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F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Midwest*

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guest editor

ROSS K. TANGEDAL

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In honor of
Gloria Whelan

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PREFACE

ROSS K. TANGEDAL

F. Scott Fitzgerald's relationship to the American Midwest has always been fraught with ambiguity, antagonism, and animosity. Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, he was quick to disparage the region publicly by referring to the work of regionalist writers as "raw and undigested" in his 1926 review of Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* and claiming that their literature "was dumped on the literary platform—mistaking incoherence for vitality, chaos for vitality."¹ However, he regularly called on his Minnesota upbringing in several short stories (such as "Winter Dreams," "Absolution," and the Basil and Josephine cycle) and portions of his novels (*This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned*, and *The Great Gatsby*). Somewhere between nostalgia and retreat, Fitzgerald's Midwest is a complicated place, a space of growth and decay as well as hope and despair. For instance, he lamented the fact that a favorable blurb for *This Side of Paradise* from eminent Midwestern writer Sinclair Lewis went unused during advertising,² yet he explicitly instructed editor Max Perkins three years later to leave any signed blurbs (especially from Lewis and H. L. Mencken) off of his new novel, *The Great Gatsby*.³ He denounced writers like Willa Cather and Thomas Boyd for writing about the "inarticulate farmer,"⁴ yet he wrote about Basil Duke Lee's "inarticulate yearning" as a St. Paul youth in "A Night at the Fair."⁵ Fitzgerald's tangled relationship with the Midwest played a significant role in his life and work, as the essays that follow demonstrate.

This issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* attempts to characterize the Midwest in Fitzgerald's work by interrogating several aspects of the author's canon. My essay focuses on Fitzgerald's treatment of early influences like Booth Tarkington, the Indiana writer whose work both encouraged and discouraged the young writer. I argue that Fitzgerald's "tepid attitude toward Tarkington and his 'illusions of boyhood' as his career progressed speaks to his flight from the Midwest, his desire to be distanced from regional writers, and his ambition to be read as a Joseph Conrad, rather than as a Booth Tarkington. Fitzgerald saw Tarkington as he saw the Midwest: a part of the past that he needed to overcome" (17).

Deborah Davis Schlacks provides an in-depth study of niceness in one of Fitzgerald's finest early stories, "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." She concludes that the story "emerges as a subversive tale: seemingly light and entertaining, and published in the mainstream *Saturday Evening Post* where subversion was a necessity, the story packs a serious punch in its depiction of an outsider embracing that status. The story rejects niceness in a most dramatic way and ensures that the 'tyranny of the nice,' 1920s style, is, for Bernice, no more" (41).

Patricia Oman positions Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* within a continuum of intertextual relations, including Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Cather's *A Lost Lady*. She contends that "the Midwest in *Gatsby* is constructed as self-consciously nostalgic and modern. This makes the novel's ambivalent vision of the Midwest different from any of Fitzgerald's source texts. From *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Fitzgerald draws a mythic but ambivalent notion of the Midwest as home. To this he adds restorative spirituality from *The Waste Land* and nostalgic affect from *A Lost Lady*. The result is all his own" (53).

Jace Gatzemeyer takes as his subject Fitzgerald's "How to Waste Material," arguing that the piece "can thus help critics relocate marginalized early twentieth-century regionalism at the heart of modernism's promotional logic as a useful foil for modernist self-promotion." Reading Fitzgerald's essay this way "prompts us to ask to what extent early twentieth-century regionalism simply served as a straw man for modernism's promotional strategies rather than as an actual antagonist or antithesis to modernism" (57). Finally, Jeffrey Swenson deconstructs the prevailing idea of Fitzgerald's nostalgic treatment of the Midwest by arguing that his late St. Paul stories "showcase Fitzgerald's complex double vision. Particularly in 'A Night at the Fair,' Fitzgerald skillfully plays with the objects of a past St. Paul, simultaneously evoking a past St. Paul of place and time while creating emotional distance from the nostalgia which that past evokes" (70). In all, these five essays cover short fiction, novels, essays, and correspondence, as well as other public interviews and pieces that Fitzgerald produced.

My hope is that the essays within this volume will better our understanding of Fitzgerald's relationship to his home region as well as elevate the Midwest as a key factor that shaped one of our country's finest writers. Fitzgerald's attempts to articulate the Midwest speak to how he wrestled with the region for most of his career, and

the essays in this volume examine the ambiguity, nostalgia, and memory that was F. Scott Fitzgerald's Midwest.

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

NOTES

¹"How to Waste Material: A Note on My Generation." *F. Scott Fitzgerald: In His Own Time: A Miscellany*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Jackson R. Bryer. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1971. 145, 147.

²Letter to Max Perkins, 30 July 1921. *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald/Perkins Correspondence*. Ed. John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer. NY: Scribner's 1971. 40.

³Letter to Max Perkins, 27 October 1924. Kuehl and Bryer 80.

⁴Letter to Max Perkins, 1 June 1925. Kuehl and Bryer 110.

⁵"A Night at the Fair." 1928. *The Basil and Josephine Stories*. Ed. Jackson R. Bryer and John Kuehl. NY: Scribner Classics, 1987. 37-38.

CALL FOR PAPERS

For a panel on the fiction of Tim O'Brien at the 2018 SSML conference: brief proposals to Sara Kosiba <skosiba@troy.edu>

INTRODUCTION

JAMES L.W. WEST III

During my final year of graduate school, while I was completing a dissertation on F. Scott Fitzgerald, one of my favorite professors asked me, with a concerned expression, whether I was confident in my choice of subject. “Fitzgerald’s a good minor author,” he said. “There’s *The Great Gatsby* and a handful of stories, but is there anything else?” My professor had my best interests in mind—and, indeed, no one back then could have predicted the enormous momentum that has driven Fitzgerald studies for the past four decades. The year was 1970; American literature was still well below the salt; and much of the attention to Fitzgerald was devoted to his life, not his writings.

My professor would have been surprised and pleased to see this special issue of *Midwestern Miscellany*. The issue contains five strong new readings of Fitzgerald’s writings, and, blessedly, not everyone is writing about *Gatsby*. The *MLA International Bibliography* reveals that more than 2,000 articles and book chapters have been published about that slim novel since the 1960s, a level of scrutiny beneath which a lesser book might have collapsed. So much exegesis! Among Modernist texts, only *The Waste Land* has attracted more attention. But there is indeed more to say, as Patricia Oman demonstrates in this issue, and there will be more after that. It’s good to see, though, that the other contributors—Deborah Davis Schlacks, Jace Gatzemeyer, Jeffrey Swenson, and guest editor Ross Tangedal—have written about other works, for there is much else to examine.

It is also good to note that the contributors to this issue are new, or relatively new, to the field. We are now into what I reckon to be

the fourth generation of scholars and critics to write about our author. The F. Scott Fitzgerald Society is going strong; the Cambridge Edition is nearing completion; a new volume of previously unpublished and uncollected writing has just appeared; interest in Zelda's life and work continues to grow; new movies and television treatments are in the works. *The Great Gatsby* has become a national scripture, studied by American teenagers during the junior or senior year of high school, and the book is widely read and taught abroad as a key to American hopes, aspirations, and dreams.

Unless Congress takes action, the text of *Gatsby* will pass into the public domain at the end of 2020. The novel (along with a great many other works of literature and film) almost lost copyright protection in 2000, but with the Walt Disney Company leading the way, copyright was extended for another twenty years. This was not so much to protect Fitzgerald's writings but to save Mickey, Minnie, Goofy, and the rest of the gang from the clutches of poster and greeting-card manufacturers. Perhaps Disney, or another corporate entity, will again persuade our legislators to postpone the deadline, but I have seen no hint of such a move. When the novel does pass into the public domain, it will be possible for all of us, and not just the textbook publishers, to issue editions of *Gatsby* from our kitchen tables. Then the novel will truly belong to the people.

The essays in this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* treat Fitzgerald as a Midwestern writer, an approach that has been neglected. In many ways he never left St. Paul and never felt or wrote so intensely about any other location. The Basil Duke Lee stories, for example, written in Paris during 1928 and 1929, capture the place, time, and feeling of Fitzgerald's youth as well as anything he ever put down on paper. No writer wants to be considered a regionalist (*vide* Faulkner, Cather, Welty, Stegner, Steinbeck) but writers are inevitably grounded in their places of birth and youthful experience. This was true of Fitzgerald: we should never forget those first lessons in social status, administered in dancing classes and recorded by him in his *Thoughtbook* of 1910-1911, nor should we neglect his upbringing in the Catholic faith, still discernible in the vignette "Thank You for the Light," composed in 1936 and first published in 2012. Had he lived longer, Fitzgerald would surely have returned to the city of his birth, at least to see old friends and refresh his memories, and would likely have written again about his native region.

Interest in Fitzgerald and in his works will continue. I am often asked if there is a person or persons responsible for this ongoing attention. The questioner usually seems to think that a particular scholar or critic (or group of academics) should be named, but the answer is much simpler. Fitzgerald himself gets the credit. *He* is responsible for the continuing interest in his work and life. *He* created the novels and stories; he provided the template for the study of his life and career. We who teach his work and write about him are complicit in the phenomenon, but without the sustained excellence of the oeuvre and the continuing fascination of the life, which he himself documented, we would have little to say.

The Pennsylvania State University

NOTHING IS LEFT BUT THE SKY:
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, BOOTH TARKINGTON, AND
MIDWESTERN INFLUENCE

ROSS K. TANGEDAL

*Youth cannot imagine romance apart from youth. That is why the rôles of the heroes and heroines of plays are given by the managers to the most youthful actors they can find among the competent. Both middle-aged people and young people enjoy a play about young lovers; but only middle-aged people will tolerate a play about middle-aged lovers; young people will not come to see such a play, because, for them, middle-aged lovers are a joke—
not a very funny one.*

—Booth Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918)

As early as 1917, a young F. Scott Fitzgerald was calling his developing first novel “a potpourri, especially as there are pages in dialogue and in *vers libre*, but it reads as logically for the times as most public utterances of the prim and prominent” (Turnbull 371). Young writers tend to write what they know, write like those that they have read, and cast themselves within a continuum of favorite or popular authors. Fitzgerald was no exception. With *This Side of Paradise* (1920), he combined the influence of several writers to create his own style, one informed by the scores of books he had read. Matthew J. Brucoli considers the novel “a bibliography of the books that shape [protagonist] Amory Blaine” after counting the sixty-four titles and ninety-eight writers mentioned in the published text (*Some Sort* 124), and John Kuehl notes that Fitzgerald’s reading “was quite selective. He picked the periods, the artists, and the genres that were necessary to his own particular genius” (78).

Fitzgerald refers to Compton Mackenzie, H.G. Wells, Robert Hugh Benson, and Oscar Wilde explicitly in an unpublished preface to the novel, and throughout his correspondence with editor Max Perkins and several friends he also references John Galsworthy,

James Joyce, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, Joseph Conrad, H. L. Mencken, Henry Adams, J.M. Barrie, and George Bernard Shaw, and later Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane. By proclaiming which writers he had read—or at least said he had read—Fitzgerald expressed his desire to enter into their profession. After submitting a revised draft to Perkins he confidently declared, “but while the other was a tedious [sic], disconnected casserole this is definite [sic] attempt at a big novel and I really believe I have hit it, as immediately I stopped disciplining the muse she trotted obediently around and became an erratic mistress if not a steady wife” (Kuehl and Bryer 17).¹

Once revision was completed, Fitzgerald wrote Perkins of a new influence: “I’ve fallen under the influence of an author who’s quite changed my point of view. He’s a chesnut [sic] to you, no doubt, but I’ve discovered him—Frank Norris . . . there are things in “Paradise” that might have been written by Norris—those drunken scenes for instance—in fact all the realism. I wish I’d stuck to it throughout!” (28). Frank Norris stands in opposition to Fitzgerald’s earlier influences like Wells, Mackenzie, and Shaw; thus, the seeds of change had already been sown within the young writer’s sensibility. This shift in influence speaks to Fitzgerald’s desire to stay relevant, even though his first novel had yet to see the printing press. Influences were as expendable as old drafts, and many writers went by the wayside in Fitzgerald’s search for authorial independence.

However, Fitzgerald wrote critic Burton Rascoe several months after the publication of *Paradise* that he’d “rather be Tarkington or David Graham Phillips and cast at least some color and radiance into my work!” (Brucoli and Duggan 72). Yet in the earlier letter to Perkins he wishes he had “stuck to it throughout,” the “it” a reference to the kind of realism practiced by Frank Norris. Fitzgerald wanted the popularity of Booth Tarkington, who was one of the best-selling novelists and playwrights of the decade, but the critical esteem of the naturalists, who were enjoying great acclaim. He had listed Tarkington as an influence alongside Wells, G.K. Chesterton, and Rupert Brooke among others as far back as 1918 (Brucoli and Baughman 17), and biographers Arthur Mizener, André Le Vot, Scott Donaldson, Jeffrey Meyers, and Brucoli all suggest that Tarkington was one of the literary figures young Fitzgerald most admired during his Princeton years (Mizener 59; Le Vot 47; Donaldson 37; Meyers 21; *Some Sort* 50).

However, post-*Paradise* Fitzgerald saw Tarkington differently. He told a fan that Compton Mackenzie and Tarkington “together taught me everything I know about the English language” (qtd. in *Some Sort* 50), yet in a 1921 letter to then-friend Thomas Boyd, he called Tarkington “fundamentally a brilliant writer” while commenting on the author’s deterioration (Brucoli and Duggan 79). In November of the same year he wrote friend Edmund Wilson that he was now met by critics “with a condescending bow ‘halfway between the posts of Compton Mckenzie [sic] and Booth Tarkington’” (Turnbull 49). Though only one year into his professional writing career, Fitzgerald had no problem denouncing one of his earliest literary heroes. He was a young writer searching for definition among a litany of literary influences, and his choice to devalue Booth Tarkington (and the Midwest) after the publication of *This Side of Paradise* points to that search.²

Tarkington, author of the popular *Penrod* series (1914-1929), *Seventeen* (1916), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918), and *Alice Adams* (1921), regularly wrote stories with young protagonists coming of age at the turn of the century in Midwestern cities. Known for his work ethic and “unflagging industry,” Tarkington used his home state of Indiana as the primary setting for much of his work, and his novels, stories, and plays became synonymous with popular literature by the time Fitzgerald was writing *This Side of Paradise* (Woodress 252). His *Penrod* stories “were an instant success when they began appearing serially in 1913 in *Everybody’s Magazine*. The *Cosmopolitan* soon outbid other periodicals for the tales and published, at several thousand dollars each, all that Tarkington cared to write, then begged for more” (179). To Tarkington’s supposed surprise, “My prices astonish me . . . they’ve climbed steadily, by offers, until I’m rather sorry for the magazines that pay ’em. I’ve never really asked any particular price: the thing has somehow just done itself” (qtd. in Woodress 179-180). By 1921, *Publisher’s Weekly*, the *Literary Digest*, and the *New York Times* had all published lists featuring Tarkington as either the “greatest” or “most significant” American author of his time (Woodress 251).

Because of Tarkington’s popularity, Fitzgerald wrote reviews of Tarkington’s *Penrod and Sam* (1916) and *Gentle Julia* (1922), and he once referred to *Seventeen* (1916) as one of the ten best books he had read (Tate 239). However, beginnings of his self-doubt regarding influences crop up in the years between these reviews. In his 1917

review of *Penrod and Sam*, Fitzgerald praised Tarkington for capturing “the unequaled snobbishness of boyhood,” and tracing “the neighborhood social system” (*In His Own Time* 113); conversely, in his 1922 review of *Gentle Julia*, Fitzgerald castigated Tarkington for his lack of structure, a similar criticism levelled against *This Side of Paradise* two years earlier (130).³ Fitzgerald had gained an influence, but with influence comes anxiety, and given the success of *Paradise*—the first edition went through seventeen printings, totaling approximately 51,000 copies (*Descriptive Bibliography* 19–21)—Fitzgerald could shed influences as fast as he acquired them.

Some reviewers were quick to spot the similarities between Fitzgerald and Tarkington. The reviewer for the *Yale Literary Review* remarked in June 1920 that “the plan of [*This Side of Paradise*]—the idea of taking a boy through youth, and abandoning him rather inconclusively some time early in his twenties—is frankly Wellsian. Perhaps too, the trick of bringing an arrogant college youth into sudden contact with the hard facts of life, is borrowed from ‘The Magnificent Ambersons’” (*Yale Literary Review*). Another review from *Publisher’s Weekly* declared that “if you enjoy the thrill of discovering a new literary star and like the sort of thing Ernest Poole and Booth Tarkington at their best stand for in our American fiction, don’t miss it” (1289).

If reviewers could locate particular connections between Fitzgerald and Tarkington, then we should not be surprised at Fitzgerald’s willingness to distance himself from his predecessor. Fitzgerald would move on from Wells and Mackenzie to Conrad and Norris with his second novel, but correspondence prior to and following the publication of *This Side of Paradise* provides interesting evidence of Fitzgerald’s anxieties regarding influences. According to Ronald Berman, at this point in Fitzgerald’s career he “is consistently interested in what is happening among other writers” (12), and his penchant for listing influences—both privately and publicly—speaks to this interest. Always positioning, always posturing, always searching, Fitzgerald “was intelligently immune to the desire of his moment for ideological conformity” (24), yet he frequently became captivated by various writers just long enough to dispense with them. In many cases, what apparently began as genuine influence quickly deteriorated into subtle scorn, and Booth Tarkington played a significant role in Fitzgerald’s ongoing cycle of influence.

