross for the hours he spent helping me through the critical stages of my work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. EARLY LIFE . . . . .	1
II. EARLY WORK . . . . .	19
III. BASIL DUKE LEE . . . . .	45
IV. PAT HOBBY . . . . .	106
V. A COMPARISON OF CHARACTERS . . . . .	138
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	143

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY LIFE

All fiction deals in part with goals, ambition, success and failure, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's work is no exception. What is exceptional about his work is the frequency with which his stories deal with failure. Malcolm Cowley says, "he surrounded his characters with a mist of admiration, and at the same time he kept driving the mist away."<sup>1</sup> Time and time again, even in his early work, his characters fail for one reason or another. They worship the idol of riches; they strive to perform physical feats above their capacities; they fail to recognize the real character of an aspiration, or they try too hard and outsmart themselves.

Fitzgerald's talent was probably inborn, but his philosophy was not. It was acquired as a result of his environment and the countless situations and occurrences of his childhood. His preoccupation with failure possibly resulted from a childhood which created a young man who,

---

<sup>1</sup>Malcolm Cowley, Introduction to the Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. xiv.

as Malcolm Cowley says, "took part in the ritual orgies of his time, but . . . also kept a secretly detached position regarding himself as a pauper living among millionaires, a Celt among Sassenachs and a sullen peasant among the nobility."<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to trace the pattern of the early formative years of F. Scott Fitzgerald in order to understand the philosophy of failure, to discuss several early stories in the light of this philosophy, and, finally, to choose two important characters from Fitzgerald's work, Basil Duke Lee and Pat Hobby, and discuss extensively their several failures. I will show how Fitzgerald defined failure and of how many varieties of failure he was aware. For this purpose I have chosen to analyze stories about characters who seem poles apart but are representative of very different periods of Fitzgerald's life. As such representatives they will help show how Fitzgerald did actually define and describe failure.

Basil Duke Lee is a teen-age boy whom Fitzgerald created in his own image. He wrote the Basil Duke Lee

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

stories between the creation of Jay Gatsby and Dick Diver. Though his latest novel, The Great Gatsby, had been successful, Fitzgerald's personal life was beginning to crumble into disaster under the strain of the life style which success had brought. He seemed to reach into his past to find the source of his discontent. He went again to those formative years to explain and understand his feelings of hollowness and loss in the midst of prosperity and success. His creation is Basil Duke Lee, and the stories are of a talented and promising young man who meets failure at nearly every turn regardless of how hard he tries to avoid it.

Pat Hobby was created during a more desperate time in Fitzgerald's life. The Pat Hobby stories are among the last things he wrote while in Hollywood. Pat Hobby is a disgusting "has-been" screen writer in Hollywood. Fitzgerald's discontent in the twenties had hardened into cynicism in the late thirties. Pat has few, if any, redeeming features. He is a cheat, a sneak, and a general disreputable drunk. The fact that Fitzgerald was disillusioned with his life in Hollywood is evident in his creation of Pat Hobby.

These two characters represent Fitzgerald's preoccupation with the forces which prevent man from achieving his goal. They serve to illustrate Fitzgerald's ideas of failure and success. The forces that keep Basil Duke Lee from achieving his goals of wealth, fame, popularity, and power are the same forces which keep Pat Hobby from sustaining his achievements into his old age. Fitzgerald's characters are victims of their own self-indulgence and their susceptibility to the very rich. Fitzgerald's vastly different treatment of each character and his handling of each character's situation in life will show more plainly what his definition of failure really is.

George Bernard Shaw once said,

An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone, never convinces him, never satisfies him but it makes him that he can't face reality nor deal with it nor handle nor conquer it; he can only sneer at them that do. . . . And all the while there goes on a horrible, senseless, mischievous laughter.<sup>3</sup>

Fitzgerald had such an imagination. Coupled with this Celtic curse was a strong sense of Puritan morality. The combination proved to be both pleasant and torturous. Fitzgerald once described his background in this manner:

---

<sup>3</sup>Edmund Wilson, The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle: 1920-1950, (New York: Farrar and Young, Inc., 1952), p. 31.

I am half black Irish and half old American stock with the usual exaggerated ancestral pretensions. The black Irish half of the family had, and really had, that certain series of reticences and obligations that go under the poor old shattered word "bredding" (modern form "inhibitions"). So being born in that atmosphere of crack, wisecrack and counterack I developed a two-cylinder inferiority complex.<sup>4</sup>

Another time he described his confused inferiorities by saying: "I spent my youth alternately crawling in front of the kitchen maids and insulating the great."<sup>5</sup> His father, from whose side of the family he inherited his romantic imagination, was a financial failure. His father, whose family could be traced "back through Irish history to the ancient Geraldini clan of Tuscan Italy,"<sup>6</sup> was a courtly gentleman who drank too much, could not hold a job, and "dwelt in the past, and on some image of himself superior to the one he was able to maintain."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Henry Dan Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 7-8.

<sup>5</sup>Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Avon Books, 1974), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>Kenneth, Eble, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 19.



For fifteen years Edward Fitzgerald was a traveling salesman for Procter and Gamble. He moved his family from one sales district to another in upstate New York until he was fired, and Fitzgerald recalled ". . . came home that evening an old man, a completely broken man. He had lost his essential drive, his immaculateness of purpose. He was a failure the rest of his days."<sup>8</sup> The remaining days of Edward Fitzgerald and those of his family were spent in various houses in St. Paul which were described by Fitzgerald in a letter to a friend at the time of the publication of his first novel, This Side of Paradise:

In a house below the average  
Of a street above the average<sup>9</sup>

Though financially Edward Fitzgerald was a failure, he introduced his son to literature and history. Fitzgerald was later to endow his best characters with the qualities he felt were present in his father. In This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald's alter ego, Eleanor, is described as having faith in the inexhaustibility of romance, courage,

---

<sup>8</sup>Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 42.

and "fundamental honesty."<sup>10</sup> These qualities and perfect manners young Fitzgerald inherited from his father, qualities which were "a natural gift unaffected by falling sales or declining energies."<sup>11</sup> In the manuscript of an essay written in 1930 Fitzgerald said: "I loved my father--always deep in my subconscious I have referred judgments back to him, to what he would have thought or done."<sup>12</sup>

The other side of the family was less romantic. Fitzgerald's grandfather, P. F. McQuillan, was the embodiment of the "American Dream," the self-made man. When he died he was eulogized in the St. Paul newspaper:

He came here a poor boy with but a few dollars in his pocket, depending solely on a clear head, sound judgment, good habits, strict honesty, and willing hands, with strict integrity his guiding motive. How these qualities have aided him is shown in the immense business he has built up, the acquisition of large property outside, and the universal respect felt for him by the businessmen of the country.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 215.

<sup>11</sup>Eble, F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

Young Fitzgerald saw, felt, respected, and appreciated the bounty of such determined effort. It was easy for him as a child to accept the remarks by his mother's family that his father was only futilely struggling to provide for his own young family. Young Fitzgerald enjoyed the security of his Grandmother's mansion in St. Paul. Only when he grew older was he able to make a reasonably rational judgment of his father's failure. Fitzgerald recounted later one of his most moving experiences as a child. He was read a nursery story of a fight between the animals of the earth in which the small animals were pitted against the large animals. The small animals won the first round but were ultimately bested by the large animals. Fitzgerald said the story filled him with "the saddest and most yearning emotion. . . . I wonder if even then I had a sense of the wearing-down power of big, respectable people?"<sup>14</sup> He may have seen the "big, respectable people"<sup>15</sup> as his McQuillan relatives, and the clever, sad, sensitive fox leader of the small animals as his father.

---

<sup>14</sup>Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

In order to come to terms with and reconcile himself to his father's failure and his own shortcomings, hurts, and embarrassments as an athlete and hero, he wrote plays, stories, and poems. . Fitzgerald was later to say that "taking things hard" was "the stamp that goes into my books so that people can read it blind like Braille."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the wounds of the spirit, Fitzgerald also carried the burden of being a self-centered, spoiled child. His two older sisters died in early childhood shortly before he was born. Naturally his mother transferred all her attentions to her handsome, clever son. He became a willing performer for company and a very unpopular playmate to his peers. He once said, "I didn't know until I was fifteen that there was anyone except me and it cost me plenty."<sup>17</sup>

After Edward Fitzgerald's family was forced to return to the McQuillan security, the McQuillans grudgingly accepted the responsibility of young Scott's education. He and his family were keeping "the postures of

---

<sup>16</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack Up. (New York: New Directions, 1945), p. 180.

<sup>17</sup>Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait, p. 17.

affluence constantly bowing to the necessities for economy."<sup>18</sup> A family conference declared that Scott would continue his education at Newman, a small, private boarding school in New Jersey. He had begun his schooling at the St. Paul Academy where he published his first story in Now and Then, the school newspaper. During this time Fitzgerald began keeping his "Thoughtbook," a journal in which he kept an account of his thoughts, emotions, and ideas. His grades at the St. Paul Academy were poor due to lack of interest in structured education and chronic absence. Although he aspired to be a popular athletic hero, he was unpopular and considered a sissy by his peers. The frugal McQuillans felt they would receive more for their money if young Fitzgerald were sent away to a boarding school where he would be "made" to study. Fitzgerald looked forward to going East to preparatory school. He considered himself an heir to the pleasures and heritage of the East because of his Maryland ancestry. He felt that he was "going home" as he neared the romantic land of his dreams. Unfortunately, he was as unpopular there as he had been at the St. Paul Academy. He was still a poor

---

<sup>18</sup>Eble, F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 19.

student; he was authoritative and "bossy" with his classmates, and his attempts as an athlete were futile except for one glorious afternoon on the gridiron when he was successful in carrying the ball for Newman.

But things were destined to get better for young Fitzgerald. He learned self-control during that first year and returned to Newman for the second year after spending a good summer at home. He had written, directed, and performed in a play, "The Captured Shadow," at White Bear Lodge, a prestigious resort where he was a member. He received notice in the social pages of the St. Paul newspapers because of his status as a member of one of the leading families of St. Paul. During one of his vacations from Newman, he met Ginevra King, a wealthy Chicago beauty, and fell madly in love. The romance continued beyond Fitzgerald's entry into Princeton, the college of his choice.

Fitzgerald actually "talked" his way into Princeton. His grade average at Newman was so poor that he was not going to be accepted, so he requested and was granted an interview with the president, and the charming young Irishman's wit won him a place in the entering class. He desperately wanted to be a "big man on campus." The wire

he sent to his mother to announce his acceptance to Princeton said, "ADMITTED SEND FOOTBALL PADS AND SHOES IMMEDIATELY PLEASE WAIT TRUNK."<sup>19</sup> Fitzgerald had hopes of becoming a football hero, but he was too small. However, his writing was not "small" and showed a great deal of talent. His circle of friends at Princeton included John Peale Bishop, John Biggs, and Edmund Wilson, Jr., whom Fitzgerald would later call his "intellectual conscience."<sup>20</sup> The first two years at Princeton were successful. He was still a poor student, but he was getting what he prized most, attention, praise, and popularity. He was also getting a great deal of experience doing what he enjoyed most, writing. Though he was denied the pleasure of performing officially in the shows, he wrote the lyrics for three of the Triangle Club's musicals. Fitzgerald's disregard for structured education kept him from achieving the status of campus leader in his third year. His grades were so poor that he could not be admitted as an upperclassman. He was taken ill and went home to recuperate in early December of his junior year. His only consolation at this time was his romance with the wealthy beauty,

---

<sup>19</sup>Mizener, Scott Fitzgerald and His World, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, p. 79.

Ginevra King. However, close on the heels of the tragedy of his college career came the tragedy of lost love. He was thrown over by Ginevra for a wealthier suitor.

Fitzgerald returned for his second junior year and began to broaden the scope of his writing. He began writing serious material for the Nassau Literary Magazine in the form of stories, book reviews, and essays, and he began seriously to try his hand at poetry. He also began writing what would be his first published novel and became a close friend of a Catholic priest, Father Sigourney Fay, who encouraged him in the writing of This Side of Paradise, which Fitzgerald dedicated to his memory. Realizing that his college career was, for all intents and purposes over, in the summer between the junior and senior years at Princeton, Fitzgerald signed for the draft into the army. Kenneth Eble says,

The Princeton failure was one of a number of experiences which helped create the pattern to be found in Fitzgerald's fiction: success coming out of abysmal failure, or failure following hard upon success.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Eble, F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 41.



Explaining his failure to his daughter, Fitzgerald said, "I slipped way back in my work, got T.B., lost a year in college--and, irony of ironies, because of scholastic slip I wasn't allowed to take the presidency of the Triangle." The failure was to be a shaping force in his life. He later wrote to his daughter, "no Achilles' heel ever toughened by itself. It just gets more and more vulnerable."<sup>22</sup> Fitzgerald returned to Princeton in 1917 to await his summons and orders from the army.

His orders came and he was sent to a succession of army camps around the United States. Later he was ordered to a ship in New York harbor which was soon to embark for Europe and the war. The armistice was signed before the ship could sail, and Fitzgerald and his fellows were marched off the ship without ever participating in the conflict, much to Fitzgerald's regret.

During his army career Fitzgerald was stationed in Montgomery, Alabama, where he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre. Zelda was the "top girl"<sup>23</sup> in Fitzgerald's

---

<sup>22</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), pp. 71-80.

<sup>23</sup>Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, p. 17.

eyes and in the eyes of almost every soldier stationed at Ft. Sheridan. Barely seventeen, Zelda was bright, witty, pretty, and emotional. She was the daughter of a well-established, old, southern family. She fell in love with Fitzgerald almost as quickly as he did with her, but she declined to marry him until his future was more secure. He returned to New York after his discharge to try to amass enough money to become formally engaged to Zelda. Piper says, "She had become the symbol of the success he had pursued for so long. She would be satisfied by nothing less than fame and fortune; winning her would mean that he had finally reached his goal."<sup>24</sup>

Fitzgerald finally left New York and his job as an advertising copy writer "and crept home to St. Paul to 'finish a novel.'"<sup>25</sup> He described his feelings in an essay: "I was in love with a whirlwind and I must spin a net big enough to catch it out of my head, a head full of trickling nickels and sliding dimes, the incessant music box of the poor."<sup>26</sup> Fitzgerald was destined not to be poor for long.

---

<sup>24</sup>Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait, p. 67.

<sup>25</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 85.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

In March of 1920, Scribner's accepted his novel, This Side of Paradise, for publication. Hot on the heels of this success came his marriage to Zelda.

Scott and Zelda immediately became the toast of New York. All of their dreams were now a reality, but as Mizener said, "Fitzgerald knew that fulfillment destroys the dream."<sup>27</sup> He rode through the streets of New York and "began to bawl because I had everything I wanted and knew I would never be so happy again."<sup>28</sup> In the midst of his greatest success there was failure. In the telegram to Zelda before their wedding, Fitzgerald had said, "EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE I AM IN THE LAND OF AMBITION AND SUCCESS."<sup>29</sup> What could one do to follow a success in "the land of ambition and success?" Fitzgerald's own success was the idealized moment which Jay Gatsby tried to capture in The Great Gatsby. Fitzgerald realized at the time of his success, as Gatsby does not, that this golden moment could not last. Fitzgerald's attempts to sustain his youthful vision would all be futile, for in the midst of his success were

---

<sup>27</sup>Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, 140.

<sup>28</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup>Mizener, Scott Fitzgerald and <sup>n</sup>His World, p. 43.

the seeds of failure, the failure to sustain his moment of glory and happiness.

Since Fitzgerald witnessed failure as a child and experienced the hollowness of success as an adult he was able to convey these feelings to his readers. He saw in his father's failure the tragedy of the power of money, and he recognized this powerful element as a big part of life. When he became an almost instant success himself, he was able to feel the power of the money and fame, and at the same time he was able to realize how hollow and meaningless it really was.

Though Fitzgerald worshipped the power of money, there were other, more valuable virtues which he believed were one's ultimate goal. The rich characters in Fitzgerald's work are usually either "fixed" by him and given their just deserts or left as shallow selfish shadows who are completely oblivious to the greater virtues.

The fact that Fitzgerald speaks thus of Ernest Hemingway in his journal, "I talk with the authority of failure--Ernest with the authority of success,"<sup>30</sup> may indicate, as William Troy says in his essay,

---

<sup>30</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 181.

