

American Glimpses in the Beautiful and Damned

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Abstract

F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered as the representative figure of the Jazz Age. Beautiful and Damned is undoubtedly an ever green novel in the history of American literature. Contemporary American days are revealed by Fitzgerald quite fabulously. Various aspects have been presented very realistically. The aim of the present research paper is to study the American Glimpses in The Beautiful and Damned.

Keywords: *anxiety, ambivalence, flapper, youth.*

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Introduction

Being a young man F. Scott Fitzgerald desired literary success and got it, immediately, with the publication of *This Side of Paradise* in 1920. In 1918 he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre who, a year later, broke off their engagement. However Fitzgerald won her back and within two weeks of the novel's publication got married the woman of his dreams. He was just of twenty four years and had everything he desired for. Even then he later claimed the pleasure was spoiled and enhanced by elegiac projection, as he wrote that he remembers riding in a taxi one afternoon between very tall buildings under mauve and rosy sky; he even began to cry because he had everything he wanted and knew he would never be so happy again. And by August Fitzgerald was at work on an another novel which, he informed his publisher, Charles Scribner that *The Beautiful and Damned* is the life story of Anthony Patch between his 25th and 33rd years. How he and his beautiful young wife are wrecked on the shoals of immorality is shown in the story. The novel was appropriately completed in the summer of 1921 and was published the coming March. In other words, *The Beautiful and Damned*, was first published in March 1922. It explores and portrays New York cafe society and the American Eastern elite during the Jazz Age before and after the First World War and in the early 1920s. The work is generally considered to have drawn upon and be based on Fitzgerald's relationship and marriage with his wife Zelda Fitzgerald.

Actually Fitzgerald wrote *The Beautiful and Damned* quickly in the winter and spring of 1921–22, while Zelda was pregnant. Following editorial suggestions from his friend Edmund Wilson and his editor Max Perkins, Chapters of the book were first serialized in *Metropolitan Magazine* in late 1921 and finally in March 1922 the book was published. Following his best-selling first book, *This Side of Paradise*, Scribners prepared an initial print run of 20,000 copies and mounted an advertising campaign. It sold well enough to warrant additional print runs reaching 50,000 copies. Fitzgerald dedicated the novel to the Irish writers Shane Leslie, George Jean Nathan and Maxwell Perkins in appreciation of much literary help and support.

Actually while reading the whole of the novel deeply and carefully, we come to know that it is full of autobiographical elements. Anthony represents Fitzgerald himself and Gloria represents Zelda Fitzgerald. Through the novel, the author has given an entirely life like image of the contemporary American society. Various aspects of the contemporary American society have been reflected so transparently that it seems as if the characters are moving around us.

As published in book form, however, it consists of three, untitled Books

consisting of three chapters each. The first book tells the story of the first meeting and courtship of a beautiful and spoiled couple, Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert, madly in love, with Gloria joyfully exclaims that her mother says that two souls are sometimes created together and in love before they are born.

Book two covers the first three years of their married life together, with Anthony and Gloria vowing to adhere to the magnificent attitude of not giving a damn for what they chose to do and what consequences it brought. Not to be sorry, not to lose one cry of regret, to live according to a clear code of honour towards each other and to seek the moment's happiness as enthusiastically and constantly as possible.

The final book recounts Anthony's disinheritance, just as the U.S. enters the First World War; his year in the Army while Gloria remains home alone until his return; and the couple's rapid, final decline after the War into alcoholism, dissolution and ruin.

Furthermore let's have a sequence wise glance over the theme and the plot and how Fitzgerald represented the contemporary American youth and society-

In the beginning of the novel, we see that the author Fitzgerald is depicting the character of Anthony Patch. He is an heir to his grandfather's large fortune and is unmotivated to work, though he tries various careers. He is entranced by Gloria and falls in love with her immediately. He is drafted into the army but does not see active service. Throughout the novel he compensates for a lack of vocation with parties and increasing alcoholism. Actually it would never get hyperbolic to state over here that his expectations of future wealth make him powerless to act in the present.