Tarkington's *The Magnificent Ambersons* follows the coming-of-age tale of George Amberson Minafer, an intolerant, snide, arrogant young man who is heir to a vast Midwestern fortune. He goes away to school (out East), attempts to pair up with young women, is idolized by his overprotective mother, loses his father part way through the book, succumbs to a disastrous car accident, and decries the loss inherent in his own generation before a revelatory ending. The novel sold well, furthered Tarkington's standing in the literary community, and eventually won the Pulitzer Prize in 1919. Interestingly, Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine, the protagonist of *This Side of Paradise*, bears a resemblance to Minafer. He, too, is intolerant, snide, and arrogant; he attempts liaisons with several women partway through the novel; a major car accident leaves him mentally scarred; and he denounces his lost generation before coming to a revelatory conclusion. Like their protagonists, Tarkington and Fitzgerald shared several experiences, namely an upbringing in the Midwest and participation in the Princeton University Triangle Club (which Tarkington founded in 1893). Moreover, while James Mellow contends that *This Side of Paradise* shows traces of Tarkington (46), Robert Sklar connects many of Fitzgerald's works to the Indiana writer. He argues that the young Fitzgerald's "cleverness and sentimentality were beginning to mark him as his generation's Tarkington" (72), and by writing his 1922 play, *The Vegetable*, "Fitzgerald was trying to turn himself into a Tarkington" (128).

But this association came at a price, since "in the commercial literary world Fitzgerald's name naturally went together with Tarkington's. Just as reviewers in 1920 had praised *This Side of Paradise* as the work of a new Tarkington, so five years later Fitzgerald's friend, Carl Van Vechten, could say blandly in his review of *The Great Gatsby* that Fitzgerald resembled Tarkington more than anyone else" (232). Sklar concludes that "Fitzgerald envied Tarkington his success, and in moments of weakness it was easy for him to fall back into the Tarkington pattern, but fundamentally from an early point in his career he had known that his growth as an artist depended upon his overcoming Tarkington's compromise with gentility" (232).

From *This Side of Paradise* to the Basil Duke Lee stories to *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald wrestled with "the ghostly Tarkington qualities" again and again (339). He wrote friend Julian Street in July 1928 that "my contempt for Tarkington extends only to his character

of being ashamed of his early sins and thus cutting out of his experience about one-half of life. He woke up one morning sober and 40, and thought that no one had ever been lascivious or drunk or vain except himself, and turned deliberately back to the illusions of his boyhood” (Turnbull 494). F. Scott Fitzgerald’s tepid attitude toward Tarkington and his “illusions of boyhood” as his career progressed speaks to his flight from the Midwest, his desire to be distanced from regional writers, and his ambition to be read as a Joseph Conrad rather than as a Booth Tarkington. Fitzgerald saw Tarkington as he saw the Midwest: a part of the past that he needed to overcome.

He further distanced himself from the Midwest later in the decade with two documents. First, he castigated regionalist writers Willa Cather, Ruth Suckow, Edna Ferber, Homer Croy, Thomas Boyd, and Sherwood Anderson (among others) for writing stories about “simple, inarticulate farmers” in a 1 June 1925 letter to Perkins (Kuehl and Bryer 107-114); second, he dressed down Anderson in a May 1926 review of Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time* as a man “of scarcely any ideas at all” (“How to Waste” 88), making clear that his own work did not align with the work of those looking for “journalistic loot” in the American midland (86).⁴ Together, these posturings show a writer deeply troubled by the labels “regionalist” and “Midwestern writer,” and his anxiety over classification certainly began with *This Side of Paradise* and, perhaps, with Booth Tarkington.

David D. Anderson accounts for this anxiety by discussing the Midwestern town in several pieces of American literature, including the town of Carlow in Tarkington’s *The Gentlemen from Indiana* (1899). Rather than seeing the work of Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and Fitzgerald as part of Carl Van Doren’s “revolt from the village” (218), Anderson characterizes their literary contributions as part of a larger schema of the mythic American search, their Midwestern towns presented “as environmental reality and as metaphorical point of departure for the continued search into a new dimension, a search that had begun on the Atlantic coast or in western Europe at some point from three to ten generations ago” (42). Searching instead of revolting, striving instead of escaping, writers like Fitzgerald recorded “one more manifestation of the age-old human search, American search, Midwestern search, for an ill-defined, vaguely-perceived but convincing ideal,” a search “fixed for us in time, in space, and in the continually unfolding myth of America” (43).

Fitzgerald's desire to separate from his Midwestern roots aligns with Anderson's concept of the American search, since Amory Blaine (*This Side of Paradise*), Jay Gatsby (*The Great Gatsby*), and Dick Diver (*Tender Is the Night*) search for something beyond the confines of themselves, their upbringings, and their failures.

Fitzgerald, like his protagonists, embarked on his own search, enacted partially in response to his former self, a former life. In *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Lucy Morgan confesses: "'I wonder if we really do enjoy [youth] as much as we'll look back and think we did! I don't suppose so. Anyhow, for my part I feel as if I must be missing something about it, somehow, because I don't ever seem to be thinking about what's happening at the present moment; I'm always looking forward to something—thinking about things that will happen when I'm older'" (112). Lucy's predicament mirrors Fitzgerald's St. Paul upbringing and his own desire to embrace a more fulfilling future beyond youthful limitations. But whether he wanted to deny his part in the region publicly, eviscerate its literary production privately, or evolve beyond what he considered its constrictions, Fitzgerald and his initial identity grew out of his St. Paul youth, and that identity would only complicate his authority after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*.

Barry Gross believes that for Fitzgerald the Midwest was filled with "occasionally glittering surfaces" rather than substantial fodder for serious fiction (114), and Scott Donaldson elaborates on Fitzgerald's troubled relationship with St. Paul, since as a youth "he knew where he stood in St. Paul society," and "it troubled him" (11). Patricia Hampl argues that "St. Paul bears the spiritual exhaustion of all the heavy lifting of Fitzgerald's desperate boyhood ambition, his almost frantic desire for fame. For fame, he senses instinctively, was his only way out. For getting out (and of course up) is perhaps the deepest of all Midwestern dreams" (xix). His out-and-up dream materialized in several texts. He wrote of rural Minnesota in "Winter Dreams" (1922) that "country towns were well enough to come from if they weren't inconveniently in sight and used as footstools by fashionable lakes" (*Short Stories* 225). In "The Ice Palace" (1921), Sally Carrol Happer is removed from the comforts of Tarleton, Georgia, while staying with her fiancé up North, of which Fitzgerald writes: "There was no sky—only a dark, ominous tent that draped in the tops of the streets and was in reality a vast approaching army of snowflakes—while over it all, chilling away the comfort from the

brown-and-green glow of lighted windows and muffling the steady trot of the horse pulling their sleigh, interminably washed the north wind. It was a dismal town after all, she thought—dismal” (64). These pejorative descriptions are cloaked in nostalgia, as Fitzgerald sought to recall his Midwestern roots while remaining adrift from them.

A reason for Fitzgerald’s tenuous relationship with the Midwest lay deep within his self-conception. He recoiled against being misread by critics, undervalued by his publisher, and forgotten by readers. His search was for legacy, his ideal defined by acceptance and acclaim. Fitzgerald’s desire to drift from his St. Paul upbringing, as well as his efforts to seek out an independent voice, are both evoked by the chimney smoke in *Ambersons*, when Isabel Minafer confesses the following to her son, George:

[T]he things that we have and that we think are so solid—they’re like smoke, and time is like the sky that the smoke disappears into. You know how a wreath of smoke goes up from a chimney, and seems all thick and black and busy against the sky, as if it were going to do such important things and last forever, and you see it getting thinner and thinner—and then, in such a little while, it isn’t there at all; nothing is left but the sky, and the sky keeps on being just the same forever. (Tarkington 160)

Just as the sky emerges out of the dissipating smoke, the dual influence of the Midwest and Tarkington remains fixed despite Fitzgerald’s attempts to snuff it out. Yet he sought credibility by showing readers, friends, and Perkins his litany of literary ancestors in the form of influence lists. If *This Side of Paradise* was, as Fitzgerald called it, “A Romance and a Reading List” (*Notebooks* 158), then his lists would assure readers and critics of his place in and understanding of the literary marketplace.

However, it is difficult for readers to trust an author’s stance on influences, mainly because there is the potential for the author to declare or deny any connections. Sklar suggests that Fitzgerald benefited from Booth Tarkington early and often in his career, chiefly because of the older writer’s financial success in both print and theatrical markets. But critics of the time who noticed the similarity were quick to disparage Fitzgerald for falling into the “Tarkington mold” when it suited him (Sklar 128). Literary critics regularly find it difficult to reconcile economic success with artistic success, since those that make money must, in some way, write for the masses rather

than for the elite.⁵ While writers like Sinclair Lewis⁶ were able to balance both throughout the 1920s, the more established Tarkington went in and out of critical vogue but rarely out of popular esteem.

To Fitzgerald, his success was his own, and his second novel had already taken shape as a naturalist examination of the Jazz Age rather than as a coming-of-age tale of a Midwestern youth. While Henry Dan Piper argues that Fitzgerald wrote *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) in the vein of Frank Norris, which provided “a healthy corrective to the florid romantic themes and rhetoric” of Compton Mackenzie (393), the novel also represents Fitzgerald’s desire to distance himself from Tarkington’s “illusions of boyhood” (Turnbull 494). Fitzgerald felt it necessary to define himself in much grander company; a wide range of international, critically acclaimed writers would play better with Scribner’s and his perceived urban readership than the work of a popular American “regionalist.” The novel initially sold well but was ravaged by critics, the same men he had hoped to impress by shifting away from Mackenzie and Tarkington.⁷

But even though Fitzgerald eventually separated himself from Midwestern writers and regional literature, he initially credits (and denigrates) them for getting his first novel to its publishable state. In an unpublished preface to *This Side of Paradise*, he writes that the subjects he had written “well below average due to boredom” included “THE ‘PREP’ SCHOOL, COLLEGE, THE MIDDLE WEST, NATURE, QUIANT STUPID PEOPLE, and MYSELF” (*This Side of Paradise* 394). Fitzgerald cites his dissatisfaction with his home region and its inhabitants before his novel has ever seen the light of day, which may have kept the preface from being published. But it seems that the unproven writer knew, even then, that in order to get his novel out he had to address those six elements of his past, including “myself.”

Incidentally, Fitzgerald has an epiphany and declares that “my course was obvious, my inspiration was immediate. Virtuously resisting the modern writer’s tendency to dramatize myself, I began another novel; whether its hero really ‘gets anywhere’ is for the reader to decide” (394-5). He knew his readers could relate not only to his characters but also to his style. Therefore, he became resentful when reviewers would pigeonhole him as a certain kind of author. However, a review of his second novel two years later by John Peale Bishop led Fitzgerald to write the reviewer and declare, “You can’t hurt my feel-

ings about the book—tho I did resent your Baltimore article being definately [sic] limited at 25 years old to a place between Mckenzie [sic] who wrote 2½ good (but not wonderful) novels + then died—and Tarkington who if he has a great talent has the mind of a school boy. I mean, at my age they'd done nothing" (Turnbull 53).

Age and writing achievement played a significant role in Fitzgerald's authorial conception. He certainly did not want to be associated with a middle-aged writer dealing with the Middle West, though at times Fitzgerald would vacillate between association and disassociation; in his 1 June 1925 letter to Perkins he wrote: "I can not disassociate a man from his work.—That this Wescott . . . and Tom Boyd and Burton Rascoe . . . are going to tell us mere superficial 'craftsmen' like Hergesheimer, Wharton, Tarkington and me about the Great Beautiful Appreciation they have of the Great Beautiful life of the Manure Widder—rather turns my stomach" (Kuehl and Bryer 111). But by May 1934, Fitzgerald deemed his Basil and Josephine stories (set in St. Paul) "not as good as I thought. They are full of Tarkington" (199). Bruccoli notes that Fitzgerald "believed that Tarkington had wasted one of the best talents in American prose" (*Some Sort* 264), and though the elder writer certainly provided Fitzgerald with a fine example in professional authorship, he also existed as an adversarial pawn in Fitzgerald's past, a post to move beyond in his search for self-identification and critical success.

As Tarkington wrote in *Ambersons*, "both middle-aged people and young people enjoy a play about young lovers; but only middle-aged people will tolerate a play about middle-aged lovers; young people will not come to see such a play, because, for them, middle-aged lovers are a joke—not a very funny one" (54). For Fitzgerald, it was always a matter of association when it came to Tarkington, just as it had been with Thomas Boyd, Ruth Suckow, and Homer Croy. Perhaps Fitzgerald, like his Midwesterner Dexter Green in "Winter Dreams," "wanted not association with glittering things and glittering people—he wanted the glittering things themselves" (*Short Stories* 221). Those "glittering things" lived well beyond the genteel boyishness of Booth Tarkington, the idealess Sherwood Anderson, or the "latest spud in the great potato tradition" that was Floyd Dell's *Moon-Calf* (1920) (Bruccoli and Duggan 75).⁸ He wanted to be the young author dealing with the urban youth, the flappers and philosophers he sought to define. In the third printing of *This Side of*

Paradise, Fitzgerald included a tipped-in note—"The Author's Apology"—in which he proclaimed that "an author ought to write for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterward" (reprinted in Brucoli, *Descriptive Bibliography* 19). This pronouncement came less than four months into Fitzgerald's career as a novelist; his profession, and his search, had begun.

Though Fitzgerald disagreed with being associated with the "revolt from the village" tradition, Van Doren ably defined up-and-coming writers like him as "bright barbarians" who "break the patterns one by one and follow their wild desires. And as they play among the ruins of the old, they reason subtly about the new, laughing" (257). The divide between the ruins of the old and the randomness of the new is represented by the conclusions to *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *This Side of Paradise*. Tarkington's George Minafer indirectly asks Eugene Morgan for forgiveness as he is ushered into security by his deceased mother's true love, since she wanted nothing more than for Eugene "'to be kind'—to Georgie!" (Tarkington 514). As Eugene enters George's hospital room, "he stopped on the threshold, startled; for, from the waxen face on the pillow, almost it seemed the eyes of Isabel herself were looking at him: never before had the resemblance between mother and son been so strong—and Eugene knew that now he had once seen it thus startlingly, he need divest himself of no bitterness 'to be kind' to Georgie" (516). George seeks forgiveness, and Eugene abides by his dying love's last wish as he prepares to forgive Isabel's Georgie, an ending both sentimental and squarely within the "Tarkington mold." However, Fitzgerald's novel concludes with Amory Blaine contemplating his future: "And he could not tell why the struggle was worthwhile, why he had determined to use to the utmost himself and his heritage from the personalities he had passed . . . He stretched out his arms to the crystalline, radiant sky. 'I know myself,' he cried, 'but that is all—'" (*This Side of Paradise* 260). Fitzgerald saw himself in Amory, a young man prepared to define himself, and no one else. Just as Amory knows himself, Fitzgerald appears to know himself, and that is all. No forgiveness or attribution, only self-assurance.

Fitzgerald's excision of authorial influences (and personalities) early in his career aligns with the "other vanishings" Tarkington described early on in *Ambersons* (10).⁹ In a self-interview for Scribner's just a few weeks after the release of *Paradise*, Fitzgerald

asked himself: “Do you expect to be—to be—well, part of the great literary tradition?” He replied: “There’s no great literary tradition . . . There’s only the tradition of the eventual death of every literary tradition. The wise literary son kills his own father” (*In His Own Time* 162-163).¹⁰ Fitzgerald’s early career was concerned with adaptation, movement, and self-definition, and he consistently measured himself with and against several writers both in private and in public. However, a passage from one of Eugene’s letters to Isabel (which George covertly reads) best demonstrates the relationship between Fitzgerald and Tarkington: “[A]t twenty-one or twenty-two so many things appear solid and permanent and terrible which forty sees are nothing but disappearing miasma. Forty can’t *tell* twenty about this; that’s the pity of it! Twenty can find out only by getting to be forty” (Tarkington 355). Fitzgerald’s criticism of Tarkington eventually came home to roost, as he, too, became remembered primarily for writing about a bygone era once he approached forty.¹¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald searched his entire career, acquiring and “killing” influences as fast as he could read them, and using “to the utmost himself and his heritage” when it best suited his fiction. Yet it was writers like Booth Tarkington who provided him with a beginning, a glittering thing for a novice writer from St. Paul, Minnesota.

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NOTES

¹Fitzgerald had submitted an earlier version of his novel to Scribner’s entitled “The Romantic Egotist” in 1918. It was rejected.

²*This Side of Paradise* made Fitzgerald famous almost overnight, yet for the remainder of his career he fought with the anxiety of being labelled “the author of *This Side of Paradise*.” For instance, while working on *The Great Gatsby* he wrote Max Perkins: “I’m tired of being the author of *This Side of Paradise* and I want to start over” (Kuehl and Bryer 80).

³A reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* called the book “disconnected,” the review from the *Sunday Republican* noted the book’s “jerkiness,” and a review from the *New Republic* noticed the book’s “lack of unity” (Bryer 5; 7; 11).

⁴See Jace Gatzemeyer’s essay in this volume concerning “How to Waste Material” for a full examination.