"F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Authority of Failure," "that the stakes for which he played were of a kind more difficult and more unattainable than 'Ernest' or any of his contemporaries could even have imagined."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>William Troy, "Scott Fitzgerald--The Authority of Failure," in F. Scott Fitzgerald, A Collection of Critical Essays, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 24.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY WORK

Some of Fitzgerald's first published work deals significantly with the theme of success and failure. Three of them, "May Day," "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz," and "Winter Dreams," are three of the most important of the early stories. These stories reveal that Fitzgerald did, indeed, "talk with the authority of failure."<sup>1</sup>

"May Day," a long short story, sometimes called a novelette, makes an appropriate beginning for several reasons. It, like most of Fitzgerald's work, is autobiographical. Fitzgerald said once that the Jazz Age "began about the time of the May Day riots in 1919."<sup>2</sup> He might have added that his own rise to fame and fortune began about that same time. "May Day" is Fitzgerald's account of the sad months he had spent in New York, "the great city

---

<sup>1</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack Up (New York: New Directions, 1945), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

of the conquering people,"<sup>3</sup> trying to make enough money to win the hand of Zelda Sayre. Through Gordon Sterrett, Fitzgerald expresses his own morbid disillusionment with life at this time. Arthur Mizener says, "Gordon Sterrett, with his frayed shirt cuffs and his poverty, his inability to get started as a cartoonist, and his alcoholic deterioration, is Fitzgerald's exaggeratedly condemnatory portrait of himself."<sup>4</sup> The curious part of this story is that it was written when Fitzgerald was experiencing the first flush of his success. Even with success in his grasp, he was interested in relating the feelings of failure and the effects of those feelings on him as a person.

"May Day" begins with a short pseudo-epic statement of the victorious nation's greedy materialism:

So gaily and noisily were the peace and prosperity impending hymned by the scribes and poets of the conquering people that more and more spenders had gathered from the provinces to drink the wine of excitement, and faster and faster did the merchants dispose of their trinkets and slippers until they sent up a mighty cry

---

<sup>3</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, "May Day," in The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 83.

<sup>4</sup>Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Avon Books, 1974), p. 106.

for more trinkets and more slippers in order that they might give in barter what was demanded of them.<sup>5</sup>

There are several plot lines in the story. Part I begins the story of the hero, Gordon Sterrett. Gordon is at the desk of the Biltmore Hotel in New York City, calling the room of a friend who is staying at the hotel. He reaches his party, is invited up, and is welcomed by his former classmate, Phil Dean. Dean, who is in town for a fraternity dance to be held at Delmonico's that evening, is enthusiastic in his welcome to Gordon. He does not seem to notice at first that Gordon is dressed in a "shabby suit" or that his eyes are framed by "the blue semicircle of ill health" or that his face shows "an unnatural glow which colored his face like a low, incessant fever." In contrast to this wretched picture of Sterrett, Dean is described as emerging from the shower "polishing his body," and surveying his shining self, and "draping himself reluctantly in fresh underwear." He is the picture of wealth and success. Only when Sterrett collapses on the bed and begins his sad story does Dean begin to notice his shabby appearance. It "exasperated him a little" to have to

---

<sup>5</sup>Fitzgerald, "May Day," in The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 83.



listen to Gordon's lament. The longer Gordon talked, the more Dean was "repelled" and "hardened."<sup>6</sup> He does not want his vacation spoiled by this disgusting display by Gordon.

Gordon continues to tick off his several problems. He has no job, he is in debt, and he is in some trouble with a woman of questionable reputation. He reveals that he needs to borrow a considerable sum of money to get back on his feet. Dean says he will consider it while they have lunch. As they leave Dean's hotel room, "their eyes met . . . that instant . . . they quite suddenly and definitely hated each other."<sup>7</sup> Gordon Sterrett, like Fitzgerald, hates Dean for his wealth, the ease with which he lives. Like Fitzgerald he has "an abiding distrust, an animosity, toward the leisure class--not the conviction of a revolutionist but the smouldering hatred of a peasant."<sup>8</sup> Dean's hatred, which was perhaps less intense, is more selfish. He is disgusted that there had to be those people in the world

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-86.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>8</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 77.

who could and would distract his attention from his own pursuit of pleasure.

Part II, though short, points up the depth of Gordon Sterrett's despair against the lazy, casual world of Dean and his friends. That Dean thinks it is "a shame that Rivers couldn't get any more Welsh Margotson collars" is almost cruelly comical when it is followed by his terse refusal of the loan to Gordon without even so much as a casual remark about how sorry he is that Gordon has fallen on such hard times. To add insult to injury, he gives Gordon a much smaller amount of money than he asked for, saying that he can really afford no more and still have enough to spend on himself in the enjoyment of his holiday. Part II ends with Gordon stumbling away "blinded by sudden tears."<sup>9</sup>

Part III is devoted to the introduction of the two characters who serve to link the several plot lines of the story. They are two sailors, Carrol Key and Gus Rose. On leave, wanting the stimulation of excitement or liquor, or both, they seek out Key's brother who is a waiter at Delmonico's.

---

<sup>9</sup>Fitzgerald, "May Day," in The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 91.

Part IV introduces the next major character, Edith Bradin, Gordon Sterrett's love. She is described in much the same terms as Dean. She is equally selfish and self-centered.

She thought of her own appearance. Her bare arms and shoulders were powdered to a creamy white. She knew they looked very soft and would gleam like milk against the black backs that were to silhouette them tonight. The hairdressing had been a success; her reddish mass of hair was piled and crushed and creased to an arrogant marvel of mobile curves. Her lips were finely made of deep carmine; the irises of her eyes were delicate, breakable blue, like china eyes. She was a complete, infinitely delicate, quite perfect thing of beauty, flowing in an even line from a complex coiffure to two small slim feet.<sup>10</sup>

As Edith pauses at the edge of the ballroom she is reminiscing and is "falling in love with her recollection of Gordon Sterrett." Coincidentally, Gordon appears at the dance as shoddy as he was in the afternoon, but now he is also drunk and more bitter than ever. When he cuts in on Edith she is overwhelmed with her love for him until she realizes that "he was pitiful and wretched, a little drunk, and miserably tired." Though she has witnessed drunkenness before, his drunkenness fills her with an "unutterable horror" Gordon tries to explain his wretchedness by telling her that

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

his desperation feels like "things . . . snapping inside me . . . like little hooks on a dress, and it's about to come off when a few more hooks go." She reacts with "revulsion" and a "faint, surprising boredom." Part IV ends as Edith coolly asks him to dance again. She has found that "love is fragile,"<sup>11</sup> and she is after all not really in love with him.

Part V, like Part II, is very short. In it, Edith leaves the dance to go to her brother's newspaper office. Her brother and a friend are the editors of a socialist newspaper. As Edith leaves the dance she passes an "over-rouged young lady,"<sup>12</sup> the questionable woman in Gordon's life.

Part VI contains the first glimpse of Jewel Hudson, the woman with whom Gordon is involved. She comes for him at the dance and the reader finds that though she entreats Gordon to come with her for his own good, her own desires are really foremost in her mind. She is not perceptive to his needs, only to her own, but he ultimately leaves the dance with her.

In Part VIII Edith reaches her brother's newspaper office in time to be involved in a riot staged against her

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-104.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

brother by an anti-socialist mob which includes the drunk Key and Rose. During the riot, Key is accidentally toppled out of the window to his death, and Edith's brother Henry gets his leg broken.

Part IX takes place in an early morning restaurant where many of the characters are sobering up. Gus Rose is there, still dazed by the death of his friend, Key. Dean and Peter Himmel, Edith's date, are present, and their ridiculous behavior gets them ousted and prepares the reader for the silly antics they perform as Mr. Out and Mr. In.

After being ejected from Child's restaurant, Dean and Peter take a cab back to Delmonico's in a vain drunken attempt to get Peter's coat and hat which he left there the previous evening. While in Delmonico's they spy two signs which say "out" and "in" on a kitchen door. Taking these signs, they insert them in their vests so that it appears that their shirts have been printed in black, respectively, "IN" and "OUT." From Delmonico's they stroll uncertainly to the Commodore for a breakfast of champagne and "a-- probably ham sandwich." After being refused a second bottle of champagne at the Commodore they drunkenly stumble to the Biltmore for more champagne. In the lobby of the Biltmore they tipsily greet a very upset Edith who is

accompanied by a policeman. She ignores their greeting and their condition, and points to the figure of Rose, who has followed Dean and Peter into the lobby, identifying him as "the soldier who broke my brother's leg." Fitzgerald's apparent motive for devoting so much space to the antics of "Mr. In" and "Mr. Out" is to point up the unconcern of these rich, self-satisfied young men with the tragedy of life around them. In fact, he rather pointedly follows their grotesque behavior with a very short Part XI, which finds Gordon Sterrett waking to find that in his drunken stupor of the previous night he "was irrevocably married to Jewel Hudson. When he is able to get up, he buys a revolver and ammunition and puts "a cartridge into his head just behind his temple."<sup>13</sup>

A tragedy can occur only when the hero makes the bad choices or in some way is responsible for his own fate. Gordon, easily Fitzgerald's favorite character in this story, is a tragic character. Fitzgerald could well understand Gordon Sterrett's despondency. Of course, Gordon does not have a novel as an ace in the hole as Fitzgerald did. Gordon has no future because he admits to Dean that

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 124-126.

he "can't stand being poor." Dean accuses him of being "sort of bankrupt--morally as well as financially,"<sup>14</sup> and Gordon sees the two types of bankruptcy going hand in hand. In other words, one's moral fortitude is determined by one's financial status--no funds, no morality. Gordon Sterrett sacrifices himself on the altar of a materialistic god. Whether or not Fitzgerald would have gone the way of Gordon is questionable, but he says in a much later entry in his journal that he "would always cherish an abiding distrust toward the leisure class. . . ." He adds that "In the years since then I have never been able to stop wondering where my friends' money came from, nor to stop thinking that at one time a sort of droit de seigneur might have been exercised to give one of them my girl."<sup>15</sup> He was suspicious and maybe insecure enough to feel that his own morality and morale depended on money just as Gordon's did.

"The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" is a fantasy. Though it is not so autobiographical as other of Fitzgerald's stories, the references to the "respect for a New England education which is the bane of all provincial

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>15</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 77.

places"<sup>16</sup> are clearly to Fitzgerald's own early environment and the sentiments found there.

The story begins as young John T. Unger from "Hades, a small town on the Mississippi River" goes off to "St. Midas' School near Boston." The story skips ahead to the middle of John's second year when he meets a new boy, Percy Washington. Percy invites John to visit his home, which, heretofore had been shrouded in mystery from everyone at school. John accepts, and while he and Percy are on the train bound for his home, Percy tells John that his father is "by far the richest man in the world." John is so taken aback by this remark that he can say only, "I'm glad. I like very rich people." John begins to tell Percy of the gigantic jewels owned by his other rich friends only to be halted in mid-sentence by Percy's proclamation that "My father has a diamond bigger than the Ritz-Carlton Hotel." Even after this introduction John and the reader alike are unprepared for the opulence in which the Washingtons live. The boys are met at the train in the

---

<sup>16</sup>Fitzgerald, "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz," in The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, p. 5.



small town of Fish whose only inhabitants are twelve men who "had become a race apart."<sup>17</sup>

The boys ride for half an hour in a horse-drawn buggy driven by a negro who speaks a strange dialect. They are transferred at dark to an "immense automobile" driven by a negro who speaks the same strange dialect. The automobile's wheels "were studded with iridescent geometric figures of green and yellow--John did not dare guess whether they were glass or jewel." Fitzgerald elaborates about the grandeur of the automobile while the boys ride an hour and a half to their destination. Though John Unger has, like the other people in Hades, an "earnest worship of and respect for riches,"<sup>18</sup> he is quite overwhelmed by the Washington wealth.

Near the end of their trip, John is conscious that the automobile is being raised off the floor of the rocky valley in which it has been traveling in order to clear the tall hills surrounding them. He asks if they are in Canada and Percy explains that the land on which his home is located is the only uncharted and unsurveyed five square miles in the United States. Percy further explains

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-7.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-8.

how this phenomenon came about. His grandfather bribed "a whole department of the State survey" the first time. "The second time he had the official maps of the United States tinkered with." Percy's father devised a plan to create a strong magnetic field and cause the surveyor's compass to register incorrectly and provided the surveyor with equipment which was made purposely defective. He also deflected a river and "had what looked like a village built up on its banks"<sup>18</sup> to fool the surveyors. Percy explained that the only real threat to their detection is airplanes. The rest of Part II and all of the short Part III contain description of the lavish home of the Washington family.

Part IV contains Percy's sketch of his extraordinary family. Percy's grandfather, a direct descendent of George Washington and Lord Baltimore, was left at the close of the Civil War with a "played-out plantation and about a thousand dollars in gold." He decided to give the plantation to his brother and departed for the West and a cattle and sheep raising future with twenty-four of "the most

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

faithful blacks, who, of course, worshipped him." While hunting for food one day without a gun, he attempted to run down a squirrel which had "something shiny in its mouth." He brought his blacks to the spot and they dug into the squirrel hole in the mountain to find that the entire mountain was one whole diamond. Of course, he told his blacks it was only rhinestone, and, being ignorant, they believed his every word. Washington realized that the only way he could gain from the possession of such a large diamond would be to keep its existence a secret. It was as large as the total of all the known diamonds in the present world and if he were to flood the market with it, diamonds would be worthless. His son, the present Mr. Washington, sealed up the mine as a safeguard. If its presence were discovered, "he should be reduced with all the property-holders in the world to utter poverty."<sup>20</sup>

In Part V, John strolls away from the palatial house "enjoying himself as much as he was able." Fitzgerald's touch of reality and insight declares that

. . . It is youth's felicity as well as its insufficiency that it can never live in the present, but

---

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-17.

must always be measuring up the day against its own radiantly imagined future--flowers and gold, girls and stars, they are only prefigurations and prophecies of that incomparable, unattainable young dream.<sup>21</sup>

The most important thing that happens in Part V is that John meets and falls in love with one of Percy's sisters, Kismine.

John meets Braddock Washington, Percy's father, in Part VI. He appears as "about forty with a proud, vacuous face, intelligent eyes, and a robust figure." He does, however, make John uncomfortable. Braddock Washington shows John the slave quarters and surprisingly he shows him a jail pit in which he keeps the captured pilots " who had the misfortune to discover El Dorado." <sup>22</sup> During the course of a conversation between these captured men and Mr. Washington, it is revealed that one of the prisoners has managed to escape from the valley.

Part VII is very short and continues an elaboration on John and Kismine's love affair, as do the first few paragraphs of Part VIII. It is in this part of the story that John realizes what happens to everyone who is invited here to visit. Kismine admits that in order to preserve the

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

secret, the Washingtons must kill their guests or make them prisoners for life. John, realizing that no former guests seem to have survived as prisoners, is furious, and he and Kismine fight in loud voices until they are overheard by Mr. Washington. Frightened by what they think he might have heard, they decide to elope the next day.

Part IX begins later that same night as John is awakened by the entry of the three black executioners into his room. Their mission is interrupted by Mr. Washington himself who orders them quickly into the elevator to aid him in some unknown scheme. John dresses quickly and goes to Kismine's room. She tells him that the Italian who had escaped has come back with an army of airplanes. As John and Kismine watch the action from the roof garden of the chateau, they see that they must beat a hasty retreat if they are to be saved. Delightedly, Kismine looks forward to being "free and poor." John grimly warns her that "it's impossible to be both together." He tells her that though he "should choose to be free as preferable of the two," he would advise her "as an extra caution you'd better dump the contents of your jewel box into your pockets."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

John, Kismine, and her sister, Jasmine, escape to a place of safety where they can see what happens.

Part X contains a rather extraordinary attempt at prayer by Braddock Washington, who addresses God by shouting "You--there . . . Oh, you above there!" As John listens he hears that

. . . he, Braddock Washington, Emperor of Diamonds, king and priest of the age of gold, arbiter of splendor and luxury, would offer up a treasure such as princes before him had never dreamed of, offer it up not in suppliance, but in pride.<sup>24</sup>

Washington has wrongly believed that God has his price. When God apparently refuses his bribe, Washington, his wife, and his son enter the mountain by way of a trap door. From their vantage point, John and the sisters see that their father has chosen to destroy himself, his family, and the "Diamond as Big as the Ritz."

Ironically, when the three escapees stop for their dinner and examine the contents of Kismine's pocket, they find that she has emptied the wrong jewelry box and has only some rhinestones which "belonged on the dress of a girl who visited Jasmine." Since they have no money, they

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.

will have to live in Hades with John's parents. Kismine asks if her father will be in Hades and John replies, "You have it confused with another place that was abolished long ago."<sup>25</sup>

The rather weak conclusion of the story is studded with a great deal of Fitzgerald's philosophy. "Everybody's youth is a dream, a form of chemical madness" and "His was a great sin who first invented consciousness" are a few examples. The theme of this fantasy is that ultimately all one's youthful dreams are doomed to failure in the cold reality of adulthood. John, who resembles Fitzgerald only in the respect that he is the son of well-to-do parents and is attracted to and becomes involved with people of fabulous wealth, tells Kismine that "there are only diamonds in the whole world, diamonds and perhaps the shabby gift of disillusion."<sup>26</sup>

There are basically two failures in this story. One of them is the failure of Braddock Washington to maintain his secret treasure. This garish dream world of the Washington's is a typically middle-class idea of wealth, but it is the only thing to which Washington can attach any

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

value. In Fitzgerald's eyes, Washington has not lived up to his obligations as a human being. He has behaved in a selfish, tyrannical manner and, like most of Fitzgerald's characters, has been unable to sustain his golden moment indefinitely, even at the cost of the sacrifices of numerous other human beings. The seed of Washington's failure is present in the lushness of his good fortune. Because he sits atop the diamond mountain, he, according to Fitzgerald's philosophy, must be destroyed or removed.