In this way, through the portrayal of Anthony Patch, the great writer has presented the contemporary American youth; which wanted to get money and enjoy a carefree pleasurable life without doing any sort of labour. Actually Fitzgerald showed the contemporary drinking sense, high fashion, late night parties and frequent love affairs without being too much concerned about those.

Moreover F. Scott Fitzgerald is best known as a representative of the 1920s and as the writer who, more than any other identified, delineated and popularized the female representative of that era, the flapper. Though it is an overstatement to say that Fitzgerald created the flapper, he did, with considerable assistance from his wife Zelda, offer the public an image of a modern young woman who was spoiled, sexually liberated, self-centred, fun-loving and magnetic. In Fitzgerald's mind, this young woman represented a new philosophy of romantic individualism, rebellion, and

liberation and his earliest writings enthusiastically present her as an incarnation of these new values.

Actually in capturing Fitzgerald's concern over the flapper's moral dissoluteness, the story anticipates the emphasis of *The Beautiful and Damned*. Since he wrote it during the first months of his marriage, readers may have expected privileged glimpses into the Fitzgerald household. The media encouraged that expectation. Newspapers and magazines featured photos of the happy young parents and their baby daughter Frances Scottie and interviews explored the effects of the flapper's philosophy on family life. Indeed, Fitzgerald did draw extensively on his early married life. His fictional use of Zelda's diary and letters encouraged her to comment, in her 1922 review of the novel that plagiarism begins at home. Readers expecting an entertaining family romance may have been disappointed that the novel showed instead, according to the author, how the Fitzgeralds' fictional counterparts Anthony Patch and his beautiful young wife Gloria are wrecked on the shoals of debauchery.

As one biographer has observed, the novel repudiates the Younger Generation thesis that had made Fitzgerald famous as his characters-Gloria and Anthony Patch - young, glamorous and emancipated - live selfishly and hedonistically after the mode of rebellious youth and end up desperate and degraded.

In a 1922 interview, Fitzgerald blamed Gloria for the damnation described in the novel. He declared that Our American women are leeches. They are an utterly useless fourth generation trading on the accomplishments of their pioneer great-grandmothers. They simply dominate the American men. In subsequent years, in his private correspondence as well as in his fiction, he continued to explore those two particular flaws in modern women – their uselessness and their dominance over men. Unfortunately, his comments may have encouraged reductionist interpretations that read the novel primarily as an comment of Gloria and of women generally. *The Beautiful and Damned*, however, certainly much more than a fictional attack on Zelda.

Gloria Gilbert is beautiful, spoiled and modern enough to claim on a woman's right to kiss a man beautifully and lovingly without any wish to be either his wife or his mistress. She revolts at the view of a colourless, humiliating marriage like her mother's and she rejects the woman's traditional role of maternal self-effacement. She wants a marriage that will be a live, lovely and glamorous performance. According to one critic, Gloria is Fitzgerald's depiction of the young American bitch, who rejects domesticity not out of any libertarian principle or career aspiration but out of sheer

theatrical self-satisfaction.

More recently, critics have shown more sympathy for Gloria. She shows a moral strength. When she decides to become an actress, she discovers, however, that she is by the age of twenty-nine too old to play the role of a flapper. In a suggestive mirror scene, Gloria collapses and lies sobbing at the image of her aging face. It is a vivid reminder that the identity she has created for herself or that has been created for her is insufficient. In short, Fitzgerald depicts Gloria compassionately. Moreover Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* is one of the most successful novels revealing the anxiety over money and waste in the early twentieth century. The period in which he wrote the novel shows the great ambivalence of American public with wealth, for Americans believe that they could achieve great wealth and strive for emulating the rich. The great ambivalence has concerned with the gain and the dissipation of the rich and obviously, it has been shown successfully in Fitzgerald's novel. Actually through the portrayal of Anthony Patch the great writer has represented the contemporary youth; whose foundations of romantic ideals were rather based on the idealized world trapped in economic anxiety haunted all the life than consciousness of the real life.