⁵Pierre Bourdieu outlines three “competing principles of legitimacy” embedded in what he calls the field of cultural production, whereby the literary field subverts the conventional hierarchy of economics by valuing “art for art’s sake” over work written for profit. Writers “tend to be torn between the internal demands of the field of production, which regard commercial successes as suspect and push them towards a heretical break with the established norms of production and consumption, and the expectations of their vast audience” (348). Literary critics tend to succumb to this model, since the writer of popular fiction cannot be

as artistically legitimate as the author of serious prose. See Bourdieu's "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed."

⁶Lewis produced seven novels in ten years from 1920 to 1930; five sold more than 100,000 copies each. *Arrowsmith* (1925) won him the Pulitzer Prize, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930. James Hutchisson contends that few authors have been able to balance "simultaneous critical and popular success" as well as Lewis in the 1920s (208). For reference, Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922) received a first printing of 80,500 copies, and the first edition run sold more than 100,000 copies (88), based in part on the success of *Main Street* (1920), which by the end of 1921 had sold over 295,000 copies (42). Other than the total first edition run of *This Side of Paradise* (roughly 51,000 copies), none of the first edition runs of Fitzgerald's subsequent novels surpassed 24,000 copies.

⁷Fitzgerald was a keen observer of the critical landscape, and he certainly would have read Van Doren's work concerning Tarkington, in which he asks, "Why then does he continue to trifle with his thread-bare adolescents, as if he were afraid to write candidly about his coevals? Why does he drift with the sentimental tide and make propaganda for provincial complacency? He must know better. He can do better" (141). This piece was reprinted in Van Doren's *Contemporary American Novelists, 1900-1920* (1922), though it was originally published in February of 1921, one year prior to the publication of Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*. Fitzgerald's second novel marks a sharp departure from his first, suggesting that perhaps he, too, wished to "do better" than the adolescent fiction of Tarkington.

⁸FSF to H.L. Mencken, 30 December 1920. In the same letter, he refers to Dell as "Dostoieffski [sic] out of the Illinois corn crop" (Bruccoli & Duggan 75).

⁹"Horse and stable and woodshed, and the whole tribe of the 'hired-man,' all are gone. They went quickly, yet so silently that we whom they served have not yet really noticed that they are vanished. So with other vanishings" (Tarkington 10).

¹⁰According to Bruccoli and Bryer, the interview was first printed as Carleton R. Davis's interview with Fitzgerald, *New York Tribune* 7 May 1920 (*In His Own Time* 163).

¹¹Fitzgerald published *Tender Is the Night* in his thirty-eighth year. Reviews were mixed, with criticism levelled against the book for adhering to the past. The reviewer for *News-Week* called the atmosphere "stale," G. L. Peterson of the *Minnesota Tribune* argued that "the people and the background are hackneyed now," and Edith Walton called the characters "the flappers and philosophers of a decade ago grown tired and a little tarnished" (Bryer 78, 85, 87).

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“I’VE TRIED TO BE NICE”: THE END OF NICENESS IN FITZGERALD’S “BERNICE BOBS HER HAIR”

DEBORAH DAVIS SCHLACKS

“Nice” is a maddeningly imprecise term, but nonetheless one with significant social consequences for many, particularly women, who, in mainstream America, have often been expected to be or act nice. “Nice” can mean “respectable,” or “kind and polite,” or “particular and to exacting standards” or “virtuous,” or “fitting and appropriate.” Sometimes meanings and usages overlap. Gender role researcher Carol Gilligan wrote in the 1990s of the “tyranny of the nice and kind,” referring to American girls being taught they must act nice. They were expected to be unassertive, hold in anger, and, consequently, have no voice (53-62). Meanwhile, originating in the 1930s, the phrase “Minnesota Nice,” has gained popularity.¹ Annette Atkins, in *Creating Minnesota*, describes Minnesota Nice as “a polite friendliness, an aversion to confrontation, a tendency toward understatement, a disinclination to make a fuss or stand out, emotional restraint, and self-deprecation.” Advocates think that “nice makes the world work a little better, smoother, more easily” (242). It is, they say, egalitarian: I’m no better than anyone else, so I should not put on airs, and I should help others because we are all equally deserving of aid.

However, according to Atkins, “critics of Minnesota Nice call this behavior passive-aggressive and bridle at never knowing for sure what Minnesotans think. Nicers, they say, pretend consensus where none exists and fail to express disagreement or emotion directly; the reserve feels cool, even cold. Racist, too” (242-43). Nicers disapprove of change or outsiders, so the “we” in “we are all equally deserving of aid” is not really everyone, but just those sufficiently like us. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” (1920),

niceness is nothing like the egalitarian version of Minnesota Nice. The characters inhabit an elite Middle Western society that thinks it owns “nice” and favors “respectable” as its definition. Most kindness is just show. As with the negative version of Minnesota Nice, a host of boundaries define and regulate this niceness: boundaries of class, race, gender, generation. Bernice’s departure at story’s end is an escape of someone who does not fit in, an escape from a 1920s version of the “tyranny of the nice.”

At first glance, “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” appears to have little to do with niceness of any stripe. Bernice, from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, is visiting her cousin Marjorie’s family in St. Paul, Minnesota. Bernice is boring at dances, speaking incessantly of Eau Claire weather and other dull topics; Marjorie is a social butterfly, brash and outspoken. Marjorie tutors Bernice in popularity, teaching her to use the “line” that Bernice will soon bob her hair. When Marjorie’s beau, Warren McIntyre, warms to the newly fascinating Bernice, Marjorie calls Bernice’s bluff on the hair bobbing, forcing Bernice into the haircut. Bernice’s looks are ruined, she will be an embarrassment at an upcoming dinner hosted by an antihair-bobbing matron, Marjorie instantly wins back Warren, and, in revenge, Bernice cuts off Marjorie’s braids while the latter sleeps. Bernice leaves town after throwing the braids onto Warren’s porch. To interrogate the role of niceness in such a not-nice story, we must explore definitions of the Middle West and the geographic, class, ethnic, generational, and gender boundaries in the region; discuss the contrasts between St. Paul and Eau Claire and the influence of Eastern notions of niceness; scrutinize niceness as portrayed in key scenes of the story; and investigate Fitzgerald’s use of a variety of allusions to elucidate the main characters’ niceness or lack thereof.

FITZGERALD’S MIDDLE WEST: EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL BOUNDARIES

In 1922, Edmund Wilson singled out “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” when he identified Fitzgerald’s being from “the middle west of large cities and country clubs” (22) as a major influence upon the author. The characters in the story “are part of the organism of St. Paul” (23), Wilson maintained. The operations of niceness in the story should thus be understood as belonging above all to this particular place. The regional label “Middle West” was relatively new and still in flux at the time of the story’s creation, having been used only since the

1890s. It had initially referred to just Kansas and Nebraska, expanded to include other states, and more recently (1902-12) taken in the states of the Old Northwest, which included Minnesota and Wisconsin. Throughout these developments, one thing held constant: the image of the Middle West as rural (Shortridge 16-26).

Fitzgerald violates this tenet and otherwise limits the targeted area when in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) he proclaims a far-northern, urban, prosperous definition. Near the novel's end, Nick Carraway describes stopping in Chicago to change trains to go farther West when returning from Eastern schools at Christmas. On these occasions, he and other returning students would discuss plans to go to the "'Ordways'? the Herseys'? the Schultzes'?" and then embark on the "murky yellow cars of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad," pulling out "into the winter night and the real snow, our snow," where "the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by . . ." (136-37). Nick notes, "That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns but the thrilling returning trains of my youth and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow" (137). Nick hereby explicitly rejects the idea of a rural Midwest; instead, his is an urban scene. Also, Nick's Middle West is the upper Middle West, land of the "long winters" and of the frost and snow.

Even more narrowly, Nick's Middle West is the prosperous part of St. Paul: the Herseys, Schultzes, and Ordways were among Fitzgerald's wealthy real-life neighbors in his upscale Summit Avenue neighborhood. For the reader unaware of these names, other details are given, such as the "fur coats of the girls returning from Miss This-or-That's" (136), people whose families can afford to send them to fancy schools and dress them in fancy clothes. They can also afford houses with lighted windows making the houses seem warm and cozy, in contrast to the shadows on the snow outside them, a portrait of the cold and dark, the environment of those outside the warm, prosperous core. This Middle West is a land of social hierarchy, with an insider vs. outsider mentality.

Notably, Wisconsin is virtually excluded from Nick Carraway's Middle West. He mentions the "dim lights of small Wisconsin stations," identifying Wisconsin with the rural and, to him, not-my-Middle-West part of the equation, the dim lights contrasting with the well-lighted windows of St. Paul's elite. Fitzgerald elsewhere men-

tions the “raw food served up by the railroad restaurants of California and Wisconsin” (“How to Waste Material” 149), as if he disliked Wisconsin and had viewed it mainly from the railroad stations of its smaller towns. In “Bernice Bobs Her Hair,” Fitzgerald deploys a similarly limited definition of the Middle West. Images from *The Great Gatsby* passage are reminiscent of the story’s opening scene. At a country club dance in St. Paul, the ballroom’s yellow windows are surrounded by a “very black and wavy ocean” that turns out to be the “heads of many curious caddies, a few of the more ingenious chauffeurs, the golf professional’s deaf sister” (48). These onlookers are outside looking in, *déclassé*, appearing black in the darkness, most with no chance of entering. Largely, the difference between them and the insiders is one of class, though the inclusion of the “golf professional’s deaf sister” on the list shows that disability is also disqualifying.

Inside, this Middle West’s interior boundaries of class, race, gender, and generational differences operate. A so-called balcony is really a circle of chairs around the room’s perimeter, in which are seated middle-aged women “with sharp eyes and icy hearts behind lorgnettes and large bosoms” who scrutinize the youthful dancers (48). The circle is called a balcony because the middle-aged women do figuratively look down upon the young dancers. In the absence of chaperones, the women think “stray couples will dance weird barbaric interludes in the corners, and the more popular, more dangerous, girls will sometimes be kissed in the parked limousines of unsuspecting dowagers” (48).

However, a generational boundary is a wall through which the older set cannot see: actually, these very things have happened on other evenings (and the chaperones know it—hence the examples) and may happen again this evening despite the chaperones’ efforts. And, unknown to the dowagers, “subtler byplay” happens, and the dancers “sway to the plaintive African rhythm of Dyer’s dance orchestra” (48) in a way that these chaperones do not recognize as a threat. Meanwhile, racial boundaries, represented by the barbaric interludes and African rhythms, are in danger of being transgressed, and gender boundaries are being crossed as girls dance scandalously and allow themselves to be kissed. In other words, the young people are not being nice, but they mostly hide or disguise this behavior, continuing to appear somewhat respectable.

Indeed, everything in this scene is shown to be theatre. The people outside are the “gallery,” the dowagers are in the “balcony,” and

the young people are on stage (48). In a 1915 letter that was the basis for “Bernice Bobs Her Hair,” Fitzgerald gave his sister Annabel advice on how to be popular, stressing, as Rena Sanderson puts it, “that popularity was, in fact, the inevitable reward for a carefully constructed persona” (149). Being a good actor was crucial: a girl might need to act nice sometimes, but any genuine kindness was neither here nor there. Since acting kind and virtuous all of the time is not natural to begin with, if these are the valued social traits, then play-acting them is an understandable result. Conversely, when the situation calls for it, the same girl can act rebellious, brash, and witty, as Marjorie often does. We see this duality in the behavior of the young people at the dance. Whatever type of behavior will advance popularity and thus marriage eligibility will happen in this elite St. Paul society.

EAU CLAIRE, ST. PAUL, AND EASTERN INFLUENCES

In contrast to St. Paul is Eau Claire, Bernice’s hometown, eighty miles east of St. Paul. With a 1920 population of around 20,000, Eau Claire was ten times smaller than St. Paul, at over 200,000. In turn, Chicago was ten times larger than St. Paul, at over two million. Fitzgerald, keenly aware of the relative prestige of cities and people and undoubtedly familiar with Eau Claire and Chicago via train trips East, perhaps chose Eau Claire for Bernice’s hometown in part because of these relative population figures. Eau Claire is, for him, ten times more provincial than St. Paul, which is in turn ten times more provincial than Chicago.

This interpretation squares with Fitzgerald’s seeming negativity toward Wisconsin, which he appears to have consigned to the ash heap of rural insignificance. Additionally, as Nikhil Gupta points out, “the name of Bernice’s hometown alone signals early French and Native American resistance to colonial expansion on the American continent” (35). Bernice’s part-American Indian ancestry, which, as we shall see, is significant to the story’s depiction of niceness, fits with her being from this particular town. Also, Eau Claire had been for over fifty years known as a lumbering center, so it may be assumed that her family’s riches come from that dying industry, dying because the clear-cutting of the pine forests in the area had almost completely decimated them by the time this story was written. The near-genocide of American Indians nationally, added to the

near-obliteration of the trees—both phenomena due to short-sighted commercialism—lives in the background as Bernice’s initial devotion to the seemingly lost cause of old-fashioned notions of what she terms “‘common kindness’” (58) gives way to Marjori’s popularity lessons, meant to make her good marriage material in what amounts to another commercial interchange. In short, by having Bernice hail from Eau Claire, Fitzgerald comments all at once on wealth, decline, and outsider status.

St. Paul is indeed presented as a formidable social presence in contrast to Eau Claire’s provincialism. Part of this formidability involved St. Paul’s influential Eastern roots, more so than most other Middle Western cities. Fitzgerald points these roots out in his 1923 review of fellow St. Paul author Grace Flandrau’s novel *Being Respectable*. He calls St. Paul a

‘three-generation’ town, while the others [he names Indianapolis, Minneapolis, Kansas City, and Milwaukee] boast but two. In the [eighteen-]fifties the climate of St. Paul was reputed exceptionally healthy. Consequently there arrived an element from the East who had both money and fashionable education. These Easterners mingled with the rising German and Irish stock. . . . But the pace was set by the tubercular Easterners. Hence the particular social complacency of St. Paul. (“Minnesota’s Capital” 141)

In the same piece, Fitzgerald writes of “St. Paul’s passionate imitation of Chicago imitating New York imitating London” (“Minnesota’s Capital” 142). This assessment was not Fitzgerald’s alone, of course. For example, in a 1922 interview with Fitzgerald, his St. Paul friend and fellow author Thomas Boyd says, “St. Paul presents to the eye the spectacle of a huge city clinging tenaciously to the east and alarmed over the danger of falling into the west” (Boyd 11).

We might assume the nature of the influence was modernizing, that Marjorie and her “pupil” Bernice are imitating Eastern ways in their brazen behavior, as if all trends originated in the East. However, the opposite was the case. It was the more traditional behavioral mores of the East that the elite Middle Westerners of Fitzgerald’s acquaintance were heretofore accustomed to imitating. Henry Dan Piper notes that Fitzgerald’s first novel, *This Side of Paradise*,

introduced to many of its more youthful feminine readers, *especially* in the East, a brand-new kind of heroine—an emancipated American girl whose behavior was quite different from the code of manners to

which they were expected to conform. Unlike her *Western* counterpart, who was a product of the more free-and-easy frontier, the *Eastern* girl was still subject to such old-fashioned European customs as the chaperon, an elaborately formal system of etiquette, and an educational philosophy which advocated the separation of the sexes and the incarceration of the girls into prisonlike boarding schools. (60-61, emphasis added)

Piper cites the etiquette lessons of Mrs. Frank Learned in *The Etiquette of New York To-day* as indicators of what was still expected of Eastern girls at this time and of Eastern distress at the freewheeling Middle-Western attitude (61). Learned states:

Many annoying complications would be avoided if parents and young people in small towns realized the wisdom, the dignity and the need of following the established rules of the social code. In many parts of the West and South society may grant a girl the privilege of visiting places of public refreshment or amusement alone with a young man, or of accepting his escort to or from an evening party, but this is contrary to the code of good form in the best social life of Eastern cities. (285-86)

As for “Bernice,” Piper says it was the “Boston and Philadelphia [that is, Eastern] ministers and editors who accused him [Fitzgerald] of trying to corrupt their daughters” with the story (61).

Besides Eastern etiquette texts, one other Eastern text is significant in “Bernice Bobs Her Hair”: Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868-1869). Susan F. Beegel perceptively shows that “Fitzgerald borrowed his main plot elements and themes from *Little Women*, turning them upside down in a Jazz Age revision of what Amory Blaine calls ‘the dull literature of female virtue’” (60). For Bernice, Alcott’s novel is, in Beegel’s terms, a “moral guidebook” (66) that has taught Bernice to value, in Bernice’s own words, “‘common kindness’” (58). What Beegel does not emphasize is that Alcott’s novel is a New England novel. In having used this novel as her guidebook, Bernice has developed an Eastern view of niceness. As Piper points out, the brazen, not-nice behavior was coming from the very social stratum in the Middle West that Fitzgerald depicts in this story. In fact, Fitzgerald helped spread word of it throughout the nation via this story (and others). Fitzgerald explains in the following statement made in an interview why it would be Middle Westerners who would serve as the founders of the new trend:

“I lived out West. In Chicago and St. Paul, for instance, the girls of my acquaintance seemed utterly different from any girls I had ever read about. Of course money was the direct reason. In the Middle West there was wealth without background, tradition, or manners, in the broad sense of the word. Naturally, with this new and powerful resource in their hands to do with as they desired, many of the younger girls could use their leisure and exuberant vitality only in some form of excess.” (“F. Scott Fitzgerald Says” 57)

Begin with some left-over frontier free-wheelingness, sprinkle with money, add a dollop of Freud and some postwar disillusionment, and the Middle Western recipe for the antinice flapper is complete, according to Fitzgerald. As he concludes, “By 1915, the best send-off a girl who visited in St. Paul could possibly have was that she bore the reputation of being a violent petter, and had driven innumerable men to distraction” (58).² Bernice is the before and after exhibit, showing what a visit to St. Paul could do to a girl.