The other failure is that of John Unger to profit from Washington's fall. It seems only fitting that John should be afforded the pleasure of the contents of Kismine's jewel box, but Fitzgerald's middle-class morality rules out acquiring wealth in such a manner. This story, then, contrasts with the first one, at least superficially. In "May Day" a lack of money is equated with a lack of morality. Here in the second story, money causes the moral failure. This difference, however, is only superficial. Fitzgerald, in "May Day" is actually commenting on the values of a society that equates money with morality. The society, then, is as corrupt as the family in the second story.



This story is an example of Fitzgerald's preoccupation with failure, but it is not a story in which one may see Fitzgerald at his best. It is an immature Fitzgerald attempting to formulate a philosophy which states what he feels are worthy traits and what constitutes success and failure.

"Winter Dreams" is a story which deals with still another kind of failure. This story is about a small-town boy, Dexter Green, who becomes a successful businessman but fails to acquire the one thing he really desires, the love of a girl named Judy Jones. Dexter's "winter dreams" are like Fitzgerald's own boyhood dreams. "Dexter is unconsciously dictated to by his winter dreams." He dreams of being a champion golfer or a "fancy" diver. Dexter first meets Judy Jones when they are both children. He meets her again when he is a successful young laundry tycoon. He falls deeply in love with her, but her love for him, like her love for a number of other men, is short-lived. Maddeningly she makes "men conscious to the highest degree of her physical loveliness." Judy proves to be a very self-centered lover. "She was entertained only by

the gratification of her desires and by the direct exercises of her own charm."<sup>27</sup>

Dexter finally breaks away from her spell and becomes engaged to another girl, "light haired and sweet and honorable, and a little stout." She would be to Dexter "no more than a curtain spread behind him, a hand moving among gleaming teacups, a voice calling to children . . . [the] fire and loveliness [of his love for Judy] were gone."<sup>28</sup>

Dexter's engagement is to be announced in June. In May, before the announcement, Dexter is to escort Irene, his fiance, to a dance, but she has a headache and Dexter stops at the dance alone for a few minutes. He meets Judy, whom he has not seen in months, and she immediately sweeps him off his feet again. His subsequent attentions toward Judy "gave serious hurt to Irene Scheerer and to Irene's parents, who had befriended him."<sup>29</sup> The flame of love burned out in Judy in less than a month and Dexter is left broken-hearted again.

---

<sup>27</sup>Fitzgerald, "Winter Dreams," The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, pp. 130-137.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-139.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

The last section of the story occurs seven years after Dexter's last affair with Judy. He has sold his laundry business and gone East to more success. He learns from a business associate that Judy is married to a man who "drinks and runs around." Dexter reacts with surprise that Judy's beauty has faded with the years. He is shocked that the man telling him the story does not find Judy ravishing. When the man leaves his office Dexter realizes that though he thought he had "nothing else to lose" he had just lost something more, as surely as if he had married Judy Jones and seen her fade away before his eyes." He comes to the realization that man always fails to sustain the one moment of beauty. "Her mouth damp to his kisses and her eyes plaintive with melancholy and her freshness like new fine linen in the morning"<sup>30</sup> no longer exist. Melodramatically, in the conclusion of the story, Dexter laments his loss, which is the failure to maintain one's youth and beauty and love.

This story, like the previous stories, deals mainly with money and its effects on people. In this story getting

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-145.

money or great wealth does not help the hero any more than having it helped the Washingtons. A society whose god is money, a man whose god is money, and a man who has all the money he wants but cannot have the one thing he really wants, are all examples of what Fitzgerald believed to be failures.

In each story the people are failures. Braddock Washington fails to keep his diamond mountain a secret. He also fails to see that there may have been something of life more valuable than preserving his secret. Though Fitzgerald wrote in his journal about talking "with the authority of failure"<sup>31</sup> long after he had written this story, it is evident that even then he realized the sense of doomed failure of those characters who worshipped money and power.

Gordon Sterrett is pathetic because he sees no way to escape moral bankruptcy. In Gordon's mind one who is financially poor is also morally poor. Morality depends on solvency. In attempting to emulate his rich friends, Gordon destroys himself. Henry Dan Piper says that Gordon is "too weak to suppress his lust for self-indulgence or to

---

<sup>31</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 181.

assert the will to gratify it."<sup>32</sup> The rich people in "May Day" are hard, callous, unfeeling, cruel people. They admire their own wealth and beauty and have no compassion for their fellow beings. Gordon fails in his quest of riches, but his real failure is innocent and childlike in comparison to the self-satisfied, smug failures the rich make of being human beings.

Dexter Green misses what life has to offer because he sets his sights on a goal far out of reach. He loves a girl who can never return his love. He fails to realize the unreality of such a goal until he is able to see that Judy Jones is not really immortal, that her beauty, her haughtiness, and her charm have all faded, and she is married to a man who treats her badly. The idea of Judy as a beautiful girl is not a reality to Dexter any more, and he sees his failure in the fact that because of his childish dreams, he has robbed himself of a very satisfying part of life. He has denied himself a meaningful relationship with another woman because of his failure to see Judy Jones in the proper perspective.

---

<sup>32</sup>Henry Dan Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 71.

Gordon Sterrett is a poorly drawn and rather poorly motivated character, but the causes of his failure are clearly his self-indulgence and his inability to cope in the midst of a materialistic world. Fitzgerald viewed his world through the eyes of a midwesterner of middle class, albeit the upper middle class, and from such a vantage point he saw the evils of money and power. He saw the disrespect with which his father was treated by his McQuillan relatives because of his inability to achieve a money and power-oriented goal. Braddock Washington represented the American aristocracy as seen by the middle class, and he is "fixed" by Fitzgerald, as are most of the wealthy characters in his later work. Washington fails as surely as Gordon Sterrett, and for rather similar reasons. Washington's self-indulgence is his desire to sustain his secret, and he fails to cope with a realistic world.

Dexter Green of "Winter Dreams" succeeds in the world of business but fails in his private and emotional life. He, like Jay Gatsby, has tried to stop time, has done so in his own mind in relation to Judy Jones, but he is unable to cope with the news that she is no longer young and beautiful and that she is mistreated by a husband who

is too young for her. The story is melodramatic and shallow, but it is another example of how Fitzgerald was attempting to come to a certain attitude toward life and to decide what success really meant and what failure actually was. These three stories are rude attempts by Fitzgerald to explain how he felt about youth, power, money, success, failure, and the effects of outside and inside forces on a character.

In each story the emphasis placed on money and wealth seems to be inherent in the life of the main characters. Their downfall stems somehow from their feelings about and their dealings in money.

## C H A P T E R     I I I

### BASIL DUKE LEE

Between publication of The Great Gatsby in 1925 and Tender is the Night in 1934, Fitzgerald wrote approximately fifty-five short stories. He wrote these for a number of reasons, but the primary one was to maintain the lifestyle to which his family had become accustomed. Among the best are the nine Basil Duke Lee stories. These stories are frankly autobiographical. Eight were originally published in The Saturday Evening Post and five were collected in Taps at Reveille. Fitzgerald thought occasionally of compiling all the stories in a volume including the not-quite-so-well-done Josephine stories. Although he was encouraged to publish them in an inclusive volume, he did not, fearing to be like Booth Tarkington, about whom he once remarked, "I have a horror of going into a personal debauch and coming out of it devitalized with no interest except an acute observation of the behavior of colored people, children, and dogs."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up (New York: New Directions, 1945), p. 179.



Taken as a whole these stories present an interesting picture of what Fitzgerald remembers and chooses to write about his adolescent years, but they are not a verbatim account of his life. Though he says he can write well only about those things he has experienced, his approach to writing is not the literal transcription of life. As in most of Fitzgerald's best writing he is able to assume a double vision through which he can experience an intense feeling, pass the feeling on to the reader, and, at the same time, be an unconcerned narrator. Arthur Mizener remarks that in these Basil Duke Lee stories Fitzgerald "apprehended things simultaneously with a participant's vividness of feeling and an intelligent stranger's acuteness of observation."<sup>2</sup>

The stories involve various aspects of young Basil's life. His growing infatuation with girls, his awareness of wealth and position, and his own self-awareness are among them. The first of the stories, "That Kind of Party," is different from the others in that in it Basil has a living father. In his notebooks, Fitzgerald

---

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Houghton-Mifflin; Avon Books, 1974), p. 20.

explains that "Basil's father had been an unsuccessful young Kentuckian of good family and his mother, Alice Reilly, the daughter of a 'pioneer' wholesale grocer."<sup>3</sup> Basil is described in "A Night at the Fair" as "Alice Reilly's boy."<sup>4</sup> Basil's father is absent in the successive stories and may be presumed dead. In other respects, "That Kind of Party" is a rather accurate account of Fitzgerald's life as a child. Basil is described as "a rather pale, towheaded little boy with the greenest of eyes and thin keen features." Basil "idled through interminable dull gray hours at school. "He guessed that there was little to learn there and his resentment frequently broke forth in insolence." Even Fitzgerald's embarrassment at his mother's eccentricities is expressed (though the fictional mother bears almost no resemblance in this respect to Fitzgerald's mother) by Basil's horror of "bringing into contact the world within and without"<sup>5</sup> when his mother suggests he have a party of his own.

---

<sup>3</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, pp. 233-234.

<sup>4</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, "A Night at the Fair," in Afternoon of an Author (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>F. Scott Fitzgeralds, "That Kind of Party," in Princeton University Literary Chronicle, Vol. XII (Summer, 1951, No. 4), 168-170.

This first story is the only one of the nine not published by The Saturday Evening Post. The editors found it unbelievable that children of ten or eleven engaged in kissing games. Fitzgerald changed the names of his character (Basil to Terence) and attempted to sell it elsewhere but with no apparent success. Basil is described thus: "by occupation actor, athlete, scholar, philatelist, and collector of cigar bands." As the story begins he had become a "fool for love" on this particular afternoon. He is infatuated by Dolly, a young beauty he meets at a kissing game party. When he reaches home in a semi-stupor, his mother asks whether he enjoyed himself and whether he would like to give a party in his own home. He is appalled by the idea. He would be mortified if his mother were to find out about the games. He is, however, tempted to arrange a party with no adult supervision and with kissing games the only entertainment provided. He and a friend pay to have a forged telegram sent to call the friend's mother away for the afternoon and then they organize the party. The day of the party Basil is very excited. He is so excited that he sasses his teacher and is threatened with a trip to the principal's office. A

bespeckled classmate teases Basil about the incident and receives a punch in the nose for his trouble. Basil cannot go home now for fear the news of his behavior in the classroom and on the grounds has preceeded him, so he goes straight to his friend's house where the party is to be held.

All goes well until the crippled brother of the boy whom Basil hit at school arrives. The wheelchair-bound Carpenter seeks revenge for the wrong done his brother. He enters "looking about him arrogantly. His handicap had made him a tyrant and fostered a singular bad temper." He calls for a game of "clap-in and clap-out" with Basil in the role of "It." Basil, suspecting a trap, must be forcibly removed from the room. When he does not respond to the call to come in (after a trick has been planned), Carpenter wheels to the hall to inspect the closet for Basil. Basil catches Carpenter in the closet and locks the door. His favorite girl, Dolly, meets him in the hall and they begin to kiss just as a tattle-tale approaches. The tattle-tale hears Carpenter's clamor in the closet, sees Dolly and Basil's embrace, and threatens to get her mother and tell her. She is as good as her word and

returns shortly with four mothers (one of them Carpenter's) just in time to see Basil yank the wheelchair over, dumping Carpenter in the floor. Everyone is horrified but amazed as Carpenter wrenches himself off the floor and stands for the first time in five years. Ironically, Basil knew that he will be "somehow blamed for Carpenter's miraculous recovery."<sup>6</sup>

The failure that Basil experiences in "That Kind of Party" is the failure of an eleven year old. "In one day he had committed insolence and forgery and assaulted both the crippled and the blind." And because of these offenses he knows that "his punishment obviously was to be in this life." But, because he is only eleven, Basil easily allows the worry of his punishment to slide away "for the moment."<sup>7</sup> Basil's failure to plan and execute a perfect petting party in this story is really a minor one considering that finally he gets a dinner invitation from the attractive Dolly.

Though this story is one of the weakest of the stories, and Basil is still a rather sketchy character,

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 168-179.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

there are certain bits of the philosophy of failure present. The fact that Basil will be "blamed" for something which is actually miraculously good is Fitzgerald's touch of irony in this story. That Basil has "one blessed hour"<sup>8</sup> does not alter the fact that his hour of happiness is doomed to end and he must face the consequences of having tried to do more than it was in the cards for him to try. Basil, like many other of Fitzgerald's characters must pay dearly for the small moments of success. Basil's dreams are large and so are his failures. They are as Fitzgerald says " great failures. "<sup>9</sup>

"The Scandal Detectives," the next story in the series, presents Basil as a more skillfully defined character. He and his friend, Riply Buckner, are fourteen and "sitting with disarming quiet upon the still unhatched eggs of the mid-twentieth century." The title of the story is the title Basil and Riply have taken as the authors of "The Book of Scandal."<sup>10</sup> This book is not filled with

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 179-180.

<sup>9</sup>Henry Dan Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Scandal Detectives," in Taps at Reveille (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), pp. 3-4.

information to be used for blackmail, but rather as protection against anyone who dares harm either of the boys. Because this provides protection and does not threaten, it becomes the device of a frightened, insecure failure rather than the tool of a bully. The book is hidden in a room above the stable in Riply's back yard along with an array of disguises used by the Scandal Detectives.

Basil, the more imaginative of the two, plans adventures for himself and the willing Riply. On this particular day, the boys have been consulting their disguises. Three neighbor girls come down the alley and beckon them to follow to Wharton's yard, a time-honored meeting place of young people in the neighborhood. One of the girls, Imogene Bissell, casts a spell over Basil in the quiet afternoon glow. He experiences the tender-sweet agony of romantic attraction with one look into Imogene's eyes. "For a moment it was too much for him. He let it go, incapable of exploiting it until he had digested it alone." He makes a date with Imogene for later in the evening to exchange rings as a symbol of their mutual attraction. Basil is not upset when he

asks whom Imogene likes best she says, "I like you and Hubert Blair best."<sup>11</sup> Hubert is such a charmer with the girls that he is automatically everyone's favorite. The date is made, however, and Basil goes home to eat dinner and to dress in his favorite outfit for the evening.

While Basil procures his ring from an old flame, Margaret Torrence, he sees Hubert Blair talking with Imogene. Basil loses a verbal exchange with Hubert and gets tagged "old Basil the Boozle"<sup>12</sup> by Hubert. Basil's attempt at being funny comes off as an ill-humored remark which alienates the crowd. Imogene forgets her half-promise to Basil as Hubert walks her home.

When Basil gets home he calls Riply and plans a little revenge on Hubert. The plan involves including another friend, Bill Kampf, in the conspiracy. The first stage is the delivering of a series of warnings to Hubert signed by "S.D." (Scandal Detectives). As Hubert's parents are discussing in mild alarm the receipt of several such warnings and Hubert is speaking with who

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 11.



he thinks is Imogene Bissell on the phone, the second stage is being put into action. Riply, Basil, and Bill, all in disguise, are waiting for Hubert to depart from his back door for a faked party at Imogene's house. Beginning with Basil, who is the first seen by Hubert, the boys renege on their plan of action. Basil discovers that he really had no desire to do harm, even of the humorous kind, to Hubert. Hubert gives chase, in turn, to the boys and then decides to tell his parents what has happened. To be on the safe side, his father decides to walk him to Imogene's home. Of course, when they arrive at the Bissell home they discover the phone call had been a fake. Before Hubert and his father can gracefully leave, the bell rings and Basil, Bill, and Riply enter and demand to know where the party is. Each declares that he had been called by Imogene to attend a party at her home that evening. Hubert is called upon to recount the story of the warnings and the hoodlums waiting for him in the alley. Basil, Bill, and Riply encourage him to tell wilder accounts of what actually happened. With each addition of fake bravery on Hubert's part, they break up in laughter. Though Imogene senses that there is a trick

being played, she is too blinded by her attraction to Hubert to find out the true story. As they all begin to depart, with Mr. Blair as chaperone, Imogene draws Hubert aside and gives him a good-night kiss. "With the corners of his mouth falling, Basil went out the door. He had stacked the cards dexterously, but Life had played a trump from it's sleeve at the last."<sup>13</sup> From most failures one can gain some strength of character, some lesson, some knowledge of self-awareness, and Basil's failures are not significantly different as were the characters in the earlier stories mentioned in this paper. In this story, as in the previous one, Basil is not cowed by his failure. "His face was turned without regret toward the boundless possibilities of summer."<sup>14</sup> He regards failure as inevitable yet he makes his best effort, as usual. Fitzgerald wrote to his daughter that "All I believe in life is the rewards for virtue (according to your talents) and the punishments for not fulfilling your

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-22.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

duties, which are doubly costly."<sup>15</sup> It seems this philosophy also applies to Basil.