In *Student Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Linda C. Pelzer states if in *This Side of Paradise*, Amory Blaine's quest for life's meaning is a paean to possibility, then in *The Beautiful and Damned* Anthony and Gloria Patch's descent into self-absorbed paralysis is a dirge to disillusionment and human waste.

The novel exhibits the psychological changes of Anthony with the haunting of money during his life with a symbol of Anthony's grandfather as a phantom chase after his own dream's shadow. Moreover, Fitzgerald notifies How Anthony and his beautiful wife are wrecked on the shoals of debauchery is told in the story. This sounds disgusting but it's really one of the most marvelous books.

With the novel's setting, New York City, in fact, up and down Fifth Avenue, Fitzgerald opens up the depth of economic anxiety of the rapidly changing in the American society in the early twentieth century.

What is surprising here, however, is Fitzgerald's contradictory and dilemma regarding money between his ambivalence to wealth depicted in his fiction and his lifestyle. In his real life, too, Fitzgerald was really anxious about getting money by pushing himself writing fiction and commercial short stories and he was usually under pressure of gaining more money to fulfill his needs. It is more especially true after Fitzgerald's marriage in 1920 when the Fitzgeralds reflect themselves as a celebrity couple in New York City, and the Fitzgeralds seem to be a symbol for the

American Dream. Jim Cullen's *American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* depicts a picture right after the title of the book which shows Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald on their honeymoon, titled that the photo is a virtual compendium of American Dreams as- house, car, beauty, youth and talent. It is a life of fabulous wealth and drifting all their time from England, France and Switzerland to Italy. Back to the America, they also spend time in the rented apartments or hotels between New York, Long Island, Montgomery, St. Paul, Wilmington and Baltimore. When Zelda gets a mental illness and is hospitalized in Baltimore, Fitzgerald still lives in various hotels in North Carolina and Maryland before his final move to Hollywood. It can be said that the Fitzgeralds certainly had never settled down and get a permanent living and also had to face many dilemmas in gaining wealth. Therefore, Fitzgerald's novels in generally and *The Beautiful and Damned* in particular exhibit a deeper sense of the hero's economic anxiety relationship with wealth as well as the narrative's ambivalence to solve the matter.

The Beautiful and Damned is a study of marriage in the Jazz Age modeled partly on Fitzgerald's own marriage with Zelda Sayre. Anthony Patch, a talented but indolent young playboy, finds no purpose in his life until he meets Gloria Gilbert, a popular debutante whose family originally came from the Middle West.

They marry and initiate a wild orgy of spending, parties, trips, drinking and gaiety which brings disaster on both of them. Anthony becomes an alcoholic and a wealthy, puritanical grandfather, Adam J. Patch, disinherits him when he discovers his immoral life. Rejected as an officer candidate in 1917, Anthony enlists as a private and in a bleak Southern army camp seduces Dot, a native small-town girl. When Adam Patch dies, Anthony and Gloria spend their last cent fighting his will. Contrary to the expectations of the reader who is familiar with the clichés of naturalism, they do not lose this case, the will is broken, they come into thirty million dollars and we know that Anthony's last chance to regenerate himself has been lost.

The theme of *The Beautiful and Damned* is well illustrated by a remark Anthony makes to the heartbroken Dot as he prepares to abandon her, a remark which sheds some light on Fitzgerald's own personal tragedy, Dot'll forget. Things are sweeter when they're lost. He know-because once he wanted something and got it. It was the only thing he ever wanted badly...and when he got it, it turned to dust in his hands.

In this way, we see that Fitzgerald has given an entirely transparent glimpse of the contemporary America by representing more than single aspect.

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