NICENESS IN THE STORY

Bernice’s initial alignment with niceness as preached in the East becomes clear in two key scenes. The first is a conversation between Marjorie and Mrs. Harvey (Marjorie’s mother), which Bernice overhears. Having listened to Marjorie talk about Bernice’s lack of popularity, Mrs. Harvey thinks that “when she [Mrs. Harvey] was a girl all young ladies who belonged to nice families had glorious times” (55). Here, “nice” means “respectable.” Later, Mrs. Harvey, objecting to Marjorie’s disparagement of Bernice, counters that Bernice is “sweet” (55)—another way of saying “nice” with the meaning of “polite and kind.” In sum, Mrs. Harvey acts as though “modern situations were too much for her” (55). Being unimpressed with niceness is presented as a modern attitude, as opposed to the old-fashioned view of Mrs. Harvey, in which being from a respectable family and acting nice and kind were considered to fit together.

Mrs. Harvey is a fictional forerunner of Riply Buckner’s mother in Fitzgerald’s “The Scandal Detectives” (1928), set in St. Paul circa 1911. Described as “a woman of character, a member of Society in a large Middle-Western city,” Mrs. Buckner is “progressing across a hundred years” in walking across her lawn toward her son and his friend, Basil, who are writing a book of scandal about neighbors. “Her own thoughts would have been comprehensible to her great-grandmother; what was happening in a room above the stable would

have been entirely unintelligible to them both” (162). Riply and Basil are not being nice in writing about neighbors’ scandals, something Mrs. Buckner could not understand if she learned of it, any more than Mrs. Harvey can understand her daughter’s devaluing of niceness. To them, “a woman of character, a member of Society in a large Middle-Western city” simply does not recognize or condone not-nice behavior.

The second key scene immediately follows the first. Upset, Bernice confronts Marjorie about the latter’s remarks: “‘I’ve tried to be nice’”(56). She reacts to Marjorie’s critique of her wardrobe by asking, “‘Do you think that was a very nice thing to say?’” (57). That is, Bernice is saying that Marjorie is not nice (not “kind and polite”). Marjorie herself contributes two uses of the word. Replying to Bernice’s question above, Marjorie says, “‘I wasn’t trying to be nice’” (57). So Bernice is right: Marjorie is not nice, and she often does not care to act nice. In her other use of the word, Marjorie offers to use a month’s allowance to put Bernice up at a “‘very nice hotel’” (58) for what is supposed to have been the last week of Bernice’s visit, if Bernice cannot face going home early and having to explain why. Clearly the reference to a “‘very nice hotel’” is a reference to respectability (and to the idea of the well-done, expensive *accoutrements* of the hotel). With this usage, Marjorie is not trying to “be nice” (kind and polite), for she makes the offer only to be rid of Bernice. Meanwhile, Bernice’s “‘I’ve tried to be nice,’” and “‘Do you think that was a very nice thing to say?’” refer to Bernice’s belief that acting nice in the sense of being kind—or at least in hiding one’s criticism—is important. Marjorie’s lack of care about niceness marks her as a modern woman—or at least so it seems.

Being nice might not be important to Marjorie, but *acting* nice sometimes is. A key part of her popularity lessons concerns putting on this precise act. Marjorie tells Bernice,

“Well, you’ve got to learn to be nice to men who are sad birds. You look as if you’d been insulted whenever you’re thrown in with any except the most popular boys. Why, Bernice, I’m cut in on every few feet—and who does most of it? Why, those very sad birds. No girl can afford to neglect them. They’re a big part of any crowd. Young boys too shy to talk are the very best conversational practice. Clumsy boys are the best dancing practice.” (61)

Further, Marjorie says that, through these means, "gradually so many sad birds will dance with you that the attractive boys will see there's no danger of being stuck—then they'll dance with you" (62). Niceness that is just an appearance and a way to manipulate, indeed a way to exploit, the shy and clumsy is what Marjorie values, for it helps her be popular and thus advances her prospects in the marriage market. But Bernice does not get off unscathed in this passage, for in it Marjorie also reveals that Bernice, champion of niceness, has not been acting nice.

How can someone who advocates common kindness so strenuously have not been nice to the sad birds? Scenes featuring two minor characters, Jim and Ethel, reveal much about the matter. Near the start of the story, Warren notices these two across the dance floor, and the narrator says they have been engaged for three years and are waiting to be married until, as Warren thinks, "Jim managed to hold a job for more than two months . . . Yet how bored they both looked, and how wearily Ethel regarded Jim sometimes, as if she wondered why she had trained the vines of her affection on such a wind-shaken poplar" (49). On another occasion, Warren points the couple out to Bernice, who replies, "I hear they've been mooning around for years without a red penny. Isn't it silly?" (53). Warren, we are told, does not like Bernice's remark; he "considered it bad form to sneer at people for not having money" (53). Yet he himself has earlier sneered at them, to himself.

This passage underscores how much maintaining a veneer of niceness means in this social set. Respectable people can have not-nice thoughts, but they had better not communicate them, at least not to the wrong person in the wrong way about the wrong thing. Bernice is not clear on the above point. For Bernice, niceness has its strict limits. At this stage, she does not know to "put on" niceness, so she is being genuine in her disdain. For Bernice, niceness is more of an abstraction, something she has read about in books, but not something she necessarily practices in her interactions with others. Perhaps niceness to her involves the absence of action rather than action. Perhaps, too, niceness applies more to how others treat her, or perhaps also to how those she deems worthy are treated, but not to how she treats anyone else. In fact, once Marjorie has made Bernice popular and the latter has been a smashing success at a country club party, Bernice falls asleep that night repeating "nice" almost as a mantra: "Marjorie nice girl—vain, though—nice evening—nice

boys—like Warren . . .” as if all that matters in assigning the term is how she is being treated at the moment—bitter irony since she is soon to be mistreated by these same characters (66).

The scenes concerning Jim and Ethel show, too, that the young people in this story (with one important exception, by story’s end) merely nibble at the edge of rebellion. They are actually conventional, trained on respectability, bound for marriages, and rehearsing for courting if not actually courting at the moment. A young woman’s fate remains, as it had for time immemorial, dependent upon the “poplar” upon which she “trains her vines” (49). Niceness in the form of respectability is still of supreme importance, and girls from nice families still have the same expectations as in earlier generations, just as Mrs. Harvey would say. Marjorie operates in accordance with these mores, too, but seems aware of them as unnatural conventions (whereas Bernice does not, early on, see them that way). In short, Marjorie wants to attract young men of the proper social class and, presumably, marry one of them someday and consciously uses niceness and its opposite as needed to do so.

SAXON PRINCESS MARJORIE VS. MÉTIS BERNICE

Indeed, though at first Marjorie seems far different from the traditional nice woman, she ultimately is not. Marjorie plays the part of a flapper who holds her own with the best of them. She does somersaults. She often says just what she thinks, no matter how insulting. However, Marjorie’s rebellion has its strict limits, just as Bernice’s niceness does. For instance, Marjorie, as Beegel points out, keeps her own hair blessedly long (69). She also does not step outside the boundaries of heteronormative behavior. Her conventionality becomes clearest in this scene:

Then Bernice winced as Marjorie tossed her own hair over her shoulders and began to twist it slowly into two long blond braids until in her cream-colored negligée she looked like a delicate painting of some Saxon princess. Fascinated, Bernice watched the braids grow. Heavy and luxurious they were, moving under the supple fingers like restive snakes—and to Bernice remained this relic [Bernice’s remaining hair, which is a relic of her once-long hair] and the curling-iron and a to-morrow full of eyes. (74)

The phrase “Saxon princess” alludes to Rowena, a major character in Sir Walter Scott’s 1820 novel *Ivanhoe*, a novel Fitzgerald loved.³

Rowena is repeatedly called a Saxon princess in *Ivanhoe*. In appearance, the fair, braided Marjorie is indeed like the fair Rowena. However, Rowena, though meant by Scott to be an idealized figure of a woman, is also depicted in *Ivanhoe* as passive and in need of rescue. For many readers through the years, she has been considered boringly nice. Of course, in behavior, vivacious and outspoken Marjorie seems little like Rowena, but in appearance and in the direct reference to her as "Saxon princess," she indeed is being compared to Rowena. However many somersaults Marjorie does or witty remarks she makes, she is limited to the boundaries of her nice, respectable, upper-crust St. Paul social world. Robert Sklar's comment about Fitzgerald's young people in the early *Saturday Evening Post* stories—among which was "Bernice Bobs Her Hair"—is that "for all their daring new ways, [they] played their games by prewar sentiments and standard rules" (109). This statement applies well to Marjorie.

The scene in which Bernice cuts off Marjorie's braids is a twist on the fairy tale plot in which the prince awakens the princess, except that here, the prince is replaced with a vengeful female rival: a young woman who has, according to Marjorie, "'crazy Indian blood'" (56). She "severed" one braid and "amputated" the other (75) from the head of a sleeping Saxon princess, who does not awaken. Marjorie is for once as passive and defenseless as Rowena. The term "Saxon princess" also alludes to Saxon bed burials. In the mid-nineteenth century, seventh-century bed burials of Saxon princesses (young women who, because of the expensive objects with which they had been buried, were called by that name) began to be discovered in England by archeologists. Two such burial sites were known of and had been publicized by Fitzgerald's time. (See Williams 30-35 for information on Saxon bed burials.) The vision of Marjorie as a Saxon princess asleep in her bed seems much like the replicas and drawings depicting what the Saxon princesses in the bed burials would have looked like. This allusion reinforces the notion of Marjorie's ultimate passivity in the face of social and psychological forces that go beyond the force of her vivacity.⁴

In contrast to the Saxon Marjorie, Bernice is a métis character—that is, part American Indian. Throughout much of the story, she is shown to be assimilated into the dominant white culture, not even letting the nonwhite part of her identity register in her consciousness. But it *does* register in Marjorie's. When Bernice overhears Marjorie

and Mrs. Harvey, Bernice hears Marjorie remark on Bernice's reputed "crazy Indian blood" (56). That Bernice's American Indian heritage is a family secret becomes clear in Mrs. Harvey's reply: "Go to bed, you silly child . . . I wouldn't have told you that if I'd thought you were going to remember it" (56). Clearly, this fact has been thought best forgotten. In fact, Indians (Ojibwe and Dakota) were very much present in the upper Middle West, near to both St. Paul and Eau Claire, but they were also often forgotten and overlooked. Marjorie's only other comment on the subject stems from and reveals this ignorance: "Maybe she's a reversion to type. Indian women all just sat around and never said anything" (56). Marjorie's comment about Indian women is indicative of stereotypical ways in which Indian women were frequently viewed—or, more aptly put, not viewed. Any realities about American Indian women are not at all a part of Marjorie's essentializing consciousness.⁵

We might think Bernice would be upset about the offensive "crazy Indian blood" talk. However, she does not bring the remark up to Marjorie when she confronts her about other aspects of Marjorie's overhead remarks that Bernice has found troubling. Not even in Bernice's thoughts, relayed by the omniscient narrator, does Bernice reflect upon the "crazy Indian blood" remark. Until Marjorie tutors Bernice otherwise, she follows to the letter the lessons of *Little Women*, and she seems to assume the social hierarchy is gospel. Then, when the rules change—that is, when Marjorie has trained her—Bernice follows the new rules well, too. Until almost the end of the story, she does not seem to consider her mixed ethnicity in any way. When it comes to race and ethnicity, this story is as much about what is not said—what messages are avoided—as what is said. Indirection and avoidance of uncomfortable, even taboo, topics, are well-honed habits, as was also the case with Warren's thinking of Jim and Ethel critically but not wanting any criticism of them to be said aloud. Niceness strikes again.

But Bernice does not ultimately avoid the taboo topic of her reputed ethnicity; her embracing of it produces the parting message of the story, where niceness plays no role at all. That is, Bernice embraces a stereotype of Native American ethnicity by cutting off Marjorie's braids, throwing them on Warren's porch, and proclaiming, "Scalp the selfish thing!" (76). Marjorie has earlier spoken of Indian women as passive, sitting around silently. This is, of course, just a stereotype, but one of Indian women, not Indian men, who were

typically stereotyped instead as brutally savage and violent. Thus Bernice transgresses not only racial-ethnic but also gender boundaries in her act. Notably, however, Bernice does not scalp first. Nikhil Gupta likens “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” to a captivity narrative in which the métis Bernice is subjected during her stay at Marjorie’s to “animosity, ridicule, and, eventually, an enforced cultural transformation” (45) in which Bernice is first to be “scalped.”

Having both the unassailably Anglo-Saxon character and the métis character scalp each other alludes to historical fact. Scalping had been practiced in the Americas by some Indian tribes beginning in pre-Columbian times, with scalps traditionally serving as trophies of battle among warriors, but eventually whites, including the government, offered scalp bounties to soldiers and others, including some Indians, who would scalp Indians hostile to their interests. Scalping was thus commercialized and became more widespread, practiced by some Indians and some whites alike (Axtell and Sturtevant 469-72). From Marjorie’s point of view, she needs to resume her position as prime product in the marriage market, so indirectly Bernice’s shorn hair serves as a bounty of sorts. From Bernice’s vantage point, she, in the end, becomes explicitly the outsider she has always implicitly been, becomes unshackled from her bondage to Eastern-cum-Middle-Western ways, most especially niceness, by scalping back. The two acts differ mainly in degree of directness: Bernice herself cuts Marjorie’s hair, but Marjorie traps Bernice into having her hair cut. Again, we note the indirectness often needed for maintaining social propriety: Marjorie gets off on a technicality in that she does not actually do the deed. She can continue to look respectable. Meanwhile, Bernice’s act is a direct strike, an utterly rebellious deed, putting her outside of bounds of this society.

The unshackled Bernice, as she departs at story’s end, stands in contrast to her namesake, Berenice, an ancient Queen of Egypt. In Egyptian legend, Queen Berenice sacrificed a lock of hair to Venus in exchange for the safe return from war of her husband—nice, respectable behavior if there ever was. In honor of this deed, Venus sent the hair up to the heavens to become a constellation, *Como Berenice* (McDonough). In the mock heroic poem “*Como Berenices*,” by the ancient Roman poet Catullus, the lock of hair, which serves as persona of the poem, complains about this act, calling it an unnecessary sacrifice. The husband would have been safe anyway and was not worth the sacrifice, says the hair, which would rather be back on

Berenice's head. Catullus's poem mockingly undercuts the notion that sacrificial haircutting to preserve marriage is worthwhile. In her act, Bernice makes a similar point, treating Marjorie's braids as a trophy, letting them cancel out the earlier forced sacrifice of her own hair on the altar of being attractive to boys.

More like the unshackled Bernice is Rebecca, the other leading lady of Scott's *Ivanhoe*. If the blonde Marjorie resembles the light-haired Rowena, then the brunette Bernice represents the dark-haired Rebecca. Rebecca is a racial outsider in Scott's novel, Jewish in a time and place in which Jewish people were reviled. Yet Rebecca is a brave, active woman who rescues other characters. While readers have disregarded the virtuous but boring Rowena, they have typically loved Rebecca. Just as Marjorie's behavior seems little like Rowena's, Bernice's behavior seems little like Rebecca's, but in terms of racial-ethnic identity, Bernice and Rebecca do occupy a similar position as outsiders. Notably, in *Ivanhoe*, Rowena suggests that Rebecca convert to Christianity, but Rebecca will not convert, proclaiming instead her loyalty to her religion and to her father, even though it will mean she and her father must leave England.⁶ Thus both Bernice and Rebecca react to attempts to convert them. Throughout much of the story, Bernice has (unlike Rebecca) seemed to readily convert to whatever behavior she thought mainstream society was asking of her. But Bernice's acquiescence does ultimately end. She, like Rebecca, leaves, unconverted, in the end. Of course, there is a definite difference in the quality of Bernice's and Rebecca's actions and motivations: Bernice's parting action is vengeful and violent while Rebecca's is noble and dignified. Nonetheless, they are both resistant to mainstream ways in the end. Notably, though Bernice's immediate destination is left unstated, Marjorie has mentioned that Bernice is "going to school in New York next year" (55). There, in the East, Bernice will presumably spread her newfound notice ways.

THE NAME SAYS IT ALL

In the end, Bernice's name says it all. On one level, it alludes in ironic fashion to Queen Berenice, as we have seen. On another, we have the dictionary meaning of this Greek name: bearer of victory, and she does, indeed, exude victory as she walks away from St. Paul, laughing. On yet another, we have the homophonic and homographic

properties of the two parts of the name: “Bern” sounds like “burn,” and “nice” (pronounced in the name like “niece”) looks like “nice” (the word with which this study has been concerned). Thus, we arrive at the phrase “burn nice,” one that well captures what Bernice has done by story’s end: she has burned niceness, burned it up for herself and, presumably, for others as her brand of rebellion will spread as she travels from this place. As the cliché goes, she “burns her bridges,” escaping across the borders of both the old-fashioned niceness code with which she began and also the new-fangled marginally rebellious yet ultimately conventional rules Marjorie has taught her. Fitzgerald’s “Bernice Bobs Her Hair” emerges as a subversive tale: seemingly light and entertaining, and published in the mainstream *Saturday Evening Post* where subversion was a necessity.⁷ The story packs a serious punch in its depiction of an outsider embracing that status. The story rejects niceness in a most dramatic way and ensures that the “tyranny of the nice,” 1920s style, is, for Bernice, no more.