Basil is a well defined and well described character in this second story. He becomes aware of several important facts of life. Instead of grasping at a momentary respite as he does in "That Kind of Party," Basil faces his situation a little more squarely and begins to understand his own personality more fully. "He perceived eventually that though boys and girls would always listen to him while he talked, their mouths literally moving in response to his, they would never look at him as they had looked at Hubert."<sup>16</sup> He begins to realize his own potentialities and limitations. In his journal, Fitzgerald wrote about himself, "I didn't have the two top things: great animal magnetism or money. I had the two second things, though: good looks and intelligence."<sup>17</sup> The fact that Basil realizes that perhaps

---

<sup>15</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 286.

<sup>16</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Scandal Detectives," in Taps at Reveille, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, p. 211.

he is not cut out to be the gentleman burglar symbolizes the process of maturing and the abandonment of childish dreams. Basil realizes that he is "morally alone"<sup>18</sup> outside Hubert's gate in his ridiculous disguise. Fitzgerald draws directly here from his own experiences as a young man. He said at the age of twenty, "I knew that at bottom I lacked the essentials. At the last crisis, I knew I had no real courage, perseverance or self-respect."<sup>19</sup> But he had dreams and aspirations toward which he would always strive and because of his attempts at grand goals, he would fail as grandly as he dreamed.

"A Night at the Fair" is set in the summer before Basil goes East to boarding school. For the several years of his and Riply's friendship, Basil, who is again described as "the imaginative member of the firm," had been the leader in most respects. Now,

the displacement effected by two feet of blue serge filled him (Basil) with puzzled dismay--in fact, Riply Buckner had become noticeably indifferent to the pleasure of Basil's company in public.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Scandal Detectives," in Taps at Reveille, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup>Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, p. 49.

<sup>20</sup>Fitzgerald, "A Night at the Fair," in Afternoon of an Author, p. 16.

Basil is sensitive and is hurt by Riply's behavior. He understands, but he would never have been so cruel had the tables been turned and Riply had been the one in short trousers.

Basil and Riply have been at the State Fair all day and are on the verge of going home when they meet Elwood Leaming, "the dissipated one among the nice boys of the town." Elwood smokes, drinks beer, and has been to a burlesque show. Elwood leads Basil and Riply on a scouting mission for girls, and they meet two girls who agree to walk with them a while. Basil's initial reaction is one of "wild excitement." Riply's only form of communication is a silly giggle, so to save the situation, "Basil pretended an interest in the sights they passed and kept up a sort of comment thereon." The girl walking with him and Riply mentions her brother in conversation and Basil with his chivalrous nature "wondered if her brother cared that she had been picked up by strangers."<sup>21</sup> Despite his concern and his attempts at conservation, Basil is odd man out because of his short trousers. After

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-19.

one trip through the Tunnel of Love, Basil sulks home humiliated.

When Basil faces his family the next morning, he declares the necessity of his having a pair of long trousers. Reluctantly his mother acquiesces and he meets his uncle downtown for the purchase. Before Basil goes downtown, Riply calls and invites him to join Elwood, three girls and himself at the fair that evening. Elwood explains that they will pick him up at his house.

As Basil walks home from his trouser-buying trip he passes the home of one of his friends, Gladys VonSchellinger. Gladys and Basil are both going East to school, and Basil has

a feeling of kinship for her--as if they had been selected for the glamorous adventure of the East, chosen together for a high destiny that transcended the fact that she was rich and he was only comfortable.

This description shows Fitzgerald's keen sensitivity to socio-economic position. Later Gladys is described in terms of "her exquisite delicacy, the fine luxury of her life."<sup>22</sup> As Basil passes her home she is chauffeured to

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-30.

her door in the limousine, and as she gets out she calls to Basil and invites him to watch the fireworks at the State Fair in her family's box. Basil thanks her, but politely and regretfully refuses because of his previous commitment.

The trousers arrive from alteration barely in time for the boys to meet their dates at the fair. Basil is sorely disappointed in his girl, "but he was unable to hurt anyone whom he thought of as an inferior." This is an echo of Fitzgerald's moral code of responsibility. Basil manages to escape through a tent flap when Hubert Blair appears and whisks away Riply's date, thereby leaving Riply a date and getting out of an uncomfortable situation. Basil ambles to the Grand Concourse where he is again invited to view the fireworks from the VonSchellinger box. "He felt a vast wave of virtue surge through him. How anyone could have preferred the society of those common girls was at this moment incomprehensible." No sooner was he ensconced in the box than Hubert, Riply, Elwood, and the girls saunter by. The adults in the box are shocked at the sight and Basil is aglow with mirthful triumph. He enjoys a sweet revenge on Riply because "the natural cruelty of his species toward the doomed was not yet disguised by

hyprocrisy." Yet he defends Riply and suggests to Riply's aunt that perhaps Riply's mother should not be told of his antics. Though Basil has experienced a great deal of satisfaction, he is not cruel or vengeful. He feels a certain guilt in regard to Riply. As he and Gladys VonSchellinger ride home, he imagines that he is infatuated with her. She invites him to come see her the next day and adds, "Basil--Basil, when you come tomorrow, will you bring that Hubert Blair?" Life has gain played a trump from its sleeve. The triumph of seeing his friend, Riply and his rival, Hubert, in an embarrassing situation is subtly ruined by the fact that Gladys VonSchellinger finds the animal magnetism of Hubert Blair exciting, more exciting than Basil's respectability. Rather than comment in length on the effect of this situation, Fitzgerald leaves Basil "looking after it [the VonSchellinger car] thoughtfully until it turned the corner of the street."<sup>23</sup>

Fitzgerald skillfully uses that time in life when a youth first struggles with attempts to appear sophisticated to express his philosophy of failure. Basil desires long trousers because they are, to him, a symbol

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-31.



of maturity. He gets the trousers to which he has attached so much importance, but they are not instrumental in his quest for romance. His date does not live up to his romantic dreams; his conduct with adults is not approved; and his imagined love for Gladys is not returned. He is left to contemplate why life is not what he tries to make it but what it is destined to be by some forces over which he has not a great deal of control. Again, Basil's dreams are romantically exciting and lively, but in each of them lurks failure which Fitzgerald, if not Basil, knows is of his own making.

The next story in the series, "The Freshest Boy," finds Basil on the train borne for St. Regis, a Catholic boarding school in the East, "the faraway East, that he had loved with a vast nostalgia since he had first read books about great cities."<sup>24</sup> Basil is anxious to get to preparatory school because he had dreamed about it for years. As the story begins, he is rudely interrupted from a daydream about the gentleman burglar (a dream he has not quite been able to abandon) by the words of Lewis Crum, his traveling

---

<sup>24</sup>Fitzgerald, "Forging Ahead," in Afternoon of an Author, p. 34.

companion. Lewis, also from Basil's hometown in the Midwest, is attempting to dampen Basil's high spirits by pointing out all the disadvantages of being a student at St. Regis. The repartee is spirited, and in its course, as if to foreshadow events, Lewis makes a remark about Basil's reputation for freshness at the country day school which they attended, a reference "to one of the most shameful passages in his companion's life."<sup>25</sup> Basil had been speared in print in the school paper when this item was printed: "If someone will please poison young Basil, or find some other means to stop his mouth, the school at large and myself will be much obliged."<sup>26</sup> Basil is embarrassed by its mention and threatens Lewis into silence. Part II contains only a letter from Basil to his mother. On first reading, the letter sounds quite typical of letters sent home from school. Because Basil's family is only "comfortable"<sup>27</sup> financially, his plea for a

---

<sup>25</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Freshest Boy," on Taps at Reveille, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Fitzgerald, "A Night at the Fair," in Afternoon of An Author, p. 24.

larger allowance in order to buy "shoe laces, etc.,"<sup>28</sup> is pitiful and sad under the circumstances. The circumstances are that not only is Basil "one of the poorest boys in a rich boys' school"<sup>29</sup> but also he is the most unpopular. He is taunted by younger boys and "dressed . . . down savagely"<sup>30</sup> by respected, older boys. Though Basil sadly "looked at his face in the glass, trying to discover there the secret of their dislike--in the expression of his eyes, his smile,"<sup>31</sup> deep inside he knew the real reason for his unpopularity. Lewis has hinted it and Mr. Rooney, the football coach who will accompany him to New York says it outright when he tells Basil, "You oughtn't to get so fresh all the time."<sup>32</sup>

Basil knows he is guilty of several crimes.

He had boasted, he had been considered yellow at football, he had pointed out other people's mistakes to them, he had shown off his rather extraordinary fund of general information in class.<sup>33</sup>

Basil probably got by with this sort of behavior in his school at home, but he was up against a different set of circumstances in prep school.

---

<sup>28</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Freshest Boy," in Taps at Reveille, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

Though Basil can find no other student to go to New York with him, when he finally is allowed to go, the headmaster "sensing Basil's predicament and perhaps the extremity of his misery," arranges for him to go to New York anyway. Mr. Rooney, who consents to go with Basil, has some business to attend to in New York so he puts Basil on his honor to go to lunch and the show alone. When Basil finishes his lunch (which he would have enriched with another chocolate parfait had he not been too shy to bother the busy waiter), he opens a letter he had received that morning from his mother. His courage returns when he reads that his mother and grandfather have offered to take him to Europe with them some time very soon. The sign of his returning courage is that "he raised his voice and . . . called boomingly and without reticence for the waiter."<sup>34</sup>

He goes to the show and in the lobby he spies one of his heroes, Ted Fay, the captain of the Yale football team. Basil is still immature enough for hero-worship and he lavishes his worship on this "legend, a sign in the sky." Basil's enjoyment of the play would be enhanced by the fact

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-38.

that he "would know all through the next hours that Ted Fay was here too."<sup>35</sup> When Act II of the play ends, Basil goes to the lobby and finds to his dismay a very wet and very drunk Mr. Rooney. Basil convinces Mr. Rooney to wait for him until the show is over. Mr. Rooney staggers off to a nearby bar.

Sooner than Basil would have liked, "the long moment of incomparable beauty was over" and he knows that he should find Mr. Rooney and return to school. He finds him in a bar near the theatre but is afraid to go in and get him. Basil decides that if in half an hour Mr. Rooney has not come out of the bar he will return to St. Regis without him and let Mr. Rooney take the consequences. As he nervously deliberates this decision, he notices the stage door and he sees Ted Fay escort the leading lady out of the theatre. "Irresistibly, Basil followed." The couple go to the tea room of a hotel where Basil is able to watch and listen unnoticed to their intimate conversation. It seems that Ted has asked the girl to marry him, but she has promised to marry someone to whom she owes her successful career. The

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

intensity of their emotions has an unsettling effect on Basil. He has not really understood it all, but he comes to the conclusion "that life for everybody was a struggle, sometimes magnificent from a distance, but always difficult and surprisingly simple and a little sad."<sup>36</sup>

A more mature Basil goes back to the bar to get Mr. Rooney and return to school. "Suddenly Basil realized he wasn't going to Europe. He could not forego the molding of his own destiny just to alleviate a few months of pain." He realizes that his dream of success, his dominance of this world of mystery and excitement, could not be jeopardized by "the jeers of a few boys."<sup>37</sup>

Part V of the story relates what happens to Basil during the remaining months of this first year at school. He takes more snubs, more bad treatment, and more taunts, but he survives to become "approved of" by some of the younger boys. The story ends with Basil being called by a nickname, a mark of acceptance in most adolescent peer groups. Basil "took it [the nickname, 'Lee-Y'] to bed with him that night, and thinking of it, holding it to him

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-44.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

happily to the last, fell easily to sleep."<sup>38</sup> The first year of school has matured Basil's attitude toward life as no experience had so far done. He seems to have acquired a much more adult attitude toward his responsibilities. He no longer fears parental retribution but accepts his responsibilities as a maturing individual.

In "The Freshest Boy" Basil realizes that he is not alone in his failure to manipulate life to suit his own purposes. He realizes, as Fitzgerald certainly does, the universality of failure, especially for those who dream big or romantic dreams. Basil's dreams of power and popularity were doomed as were the dreams of others like Ted Fay, Mr. Rooney, and the headmaster of St. Regis. Though the story ends in success, it has failure as its major topic. Every important character in the story is the victim of failure. Though not explicitly explained, it is implied that each failure is a result of the character's own doing. Each has had an idealistic dream ruined by something which he has done inadvertently to bring him down to failure. The vast majority of the failures are

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.

"character building" in nature. Here, especially, Basil learns to make sacrifices, to deal with situations that must be dealt with, and to attain a most important victory. In the midst of all the failure he sees and experiences, he does win. He wins the all-important social acceptance, albeit he wins it very painfully. Fitzgerald probably sees the acceptance as a turning point in Basil's young life.

"He Thinks He's Wonderful" begins as Basil, with "his brightness . . . subdued, and the air of consideration in his face" returns home after "an unhappy year at school." Basil is in the midst of full-blown adolescence. "He believed that everything was a matter of effort" and "he wanted to be a great athlete, popular, brilliant and always happy." This last desire lends a poignancy to his ambitions. By the time he wrote this story Fitzgerald realized that it was impossible to sustain happiness for any length of time. He also realized the consequences of having been spoiled by an indulgent mother. Basil has "grown uselessly introspective" this first year at school because of his punishment for his "freshness." This introspection, according to Fitzgerald's philosophy,



"interfered with that observation of others which is the beginning of wisdom."<sup>39</sup> Basil, then, has not reached that stage of maturity in which he can begin his real education. He is temporarily situated on a plateau at peace with himself.

On the train for home, Basil meets a hometown friend, Margaret Torrence. She notices the change in Basil and finds it very attractive. As Part II begins, "the curtain is about to be drawn aside for an inspection of Basil's madness that summer." Margaret spreads the story that she thinks Basil is wonderful, and Basil's reaction is almost predictable. The summer begins with a warm evening on a porch. Basil is found to be every girl's favorite boy when they play the game of "Truth." "Basil was not surprised--we are never surprised at our own popularity." A new boy, Joe Gorman, has joined Basil's group of friends. Joe sings beautifully, to Basil's envy. In hopes of remedying his own flaw of not being able to sing "so people could stand it," Basil strikes a friendship with Joe and asks him to go for a soda at the local shop. Joe had not liked Basil the previous year, but he is

---

<sup>39</sup>Fitzgerald, "He Thinks He's Wonderful," in Taps at Reveille, pp. 47-48.

"overwhelmed with Basil's success with girls."<sup>40</sup> Buoyed up by his own reflections, Basil proceeds to alienate Joe completely by outlining how Joe could become as popular as himself. Basil stresses politeness, Eastern schooling, and proper attire, things about which Joe is already sensitive.

Before falling asleep, Basil comes down from his cloud of popularity and realizes that he has been "bossy" and that he may have "made him [Joe] mad." Basil must pay the price again for his exuberant success. He fails to get a date for a dance at Black Bear Lake, and he must beg a ride with Joe Gorman, now a new enemy, and Hubert Blair and Lewis Crum, enemies and rivals of long standing. All evening Basil tries to re-live his success of the early summer with the girls but is unsuccessful. He is snubbed and insulted and finally leaves the party with Bill Kampf, a friend from the days of the Scandal Detectives. Basil promises to help Bill entertain his cousin, Minnie Biddle, if Bill will take him to catch the trolley for home. On the trolley, Basil childishly dreams of a sweet revenge on

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-53.

his crowd. "How sorry they would all be--Imogene and Margaret, Joe and Hubert and Riply" when he became " President of the United States at twenty-five! "<sup>41</sup>

The name Minnie Bibble "vaguely revolted" Basil when he first heard it, but the girl herself certainly does not have the same effect. Minnie's full name is Ermine Gilberte Labouisse Bibble and she is a femme fatale at the tender age of fifteen. Although, as the narrator says, "Let it not be gathered from the foregoing that the somewhat hard outlines of Miss Bibble at twenty had already begun to appear." She is described as "of radiant freshness." "In passage" from love-sickness to Glacier National Park, "she would come to Basil as a sort of initiation, turning his eyes out from himself and giving him a first dazzling glimpse into the world of love." Basil takes another step toward maturity in this relationship with Minnie Bibble. He becomes intoxicated by her smile. "He wanted nothing except to watch it with a vast buoyant delight."<sup>42</sup>

Minnie arranges for Basil to accompany her and her family on the trip to Glacier National Park. She tells

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-61.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-62.

Basil that she will call him after her father has made arrangements with his mother. However, as Basil rides to the station with Mr. Bibble, who had a very good impression of Basil as a "nice, quiet, level-headed boy," Basil manages to ruin "the behavior of three days."<sup>43</sup> He talks and boasts of his success in school and unwittingly belittles Mr. Bibble's favorite pastime, sailing. The consequences are that Minnie calls Basil and tells him he will not be invited on their trip west.

At last Basil has reached the level of maturity which enables him to "shake off the blood like water not to forget, but to carry his wounds with him to new disasters and new atonements." Though "he lay on his bed, baffled, mistaken, miserable," he is "not beaten." He is somehow strengthened by his disappointments, but he forges on toward his unknown destiny. The final section of the story finds Basil in possession of his grandfather's "electric." The last we see of Basil in this episode he rides off with Imogene Bissell in the "electric" recklessly to do "anything."<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-67.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-68.

From a triumph of some magnitude early in the summer, to a miserable downfall at a later party, to a successful relationship with the young charmer Minnie Bibble, to a pathetic debacle with her father, to a final minor triumph with a car, Basil's life takes on the characteristics of a roller coaster ride.

This story marks the beginning of Basil's love affair with Minnie Bibble, which definitely parallels Fitzgerald's love affair with Ginevra King. At last Basil meets a girl who lives up to his dream of romance. Fitzgerald never got over Ginevra King. At least he never allowed himself to think he did, and Basil has the same weakness for Minnie Bibble. This is Basil's first experience with romantic love, and inexorably linked with his success is his failure. Perhaps, this time, Basil is more easily able to see his glaring errors which lead to his downfall. Because of Fitzgerald's own painful awareness of failure in a love affair, he is able to create and explain his character's awareness of the same emotion. The great consolation prize in this particular story, Minnie Bibble, will eventually become one of his failures also.

As Fitzgerald looks back to his adolescence through Basil, the reader can see how brutally honest about his faults Fitzgerald was. He respects the romantic dreams and portrays them faithfully, but also he portrays his faults and blunders with the same intense reality. Though one senses that Fitzgerald longs for a time past, one also senses Fitzgerald's desire to make it clear that everything in the past is not romantic and nostalgic. It is as if he would have us see why he is qualified to say that he does "talk with the authority of failure."<sup>45</sup>

"The Captured Shadow" derives its title from the play which Basil writes and produces in the course of the story. This play is not Basil's first attempt at writing, as witnessed by his notebook. He stays up all night writing it even at the risk of becoming "crazy." Though he has visions of producing it alone, his friend, Riply Buckner, first having been convinced by his mother, convinces Basil that Miss Halliburton should be asked to be present "to keep order at rehearsals."<sup>46</sup> This is a subtle comment on the maturity of the characters.

---

<sup>45</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 181.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-74.

Deciding on the leading lady "proved to be a difficult matter." As usual, Imogene Bissell won the prize, but unfortunately, when she is called she has to refuse because of a previous commitment to have her tonsils removed. Basil refuses to accept any of Riply's suggested alternatives and "finally a face began to flash before his eyes," the face of Evelyn Beebe. Evelyn was a lass of "precocious charms." Though only sixteen, she is a member of an older group of adolescents. Once Basil envisions Evelyn as the leading lady, Lelia VanBaker, he can see no one else playing the role. He and Riply go to Evelyn's house to ask her to be in the play and find that she is entertaining "Andy Lockhart--winner of the Western Golf Championship at eighteen, captain of his freshman baseball team, handsome, successful at everything he tried, a living symbol of the splendid, glamorous world of Yale."<sup>47</sup> Basil is still a hero worshipper despite whatever other maturity he has acquired. By promising her that Hubert Blair, Basil's rival from previous stories, will be the leading man (a spur of the moment desperation move by Basil), they persuade Evelyn to be their star.

---

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 74-75.

When Basil reads his play to the prospective players, he is interrupted by Hubert Blair, the embodiment of all that Basil would like to be. Hubert is described as "shallow" except for "two or three felicities which he possessed to an extraordinary degree." Hubert has "flashing self-confidence, . . . cherubic ingeniousness, . . . and . . . extraordinary physical grace." The shallowness, of course, does not appeal, but it was difficult not to covet Hubert's animal magnetism. All the rehearsals are more or less successful until Hubert refuses to stay for a complete rehearsal. Basil, tired and short-tempered, attacks his excuses. Hubert counters by calling Basil "Bossy," an insulting nickname acquired at prep school. Enraged, eyes blazing, "Basil took a step toward him" threateningly but at the same time "a vast impotence surged over him at the realization that the past was always lurking near."<sup>48</sup>

The next setback to the production comes when Evelyn announces that family plans make it impossible for her to be in the play. Her family is going East and her father insists that they all go together. Basil is

---

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 78-80.



crestfallen as he sits alone in his room watching Teddy Barnfield, a little neighbor boy, playing alone in his backyard because he has the mumps, which are described by Basil's mother as not "at all dangerous, but . . . very contagious." Basil leaves the house, and on his way he meets Evelyn Beebe's brother going to play with Teddy Barnfield. Hamilton Beebe does not know that Teddy has the mumps. Basil wrestles with his conscience quickly and decides not to tell Ham. He knows that if Ham is exposed to the mumps his family will have to postpone its trip East. Basil is "fully aware that it was the worst thing he had ever done in his life."<sup>49</sup> This attitude sets the tone of the rest of the story.

Evelyn stays with the production and the play is a financial as well as a critical success, but Basil's triumph is tainted by the fact that it was won by fraud and deceit. Again Basil is plagued by his disillusionment about one's ability to sustain happiness, excitement, and success. When the play and the public acclaim are over, there is emptiness in Basil, "a hollowness like fear." As he and his mother walk home he is glad that the play

---

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

has been a success, but he remembers the price little Ham Beebe had to pay for that success and he is remorseful. Basil's mother's words, " God, help him! help him . . . because he needs help that I can't give him anymore." <sup>50</sup> are a bit melodramatic, but they indicate that Basil has reached and passed another milestone on his road to maturity. He has felt the first of those hollow triumphs that most ambitious people experience during their lives. He succeeds here, but he has not yet acquired the ability to cope with the let-down that follows success and the guilt over the ruthlessness with which it was accomplished.

Implicit in the beginning of anything is the end, and Basil's first realization of this truth occurs in this story. Throughout the production of his play he has failed to realize and to appreciate, to a certain degree, each incident as it happens. Fitzgerald makes a deliberate comparison of Basil's mood while staying up all night to compose the play and his reaction to his mother's praise after its successful production on stage. This story is probably the most carefully structured of all the series.

---

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89.

It seems to be Fitzgerald's statement of personal philosophy. Each person has his own feelings and reactions about what is worthwhile or exciting about life. To some the fun is in the collecting of fame, power, and wealth. To others the enjoyment comes as a sense of satisfaction with the rewards of labor. Basil, like Fitzgerald, received the greatest thrill in creating, not in enjoying the praise and spoils afterward.

The failure in "The Captured Shadow" is Basil's let-down. The golden moments of creation and production slip away almost without realization, and Basil is left empty, bereft of emotion. The fault may lie in the fact that by beginning something, a play or whatever, one engenders an end, and this end, to Fitzgerald, was failure--failure to cope with that emptiness of success which is a form of failure. In the process he has learned something about the nature of success and failure.

"The Perfect Life" begins with a triumph for Basil. He is greeted by his school mates after a football game in which he has been the hero of the day. He is complimented by nearly everyone from headmaster to gardener. Basil is most impressed when John Ganby, a St. Regis alumni, compliments him and asks to talk to him later.

Ganby, "serious, upright, handsome, with a kindly smile and large, earnest blue eyes," informs a startled Basil that now that he is a hero, he has a "responsibility" to "every boy . . . who goes around smoking cigarettes behind the gym." The idea of being a perfect and noble person has never really occurred to Basil. In fact, "the real restraining influence on him was fear--the fear of being disqualified from achievement and power." With Ganby's help Basil envisions himself a selfless leader of his college, and later "he would face the nation from the inaugural platform on the capitol steps." As he contemplates this life, Basil recalls his previous ambitions and tries to see the two in relation to one another:

To be of great wit and conversational powers, and simultaneously strong and serious and silent. To be generous and open and self-sacrificing, yet to be somewhat mysterious and sensitive and even a little bitter with melancholy. To be both light and dark.<sup>51</sup>

Basil decides to try this new life.

The change it causes in Basil does not go unnoticed. His friend, George Dorsey, who has invited him to his home for Thanksgiving vacation, tells his mother

---

<sup>51</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Perfect Life," in Taps at Reveille, pp. 91-94.

there is "some funny way he's got to be lately." Basil "gets people aside and talks to them. Then he sort of smiles at them. " George attributes Basil's behavior to his being " so good at football. "<sup>52</sup>

A week later Basil and George arrive in New York and Basil meets George's sister, Jobena, "one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen in his life." Excited by the girl and the "compact luxury" of the Dorsey home on 53rd Street, Basil hopes to make the "best of both worlds." He hopes to "get a good deal of work on George Dorsey in these five days." Basil told Mrs. Dorsey he was going to be a minister, "and immediately he didn't believe it himself."<sup>53</sup> It is difficult for the reader to see Basil in this role, and it seems a little difficult for Basil to see himself in it.

The two young Dorseys, Basil, and other friends go to "Emile's" to dance. Naturally, Basil can dance only the waltzes and can drink only tea because of his commitment to the good life. He watches, "trying to pretend to himself that he disapproved of it all but was too polite to show it." While sitting thus he is joined by a

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 96-97.

young friend of the Dorseys, Skiddy DeVinci. George tells Basil upon his return to the table that Skiddy and Jobena had been engaged last summer. Basil's emotions are confused. He "glowed suddenly with excitement" at George's report of Skiddy and Jobena's conduct during their engagement, but this changed to "indignation--steadily rising indignation"<sup>54</sup> as he considered it in the light of his new convictions.

When Jobena arranges to ride home with Basil in a hansom cab, he takes the opportunity to preach repentance to her. He assumes that Jobena's cold reaction to his sermon means that she is "thinking hard--as he had done the month before." He finds out how wrong he is when he overhears Jobena talking to Skiddy deVinci. She tells Skiddy that Basil is a "nasty little prig." To his horror he also hears Jobena say that because of the impression Basil's sermon has made, she is disgusted with perfect men and their perfect lives and that she will consent to marry Skiddy tomorrow if he wishes. Because Basil is "a slave to his own admiration," deep in his heart he believes that what she says is true. He tries to summon the courage to

---

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-101.

tell Mr. Dorsey but finally decides to do something to stop Jobena on his own. He goes to Skiddy's apartment, lures him into a bar where he proceeds to get Skiddy drunk and prevent his rendezvous with Jobena. When he finally gets Skiddy into a taxi bound for the grave of his dog, Eggshell, Basil returns to the Dorsey's to find Jobena angrily waiting with her suitcase. Basil has had several cocktails with Skiddy and now "the self-respect he had lost . . . rushed back to him; and he is "tingling with the confidence of power." He tells Jobena that his sermon was all a "joke."<sup>55</sup>

Ironically, in this story Basil fails because he tries too hard to be perfect. Basil's maturity increases in this and his luck improves. He is becoming more proficient at escaping his own self-made dilemmas. He is more perceptive and clever, but he is not able to perceive quickly enough that he is not suited to the life outlined by John Ganby. The success he craves is not the sort that requires sacrifices. He seems to have little, if any, remorse over this realization when it finally comes. It is as if he eliminates another category from which he will

---

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-112.

choose his lifestyle. He will not be the gentleman burglar, the darling of the rich girls, or the popular prep school athlete.

The "confidence of power"<sup>56</sup> which rushes back to Basil after his loss of self-respect the previous evening in the pantry is the Fitzgerald confidence in the ability at least to attempt to mold life to his liking. This is the only story of the series in which Basil's failure is of relatively little importance. That he fails to be "perfect" is not vital. Basil's guiding principles, like Fitzgerald's were to avoid those things which would keep him from the realization of his dreams. To turn this around and set positively toward a goal of sacrificing the dreams out of goodness was not tolerable to Basil or Fitzgerald once his eyes were opened to the fact that he was a failure at this "perfect" life. Basil mistakenly thinks he can reconcile the differences between his first dreams and the dreams of the perfect life, but he realizes that it is impossible. Fitzgerald is careful to point out that Basil must not be so self-indulgent as Skiddy DeVinci.

---

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 111.



Skiddy's corruption by drink is a foil for Ganby and for Basil's pose as a self-sacrificing person. DeVinci is self-sacrificing, but of a different sort--the sort which Fitzgerald finds equally distasteful and damaging. DeVinci sacrifices his health and his life to his own self-indulgence as Fitzgerald, to his regret, does in his own life. Basil's failure to achieve a false moral perfection has led to a kind of knowledge of moral reality.

"Forging Ahead" is set the summer before Basil is to leave for college at Yale. Basil's failure in this story is different and possibly less important than some of his other failures. He and his mother are caught in a terrible financial difficulty and Basil decides to work his way through Yale. Basil is repulsed by his mother's suggestion that he go to the state university. To do that would mean to give up "the far-away East, that he had loved with a vast nostalgia since he had first read books about great cities." Fitzgerald ironically presents Basil as innocently immature and feeling that "nothing needed to be imagined there, for it was all the very stuff

of romance--life was as vivid and satisfactory as in books and dreams."<sup>57</sup>

In order to become a part of such a romantic picture, Basil, still of the opinion that everything is a matter of effort, must have money. His first failure comes as a result of his attempts to get his first real job. He applies for a job as a reporter on every newspaper in town and is "insulted by the doorkeepers, office boys and telephone girls." He does not "apply to the parents of his friends" because he is "'too stuck up.'" Which means, of course, that he is too proud. He eventually gets a job on the railroad through his neighbor, Eddie Parmelee. He lasts two days before being laid off, losing his new four-dollar overalls to theft and after "learning that nails are driven from a kneeling position."<sup>58</sup> He earned four dollars which meant that he had lost his carfare in the bargain.

As a last resort, Basil goes to his great uncle, Benjamin Reilly, for a job. Newly married, Benjamin Reilly

---

<sup>57</sup>Fitzgerald, "Forging Ahead," in Afternoon of an Author, p. 34.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-37.

is reluctant to give young Basil a position at his wholesale drug company until his wife sees that Basil would make a perfect escort for her dowdy daughter, Rhoda. After his first dinner party with some young people whom he considered "a collection of cripples," Basil realizes that he is being "exploited." Included in this dinner party is an old acquaintance of Basil's, Lewis Crum, who was attendant at Basil's disastrous first year at St. Regis. The mention of Lewis here points up the fact that Basil has been a success, despite his present financial embarrassment. Basil is not by choice included in the "collection of cripples." He belongs to that "stuck up"<sup>59</sup> crowd who is hated by this group.

After spending interminably long weeks of being burdened with Rhoda Sinclair's presence at every dance, Basil is told by Bill Kamph that Minnie Bibble is back. Basil is quite excited and it is easy to see that he had not matured so quickly as Minnie. When they meet at a dance, she is cool and at ease. She is astonished when Basil leaves her to go back to Rhoda. She does not "guess

---

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-39.

that the young man walking away from her so submissively was at the moment employed in working his way through Yale."<sup>60</sup>

As a precaution, Basil registers for the fall term at the state university. Poor Basil is caught in a terrible bind. He must maintain a position as an employee of his great uncle or forfeit his dream of Yale. Consequently, he cannot give his full attention to Minnie as he would like. Finally Minnie comes to Basil to make sure of his affections. She is soon to leave for home and her aunt and uncle, the Kampfs, are giving her a going-away dinner party at the club on the same night as a party given by Rhoda, which already has "one girl too many." Basil is invited to both parties and in despair calls both parties and says he is sick. Rhoda insists he find someone to take his place. Basil pays Eddie Parmelee to go for him. As Basil languishes in despair later in the evening, his mother receives a phone call from Mrs. Reilly, Rhoda's mother. It seems that Eddie Parmelee has sent Mr. Utsonomia, a new foreign student at the state university, to take Basil's place at Rhoda's party. Basil hears his mother

---

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

tell Mrs. Reilly that Basil does not have to worry about approval any more for she and Basil are once again solvent, having sold "the Third Street block to the Union Depot Company for four hundred thousand dollars."<sup>61</sup>

Fitzgerald handles the final segment in an interesting way. Instead of allowing the reader to share Basil's elation firsthand, he lets us hear Basil through Mr. Utsonomia's ears. As he sits on the veranda at the dance, Mr. Utsonomia is sure that he hears Mr. Basil Lee propose marriage to a young lady. If he is taking Basil's place at a party, why is Basil there?

This story depends too much on tricks to be very effective. Basil's attitude toward the financial crises is mature in some respects and childish in others. He takes a mature stand in wanting to do his share to make his own way, but he never considers that there might be something more important to his mother than his dream of an education at an Eastern university.

Basil's failure in this story is his inability to sacrifice in order to achieve his goals and aspirations. Fitzgerald attempts in this story to point out that Basil

---

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-49.

is not adept at sacrificing for his dreams. Working is in accordance with his ideas of progress toward a goal, but sacrificing one's dream girl does not come under that same category. The point of this story is that Basil sees the importance of the power of money. He is deprived of his own dreams of an education at Yale by a lack of money, and he could be as easily stripped of his girl for the same reason. Money buys Bill Parmalee; it buys Basil for Rhoda, at least temporarily. It is disgusting to Fitzgerald, but he is not unaware that it is a fact in the American society that "money talks." He makes a strong point of his disgust by the trick of the phone call which reveals that Basil's life is changed by the acquisition of money. What Basil fails to do is to live the "American Dream." He tries to achieve through work and fails. He loses his overalls, his carfare, and his college dreams, and he nearly loses his girl. Most important, Basil realizes, as Fitzgerald does, that the American Dream comes true only for those who have the money to buy it, and that he has, at best, a limited control over his own destiny.