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NOTES

¹Minnesota playwright Syl Jones traces the concept to Scandinavian immigrants and cites the novel *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks* (published in 1933; English translation in 1936) by Danish-Norwegian novelist Aksel Sandemose, as introducing it. In this novel, the Jante Law (Janteloven) consists of ten rules summed up in the notion that you should not feel you are anything special. See also Avant and Knutson on Janteloven in Norway and in the Middle West.

²A 1922 *Ladies’ Home Journal* article, “Our Jazz-Spotted Middle West” by John R. McMahon, shows the boomeranging quality of the spreading of the new behavioral code. McMahon complains that Middle Western small towns are being infected with “modernity,” which he equates with jazz: “With the invention of the Afro-American dance [that is, jazz], that unholy mingling of the civilized with the savage, they [young people] seem to feel that the last handicap upon rural life has been removed” (38). McMahon does not name the origination point of the issue (Middle Western cities) but does suggest that once the craze became “universal” (181), it affected the East to the extent that “Deans of women in Eastern colleges, though deploring the modern dance, have fairly been forced to surrender to it” (181). Now, in 1922, it has come back West, affecting Middle Western colleges and small towns of the region.

³Gupta 44-46 speaks of the “Saxon princess” label applied to Marjorie as a way of proclaiming Marjorie’s racial purity (but Gupta does not link the phrase to *Ivanhoe*).

⁴See Berman 38-39 on Marjorie’s insufficiency in dealing with unconscious forces.

⁵In real life, someone such as Bernice could have had mixed ethnicity of this kind. Gray points out that intermarriage between Indians and French fur traders was common in this region before white settlers came there. And Wingerd writes of the “fluidity of racial boundaries” in the early St. Paul area, once white settlers did come. Marriage to Ojibwe and Dakota women was not uncommon for white men who settled early on in St. Paul (circa the 1840s). Yet even then, the society was not egalitarian; the Anglos held the power (20). By only a

decade or so later, long before the era in which “Bernice” is set, racial boundaries became much more impermeable. See also White for an example of an upper Middle West intermarriage in the St. Paul frontier era. In addition, even though racial categorization spelled the end of the fluidity and in other regions federal removal policies had caused tribes to go farther West, the policies had “either been incomplete or ineffectual” in the upper Middle West, says Gray (126; see also Cayton and Gray 14). So Ojibwe and Dakota people remained, paradoxically, a “formally invisible” presence (Gray 126), and Marjorie’s stereotyping shows how far removed the elite could be from those who were right there beside them. See Green for discussion of images of Indian women.

⁶In separate articles, Lewin and Ragussis (“Writing”) discuss Rebecca’s nonconversion. Also see Ragussis (“Representation”) on the character Berenice Montenero in Maria Edgeworth’s 1817 novel *Harrington*. A source for Scott’s Rebecca, Berenice is a Jewish woman who, out of respect for her father, will not convert to Christianity. Edgeworth is also the author of *Castle Rackrent*, a novel mentioned by Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*. Edgeworth’s Berenice is yet another quite probable source of Fitzgerald’s character’s name.

⁷Sklar discusses the *Post*’s conservatism, commenting (in a passage mentioned in part earlier) that in Fitzgerald’s *Post* stories, “the young, for all their daring new ways, played their games by prewar sentiments and standard rules. This must have been deeply reassuring to conservative readers of any age, for it implied that inevitable change would come without any great disruption in the eternal continuities” (109-10). Mangum discusses how the *Post* was devoted to the status quo, leading Fitzgerald in his early stories for the magazine to “make his chronicles as amusing to the average citizen as they were sometimes, perhaps, tragic to him” (31).

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THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME: MIDWESTERN
INTERTEXTUAL PLAY AND SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN
THE GREAT GATSBY

PATRICIA OMAN

Set primarily in New York City and the wealthiest neighborhoods of Long Island, F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* is not an obviously regional text. However, in addition to beginning and ending in the Midwest, it shares with the American regionalists of the 1920s fundamental critiques of American culture. Robert L. Dorman, for instance, argues that American regionalism arose after World War I "in response to a pervasive sense of malaise, of cultural crisis, that began troubling artists and intellectuals across the United States during the 1920s" (2). This "sense of malaise" is present throughout the novel, even culminating in the death of the title character, but Fitzgerald does not draw on typically regional themes or locations to represent it. While regionalists "located their own alternative materials, their models and visions of integrated cultures, out in the provinces, among the American folk" (3), in *Gatsby* Fitzgerald does just the opposite. Drawing from a European model of cultural malaise—the grail quest myth—he sends his characters on a journey from their native Midwestern provinces to the East Coast. Although *Gatsby* never makes it back to the Midwest, narrator Nick Carraway does, and it is this homecoming that defines the novel as Midwestern.

The complex intertextual field in *Gatsby* reveals how Fitzgerald transforms the European grail quest into a Midwestern phenomenon. The novel looks not only to the Western humanist tradition through texts such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) but also to the Midwest of the early twentieth century through texts such as L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923). This tension between a European cultural past and

an up-and-coming American region is not contradictory, though. In *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald draws on the spirituality inherent to the grail quest myth (and its earlier mystery cult influences) and Midwestern tropes to posit the Midwest as the literal and symbolic space of American national myth.

Of all the intertextual references in *Gatsby*, *The Waste Land*, especially the grail quest myth, has received the most attention from scholars. Fitzgerald himself acknowledged the debt in 1925 when he sent a copy of the newly published novel to Eliot with an inscription calling himself Eliot's "enthusiastic worshipper" (qtd. in Lagomarsino 44). Eliot reciprocated by calling the novel the "first step forward American fiction had taken since Henry James" (Turnbull 198). Despite this widespread recognition of Eliot's influence, however, I argue that *Gatsby* also draws significantly from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and *A Lost Lady*. My attempt to trace these intertextual connections in *Gatsby* is complicated by the fact that the three source texts I have identified all seem to draw from similar influences; that is, they all incorporate the themes of desert, water, and fertility associated with the grail quest myth. However, Baum and Cather place these themes in a specifically Midwestern context and inspire Fitzgerald's own ambivalent vision of the Midwest.

Andrea Lagomarsino argues that scholars' tendency to interpret the quest theme in *Gatsby* as "ironic, even 'parodic'" is misleading (46). These scholars assume that *Gatsby* is the protagonist, the knight who undertakes the quest, but she argues that *Gatsby* has more in common with the Fisher King than with the knight. Although there is no definitive grail quest story, the general myth is that a knight or quester must find the mystical grail to cure the sickness of the Fisher King. In curing the Fisher King, the grail also cures his lands, which have fallen to desert or ruin because of the sickness. The grail is therefore often seen as a symbol of fertility or spiritual redemption, especially since most versions suggest that the Fisher King's wounds are to his genitals. Fitzgerald scholars have often interpreted *Gatsby*'s unsuccessful attempt to win his grail (i.e., Daisy) as a failed quest, but *Gatsby*'s longing for Daisy mirrors the Fisher King's illness since both *Gatsby* and the Fisher King are unable to consummate their love. *Gatsby* therefore does not fail a quest so much as succumb to an illness.

By analyzing Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, Eliot's acknowledged source material for the grail myth, Lagomarsino

argues that *Gatsby* actually draws on the pre-Christian fertility cults of Adonis, the origin of the grail myth. This reading explains why Nick and, especially, his return to the Midwest, are so significant. The Fisher King, she notes, is closely related to the Phoenician/Greek god Adonis, whose “annual death and resurrection herald the rainy season that ultimately restores life to the earth” (50). The initiate to these rites witnesses this death and resurrection and therefore gains spiritual understanding from it. If Fitzgerald’s novel is based on this earlier version of the myth, then *Gatsby* is not the quester but the Adonis/Fisher King character whose death heals the world and Nick is the quester/initiate who witnesses these rites to bring about spiritual renewal. Lagomarsino’s argument is especially convincing because it explains Nick’s loyalty to *Gatsby* after his death, why he feels compelled to sort out the funeral details and track down *Gatsby*’s friends and family. These are ritual functions required of the initiate. Thus, the novel’s quest is fulfilled, not ironically or parodically, and Nick’s return home to the Midwest must fulfill some part of the ritual.

Lagomarsino’s reinterpretation of the novel’s grail quest imagery helps, in part, to explain Nick’s affective reorientation to the Midwest at the end of the novel. In the first chapter, Nick claims that when he came back from the Great War, the Midwest was no longer “the warm center of the world” but “seemed like the ragged edge of the universe” (7). By the end of the novel, however, the Midwest has been redeemed for him and seems like “the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow” (184). This nostalgic Currier & Ives representation of the Midwest is brought about by the spiritual knowledge inspired by *Gatsby*’s death, which evokes the last line of *The Waste Land*: “shantih shantih shantih.” In his notes to the poem, Eliot argues that the word “shantih” roughly translates to “The Peace which passeth understanding” (64), which could be a generic way to describe nostalgia. However, Eliot’s poem does not explain why Fitzgerald locates this nostalgia in the Midwest specifically. The intertextual references to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and, to a lesser extent, *A Lost Lady*, do.

I am not aware of any documentation that Fitzgerald liked (or even knew about) Baum’s novel,¹ but the parallels between *Gatsby* and *Oz* are undeniable, especially in the similarities between Dorothy and Nick. Both characters leave the Midwest because of a cata-

strophic event—WWI for Nick and a cyclone for Dorothy. Laura Barrett argues that Nick's surname, "Carraway," is a pun on the way he is carried away to the East Coast, just as the surname "Gale" refers to the cyclone that blows Dorothy to Oz (159), and Nick even has a dog for a short while when he first gets to East Egg. The supporting characters of the two novels are also roughly parallel: Daisy is the Scarecrow who is smarter than she or anyone else gives her credit for, Jordan the Tin Man who does not seem to have a heart but nevertheless loses it, and Tom the Cowardly Lion who bluffs and growls but ultimately turns out to be dangerous. Further, both protagonists face a powerful man who turns out to be a humbug—the alliteration of the title *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* repeated in the title *The Great Gatsby*. Beyond the character similarities, however, the two novels share contrasting desert/water/infertility imagery that ties *Gatsby* specifically to the Midwest. The infamous "valley of ashes" is the intertextual nexus of *Gatsby*, linking the novel not only to Eliot's poem but also to *Oz*. Its explicit description as a "waste land," for instance, suggests that Fitzgerald consciously drew from the modernist imagery of spiritual and moral decline in *The Waste Land*, but the description of the valley as a "gray land" over which "spasms of bleak dust . . . drift endlessly . . ." (27) also echoes descriptions of the gray Kansas prairie in Baum's novel. In all three cases, the desert-like waste land is part of a ritual performance involving death and spiritual renewal, but Fitzgerald's incorporation of Midwestern tropes and character types from *Oz* transforms the universal themes from *The Waste Land* into Midwestern ones.

In both novels, water imagery links the enduring myths of the American Garden and the Great American Desert. As Lagomarsino notes, the image of Gatsby's body floating on a "laden mattress" in the pool echoes the funeral rites of Adonis, whose body is sent ritually along a body of water on a bier (49-50). The cleansing rains that follow Adonis's death also appear during Gatsby's funeral (50). The purpose of this ritual is to not only redeem the Midwest as a nostalgic space but also to transform the valley of ashes back into the Edenic scene that, as Nick describes it, appeared to "Dutch sailors' eyes" as a "fresh, green breast of the new world" (189). A similar cleansing ritual takes place in *Oz* when Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch of the West with water. Although the stated reason for killing the Witch is to appease the Wizard, it is important to remember the desert conditions of Dorothy's Kansas home. As with Nick's

Midwestern home, Dorothy's Kansas is described as the edge of the universe. In fact, "When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached the edge of the sky in all directions" (1). In contrast to the drought-stricken Kansas of the 1890s, Oz is generally a verdant fantasy world. When she arrives in Oz, for instance, Dorothy finds "a country of marvelous beauty," with "lovely patches of green sward all about," "stately trees bearing rich and luscious fruits," "gorgeous flowers," and "a small brook, rushing and sparkling along between green banks, and murmuring in a voice very grateful to a little girl who had lived so long on the dry, gray prairies" (5). Baum's description of Oz's landscape as a utopian garden is a general convention of fantasy literature, but in its specific Kansas context it contrasts with the Great American Desert.

The color green also plays an important role in both novels, not just as the verdant antithesis of the desert imagery, but also as a way to link the Midwest to national myth. In *Gatsby*, it appears in the light at the end of Daisy's dock, which, according to Nick, represents for Gatsby "the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us" (189). In other words, the color green represents the unnamable, unattainable desire at the center of the novel (i.e., the "Peace that passeth understanding"). In *Oz*, the color green is both a symbol of the Wizard's nationalizing ambitions and the realization that the nation is a myth. Each of the regions of Oz is associated with a specific color: Munchkinland (the East) with blue, Winkieland (the West) with yellow, Quadlingland (the South) with red, and the Central region, also called Oz, with green. Because the effect of Dorothy's journey westward across Oz is to make the Wizard the primary leader of all regions, the color green represents his attempts to consolidate power. If, as Jerry Griswold argues, "the map of Oz is a map of the United States" (463), the Midwest serves a similar function as the Central region of Oz: it is both a distinct region and the symbolic representation of the nation. Fitzgerald's incorporation of themes and characters from *Oz*, especially the color green, thus suggests that *Gatsby* is invested in national myths.

The association of the Midwest with the nation is reinforced by the dual structure of each novel. The polysemic message of Baum's novel, for instance, is encouraged by the confusing nomenclature of his fantasy world—the whole land is known as "Oz" (as in the Land

of Oz), but the Central region, where the Emerald City is located, is also called “Oz.” Dorothy’s journeys—both between Kansas and Oz and within Oz itself—move continuously between a center and various peripheries. From the literal geographic center of the United States, she is transported to the periphery (Munchkinland) of Oz. Then she journeys to the center of Oz (the Emerald City) and then to another periphery (Winkieland) before going back to the central Emerald City. Before she can go home to Kansas, however, she journeys to another periphery (Quadlingland) to see Glinda. Dorothy’s constant movement between the center and its peripheries and the confusion between the center and periphery of Oz in nomenclature suggest that the novel’s multiple centers are symbolically connected. Nick’s journey in *Gatsby* is similar. After leaving Minnesota, which no longer feels like the center but the “ragged edge” of the universe, Nick lands in East Egg. In his time there, he crosses through the central valley of ashes many times on his way back and forth between East Egg and New York City. The valley of ashes, therefore, has a symbolic connection to Minnesota as the center. When Gatsby’s death renews the valley of ashes, it also renews Minnesota for Nick, just as the renewal of the Emerald City as the central administrative unit of Oz renews Kansas for Dorothy. The Midwest is the literal and symbolic center of both texts; that is, just as Oz is the projection of a national fantasy onto the Midwest in *Oz*, the East Coast is the projection of a national fantasy onto the Midwest in *Gatsby*.

The novels differ significantly in their affective responses to the Midwest, however. It is precisely when Nick admits the fantasy nature of the East Coast that he refers to the Midwest as “home,” claiming, “After Gatsby’s death the East was . . . distorted beyond my eyes’ power of correction. So . . . I decided to come back home” (185). The incorporation of the Adonis/Fisher King imagery into *Gatsby* suggests that the representation of the Midwest as “home” has spiritual/mythic dimensions. In other words, the nostalgic vision of the novel combines the spirituality of *The Waste Land* with the Midwestern trope of “home.” Dorothy’s recognition of Kansas as home lacks emotion, however. When the Scarecrow asks her why she would ever want to return to “the dry, gray place you call Kansas”—a reasonable question given the desert reality of 1890s Kansas—she replies, “No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home” (19). Her

response is an almost verbatim quote of “be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home” from Henry Bishop’s song “Home! Sweet Home!” which romanticizes the sanctuary of home life, but Dorothy never gives a personal reason for wanting to return home.² Thus, although both Nick and Dorothy call the Midwest “home,” *Oz* lacks the nostalgia of *Gatsby*.

To find a nostalgic vision of the Midwest, Fitzgerald looked to Willa Cather. Although I have suggested that Fitzgerald borrowed the Adonis/Fisher King myth from *The Waste Land*, he could have borrowed it directly from *A Lost Lady*, which elegizes the Nebraska frontier. In April of 1925, Fitzgerald wrote to Cather apologizing for what he called “an instance of apparent plagiarism” (qtd. in Bruccoli 171). He was referring specifically to the similarities in the descriptions of Daisy Buchanan in *Gatsby* and Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady*—Fitzgerald even admitted to reading *A Lost Lady* while he was working on the first draft of *Gatsby* (Bruccoli 171)—but there are more fundamental similarities between the two novels. As Lagomarsino argues, the *Gatsby*/Daisy/Tom love triangle in *Gatsby* parallels the mythical Adonis/Aphrodite/Ares love triangle in Adonis myths (57). In *A Lost Lady*, Marian Forrester (Aphrodite) is married to the disabled Captain Forrester (Adonis/Fisher King) but carries on an affair with the brash Frank Ellinger (Ares). Further, Captain Forrester’s death parallels the death of *Gatsby*, and a young man, Niel Herbert, serves as witness to the events. These parallels are so striking that I wonder whether Cather was directly influenced by *The Waste Land* (or Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*), as well.