"Basil and Cleopatra," the last of the series, takes Basil up to his freshman year at Yale. The success

of his performance on the football field overshadows his failure to hold the attention of Minnie Bibble. As the story opens, Basil and Minnie are both in Mobile, a "soft . . . Southern city" where "the houses on either side of the street were gently faded behind proud, protecting vines." In addition to some characters the reader has met in other stories, there is a new character with that crazy name, Littleboy LeMoyne, a gallant Southern gentleman. It appears that though Basil has met Minnie at the train she has "glanced over his shoulder and fallen in love with"<sup>62</sup> LeMoyne. Basil is not only aware of this situation, but he is seething over some rumor he had heard earlier in the fall about Minnie's fickleness.

Although Minnie is throwing Basil over for LeMoyne, she realizes that

. . . there was something else in his [Basil's] face-- a mark, a hint of destiny, a persistence that was more than will, that was rather a necessity of pressing its own pattern on the world, of having its way.<sup>63</sup>

She decides not to let go of him yet. She promises kisses if he will not return to school to study as soon as he

---

<sup>62</sup>Fitzgerald, "Basil and Cleopatra," Afternoon of an Author, pp. 51-52.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

planned. Basil, like Fitzgerald, has problems with grades and he barely makes it into Yale because of these problems.

It is interesting to note that when Basil does get to college he rooms with George Dorsey, who is familiar from "The Perfect Life," and with Brick Wales. Wales had been Basil's roommate for a few days in the first year at St. Regis. Wales had left their room because of Basil's reputation for bossiness and his unpopularity. The fact that Basil is now rooming with Wales indicates that there has been a change in Basil's status over the several years. He is no longer a social outcast.

Basil goes to see Minnie at her private school in the fall and finds that she wants to be "friends." He is crushed, and to add insult to injury he receives a copy of a picture of Minnie in the mail after he returns to school. The picture is a copy of one which Basil had picked as his favorite during the summer. The inscription, "'L. L. from E. G. L. B. Trains are bad for the heart, " puzzles him, but he finally realizes that Minnie has accidentally switched pictures and Basil has received the picture meant for Littleboy LeMoynes. The inscription is in reference to a train trip north that the southern crowd had made together and to an embarrassing episode which



occurred with Littleboy and Minnie. Basil has heard (from Fat Gaspar, a mutual friend) about their getting caught in a compartment petting with the door locked. This is a sure indication that it is all over with him and Minnie and he "threw himself on his bed, shaken with wild laughter."<sup>64</sup>

The story moves forward to a freshman football practice. The scene is a dream of Fitzgerald's which he never really got tired of re-living. Basil has been ineligible for football because of poor grades, but a coach notices him on his first day of eligible practice and indicates that Basil has potential. As a result, Basil makes the squad, but he is third string quarterback. He gets his first break when one of the quarterbacks breaks an arm and the other is injured in the game with Princeton freshmen on whose team Littleboy LeMoyne plays. Basil gets to go in to replace the injured player and helps his team win the game.

After Basil and Littleboy meet outside the locker rooms, and LeMoyne tells Basil that Minnie has thrown him over for a classmate of Basil's named Jubal. Basil can

---

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 59-60.

see that LeMoyne's "face is miserable."<sup>65</sup> He tells Basil that though Minnie was not at the game she will be at the Lawn Club Dance for Yale students that evening. Basil dines with Jobena Dorsey and her brother, George, and they attend the dance together. Jobena encourages Basil to try to forget Minnie. She tries to understand when Basil's conversation reveals that he has put Minnie Bibble in a class with such notable heartbreakers as Cleopatra, Salome, and Madame DuBarry.

When Basil dances with Minnie he is dizzy with emotion. While they are dancing Littleboy LeMoyne breaks into the dance, drunk and melancholy over his first lost love, Minnie. He creates quite a commotion and has to be led out of the dance to sober up. Minnie is upset and tries to explain to Basil that he is very understanding and that she doesn't "want to be mean to anybody; things just happen." Minnie treats Basil in much the same manner that Judy Jones treated Dexter Green in "Winter Dreams," but this time the man behaves differently. Basil refuses to look at Minnie and declares that he understands that "when a thing's over, it's over." This new Basil knows

---

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

that "he had made all his mistakes for this time" and now "there was nothing to do but escape with his pride." He steps to the veranda and reflects much as Jay Gatsby did in The Great Gatsby:

There was a flurry of premature snow in the air and the stars looked cold. Staring up at them he saw that they were his stars as always--symbols of ambition, struggle and glory. The wind blew through them, trumpeting that high white note for which he always listened, and the thin-blown clouds, stripped for battle, passed in review. The scene was of an unparalleled brightness and magnificence, and only the practiced eye of the commander saw that one star was no longer there.<sup>66</sup>

Fitzgerald's use of the image of the commander indicts that Basil is finally in command of his fate. No one but he can see that one of his stars which represent "ambition, struggle, and glory"<sup>67</sup> is gone. He has failed in his struggle to win the love of Minnie Bibble, but he will continue in his quest for bigger and better goals.

"Basil and Cleopatra" is one of the weakest of the series.. It, like "Forging Ahead," makes too much use of trick and fate. Basil is not so clear to Fitzgerald here

---

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-69.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

as he was in "The Captured Shadow," "He Thinks He's Wonderful," of "The Freshest Boy." Basil, like other Fitzgerald heroes, Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby, Dick Diver, Amory Blaine, and to some degree Monroe Stahr, is in part, Fitzgerald himself. To study the Basil Duke Lee stories is to study the childhood of Amory Blaine, the hero of Fitzgerald's first novel, This Side of Paradise. Though Amory was endowed with things which Basil lacked, such as money and social position, he experienced the same sort of frustrations as Basil Duke Lee. He was fresh and suffered for it as Basil did; he yearned for power as Basil did, and he lost one of his "stars" as Basil lost Minnie. Yet for all the loss, Basil has learned to accept it with dignity, and without going to pieces. This acceptance is another major step toward adulthood.

Richard Lehan said in F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction that Fitzgerald's fiction deals with "three realms of time--time idealized, time sentimentalized, and time regretted."<sup>68</sup> The Basil Duke Lee stories easily fall into the first two categories, but only barely

---

<sup>68</sup>Richard D. Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1956), p. 59.

into the last. Fitzgerald says in "He Thinks He's Wonderful" that

. . . there is a time when youth fluctuates hourly between one world and another--pushed ceaselessly forward into unprecedented experiences vainly trying to struggle back to the days when nothing had to be paid for.<sup>69</sup>

He speaks of Basil's behavior that particular summer as "madness."<sup>70</sup> Coupled inextricably with his preoccupation with failure is Fitzgerald's worship of youth and vitality. Gordon Sterrett in "May Day" has lost his vitality, his ability to cope with life. He has wasted his vitality, both moral and financial, and he is "bankrupt."<sup>71</sup> In a letter to his daughter, Fitzgerald said, "Our danger is imagining that we have resources--material and moral--which we haven't got."<sup>72</sup> Basil's failures stem from his inability to understand and profit from his own strengths and weaknesses, but out of the failures come increased understanding and maturity. Basil is a dreamer like

---

<sup>69</sup>Fitzgerald, "He Thinks He's Wonderful," in Taps at Reveille, p. 49.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Fitzgerald, "May Day," in The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 87.

<sup>72</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 56.

Anthony Patch in The Beautiful and Damned about whom Fitzgerald said, "no one dreams, without his dreams becoming fantastic nightmares of indecision and regret."<sup>73</sup> Time and again Basil dreams of power, glory, and wealth and fails miserably in his quest for them.

The irony of the entire Basil Duke Lee series lies in the fact that despite his repeated failures, Basil is still considered by Fitzgerald and the reader to be a young man of some promise. Later, when considering Pat Hobby we will see that Pat has no promise, but he has a certain perseverance which makes him another of Fitzgerald's ironic characters.

After growing up in an atmosphere of, as he said, "crack, wisecrack and counter crack,"<sup>74</sup> Fitzgerald was aware of failure. The power of his rugged, pioneering McQuillan relatives' money over his mannered, weak, ineffective father was evident even to a child. So much emphasis was placed on money in Fitzgerald's home that as

---

<sup>73</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 282.

<sup>74</sup>Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald, A Critical Portrait, p. 8.

a child he had a horror of being poor and having to go to the poorhouse. Little it seemed to matter that his father was a descendant of genteel southerners if he could not and did not sacrifice his body and soul to the pursuit of money. Fitzgerald was able, when he matured, to see the virtues of each philosophy, and to combine the two to make his own. He valued courtesy, honor, and the finer virtues as much as he valued the Christian work ethic. Almost without bitterness he is able to see that the American Dream comes true only for those who have the money to buy it and make it happen. He knows how hard he worked for his first success, but he would like to think that he has preserved the virtue of being honest to himself in the process. Late in life he wrote to his daughter, "life is essentially a cheat and its conditions are those of defeat, and that the redeeming things are not 'happiness and pleasure' but the deeper satisfactions that come out of struggle."<sup>75</sup> His struggle, in his own words was, "I must hold in balance the sense of the futility of effort and the sense of the necessity to struggle; the conviction of the inevitability of failure and still the determination to 'succeed.'"<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 306.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

Riches . . . put a man above the mass, gave him freedom and mobility, granted him the opportunity to develop the finest qualities of his nature, afforded him the heroic stature that made his success a triumph or his failure a tragedy,<sup>77</sup>

says Charles Weir, Jr., in the article, "An Invite with Gilded Edges."

Such statements form a criteria for criticism of the Basil Duke Lee stories. All the stories include a kind of nostalgic irony. While he longs for the past through these stories, Fitzgerald is able to see the pain and suffering Basil feels. Some critics have dismissed the Basil Duke Lee stories as an attempt by Fitzgerald to ease his troubled mind during a time of stress. It might be said that he used them as an escape from the reality of his circumstances. This criticism is invalid if one considers how each story contains not only a vision of "time idealized,"<sup>78</sup> but also of "time regretted."<sup>79</sup> Would someone

---

<sup>77</sup>Charles Weir, "An Invite with Gilded Edges," a study of F. Scott Fitzgerald, in F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work, Alfred Kazin, ed. (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1951), p. 141.

<sup>78</sup>Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction, p. 59.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.



seeking respite from tension wish to re-live the torture of Basil's first year at boarding school as Fitzgerald does in "The Freshest Boy?" Escape was not his reason for writing these stories. He was formulating a philosophy, perhaps even unintentionally. He was expressing what he knew of life, success, and failure. Basil became aware of his individual limitations, his lack of animal magnetism, and his lack of courage in "The Scandal Detectives." He became aware of the failure of others to control life in "The Freshest Boy" where he disproves Fitzgerald's earlier belief that "Life was something you dominated if you were any good. Life yielded easily to intelligence and effort, or to what proportion could be mustered of both."<sup>80</sup>

Basil learns the hard way that he must control his almost uncontrollable exuberance in "He Thinks He's Wonderful." Again, implicit in his success are those events which will give birth to his failure. He makes a hit with the girls and it goes to his head. He makes a hit with Minnie's family, then ruins it all with too much of a good thing: talking.

---

<sup>80</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 69.

In "A Night at the Fair" he sees that the virtues of kindness and respect are not the things valued by the wealthy Gladys VonSchellinger. She is attracted to something Basil does not have: animal magnetism. In "The Captured Shadow," probably the best of the lost, Basil's failure is more mature and complex than the other previous failures. He is able to control and manipulate life to his fancy, but he finds a hollowness in success. Fitzgerald may be re-exploring his own feelings in the aftermath of his early and sudden success. Perhaps more should be made of the way in which the success was gained. Little Ham had to suffer the mumps in order for the play to be successful. Considering Fitzgerald's own maturity when writing these stories it would be foolish to believe that there is anything more than irony in his statement that not telling Ham about Bobby's mumps was "the worst thing he had ever done in his life."<sup>81</sup> Basil is, in the words of Edwin Fussell, "Driven by inner forces that compel him towards the personal realization of romantic wonder" and

---

<sup>81</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Captured Shadow," Taps at Reveille, p. 82.

he is "destroyed . . . or, at best, he is purged of these unholy fires, chastened, and reduced."<sup>82</sup>

"The Perfect Life" is a clever story which makes Fitzgerald's stand on moral responsibility clear. Basil will not be the success he hopes to be by simply sacrificing those things he wants most. He has enough trouble achieving the few small successes to give up his chances because of the desires of someone else. Basically, it seems that such a philosophy is selfish, but this is not a valid criticism when one considers why anyone goes through the ritual of self-sacrifice. Fitzgerald was probably aware that those who sacrifice as John Ganby does, do it because what they want can be gained in only this way. Basil sees it as selfish and fake for him to adhere to a philosophy based on something less than the truth. Basil fails to achieve "The Perfect Life," but upon closer scrutiny, it does not seem perfect after all.

Even though Fitzgerald refused to re-work and refine the later Basil Duke Lee stories into a more tightly structured group, the reader can easily see Basil's maturation

---

<sup>82</sup>Edwin Fussell, "Fitzgerald's Brave New World," in F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 44.

process. Basil becomes increasingly aware of the real world in the series, but his maturity continues to lead him on toward new failures. Though his enthusiasm rarely flags, he is constantly unsuccessful in many of his endeavors. Basil Duke Lee, like Fitzgerald, can "speak with the authority of failure."<sup>83</sup>

For all of Basil's and Fitzgerald's financial problems, Basil is not concerned primarily with money. His goal is always tied to some concept of himself and his dignity. For all his failures, he is constantly improving as a person, not deteriorating. The stories do not promise that Basil will ultimately attain anything but this personal integrity, but he does get that.

Fitzgerald, at a time of his life when he is successful but under stress, conjures up Basil, who in some ways represents his values and ideals. Later, when Fitzgerald's life has gone sour, he conjures up Pat Hobby--a much more wretched failure who is the antithesis of Fitzgerald's ideals. Pat possibly represents what Fitzgerald fears he could become, just as Basil represents what good qualities Fitzgerald hopes he has acquired.

---

<sup>83</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, p. 181.

## C H A P T E R     I V

### A COMPARISON OF CHARACTERS

The seventeen Pat Hobby stories were Fitzgerald's last completed work. They were first published in Esquire magazine beginning in January 1940, continuing until May 1941, five months after Fitzgerald's death. According to Arnold Gingrich, the editor of Esquire at the time, Fitzgerald intended to compile them into a book. He died, however, without even being able to revise some of the later stories.

Between the writing of the Basil Duke Lee stories and the writing of the Pat Hobby stories a great deal of tragedy had occurred in Fitzgerald's life. His wife Zelda suffered a severe mental breakdown early in the 1930's. Fitzgerald became an alcoholic and suffered a serious mental depression some years later. After the first agony of his depression had passed, Fitzgerald tried to assess his broken life in the only way he was able to understand it: by writing about it. Part of this catharsis was the writing of several articles and essays which first appeared in magazines and were later collected

and edited by Fitzgerald's friend and critic, Edmund Wilson. Wilson titled the collection The Crack Up, using the words Fitzgerald himself had used to describe what had happened to his life.

In one of these essays, "Pasting It Together," Fitzgerald tries to decide what course of action he must take in order to survive his ordeal:

So, since I could no longer fulfill the obligations that life had set for me or that I had set for myself, why not slay the empty shell who had been posturing at it for four years? I must continue to be a writer because that was my only way of life, but I would cease any attempts to be a person.<sup>1</sup>

An understanding of the word, "person" in the previous quotation is the key to the explanation of Fitzgerald's re-defined philosophy. Basil Duke Lee is sitting . . . "upon the still unhatched eggs of the mid-twentieth century,"<sup>2</sup> while Pat Hobby tries desperately to survive "the fearful forties."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps because of their ages or

---

<sup>1</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, (New York: New York: New Directions, 1945), pp. 81-82.

<sup>2</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Scandal Detectives, "In Taps at Reveille (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Pat Hobby Stories (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 54.

because of their times these characters represent a different kind of person haunted by the same spectre of failure. The "person" who is Basil Duke Lee is different from the "person" who is Pat Hobby. It is possible to say that their motives are different and that therein lies the difference between them. Basil Duke Lee strives to become a "person," to be popular, powerful, wealthy, and happy because these things are the symbols of the good life. He is aware of his limitations and of his self-indulgences, but he still tries to overcome these obstacles in his quest for fame. Basil Duke Lee works for his goal in spite of these weaknesses and faults, but Pat Hobby schemes for his goal because of his weaknesses and faults. In his account of Fitzgerald's writing career, Aaron Latham says, "Over the course of Fitzgerald's writing career, there had been a shift from the nostalgia for what is lost in the past to a nostalgia for what will be lost in the future."<sup>4</sup> Pat Hobby represents, to some extent, what Fitzgerald sees as the horror of the future. Pat has lost that magical

---

<sup>4</sup>Aaron Lathan, Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), p. 269.

glory that Basil Duke Lee had. Pat is more concerned with getting by than he is with any romantic dream of the future. Pat lives in the magical, make-believe world of Hollywood, but ironically, his life is not touched by the glamor of make-believe. His bitter poverty is juxtaposed with the affluence and power of the studio heads and stars. Pat is unable to realize what has happened to his life. He remembers being wealthy and productive, but he is unable to recapture his fame and fortune. What are the reasons behind his fall? Is it something he has said which got back to the wrong ears? Is it his political leanings? Pat asks these questions over and over but never seriously questions his own limited capabilities.

While Basil Duke Lee is "imaginative" and "bright,"<sup>5</sup> Pat is described as having "old eyes,"<sup>6</sup> "thin gray hair,"<sup>7</sup> and having scarcely opened a book in a decade. Whereas Basil makes plans for his future, Pat merely

---

<sup>5</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Scandal Detectives," in Taps at Reveille, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Fitzgerald, "Pat Hobby's Secret," in The Pat Hobby Stories, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup>Fitzgerald, "On the Trail of Pat Hobby," in The Pat Hobby Stories, p. 121.



schemes for his existence. Basil yearns for a bright and promising future of power and popularity, but Pat yearns for pleasure and luxury. Even while he has a job, Pat's day is a "long empty dream."<sup>8</sup> Pat has no future and he is no more disillusioned by failure than is Basil Duke Lee. He knows that implicit in each of his schemes are those things which will cause his failure. Though he has a different story with a different point of view, Pat is yet another character of Fitzgerald's who talks "with the authority of failure."<sup>9</sup>

Though all the Pat Hobby stories deal with failure, only a few are worthy of comment. The stories may be grouped as those in which Pat comes to some realization of his own limitations and the real implications of his failure and those in which he merely outsmarts himself and does not realize what has happened to him.

Some of the poorest stories deal with Pat's theft of someone else's material. "A Man in the Way" concerns

---

<sup>8</sup>Fitzgerald, "Pat Hobby, Putative Father," in The Pat Hobby Stories, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup>Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, p. 181.

Pat's theft of a new writer's story. "Teamed with Genius" deals with the theft of an English co-writer's script. In "The Homes of the Stars" Pat "steals" someone's business for a five dollar tip.

Other stories are so poorly written that it is hard to categorize them thematically. "Pat Hobby's Secret" is about what happens to Pat when he goes in search of a fellow writer in an attempt to find out the end of a story.

Pat's unsavory clandestine dealings are the subject of "Pat Hobby's College Days," "No Harm Trying," and "On the Trail of Pat Hobby." "Pat Hobby--Putative Father" is a cynical story of Pat's only meeting with his son, who is now the crown prince step-son of a foreign raja in an Arabian country.

"Fun in an Artist's Studio" tells what happens when Pat poses for a portrait for a ruthless woman artist who wants to capture Pat's face as an aged and desperate drunk. Two others, "Pat Hobby's Secret" and "No Harm Trying" are weak stories of deceit and bumbling treachery. Unquestionably, Fitzgerald intended to re-work and revise all of these stories, but he died before he was able to do

so. For the purpose of this paper it is as well to leave them out of the discussion as they add little or nothing to the subject.

Those stories which merit some comment are "Pat Hobby's Christmas Wish, "A Patriotic Short," "Pat Hobby's Preview," "Pat Hobby Does his Bit," "Pat Hobby and Orson Welles," "Boil Some Water--Lots of It," "Two Old Timers," and "Mightier Than the Sword."

The first of the Pat Hobby stories to be published was "Pat Hobby's Christmas Wish." It begins on Christmas eve in a Hollywood movie studio. The plot involves a letter Pat's new secretary has kept secret for a number of years. She leads Pat to believe that this letter will be useful as a blackmail scheme against Pat's present boss and his secretary's former boss, Mr. Gooddorf. Pat Hobby, who "knew the game from twenty years' experience," is temporarily working at a four week writing job which will not be extended because of the poor quality of his work. When his new secretary says she has an incriminating note of Mr. Gooddorf's "cash, cars, girls, swimming pools swam in a glittering montage before Pat's eyes." Perhaps Pat can change the awful present into a golden future of

luxury. Pat had a "brief period when he had headed a scenario department" but ironically has been "reduced back to a writer."<sup>10</sup>

Pat initiates the blackmail scheme by luring Mr. Gooddorf to a bar where he, Pat, and the secretary can make a deal. Pat informs Mr. Gooddorf that he has information that links him to the death of a director a few years past. For the suppression of such information, Pat wants to be made a director immediately--tomorrow, in fact. It is Pat's Christmas wish. In Pat's own words, "I've had a hell of a time. I've waited so long."<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately for Pat, Mr. Gooddorf laughs in his face and discounts the importance of the note.

Pat has outsmarted himself. The note was not a confession of guilt after all, and all of Pat's dreams dissolve before his eyes. He is defeated by his own desires for power somewhat in the same way as Basil Duke Lee. Pat is a scoundrel, but not unlikeable. His charm,

---

<sup>10</sup>Fitzgerald, "Pat Hobby's Christmas Wish," in The Pat Hobby Stories, pp. 1-8.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

however, serves to make him less a comic character than he could be.

The motif of lost youth is evident here. Miss Kagle, Pat's new secretary is "thirty-six, handsome, faded, tired." She tells Pat that Mr. Gooddorf has had her transferred out of his office because "I reminded him he was getting on."<sup>12</sup> Both Pat and Miss Kagle are has-beens. Pat receives no bonus at Christmas; Miss Kagle receives only ten dollars, and Mr. Gooddorf laughs at them both.

The theme of the story centers on this last fact. Mr. Gooddorf is obviously not a young man but is near Pat's age. The thing which makes him different from Pat and Miss Kagle is that he has power and money, and because he has them, he can challenge Pat with such remarks as "Since when have you been decent," and "You showing up here with a halo!"<sup>13</sup> Mr. Gooddorf has a job suitable for a man of forty-nine. It is the kind of job Pat wishes for in his Christmas wish.

Mr. Gooddorf tells Pat that he should have been "cracked down on" when he was a successful writer, meaning

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

that Pat should have been told how to take care of himself and his money when he had something to salvage. But, as Gooddorf, says, both Pat and the murdered man in the note were "amusing guys," and no one considers any concern for a mere writer or director. Gooddorf's uncaring attitude shows Fitzgerald's philosophy that the wealthy, whether in Hollywood, New York, or St. Paul, have very little concern for the less fortunate of their fellows. But the blame for Pat's failure cannot be put on another character. The theme of failure runs through all the stories in this series, as it does in the Basil Duke Lee stories. In "Pat Hobby's Christmas Wish" it seems that Pat's failure is due to his own self-indulgence rather than to fate or to the actions of others toward him. Pat's remark that he has "been cracked down on . . . Plenty,"<sup>14</sup> serves to point up his feelings of self-pity. Pat is more sinister in this story than he appears to be in some of the later stories. One almost feels that his failure and punishment, while poignant and sad, are justified. One of the aspects of his character which makes Pat even more pathetic is that

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

he is concerned entirely with money and seems to care very little for his own personal pride and dignity.

Pat is portrayed more sympathetically in "Boil Some Water--Lots of It." He is working on "a 'polish job,' about the only kind he ever got nowadays." The only work he has done is the writing of one line, "Boil some water--lots of it." This line had "sprung into his mind full grown as he had read the script."<sup>15</sup> He decides to go to the First Aid Station on the lot to see the doctor on duty in hopes of having some sort of inspiration for what should follow his one line. The doctor is out when Pat arrives at the office, but the nurse, who is new to the job, accepts Pat's offer of lunch.

The degree to which Pat has slipped from grace is evident in the scene at the commissary. He and the nurse sit near the "Big Table" where those of prominence sit. Pat remembers that he "had been a familiar figure at the Big Table; often in his golden prime he had dined in the private canteens of executives." But now there were new faces at the Big Table which "looked at him with the

---

<sup>15</sup>Fitzgerald, "Boil Some Water--Lots of It," in The Pat Hobby Stories, pp. 21-22.

universal Hollywood suspicion." However, he tells the nurse, "I usually sit over there."<sup>16</sup>

What appears to be a costumed "extra"<sup>17</sup> attempts to sit down and eat at the Big Table after being told that the table is reserved. He becomes belligerent and insists on his right to sit where he pleases. He seats himself and begins to make remarks about the quality of the film he is in, calling it trash and other unflattering names. Everyone at the Big Table is immobilized by disbelief and shock. But, like a knight defending the castle of his leige lord, Pat Hobby grabs a tray and slams the intruder on the side of the head, knocking him unconscious and drawing blood. Immediately someone jumps in to explain that the person who appeared to be an extra was really the writer of the film who was playing a joke on the producer, Max Leam.

Pat Hobby, like Basil Duke Lee in "That Kind of Party," knows that "he would have to take the rap" for having done what he thought should be done. Basil tips

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 25.



over the wheelchair of a tyrannical cripple and Pat Hobby attacks an intruder who insults the ranking royalty, and because they behaved nobly they will be punished. In Pat's words, "He alone in this crisis, real or imaginary, had acted. He alone had played the man, while those stuffed shirts let themselves be insulted and abused." The unfeeling workers in an industry will not rise to the call of chivalry. Pat Hobby, the artist, the failure, will act "the man." He champions the character and rights of others while lesser beings who are interested only in material gains sit idly by, too unemotional to respond. When the doctor arrives to attend to the wounded man, his first order to the waitress is to "Boil some water! Lots of it."<sup>18</sup> Pat does not have to imagine any more. He is sure what will follow this line now.

This story is a good example of Fitzgerald's acceptance of the failure of moral values in the face of wealth, the failure of the Romantist in the materialistic world, the failure of an individual in a mass society, and the failure of an artist in an industrial world. Everyone

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

except Pat reacts predictably in the face of a threat. Pat's actions and motives sprung from a well whose waters no longer are valuable or even desirable. Thus, the few good impulses he had are out of place in his world.

"Boil Some Water--Lots of it" is one of several really well written stories of the group. In it Fitzgerald grapples with a theme worthy of his talents. In this story, and in perhaps two others in the series, is Pat endowed with the qualities which might make him heroic in any sense. Pat springs to action almost by instinct. He protects the name of that which he respects and he does it naturally and heroically. He is shocked by the behavior of the others. He cannot believe their frozen reactions. However, with his typical ironic twist, Fitzgerald makes sure that Pat is not a winner. Pat has walked into a situation, all parts of which he does not understand, but his reactions are swift. Unfortunately, his heroism is unnecessary and dangerous in this situation, and Pat knows now without being told what line will follow "Boil Some Water--lots of it."<sup>18</sup>

"Pat Hobby and Orson Welles" is a clever display of some of Fitzgerald's attitudes about failure. Pat is

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

unable to get on the studio lot because of a new ruling. Over the years as his prominence as a writer declined, "The gift of hope had remained . . . through his misfortunes,"<sup>20</sup> and he feels that if he is to find work he must be within easy reach when the producer needed a writer in a hurry. Being banned from the lot literally takes Pat's livelihood from him since he has eaten property food and worn costume department clothes for years. Pat considers the studio lot his home and he resents this new man, Orson Welles, for he feels that Welles has literally pushed him out of the gate as in "an old Chaplin picture about a crowded street car where the entrance of one man at the rear forces another out in front." Even though Welles works at another studio, Pat desperately appeals to Harold Marcus, "one of the most powerful men in the whole picture world," by explaining that he (unlike Welles who is so radical) wants only to be permitted "to leave things as they are" and watch the film industry "grow,"<sup>21</sup> from on the lot.

---

<sup>20</sup>Fitzgerald, "Pat Hobby and Orson Welles," in The Pat Hobby Stories, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-47.

He gets his wish and returns to the lot where everyone seems to be aware of the animosity he feels for Orson Welles and teases him unmercifully about Welles. When Pat tries to get a loan from a hair-dresser on the lot, he must undergo an embarrassing stunt to get the money. The hair-dresser glues a fake beard on Pat because he says he thinks Pat will look like Orson Welles with it on. Desperate for the ten dollar loan, Pat consents to the beard. After it is applied, the hair-dresser offers to drive Pat to the lot but secretly puts a sign which says "Orson Welles" in the rear window of the car and drives slowly around the lot for everyone to see. As they drive down the main studio street, they pass a small group of men, one of whom is Mr. Marcus, by whose generosity Pat is on the lot. As they pass, Mr. Marcus apparently has a heart attack, and one of the men rushes up to the car which, because of the sign, he thought contained Orson Welles, and asks Pat, "Mr. Welles, our Mr. Marcus has had a heart attack. Can we use your car to get him to the infirmary?"<sup>22</sup> Pat is appalled, jumps from the opposite door, and escapes.

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

Pat's fear of being shoved out by a newcomer is yet another way in which Fitzgerald explains his philosophy that those who have past experience and success to their credit can be removed by upstarts who have only money or notoriety to their credit. The theme is a variation on the same theme of money and power versus talent and morals, and Pat's reaction again shows incompetence and fear of authority.

This story possibly springs from an actual incident in which Fitzgerald wrote himself a letter asking about his own health and sent it to himself. In the land of Hollywood make-believe, Fitzgerald had a problem of lost identity much like the one which Pat experiences. When Fitzgerald came to Hollywood for the last time to make, first, enough money to pay his enormous debt, later, to make a conquest of the industry, and still later, to make a last stand against disease and dissipation, he was almost an unknown to many members of the film colony. In fact, Bud Schulberg, who was to become a close friend, was shocked to find that Fitzgerald was still alive and would be working with him on a script. "Pat Hobby and Orson Welles," though not a very good story and not very well

done, illustrates how one's sense of identity can be warped and distorted by the magic of make-believe (symbolized by the beard) and the power of new talent (symbolized by Welles). Pat's reluctant trip into the identity of Orson Welles points out to him and the reader that though another's life may seem more profitable, more glamorous, seen from the inside it is fraught with its own problems. Consequently, when Pat is mistaken for Orson Welles by Mr. Marcus, who has a heart attack at the sight of Welles on the studio grounds, Pat rushes to the nearest bar and has drinks set up for every "muff"<sup>23</sup> in the place as a token of his new respect for Orson Welles' own problems as a celebrity and, perhaps, in recognition for a moment of his own limitations.

In "Pat Hobby Does his Bit," Pat, now a "dolorous and precarious forty-nine," is desperate for money to pay the North Hollywood Finance and Loan Company for a loan on his car. As the story opens, Pat is trying to secure a loan from a stunt man extra who is on the set of a film being shot. Accidentally, Pat gets into one of the scenes,

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

and it turns out that as soon as this scene is shot, the English actress who stars in it leaves hurriedly for another engagement in England, leaving a film with one man as "The Rat" in all but one scene and Pat Hobby as "The Rat" in that scene. Consequently, some scenes of the film must be shot again with Pat in the role of "The Rat." Pat enjoys his new venture because it is easy and it provides him with money both to pay the finance company and money with which to get to the Santa Anita race track. Pat's last scene is on location and it involves his wearing a steel corset and being run over by car. Pat objects, but as he refuses to play the scene, he is tormented by the appearance of the collector from the North Hollywood Finance Company. Pat reluctantly agrees to go through the scene for the sake of his car, "his coupe, his faithful pal and servant since 1934, companion of his misfortune, his only certain home."<sup>24</sup>

The ending of the story is rather flat, and it can surely be assumed that Fitzgerald intended to revise it. Pat remembers hearing someone call "Action" and the sound

---

<sup>24</sup>Fitzgerald, "Pat Hobby Does His Bit," in The Pat Hobby Stories, pp. 82-90.

of the approaching car, then he faints or is knocked out. When he comes to, he is still lying in the ditch in the steel corset and he is unable to get up. His shouts bring a lot guard who helps him and who explains that Pat was probably forgotten in the excitement of the star's getting his leg broken as the car turned over on him. Pat's last reaction in the story is a "fierce pride" at being "someone to be reckoned with after years of neglect." He is angry, but he is perversely pleased that he had "managed to hold up the picture once more."<sup>25</sup> Instead of failure, perhaps Pat has scored a small victory, at least in his own eyes. Through happenings beyond his control he has become the instrument of postponement again in this movie. This peculiarly twisted ending of this story gives it what importance it can have. Pat should be feeling very low because he has been completely forgotten by the film makers. His feelings are so distorted, however, that he takes a diabolical glee in his part in holding up the picture's production, and considers his part in the action as a triumph. Fitzgerald again uses cynicism to deliver

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 91.



his message that the world of Hollywood is not an ideal situation for a writer.

Perhaps here, as well as in the story about Orson Welles, Fitzgerald enables Pat to see some of his own limitations. Pat knows that his part in the delay is not really very important, but he shows the spitefulness of the incompetent by gloating.

The plot of "Pat Hobby's Preview" is again the theft of someone else's material. As the story opens Pat is trying to get tickets for the preview of a new movie which he claims he has helped write. Jack Berners, the producer, tells him that the other screenwriter, Ward Wainwright, is angry about Pat's claim, but that he, Berners, will try to get Pat some tickets for the preview.