Gatsby’s use of the American Garden and the Great American Desert tropes also could have come from *A Lost Lady*. Captain Forrester’s description of the plains when he first arrives in Nebraska, for instance—“good hunting, plenty of antelope and buffalo, boundless sunny sky, boundless plains of waving grass, long fresh-water lagoons yellow with lagoon flowers, where the bison in their periodic migrations stopped to drink and bathe and wallow” (42)—is pastoral and Edenic. The plenty he experiences upon his arrival does not last forever, though. After a horse-riding accident, he retires from the railroad business and, like the wounded Fisher King, watches as his lands and wealth begin to decline. When Forrester dies, however, no restoring rains bring back the vitality of his estate, Sweet Water. In fact, the opening lines of the novel, “[t]hirty or forty years ago,” indicate that Sweet Water’s prime is already past (3). Further, in the pre-

sent moment of the novel, Forrester's estate is located "in one of those grey towns along the Burlington railroad, which are so much greyer today than they were then . . ." (3). The emphasis on the color grey underscores the irony of the estate's name, Sweet Water, and echoes the contradictory desert/water imagery found in both *Gatsby* and *Oz*.

Because *A Lost Lady* is oriented to the remembrance of a halcyon past, its primary mode is nostalgic, which may have been appealing to Fitzgerald, but ultimately it is too pessimistic about the possibility of retrieving that past. Recognizing that many other scholars have seen a connection between Fitzgerald and Cather's propensity toward nostalgia, Stanley Brodwin argues, "Although Cather and Fitzgerald draw . . . an occasional but striking similarity of insight and emotional tone . . . we must recognize that at the very core of their artistic achievements there throbs a radically different perception and emotional confrontation with what is perhaps the most vital creative dialectic of all: the relationship of the past to the present and the prophesied future of hope and desire fulfilled" (107). While Brodwin does not go on to explain this argument in relation to *A Lost Lady* specifically, it certainly applies. Nick is able to redeem the Midwest in *Gatsby*, but his counterpart in *A Lost Lady* is not able to achieve this goal. As the quester in the Adonis mystery rites, Niel is a failure because he is unable to bring about spiritual renewal after the death of Captain Forrester. Significantly, Niel associates the downfall of the Forresters with the end of the pioneer era. The novel argues specifically, "[Niel] had seen the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneer. He had come upon it when already its glory was nearly spent" (144).

Further, it is precisely when he is most disillusioned about the woman he has admired most of his life, Marian, that readers are told, "This was the very end of the road-making West . . . It was already gone, that age; nothing could ever bring it back" (144-45). The last chapter of the novel describes Marian's success late in life in Buenos Ayres [sic], but Cather is fatally critical of frontier nostalgia by limiting it strictly to the past. In contrast, while Fitzgerald is critical of the nostalgic, mythic vision of *Gatsby*, he does not restrict it to the past. The penultimate paragraph of the novel reveals Nick's ultimate ambivalence toward the myth of the Midwest as "home" when he switches from third-person to first-person: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It

eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow *we* will run faster, stretch out our arms farther And one fine morning,—” (189, ellipses in original and emphasis added). By switching from third-person “Gatsby” to first-person “we” Nick acknowledges both the illusory nature of Gatsby’s vision and its seductiveness.

The color green, in fact, is a symbol of deception in both *Gatsby* and *Oz*. For instance, the Wizard fools everyone into thinking that the city is green by making them wear green spectacles. Dennis Duffy argues that the Wizard’s green-tinted spectacles were the inspiration for the disembodied spectacles on Dr. T. J. Eckleburg’s billboard overlooking the valley of ashes in *Gatsby* (74). He further links this example to the drought-stricken Great Plains of the 1890s via a story told by Baum’s son, Frank Joslyn Baum: “That delusional green that attracts both Gatsby and the Wizard, Baum first encountered during the 1893 depression that wiped him out as a dry-goods’ storekeeper in North Dakota. Then he had heard tell of a desperate farmer who had put green goggles on a starving horse, hoping to convince him that a pile of wood shavings was in fact fodder” (73). Duffy argues, “What [the Wizard’s green spectacles] help us to ‘see,’ that is, to understand, is our willingness to ascribe visionary significance in objects incapable of generating it” (74). In other words, Duffy argues that the eyeglasses motif in both novels is ironic—the mythic vision chased by Gatsby and the Wizard is illusory. Nick’s assertion that “after Gatsby’s death the East was . . . distorted beyond my eyes’ power of correction” (185), i.e., that after Gatsby’s death he took off the green spectacles, acknowledges that his nostalgic vision of the Midwest as the mythic home is also suspect.

Ultimately *Gatsby* relies on what Svetlana Boym calls “reflective nostalgia,” which “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity” (xviii). This makes the novel’s representation of the Midwest different from that in any of his source texts. From *Oz*, Fitzgerald draws a mythic but ambivalent notion of the Midwest as home. To this he adds restorative spirituality from *The Waste Land* and nostalgic affect from *A Lost Lady*. This makes his ambivalent vision of the Midwest his own. Even though Nick acknowledges that “this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners” (184), scholars have had a difficult time arguing that *Gatsby* is a regional novel. In fact, John N. Duvall argues that “Midwest literature typically [would not] claim .

. . . Fitzgerald, despite . . . being from . . . St. Paul Minnesota” (242). Duvall’s reasoning is that “definitions of modernism tend to cast it as nearly the antithesis of regionalism. If regionalist fiction . . . typically focused on matters of domesticity in rural localities, modernism was an international movement, encompassing the fine arts as well as literature” (242). *Gatsby*’s representation of the Midwest in mythic rather than realist terms may conflict with definitions of regionalism as domestic or folk, but it is in keeping with Fitzgerald’s disdainful opinion of the “peasant” vogue in 1920s American literature. In a June 1925 letter to editor Maxwell Perkins, for instance, Fitzgerald criticizes American regional novels because “the American peasant as ‘real’ material scarcely exists. He is scarcely 10% of the population [and] isn’t bound to the soil at all as the English and Russian peasants were” (Turnbull 186-87). In the same letter, he calls Willa Cather a “second-rater” because she recycles the “simple inarticulate farmer” of the earlier English regionalists, only not as well (186). Fitzgerald, therefore, is not interested in the “American folk” or the realities of rural Midwestern life. In fact, Nick specifies in *Gatsby* that “my Middle West” is “not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns . . .” (184). Rather, Nick’s Midwest— “the thrilling returning trains of my youth and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow” (184)—is affective and mythic rather than realist.

Fitzgerald’s synthesis of *The Waste Land*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and *A Lost Lady*—an iconic example of high modernism, a classic children’s novel, and a Midwestern regional novel—might seem counterintuitive, but all three contribute to *Gatsby*’s mythic vision of the Midwest as the symbolic national home. If scholars have trouble believing that an American novel from the early twentieth century can look for inspiration to both modernism and regionalism, the problem may be with the categories rather than the texts. The intertextual references in *Gatsby* suggest not only that regionalism is more complex than many believe but also that modernism and regionalism are not so incompatible.

NOTES

¹That Fitzgerald would be familiar with fairytales and children's literature, however, is suggested by Paul Rosta, who documents that fourteen-year-old "Scott Fitzgerald" won honorable mention for a photograph he submitted to the October 1910 issue of *St. Nicholas*, a popular literary magazine for children (42-43).

²"Home! Sweet Home!" originally appeared in John Howard Payne's 1823 opera *Clari, or The Maid of Milan*, with lyrics by Payne and music by Bishop. Bishop popularized the song in the 1850s, under his own name, as a parlor ballad.

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“HOW TO WASTE [REGIONAL] MATERIAL”:
MODERNIST PROMOTIONAL LOGIC AND F. SCOTT
FITZGERALD’S DISAVOWAL OF REGIONALISM

JACE GATZEMEYER

In May of 1926, as a part of his campaign to gain wider recognition for the work of the young Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald published a review of *In Our Time* in *The Bookman*, “How to Waste Material: A Note on My Generation.” More of an essay on contemporary American literature than a traditional review, Fitzgerald’s polemic took issue with what he called the “waste” of “American material,” which “is being turned out raw and undigested” by American writers (“How to Waste” 86). Driven by “the insincere compulsion to write ‘significantly’ about America,” these writers had been scrambling, wrote Fitzgerald, in a “literary gold rush” to present some distinctly American historical period, place, or way of life “that hadn’t been ‘used’” (86). This practice, he argued, ultimately produced underdeveloped work “doctored up to give it a literary flavor” (86). In search of “American material,” said Fitzgerald, “one author goes to a midland farm for three months to obtain the material for an epic of the American husbandman! Another sets off on a like errand to the Blue Ridge Mountains, a third departs with a Corona for the West Indies,” but regardless of the region, “one is justified in the belief that what they get hold of will weigh no more than . . . journalistic loot” (86).

On the literary-critical side, Fitzgerald blames H. L. Mencken’s “offensive” and overly “sharp” criticism, which has “begotten a family of hammer and tongs men . . . play[ing] continually with his themes in his maternal shadow” (87). But on the artistic side, the fault lies with regionalist writer Sherwood Anderson. “Through a curious misconception of his work,” says Fitzgerald, readers understand

Anderson to be an inarticulate man of ideas when in actuality he is a masterful prose stylist bereft of any ideas at all (88). As a result, American authors waste material by “proceed[ing] to imitate Anderson’s lapses from that difficult simplicity they are unable to understand” (88).

In his tirade against Anderson in “How to Waste Material,” Fitzgerald wages war on the literary production of the early twentieth-century regionalist movement, suggesting that regional writing expresses merely the “raw and undigested” local particulars of American life and lacks what he vaguely calls “the catharsis of a passionate emotion” (86-88). But why would Fitzgerald paint regionalist writing in such a negative light? As an author who wrote often and vividly of the Midwest himself, what is at stake in Fitzgerald’s harsh characterization of regionalism? In “How to Waste Material,” Fitzgerald firmly positions himself against what he sees as the false literariness and the concern with “lesser things” that characterize the regionalist movement.

If we take into consideration the peculiar modernist strategies of allotting value and creating frameworks of expectations, Fitzgerald’s essay can be understood to constitute a self-promotional gesture, a sort of framing maneuver to position its author as a member of the elite culture of modernism in contrast to the lesser, sentimental, and “journalistic” literary production of regionalism. “How to Waste Material” can thus help critics relocate marginalized early twentieth-century regionalism at the heart of modernism’s promotional logic as a useful foil for modernist self-promotion. Indeed, understanding Fitzgerald’s essay in this way prompts us to ask to what extent early twentieth-century regionalism simply served as a straw man for modernism’s promotional strategies rather than as an actual antagonist or antithesis to modernism. Anderson’s oeuvre, for instance, seems committed to both modernist and regionalist modes of expression. Furthermore, taking this angle on “How to Waste Material” also suggests additional avenues for approaching Fitzgerald’s conflicted relationship with regionalism, which, although he outwardly disavowed it as a genre, seems to operate as a peculiar mode of representing local spaces in much of his own work.

Fitzgerald was certainly not alone in disavowing regionalism during this time. With “How to Waste Material,” Fitzgerald joined contemporaries Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. Both had been mentored by Sherwood Anderson, and both had recently

mocked his work and the emergent regionalist movement in general. Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring* (1925), a farcical parody of Anderson's recent bestselling *Dark Laughter* (1925), brutally satirized Anderson's style and themes.¹ Though Anderson had been instrumental in introducing Hemingway to Paris's avant-garde circles and in getting *In Our Time* (1925) published, Hemingway used the mockery of *Torrents* to dissociate himself completely from the older author's influence, among others.² Faulkner, too, distanced himself from Anderson and regionalism. In his foreword to *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* (1926) Faulkner mimicked "Anderson's primer-like style" ("Note" 6), and in *Mosquitoes* (1927) he created a parodic regionalist character, Dawson Fairchild, as a stand-in for Anderson. Through Fairchild, Singal has argued, Faulkner "attempted to differentiate himself from Anderson" and, specifically, "found fault with his mentor's mid-western provincialism" (84-85).³ Though Anderson had inspired him to become a novelist and had even encouraged him to write about "that little patch up there in Mississippi where you started from" ("Note" 8), Faulkner eventually sought, like Hemingway, to separate himself cleanly from his literary mentor and, by extension, the regionalist style with which he was associated.⁴ Faulkner and Hemingway sought to relegate Anderson to the literary past through parody, a method that, Hutcheon argues, can serve as "the means for some writers to shake off stylistic influences, to master and so supersede an influential predecessor" (96). Likely considering Anderson less a "predecessor" than a contemporary, Fitzgerald composed not a parody but a polemic, an attack aimed to separate himself from Anderson and regionalism.⁵ Through his essay in *The Bookman*, Fitzgerald drew a sharp line between himself and Anderson, and between modernism and regionalism.

Like Faulkner and Hemingway, Fitzgerald had formerly lauded Anderson's work and looked to him as a leader in American fiction. Fitzgerald's review of Anderson's *Many Marriages* (1923), for instance, gushed with praise. Fitzgerald called *Many Marriages* an "amazingly beautiful vista" produced by "a sensitive, highly civilized man" and expressive of a "transcendental naturalism" akin to that of James Joyce (*Authorship* 83-84). But in this review, Fitzgerald also forecasted what would become a sharp critique of Anderson, suggesting that the author had "perhaps endowed lesser things with significance" (84). On 4 March 1923, Anderson wrote Fitzgerald to

say that he had “read [the review] with delight” and to respond to the comment about “lesser things”: “it may well be the idea I have isn’t well digested in me . . . At such times some little thing—a well made chair, a bit of jewelry, a touch of color remembered from some painting seems to cheer me up” (Brucoli & Duggan 127-128). Echoing the language of digestion that Fitzgerald would later use deprecatingly in “How to Waste Material” with reference to authors who “turned out raw and undigested” local particulars, Anderson acknowledges his own tendency to focus on what Fitzgerald considered the “lesser things.” Yet despite his distracting focus on these “lesser things,” Fitzgerald’s review suggests, Anderson’s “transcendental naturalism” ultimately rises above these local details toward some more universal meaning. Before developing his distaste for and criticism of Anderson’s work, then, Fitzgerald’s early appreciation for the author crucially hinges on his ability to transcend these distracting “lesser things.”

If Fitzgerald had been so publicly enthusiastic about Anderson’s work in 1923, what had changed by 1926? What faults had Fitzgerald found in Anderson’s work and in regionalist writing in general? The roots of the antiregionalist sentiments that would become public in “How to Waste Material” were first expressed privately in a 22 April 1925 letter to his Scribner’s editor, Max Perkins. At the heart of his attack was precisely the disapproval of regional writing’s focus on the “lesser things.” In a previous letter, Perkins had praised Thomas Boyd’s new novel, *Samuel Drummond* (1925), the somewhat sentimental account of a rural Ohioan’s (failed) attempts to revive the family farm in the years following the Civil War.⁶

Though he had helped to get Boyd’s *Through the Wheat* (1923) published, Fitzgerald used this new novel, which he thought “sounds utterly lousy” (Kuehl & Byer 185), as the motivation to express at length to Perkins what Matthew J. Brucoli calls his “conviction that the back-to-the-soil novels were fakes” (244). Fitzgerald rehearsed many of the ideas that would appear in “How to Waste Material” in his April 1925 letter to Perkins, in which his vitriol took the form of a satirical timeline titled, “History of the Simple Inarticulate Farmer and his Hired Man Christy (Both guaranteed to be utterly full of the Feel of the Soil)” (Turnbull 185). Fitzgerald divided his “history” into three periods. He first noted the emergence of the “simple inarticulate farmer” figure in the works of European authors like George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Emile Zola, until “after a peep at Hardy,

Hamlin Garland finds him in the middle west” (186). The “second period” continued this trend in American literature:

- 1914—Sheila Kaye-Smith frankly imitates Hardy, produces two good books and then begins to imitate herself.
- 1915—Brett Young discovers him in the coal country.
- 1916—Robert Frost discovers him in New England.
- 1917—Sherwood Anderson discovers him in Ohio.
- 1918—Willa Cather turns him Swede.
- 1920—Eugene O’Neill puts him on the boards in *Different and Beyond the Horizon*.
- 1922—Ruth Suckow gets in before the door closes. (185)

After these authors had “exhausted the ground, the type was set. All was over” (186). In the “third” and final period, says Fitzgerald, “The Cheapskates discover him—Bad critics and novelists, etc.” (186). Among these “cheapskates,” he identifies Homer Croy, Edna Ferber, Margaret Wilson, and Tom Boyd. With a mocking satirical attitude, much like that of Faulkner’s *Mosquitoes* and Hemingway’s *Torrents*, Fitzgerald points to a long and, in his view, worn-out tradition of sentimental depictions of rural folk figures in fiction, concluding powerfully: “TOM, BOYD, WRITES, NOVEL, ABOUT. INARTICULATE, FARMER WHO, IS, CLOSE, TO SOIL. AND, HIS, HIRED, MAN CHRISTY! STRONG! VITAL! REAL!” (186).