Pat is described as being made of "sterner stuff," and of having been "dogged" by a "harsh fate" for "nearly a decade." His decline from prominence is "at a pace that would have dizzied a lesser man." While he has a drink in a nearby bar, Pat spots a "lost girl."<sup>26</sup> He goes to her rescue; they introduce themselves, and Pat makes a date

---

<sup>26</sup>Fitzgerald, "Pat Hobby's Preview," in The Pat Hobby Stories, pp. 93-94.

with her for his preview in the evening after stretching the truth a bit to impress her.

Pat picks up his tickets, buys a new hat and shirt, and later picks up Eleanor, the "lost girl," and they go for a drink and dinner. Then they go to the studio theatre where they must pass through a throng of fans to get to the entrance. Pat presents his tickets and all goes well until they are a few paces inside the theatre. The doorman grabs Pat and tells him the tickets which he presented are for a burlesque show downtown. Under the circumstances, however, "Pat was cool." He told the doorman to go get Jack Berners and he would verify Pat's identity. Before this can be done, however, the other writer, Ward Wainwright, comes bursting out of the theatre and denies any claim to the picture which he says looks like "the prop boy directed it."<sup>27</sup>

Eleanor, who has become embarrassed by their situation and by the "jeering jests" of the small group of fans who have witnessed the spectacle, is aware that Pat is "rather simple,"<sup>28</sup> but she feels a surge of confidence as she enters the theatre on the arm of the man whose name will stand alone as the screenwriter of this film.

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-100.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

The theme of the story is again failure. Though Pat gets his name on a film, it is a poor film. Though he gets to go to the preview with a "Cute Little Blonde," it is only after severe embarrassment in front of a crowd. Pat Hobby, the man of twenty-years experience is pictured on a downslide "with the help of every poisonous herb that blossoms between Washington Boulevard and Ventura, between Santa Monica and Vine."<sup>29</sup>

"Pat Hobby's Preview" is one of the best of the series. In it Fitzgerald has made the reader see how desperate Pat is for his name to appear on a film even if that film is a really poor one. He has lost what personal pride he may have had, and he is sadly unembarrassed by the scene at the theatre. He is willing to be insulted because he wants the screen credit so badly. Pat is the epitome of failure. His desperation has driven out all his pride and twisted his morals to the point that he is almost inhuman in his lack of feeling. With a pathetically false feeling of youth, in Eleanor's presence, Pat "felt young again, authoritative and active, with a hand in many schemes."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 93-94.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

Pat experiences a nostalgia for the past without being able to recapture it. Yet even those things he wants--youth and credit for a bad movie are a sign of his shallowness.

"A Patriotic Short" is the one story of the series in which Fitzgerald shows dramatically Pat Hobby's grasping for the days of past glory and fame. As Pat labors over a script about a Civil War hero for Jack Berners, he reminisces about his once opulent past success. The subject of the movie on which he is working makes Pat's mind continually turn back to the time he was asked to lunch in the private dining room when the President of the United States came to visit the studio. Pat's own

. . . memory of the luncheon was palpitant with glamor. The Great Man had asked some questions about pictures and had told a joke and Pat had laughed and laughed with the others--all of them solid men together--rich, happy and successful.<sup>31</sup>

Pat continues through this story to travel from the present to the past until finally he steps to the hall for a drink of water and is ignored by a new star and several executives. It is important to note that he is not snubbed,

---

<sup>31</sup>Fitzgerald, "A Patriotic Short," in The Pat Hobby Stories, p. 118.

To be snubbed, one must be noticed or cared about, but Pat is only ignored by these people. The idea of such an end for a man who had been "solid, rich, happy and successful" and who had met and talked with the President is almost more than Pat can bear. He goes back to his office and sobs over his script, tormented by what fate has seen fit to do to him. This story is one of the best of the series, exemplifying Fitzgerald's point that the past accomplishments of one's life are of no value at all in the world which deals with the youth and wealth of the present.

In "A Patriotic Short" Fitzgerald has expressed his own feelings of dejection, rejection, despondency, frustration, and desperation through the character of Pat Hobby. He, like Pat, is chained to his commitment to a job. Fitzgerald's job and Pat's job are similar, but their motives are somewhat different. Pat's dream of success is the return to a life of sensual pleasures of wealth, but Fitzgerald's dream of success is a return to a world which will hail him again as a serious writer. Pat dreams of past success and remembers vividly his wealth and comfort, but Fitzgerald's recollections are of having once been courted, once called genius, but he and Pat both know what it is to

labor in loneliness and neglect. The failures of both Fitzgerald and Hobby are inevitable because of their inability to sustain that moment is a combination of poor judgment and the system in which they operate.

Fitzgerald's identification with Pat Hobby is not nearly so close as it is with Basil Duke Lee. While the failures of Basil Duke Lee are Fitzgerald's failures, the failures of Pat Hobby are only failures which Fitzgerald sees as a horror of what he could become if he remained in Hollywood too long. Fitzgerald feared he would lose his desire for achievement and his self respect as Pat has.

"Two Old-Timers" is a very short piece about the consequences of a traffic accident involving Pat and an old silent film star, Phil Macedon. The plot is that Macedon refuses to acknowledge that he and Pat are acquaintances from the past. The theme is obvious and a bit strained. Pat and his car are both outmoded relics of another time, whereas Macedon is well-preserved and comfortably retired. Pat's defense against Macedon's smug refusal to claim his acquaintance is to tell the guard detaining them at the police station about an incident during the filming of a movie in which Macedon proved to be a coward.

The story ends with Pat calling Macedon just another "old-timer"<sup>32</sup> like himself. Fitzgerald tries to show through this story that he believes in judging a man not only on what he is now but also on what he has been in the past. Apparently this is one of the stories which Fitzgerald did not get to revise. The basic theme is good, but it is poorly developed. Again, there is failure; this time the failure of Pat to be recognized by someone from his past who should recognize him. If one had not read any of the other Pat Hobby stories, it would be hard to make any really sensible comment on what kind of person Pat Hobby is because the characterization he receives in the story is sketchy. The characterization of Phil Macedon also suffers from this sketchiness. Pat's disclosure about him causes no major ripple on Macedon's rather blank facade. By putting these two "old-timers" together in a scene with a rather innocent bystander, the officer who has to detain them until they are bailed out, Fitzgerald is able to convey the difference he sees in the way the writer is remembered by the public in relation to how the star is remembered by the public. The young officer remembers Phil Macedon but fails to give any

---

<sup>32</sup>Fitzgerald, "Two Old Timers," in The Pat Hobby Stories, p. 141.

recollection of Pat's successes. Fitzgerald points out that for a writer to be successful and for that success to live, he must get notoriety and a lot of it. Pat is not remembered or respected, but this wealthy and cowardly old film star is. Pat, as well as Fitzgerald, sees the inequity of this system of rewards.

Again, Fitzgerald makes use of the make-believe world to stress a theme. The old actor, though he maintains his facade of success and pride, comes out little better than Pat. Pat has exposed him as a coward, but it seems to bother the old actor very little. He is as much a reprobate as Pat. He has no more admirable qualities than Pat, but he is a better actor. Macedon is a character whom Fitzgerald developed to show his disgust with the cruel world of Hollywood. Although Macedon seems to represent a successful, retired actor, he is as much an embodiment of failure as Pat Hobby. Fitzgerald sees Macedon and reacts with the feeling that if this is what Hollywood offers as success, it really has little to offer.

Fitzgerald makes a distinction in "Mightier Than the Sword" between "authors" and "writers." At the beginning of the story, Pat overhears a conversation at the



shoeshine stand between a writer and a director. The writer has written a scenario which the producers will not accept and he has been released by the studio. The writer, E. Brunswick Hudson, is furious at the outcome and leaves in a fit of anger. Dick Dale, the director turns to Pat and asks him about his screen credits, to which Pat proudly replies, "I got credits going all the way back to 1920." Pat, Dick Dale, and Dale's script girl finally work out a plot (after Pat is hired) which is flatly turned down by the producers, much to Dale's chagrin. He calls for Hudson and his previous story only to find that Hudson is quite reluctant to give anything. Dale angrily fires Pat, who is grateful for the several weeks work at fair pay which he has gotten. Pat leaves the office and sleeps that night on a bedroom set and awakes in the morning with one hundred dollars in his pocket and a little breakfast left in his bottle. As he leaves the lot, he again overhears a conversation in which Dick Dale tells H. Brunswick Hudson again that he can be dispensed with as far as he is concerned because the studio has the rights to the first script which Hudson has written. When Dale leaves, Pat consoles

Hudson with the statement, "They don't want authors. They want writers--like me."<sup>33</sup>

Fitzgerald's purpose in "Mightier than the Sword" is to distinguish between writers and authors. The writer is apparently just a person who interprets the ideas of a producer. The humorous scene in which the producer is shown in the act of writing screen play is a good example of how Fitzgerald disdainfully sees producers as authors. An author is a creator whereas a writer is a fixer or a secretary for the producer in Fitzgerald's cynical opinion. However, while Pat gets a temporary job, it is the work of the "author" Hudson which is ultimately used. Pat is a failure because his offerings are almost worthless.

Though poorly organized and more poorly written, the Pat Hobby stories are a feeble effort which kept the spectre of poverty from overtaking Fitzgerald in his last years. They also serve as a way for him to show his disgust and hatred for the whole Hollywood scene. Pat Hobby is his vision of what Fitzgerald sincerely hopes he will not become--the embodiment of what the corrupt and

---

<sup>33</sup>Fitzgerald, "Mightier Than the Sword," in The Pat Hobby Stories, pp. 144-149.

money-oriented world of Hollywood could do to a writer. Pat's low aspirations prevent him from being tragic. At the same time that he was writing these Pat Hobby stories Fitzgerald was writing what may have been, had it been completed, his best work, The Last Tycoon, a novel about a heroic, romantic producer who is ground under the heel of the immoral money-grubbing Hollywood system. Though Pat is hardly the symbol of the "tycoon" and deserves the punishment and the failure he has, occasionally there are flashes of the old Fitzgerald who expressed so well the aspirations of young Basil Duke Lee as he steps to the porch in "Basil and Cleopatra" and "saw . . . his stars as always--symbols of ambition, struggle and glory."<sup>34</sup> And again in "The Great Gatsby" when he said,

. . . the blocks of the sidewalk really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees--he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.<sup>35</sup>

These heroes of Fitzgerald's fiction are success-oriented and so is the lowly, unheroic Pat Hobby. But Pat's visions

---

<sup>34</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Basil and Cleopatra" in Afternoon of an Author (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 68-69.

<sup>35</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925, renewal copyright, 1953), pp. 99-100.

of glory are not particularly ambitious, only sensual and grasping. Pat repeatedly reminds everyone that "I lived up here once,"<sup>36</sup> as Fitzgerald does to a visitor to the cupola in "The Author's House." But Pat has never really been where Basil Duke Lee has been. Pat is able only to prate on about his nearly thirty credits dating as far back as 1920. Considering what a hack, a cheat, and a liar he is now, it is hard to imagine Pat as a character of even nearly heroic quality.

More cynical and less ironic than the Basil Duke Lee stories, these seventeen Pat Hobby stories are a weak comment on a place. Fitzgerald's hatred of the fake Hollywood world is evident in each story. He is as disgusted with the ridiculously stupid Pat Hobby as he is with the aimless, self-centered Hollywood scene itself.

---

<sup>36</sup>Fitzgerald, "The Author's House," in Afternoon of an Author, p. 189.

## CHAPTER V

### A COMPARISON OF CHARACTERS

Pat Hobby and Basil Duke Lee are both failures, but failures of entirely different kinds. While Basil is "driven by inner forces that compel him towards the personal realization of romantic wonder,"<sup>1</sup> Pat lives strictly from hand to mouth, each day's survival a triumph. Basil is "purged of these unholy fires, chastened, and reduced,"<sup>2</sup> whereas Pat is destroyed by similar ambitions. But as Fitzgerald knows, youth and beauty have a miraculous elasticity and powers of recovery, and Basil survives whereas poor old Pat sinks lower and lower in his partially self-made hell. Pat is doomed to fail in the progressive stages of old age, and the reader finds that this, too, can be an excruciatingly painful time to meet head-on the rigors of failure.

Basil has a personality rent with flaws. He is overconfident, imaginative, overaggressive, exuberant,

---

<sup>1</sup>Edwin Fussell, "Fitzgerald's Brave New World" in F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

impressionable, vulnerable, and romantically silly. But he imagines himself true to himself and to his convictions and he does his best to be so. He knows, as Fitzgerald and every other person of ambition knows, that success, youth, and beauty are transient things, and no matter how true one is, the glory of youth and beauty cannot be sustained. Time is on someone else's side. Whose, no one knows, least of all Basil, but he does not stop trying to sustain the "moment of beauty"<sup>3</sup> simply because he knows his efforts are futile. It is as if he knows that we are all doomed to fail in our several ambitions, but for his part, he wishes to be remembered as a fighter.

Pat's character, too is flawed. He lies, cheats, tricks and uses others, and worst of all, none of it bothers him. He prefers to be a fighter as well, but for an entirely different reason. Pat's pedigree and motives are not so prestigious nor so respectable as Basil's. Pat refuses to give up in his battle, but the reasons behind his tenacity are starvation, freezing, and incarceration. The reader

---

<sup>3</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack Up, (New York: New Directions, 1945), p. 198.

is given very little information about Pat's previous life except that he wrote scripts for silent films, was once successful at it, was married a number of times, and has squandered a good deal of money on drink and horseracing. His original ambitions are not known. There are indications that he was a cheat early in his career and because of such indications one hastens to categorize Pat as a failure. That he may well be, but he still serves the purpose of being yet another character who helps define Fitzgerald's idea of failure. Both idealistic adolescent and unprincipled old scoundrels are the victims of their own self-indulgences and of the fateful nature of life itself. Neither loses hope nor quits in his personal quest for success, but each is doomed to failure because of the fact that he is born.

These two characters are different in almost every respect except that they both fail time and again. Regardless of time or place, the spectre of failure menaces from the shadows. In the upper class neighborhood in a Midwestern city, in the confines of an Eastern boys' school, at a fraternity dance, or on a Hollywood movie lot, failure lurks. The theme is, of course, that failure is there

because it is an integral part of life. Though the Pat Hobby stories are the poorer of the lot, their setting lends itself well to Fitzgerald's purpose. Hollywood becomes for Fitzgerald a microcosm of life. All the fakery, sham, deceit, and the cruelty of life are there. Pat Hobby's stupidity and ignorance symbolize the average American whose low dreams and ambitions tie him down. The power and glory of money symbolize the greed of man. Fitzgerald sees in this vision of horror a failure which is more understandable than the failure of Basil Duke Lee. Basil is a character who has talent and perception, but he fails. Fitzgerald treats Basil's failure with the gentle irony of reminiscence and indicates that Basil is the embodiment of the heroic American type. Basil's innocent acceptance of middle class goals and his dazzled and amazed attitude toward wealth is an extension of Fitzgerald's own reactions. Basil fails to achieve goals, but never fails as a person. At the end of the series, after many many failures, he emerges as a far more mature and knowledgeable person. Basil's failures are the kind inevitable to the human condition. The second kind of failure, Pat Hobby's is not inevitable. It is a failure of self-respect and the human dignity in each person.



Fitzgerald always knew what failure was. He always recognized its prominent position as a part of life. From his very earliest to his very last writing he dealt with defining and illustrating failure. It is hard to separate Fitzgerald's real and imaginary lives. He was and was not Basil Duke Lee. He was and was not Pat Hobby. There is more real Fitzgerald in the character of Basil Duke Lee, but it cannot be denied that Fitzgerald had himself felt as Pat Hobby did when he bent over his desk and cried in "A Patriotic Short." As Fitzgerald changed, so did his manifestations of failure, but the definition remained the same, and both Basil Duke Lee and Pat Hobby were able to "talk with the authority of failure."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

### Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald

- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. Afternoon of an Author. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Taps at Reveille. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "That Kind of Party," Princeton University Library Chronicle, Vol. XII. Summer, 1951, No. 4.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Beautiful and Damned. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Crack-Up. New York: New Directions, 1945.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Pat Hobby Stories. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. This Side of Paradise. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.

### Works About Fitzgerald

- Cowley, Malcolm. Introduction to The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951.
- Eble, Kenneth. F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963.

- Fussell, Edwin. "Fitzgerald's Brave New World" in F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- Latham, Aaron. Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood. New York: Pocket Books, 1972.
- Lehan, Richard D. F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1956.
- Mizener, Arthur. The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Houghton Mifflin, Avon Books, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Scott Fitzgerald and his World. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972.
- Piper, Henry Dan. F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.
- Troy, William. "Scott Fitzgerald--The Authority of Failure," in F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963.
- Weir, Charles. "An Invite With Gilded Edges," in F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and his Work. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1951.
- Wilson, Edmund. The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle: 1920-1950. New York: Farrar and Young, Inc., 1952.