As the letter continues, Fitzgerald criticizes these regionalists for mythicizing the “American peasant,” who “as ‘real’ material scarcely exists . . . and if [he] has any sensitivity whatsoever . . . he is in the towns before he’s twenty” (187). Fitzgerald diagnoses the overuse of “the inarticulate farmer” as a literary retreat from the modern world into the fossilized past, an obstinate nostalgia for a static world in the face of a dynamic modernity: “Using [the simple inarticulate farmer] as typical American material is simply *a stubborn seeking for the static, in a world that for almost a hundred years has simply not been static* (187).⁷ Lacking “ideas,” Fitzgerald suggests, these authors look to “the old, old bag which their betters have used and thrown away” (187). Unlike real artists—presumably “modernists” like himself—regionalist writers simply look to a worn-out figure of the American folk, “the simple inarticulate farmer” (186). As he told Perkins, “Tom [Boyd] flatters himself that he can sit down for five months and by dressing up a few heart throbs in overalls produce literature” (187). While Fitzgerald would revise and refine these ideas

in “How to Waste Material,” the argument would remain essentially the same: regionalist authors churn out nothing but “journalistic loot” dressed up in sentimental nonsense, despite their attempts to mine the worn-out literary material for a mythic “epic of the American husbandman” from a trip to “a midland farm” (“How to Waste” 86). In fact, in his evaluation of Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, Fitzgerald would see “an echo of Anderson’s way of thinking in those sentimental ‘horse stories,’ which inaugurated his respectability and also his decline” (89).⁸

To further illustrate his point, Fitzgerald asserts in his letter that while “the thoughtless” believe “that Sherwood Anderson is a man of profound ideas who is ‘handicapped by his inarticulateness’” (187):

As a matter of fact Anderson is a man of practically no ideas—but *he is one of the very best and finest writers in the English language today*. God, he can write! Tom could never get such rhythms in his life as there are on the pages of Winesburg, Ohio—Simple! The words on the lips of critics make me hilarious. Andersen’s [sic] style is about as simple as an engine room full of dynamos. (Turnbull 187)

Fitzgerald praises Anderson’s style on the one hand, yet he attacks his lack of “ideas” on the other, for without significant “ideas,” American regional writing constitutes a wasting of “material” (187). Indeed, in “How to Waste Material” Fitzgerald recreates this sentiment nearly verbatim, saying, “To this day reviewers solemnly speak of [Anderson] as an inarticulate, fumbling man, bursting with ideas—when, on the contrary, he is the possessor of a brilliant and almost inimitable prose style, and of scarcely any ideas at all.” (88).⁹ But the question remains: why make the leap from letter to essay, from the private to the public sphere? What was at stake rhetorically in publishing an invective against regional writing in *The Bookman*? Why, in a word, does Fitzgerald bother to take his satirical letter to Perkins, revise it into a polemical essay, and attach it to a brief review of Hemingway’s *In Our Time*?

In the wake of Andreas Huyssen’s influential *After the Great Divide* (1986), scholars of modernism have reconceptualized the relation between modernist literature, high and low art, and the commercial market.¹⁰ Rather than being opposed or indifferent to popular culture, modernist authors actually appropriated certain of its promotional discourses in order to set themselves and their work apart

as part of an elite, minority culture of “high” art. Critics have further connected modernism’s concern with popular culture and the market to what Jonathan Goldman calls “the cultural logic of celebrity” (2).¹¹ Approaching modernism “less [as] a periodizing term or a bundle of formal concerns than [as] a historically circumscribed mode of presenting value and prescribing frameworks of expectations,” Aaron Jaffe’s *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005) argues that modernists used what he calls authorial “imprimaturs”—the peculiar, inimitable signatures imprinted on their texts—as a means of self-promotion, to signal their work as a part of the elite minority culture of modernism (12). Jaffe argues that in order to promote themselves and maintain their distinctive rejection of commercialism, modernists developed a promotional logic through which their names could accumulate cultural value without acquiring the taint of the commercial market. Using these peculiar authorial “imprimaturs,” modernists could signal their texts as a part of the elite minority modernist culture while also, crucially, distancing their own work from other supposedly subordinate or un-literary texts: “the key ingredient in modernist reputation, I argue, is not only the demonstration of high literary labor through imprimaturs and extant masterpieces, but also the capacity to frame work against contrastingly lesser labors of contemporaries” (4). With “How to Waste Material,” Fitzgerald attempted to signal publicly his status as a literary modernist by positioning himself explicitly against regionalism.

More than a private diatribe, Fitzgerald made the decision to disavow regionalist writing as part of a published essay, for if, in the mid-1920s, he was worried that he would be associated with regionalism, this concern was justified. After all, two prominent critics had in the early 1920s identified Fitzgerald as a sort of regionalist. In his *Contemporary American Novelists, 1900-1920*, drawn from a series of articles published in *The Nation* in 1921, Carl Van Doren had placed Fitzgerald within an emergent regionalist movement as part of what he called the new “revolt from the village” school (146). According to Van Doren, authors like Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, E. W. Howe, Sinclair Lewis, Zona Gale, Floyd Dell, and Dorothy Canfield depicted regional settings with a sharp realism and a biting criticism, positioning themselves as a new generation of regionalist writers opposed to the previous generation’s sentimental “cult of the village” (146).

In March of 1922, the well-known critic and public intellectual, Edmund Wilson, a friend and former Princeton classmate of Fitzgerald's, published an essay in *The Bookman's* Literary Spotlight series (1921-1924) profiling the up-and-coming young author. One of the earliest published critical assessments of Fitzgerald and his work, Wilson's essay identified the most important of the “things worth knowing” about the author “for the influence they have had on his work” (22). “In the first place,” declared Wilson, and most importantly, “he comes from the middle west—from St. Paul, Minnesota. Fitzgerald is as much of the middle west . . . as [Sinclair] Lewis” (22). Marveling at the way “the characters in, say, ‘Bernice Bobs Her Hair’ are part of the organism of St. Paul,” Wilson suggests that Fitzgerald may be better suited to a sort of regionalist writing: “it seems to me a great pity that he has not written more of the west: it is perhaps the only milieu that he thoroughly understands” (22).

Much like Van Doren's classification of Fitzgerald as a member of the “revolt from the village” school, Wilson's early profile of Fitzgerald comes dangerously close to labeling the author a regionalist—or at least to suggesting that he would be best suited to regionalist writing. Therefore, Fitzgerald may have wanted to break himself from what he considered “the lesser labors of contemporaries” (Jaffe 4) and mark his position as an elite modernist author concerned with more than the local particulars of regionalist writing. Rather than be considered the kind of regionalist writer Van Doren and Wilson believed him to be, Fitzgerald chose instead to distance himself aggressively from that cohort with “How to Waste Material.”

More than just a negative framing gesture, the primary criticism of regionalism in “How to Waste Material” seems calculated to imply subtly the presence of a certain “cosmopolitan” quality in Fitzgerald's own work. As Tom Lutz has shown, American regional writing has historically been marginalized thanks in part to a tendency by critics and reading publics to prefer “literary cosmopolitanism,” the inclination to value texts only to the extent that they can be understood to embody “cosmopolitanism” or express universal verities (16). Even beyond this general principle of literary value, modernist literary production has always understood itself as distinctly expressive of an international, urban-centric, and anti-provincial attitude, a movement emerging out of a cosmopolitan expatriate scene in which “exiles and émigrés” mixed together in the metropolises of the world.¹²

Thus, to some extent, in order for American writers to legitimize their literary production and mark it as part of the elite culture of “modernism,” they had to delocalize it; in order to create modernist legitimacy, its supposedly “cosmopolitan” qualities had to be emphasized over the local. In this sense, the structural logic of modernism itself relied somewhat on regionalism as a foil for its promotional development.¹³ As Jaffe asserts, “the history of modernism’s ‘structural logic and development’ is embedded in . . . the kinds of discourse it habitually marks as subordinate, minor, unliterary, or, worst of all, commercial” (6). Thus, we might read Fitzgerald’s tirade against regionalism in “How to Waste Material” as a marker of the centrality of regional writing to the promotional development of modernism. Fitzgerald’s disavowal of regional writing not only condemns the merely local “lesser things” of regional writing, but also, in so doing, frames Fitzgerald’s own work against the “lesser” literary production of regionalism, suggesting, through contrast, his comparative cosmopolitanism and, hence, “modernist” status.

Given this modernist promotional aim, *The Bookman* was a particularly significant place for a public disavowal of regional writing like that of “How to Waste Material.” Founded as a magazine for “Bookbuyers, Bookreaders, and Booksellers” and the first American magazine to publish a best-seller list, *The Bookman* was a publication geared towards developing popular literary taste (Mott 435). Under the editorship of John Chipman Farrar from 1921 to 1927, the circulation and reputation of *The Bookman* grew to such significant proportions that Frank Luther Mott has described the magazine during these years as “a kind of working guide to the current literary movements” (438). In the mid-1920s the magazine had become the primary site for a budding debate between avant-garde modernism and the conservative “New Humanism” of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More.¹⁴ In “How to Waste Material,” Fitzgerald argued not only that regional writing was concerned with the “lesser things” of local particulars, but also that it was lacking “ideas” and full of nostalgic sentimentality; this position would have clearly marked Fitzgerald as a member of the modernist camp in contrast with the New Humanists. In the particular context of *The Bookman* in 1926, then, along with a promotion of Hemingway, Fitzgerald’s essay also functions as a public gesture of modernist self-promotion.

Furthermore, even Fitzgerald’s criticism of Mencken in “How to Waste Material” can be understood from this self-promotional view-

point. Fitzgerald insinuates his disapproval of regionalism’s popular appeal by attacking the Mencken-inspired “hammer and tongs men,” the reviewers and critics who praised the “journalistic loot” of regional writing, “who manufactured enthusiasm when each new mass of raw data was dumped on the literary platform” (“How to Waste” 87).¹⁵ Fitzgerald demeans these critics not only for praising the “raw and undigested” material depicted in regional writing, but for also undermining the elite, minority status integral to modernist cultural value. He complains that “[e]very week some new novel gave its author membership in ‘that little band who are producing a worthy American literature.’ As one of the charter members of that little band I am proud to state that it has now swollen to seventy or eighty members” (88).

Indeed, in a letter to Perkins circa 27 December 1925, Fitzgerald clearly explained his contempt for the commercially successful aspects of regionalist texts by noting “with a brighter shade of hilarity” the popular press’s reviews of Anderson’s *Dark Laughter*: “You notice it wasn’t from those of us who waited for the Winesburg stories one by one in the *Little Review* but by Harry Hansen, [Laurence] Stallings, etc., and the other boys who find a new genius once a week and at all cost follow the fashions” (Turnbull 194). With disdain for the Mencken-esque critics who attempt to influence—and are influenced by—the movements of popular culture, who “find a new genius once a week” yet also “follow the fashions,” Fitzgerald distances himself as a modernist from commercial popular culture, particularly with reference to Anderson’s earlier and less commercially successful publications in the avant-garde *Little Review*.¹⁶

In response to essays like those of Van Doren and Wilson, and in line with recent parodies of regionalism by Hemingway and Faulkner, Fitzgerald wrote “How to Waste Material” as a firm position statement, an attempt to mark himself as an avant-garde modernist opposed to the sentimental regionalism of authors like Sherwood Anderson. Drawn from a private rant about the faults of regionalism, Fitzgerald’s article in *The Bookman* can be seen as a public gesture calculated to frame its author as a member of the elite culture of modernism in contrast to the “lesser things,” sentimentalism, and “journalistic” literary production of regionalism. From this vantage point, “How to Waste Material” can be understood to reveal the sense in which regionalism served as a convenient foil for modernism’s complex promotional logic, a contrast against which mod-

ernist authors might imply their concern for more “cosmopolitan” subjects than the mere local particulars of regionalist writing. “How to Waste Material,” furthermore, suggests Fitzgerald’s conflicted public and private relationship with the Midwest and regionalism, a subject in need of deep and extended exploration in Fitzgerald scholarship.

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NOTES

¹*On The Torrents of Spring* as a satire of Anderson, see Rideout, 635-637.

²For more on the early relationship between Anderson and Hemingway, see Rideout, 406-8, and Reynolds, 4-11. When Hemingway arrived in Paris, Anderson wrote letters of introduction for him to Lewis Galantière, Silvia Beach, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein (Rideout 444). Anderson also urged Liveright to publish *In Our Time* and wrote a blurb for its dust jacket (Rideout 568). *Torrents* also mocked several other writers, including Gertrude Stein.

³For an extended discussion of Faulkner’s critique of Anderson through the character of Dawson Fairchild in *Mosquitoes*, see Singal, 83-86.

⁴For more on the early relationship between Faulkner and Anderson, see Rideout, 557-59, and Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, 120-147. Faulkner would later dedicate *Sartoris* (1929) to Anderson, “through whose kindness I was first published, with the belief that this book will give him no reason to regret that fact.”

⁵Unlike Hemingway and Faulkner, Fitzgerald had no significant personal relationship with Anderson. The two met for the first and possibly only time in New York in October of 1922 (Rideout 488-489).

⁶In his 9 May 1925 letter to Fitzgerald, Perkins had written that “Tom Boyd’s ‘Samuel Drummond’ is a splendid piece of work” (Kuehl & Bryer 106).

⁷All correspondence has been transcribed exactly as written. No emendations have been made.

⁸Anderson had written several well-received short stories centered on horses and horse racing, including “I Want to Know Why,” “I’m a Fool,” and “The Man Who Became a Woman.”

⁹Ernest Hemingway had conveyed this same notion the previous year in a March 1925 review of *A Story-Teller’s Story* (1924) in *Ex Libris*: “It is a great mystery and an even greater tribute to Sherwood that so many people writing today think he cannot write. They believe he has very strange and sometimes beautiful ideas and visions and that he expresses them very clumsily and unsuccessfully. While in reality he often takes a very banal idea of things and presents it with such craftsmanship that the person reading believes it beautiful and does not see the craftsmanship at all” (72). Later, H. L. Mencken, in his December 1926 review of *Dark Laughter*, would repeat this observation: “The history of Sherwood Anderson is the history of a man groping painfully for an understanding of his own ideas . . . [*Dark Laughter*] is, I think, one of the most profound American novels of our time” (88).

¹⁰In particular, see Lawrence Rainey’s *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), Michael North’s *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (1999), and Mark S. Morrisson’s *The Public Face of Modernism* (2000).

¹¹In particular, see Jonathan Goldman’s *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* (2011), Faye Hammill’s *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars* (2007), Loren

Glass's *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (2004), and Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005).

¹²For an overview of modernism and cosmopolitanism see Lyon, 387-412.

¹³For another take on this delocalizing tendency in modernism, especially in terms of the Southern Renaissance, see McClain, 227- 254.

¹⁴On New Humanism's relationship to *The Bookman*, see Hoeveler, Jr., 227-233.

¹⁵It bears noting here that Fitzgerald's attitudes toward critics were constantly shifting, as was his public persona in general. For instance, despite his condemnation of Mencken in “How to Waste Material,” Fitzgerald would later praise Mencken in his introduction to the 1934 Modern Library Edition of *The Great Gatsby*: “[Critics] were encouraged by [Mencken's] bravery and his tremendous and profound love of letters . . . I don't think many men of my age can regard him without reverence . . . To any new effort by a new man he brought an attitude . . . he came equipped; he never had to go back for his tools” (222).

¹⁶Not only did Anderson receive no compensation for the bits of *Winesburg, Ohio* accepted by *The Little Review*, but over the book's first year in print, according to Rideout, it made him only about \$320 (321). For more on *The Little Review*, see Golding, 61-84.

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BEYOND THE NOSTALGIA OF OBJECTS: FITZGERALD'S "A NIGHT AT THE FAIR"

JEFFREY SWENSON

I no longer regard St. Paul as my home any more than the Eastern seaboard or the Riviera. This is said with no disloyalty but simply because after all my father was an Easterner and I went East to college and I never did quite adjust myself to those damn Minnesota winters. It was always freezing my cheeks, being a rotten skater etc.— though many events there will always fill me with a tremendous nostalgia.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, Letter to Marie Hershey Hamm, 4 October 1934.¹

While celebrated in St. Paul, Minnesota, with a statue of his likeness, a theater named after him, and bronze plaques dotting the city, F. Scott Fitzgerald largely avoided his boyhood home in his fiction. When he did write about Minnesota, he often evoked the cold, as he did in Dexter Green's snow-laden fairways of "Winter Dreams" or debutante Sally Carol Happer's misadventures in "The Ice Palace." However, the Basil Duke Lee stories—those that drew from his life growing up in St. Paul—are all perceptibly warmer, most being set in the summer. As Dave Page points out in his forward to *The Thoughtbook of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, the Basil Duke Lee stories later collected in *The Basil and Josephine Stories* obviously draw on his teen years in St. Paul, including "The Scandal Detectives"—a story about a secret journal much like the one Fitzgerald kept as a teen—and "A Night at the Fair"—a story about Basil's trip to the Minnesota State Fair.²

Perhaps because of their clear connection to the languid summers of his youth, Fitzgerald's "Basil" stories have been relatively ignored, viewed as the pastoral reflections of a reminiscing author. As with much of Fitzgerald's work, readers shouldn't take the reminiscent quality of the Basil stories simply as veiled biography. While Fitzgerald creates a sense of nostalgia in these works, he separates a

longing for a past place and time—for the things of the past—from a mature, cosmopolitan worldview. In other words, he sentimentalizes descriptions of place, tradition, and object, but he also creates complex, adult, and lasting problems for Basil to face. Fitzgerald superimposes complex problems upon a nostalgic St. Paul, and Basil's struggles in "A Night at the Fair" are less a fond reminiscence and more effectively a series of adult revelations about an indeterminate and unsure world.

The summers of youth often equate to nostalgia in writing, but as many critics have realized, Fitzgerald is a savvy writer who avoids cliché. In her study of "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," Veronica Makowsky argues that Fitzgerald converted "seductive fantasies about the past into compelling truths about the consequences of belittling and misrepresenting the past" (200). Similarly, in his seminal essay "The Romance of Money," Malcom Cowley noted Fitzgerald's "double vision," or how the author "lived in his great moments, and lived in them again when he reproduced their drama, but . . . also stood apart from them and coldly reckoned their causes and consequences" (86). Cowley goes on to call this "doubleness or irony . . . one of his distinguishing marks as a writer" (86). Bryant Mangum builds on Cowley's conceptualization of this double vision, arguing: "Fitzgerald sets things in opposition in such a way that the reader can, on the one hand, sensually experience the event about which Fitzgerald is writing, immersing himself emotionally in it, and yet at the same time retain the objectivity to stand back and intellectually criticize it" (10). In much of his fiction, then, Fitzgerald generates a sense of emotional attachment tempered with intellectual distance. Thus, although critics often posit the Basil stories as authorial retreats to childhood, these stories actually showcase Fitzgerald's complex double vision. Particularly in "A Night at the Fair," Fitzgerald skillfully plays with the objects of a past St. Paul, simultaneously evoking a past St. Paul of place and time while creating emotional distance from the nostalgia which that past evokes.

Fitzgerald cultivates tension between nostalgia and the complexities of adulthood as he establishes his setting in "A Night at the Fair." The story opens with the Minnesota State Fair juxtaposed with the twin shadows of Minneapolis and St. Paul, two urban centers which have long been distinct, yet connected: "The two cities were separated only by a thin well-bridged river; their tails curling over the banks met and mingled, and at the juncture, under the jealous eye

of each, lay, every fall, the State Fair" (36). The description lays out the strange emotional distance between the two cities, placing the Minnesota State Fair, which was first held in 1859 in Minneapolis but settled in 1885 at the 320-acre site Fitzgerald describes, as a prize that both covet ("Fair History"). This jealousy becomes a running theme in the story as Basil competes with other boys in picking up girls. The narrative highlights the contrast between the working-class factories of Minneapolis and the brownstone aristocracy of St. Paul. Alongside the geographical tension, the fair evokes an inherent nostalgia: its annual recurrence broaches feelings of return at a moment of transition between summer and fall, a time of harvest and change.

After Fitzgerald establishes the story's fair setting as a nostalgic nexus of recurrence, transition, and cultural conflict, he shows fifteen-year-old Basil's playful yet particularly fixed sense of place. In the second paragraph, the narrator describes Basil's inscription in a school textbook: "Basil Duke Lee, Holly Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota, United States, North America, Western Hemisphere, the World, the Universe" (37). Basil's fanciful description of his place in the universe reveals the naiveté of a teenager and his innocence regarding where he belongs in the grand order. One description of place shows Basil as stable and fixed in the universe, while the other shows two "twin" cities in tension, covetous of one another. The two descriptions of place establish a tension between the naïve self-assuredness of youth and the complexities of adulthood that will be on display in the story.

Tensions are further complicated because Basil is soon to leave for school in New Jersey, and he understands that the boarding school experience will socially and physically separate him from his friends in St. Paul.³ He becomes conscious of what stands to change when he meets Gladys Van Schellinger—a girl who lives in a mansion on the pretentious "Crest Avenue," likely a thin fictional veneer for St. Paul's eminent Summit Avenue.⁴ While Basil lives nearby on the less eminent Holly Avenue, the fact that both children will go east for school draws him into Gladys's sphere, if tenuously: "Gladys Van Schellinger had never been his girl, nor indeed anyone's girl, but the fact that they were starting away to school at the same time gave him 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" (46). Gladys may occupy a different social sphere than Basil, but

their shared mobility and pending connection to eastern schools allow Basil to see himself with her. At the same time, the outward pull eastward undercuts Basil's nostalgic connection to his home city, as the northeast stands in for broader and higher social horizons than one could scale in St. Paul, even from an address as pretentious as Crest Avenue. All the locations within the story—Basil's address, the fair, Crest Avenue—are unmoored and contested.

Fitzgerald again toys with liminality and nostalgia with the driving plotline of "A Night at the Fair": Basil's fixation on long pants and their association with adulthood. But like all markers in the text, Fitzgerald uses something in transition to mark the passage of time. Basil attends the fair with Riply, a friend who has just graduated from short pants to trousers. Fitzgerald's narrator makes light of the difference between the boys, describing Basil as discomfited by the "displacement effected by two feet of blue serge"; however, it has caused Riply to change his behavior: "His own assumption of long trousers had seemed to promise a liberation from the restraints and inferiorities of boyhood, and the companionship of one who was, in token of his short pants, still a boy was an unwelcome reminder of how recent was his own metamorphosis" (37).

The transition from short pants to long is markedly nostalgic, since the practice of transitioning from short pants to trousers upon adulthood was quickly going out of style. As Jo Paoletti notes, the fashion of putting young boys in knickers until the age of fifteen was going out of fashion in the United States through the 1920s, especially in urban centers, and "by the end of the 1930s, the transition from short pants to full-length trousers had been eliminated" (47).⁵ The pants work on two levels: as an object of nostalgia (a transition now past) and as a signifier of the transition from youth to adulthood. Thus, though the boys enjoy a day together at the Penny Arcade, they emerge from the tent at dusk as characters at odds: a boy in short pants versus a young man in trousers.

In the transition from the fair of the day to the fair of the evening, from arcade games and "food and pop," to the shadows and rides of the Midway, Basil and Riply yearn for change: "Coming out of the stuffy tent into the glow of the sunset, the two boys hesitated, glancing up and down the crossed highway with expressions compounded of a certain ennui and a certain inarticulate yearning . . . they wanted a change in the tone, the motif, of the day" (37-38). The "inarticulate yearning" emphasizes the undirected possibility of the boys' freedom

in the liminal dusk. The yearning takes concrete form when they run into two symbols of the fright and possibilities of adulthood: a red "Blatz Wildcat"—likely Fitzgerald's version of a 1914 Stutz Bearcat—and within it, "in the posture of aloof exhaustion exacted by the sloping seat, was a blonde, gay, baby-faced girl" (38).⁶ In his *Notebooks*, Fitzgerald discussed the nostalgia he assigned to the Stutz: "When I was a boy I dreamed that I sat always at the wheel of a magnificent Stutz—in those days the Stutz was the stamp of the romantic life" (244). The two boys stare first at the girl and then ashamedly at the car, the two linked by freedom, adulthood, and sex. As with the artifact of the short pants, the Blatz/Stutz serves as an object of nostalgia that permits the reader to revel in the romance of a past, while the girl presents a more complex and lasting problem, one rife with long-term consequences. Riply and Basil watch the girl speed away with "the dimly terrible" Speed Paxton, "the wild and pampered son of a local brewer" (38), which raises the possibility of what might happen between the blonde and Paxton in the car. Fitzgerald complicates the "romantic life" of the Stutz (speed and sex) with the repercussions that might follow, namely accidents and pregnancy.

Cast in this light, the boys' further experiences take on a different resonance. Left looking upon what the future might hold, the boys run into another older boy, Elwood Leaming, "the dissipated one among the nice boys of the town—he had drunk beer, he had learned from chauffeurs, he was already thin from too many cigarettes" (38). The three boys decide to pick up some girls, and as they proceed through the fair, Basil is keenly aware of "a gap separating him from these two" (38). This distance is even more pronounced when the trio pick up two young women. Elwood moves with "confidence" and Riply with "its nervous counterfeit." After Elwood says hello to the girls, Basil worries: "Would they call for the police? Would his mother and Riply's suddenly turn the corner?" (39). Though Basil tries to make conversation with one of the girls, she links arms with Riply, and Basil becomes the fifth wheel.

Basil's discomfort increases when Elwood announces that they should all take a ride on the Old Mill, likely inspired by "Ye Old Mill," a ride opened at the fair in 1915.⁷ The Old Mill reinforces the contrast between child and adult at the fair, as it acts both as a gentle boat ride for children and a tunnel of love. Like the Blatz Wildcat, the Old Mill promises a canoodling adventure. Built for the fair, the

ride is obviously a nostalgic construct, being neither old nor a mill, a thing of simulacra with a nostalgic label. Here Fitzgerald introduces real problems within adult relationships in a setting of constructed nostalgia. On the boat ride, wedged in the back seat with Riply and the girl, Basil soon realizes his friend has embraced her. The décor of the tunnel reflects his tortured horror at being trapped in a boat with two romantic couples: “They slid into a red glow—a stage set of hell, with grinning demons and lurid paper fires—he made out that Elwood and his girl sat cheek to cheek—then again into the darkness . . .” (42). Basil rocks the scow to break up the couples, and they chastise him for it, cutting him out of the group for a second ride to the strains of “So long, little boy!” (43). Basil rides the attraction as a child would, while his companions ride it like adults (or at least teens) would, exacerbating the division between short and long pants, between day and night at the fair, and between the nostalgic past and the pressing realities of adulthood.

Driven by the horrors of his night at the fair, Basil accosts his mother the next morning and convinces her to purchase long pants for him; they go downtown to purchase and alter the trousers in time for the fair that night. Basil reconciles with Riply based on his promise of providing a third girl, a “sister” for another night of rides on the Old Mill (47). In this case, then, the girls themselves become objects, similarly to how Ben de Bruyn describes the objectification of Nicole Diver in Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night* as “a supremely modern commodity” (96). The girls whom Basil, Riply, and Elwood picked up the night before are not named. Unlike Gladys Van Schellinger, whose address and mansion make her singular, these girls are interchangeable, lower-class objects, things upon which memories are built. They also attend the fair unescorted by parents or chaperones, unencumbered by Basil’s upper middle-class social constraints.

On this first night at the fair, the girl Riply and Basil vie for is unnamed; she is simply called “Riply’s girl” (49). These girls are objects for created memories of kisses in the dark. As he worries over his pants not being delivered on time, Basil—in an act of preemptive nostalgia—laments the loss of an inchoate kissing moment with unnamed girls that he has not yet experienced: “In a day or so the fair would be over—forever—those girls, of all living girls the most intangible, the most desirable, that sister, said to be nicest of all—would be lost out of his life. They would ride off in Blatz Wildcats

into the moonlight without Basil having kissed them. No, all his life . . . he would look back with infinite regret upon that irretrievable hour" (47). Basil romanticizes the possibility of imagined kisses from anonymous and undefined girls, of fairs and affairs lost forever. The narrator goes on to note that Basil is at that moment "unable to perceive that he would have any desires in the future equivalent to those that possessed him now," but Fitzgerald has it both ways in the passage, cultivating the nostalgia of the fair, the lost kisses, and the unnamed girls even as he dismisses them (47).

The idealized yet unnamed girls assert themselves within the story, and their presence reminds readers of problems beyond kisses: they are distinctly of a lower class. The girl Basil is set up with on the second night—again one named only as a younger sister—is described as "a fright, squat and dingy," who wears "cheap pink powder" (49). While this is the girl whom Basil will kiss on the Ferris wheel, the boy feels uncomfortable with her cheapness, and he tries to better determine her social status when he asks her where she lives. She tells him she goes to "Number 7 School," the number exposing her common status, separated from Basil's ilk. But Basil soon finds that his game of social class, gender, and sex is child's play compared to the social machinations going on around him. On their second night at the fair, Riply's girl is called by name, Olive. She refuses to ride the Old Mill a second night because of a date she has made with another boy, Bill Jones. Olive rates a name because she has turned the tables, which makes the boys she dates interchangeable and faceless despite their class status. The struggle over names is further complicated when the party meets "Jones"; Basil recognizes him as Hubert Blair, the dashing young man of Basil's set. Hubert has been laying distance between himself and the young woman *he* has picked up.

By the end of the story, the focus on nostalgic objects—Basil's short pants, the Old Mill—has been complicated by Fitzgerald's play with names, place, and class. The sister with the cheap pink powder is fixed in her nameless place in the lower class by her attachment to the Number 7 School, but she is free to pick up boys or to kiss them on the Ferris wheel, as she does with Basil. The sister counterbalances Gladys Van Schellinger, whose Crest Avenue address signals her wealth; Gladys's chauffeured car allows her to travel where she likes, but only under adult supervision. Gladys is described as "—a tranquil, carefully nurtured girl who, so local tradition had it, was being brought up to marry in the East," and she is "not allowed the

casual freedom of children in a Midwestern City” (45). The nameless sister has social freedom but not the wealth to act on that freedom; Gladys’s name, address, and wealth grant her power but constrain her actions. In the beginning of the story, Basil’s greatest challenge seems to be making the jump between short pants and long. In the end, he must choose between spending the rest of the night with the girl of the Number 7 School and watching the fireworks with an inviting Gladys in a private box. As Andrew Hook has noted, moments like these impinge on Basil’s “youthful consciousness” because they acknowledge “the existence of a world in which being seen to date the most beautiful girl, or failing to get in to Yale, are hardly matters of consequence” (9). He leaves his group of friends and chooses to sit with Gladys, even though the couple are supervised by Gladys’s parents and other chaperones.

The depth of Basil’s fraught decision is brought to light as he and Gladys watch the performance of the Battle of Gettysburg. The class conflict is once again echoed in the mock battle, yet another piece of constructed nostalgia akin to the Old Mill. Fitzgerald uses imagery of the Civil War both at the beginning and end of the story, introducing the fair in the first paragraph with a description of how it ends each evening: “As a compromise between the serious and the trivial, a grand exhibition of fireworks, culminating in a representation of the battle of Gettysburg, took place in the Grand Concourse every night” (37). The trivial act remains undefined, however: are the fireworks trivial, or is the nightly battle reenactment? The memory of the Civil War lives on at the fair only as an incidental piece of nostalgia, a trivial act to the northerners viewing the mock battle.

Under the fireworks, Gladys notices Basil’s friends walking around the track in “a sort of Lilliputian burlesque of the wild gay life,” and she comments, “What funny girls” (52). The girls—objects of appeal to Basil earlier in the afternoon—are thrown into sharp relief through Gladys’s derisive comment, and the prospect of romance as an adult becomes a much more complicated battlefield. As the pair ride home in a chauffeured car, Basil has convinced himself that he has made the right choice in Gladys, she seeming “beautiful to him then; that vague unexciting quality about her was more than compensated for by her exquisite delicacy, the fine luxury of her life” (53). But Gladys is only interested in Basil as a means to an end; she asks him to come over the next day, but she also asks him to bring Hubert Blair, Basil’s rival in “The Scandal Detectives.” As with so

many of Fitzgerald's heroes, Basil's dreams of romance are smashed on the unseen shoals of a more handsome, outgoing boy. The romantic journey down the tunnel of love seems simple to a boy in short pants, but the world becomes unmoored.

And unmoored is how Fitzgerald wants the reader to feel. "A Night at the Fair" consists of nostalgic object after nostalgic object, each revealing danger or falsehood beneath its surface. Behind every envious boyhood glance at a blonde in a Blatz Wildcat lies the dangers of sex. Even objects constructed to evoke memory, like the Old Mill and the Civil War reenactment, are themselves patently fake, merely twisted images of a wished-for or sentimentalized past. Beyond these nostalgic objects, Fitzgerald lays out the complexity of relationships as colored by class conflict, even the supposedly simple trysts of youth. At the fair, lower-class girls go unnamed, middle-class boys hide their identity, and upper-class girls like Gladys sit chaperoned and constrained in their grandstand box. Fitzgerald simultaneously warns readers to be wary of the real feel of nostalgia, of the feeling for past things created in memory even as he projects real class anxiety upon that nostalgic setting. The "real" of the past exists in the instability of names, of knowing who is who; the "real" is the tenuous nature of all relations with others colored by class status and the unreliability that engenders. Basil's stock rises and falls with his pants, as the lower-class girls are objects to be obtained and kissed and forgotten. Beyond the nostalgia of objects lies a shifting and shockingly real critique of the perils of social relations, a critique that is both adult and striking.

Hiram College

NOTES

¹*A Life in Letters* 270-271 (qtd. in Tate 217).

²"The Scandal Detectives" and "A Night at the Fair" were written in March and May 1928, respectively, and were originally published in the 28 April 1928 and 21 July 1928 issues of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Fitzgerald was paid \$3,500 for each story (Mangum 106-109; Tate 175, 221).

³Fitzgerald left St. Paul in 1911 for the Catholic Newman School in New Jersey at age fifteen (Tate 175).

⁴In "Nostalgia or the Flight of the Heart," Fitzgerald describes walking along "Crest Avenue," a road "inaugurated" by a cathedral, or the Cathedral of St. Paul. He passes a "great brownstone mass built by R. R. Cornerford, the flour king, followed by a half mile of pretentious stone houses built in the gloomy 90's" (*Crack-Up* 227). The "brownstone mass" likely refers to the mansion of railroad baron James J. Hill. For more on Fitzgerald's St. Paul, consult Dave Page and John Koblas's *Fitzgerald in Minnesota*, especially pp. 19-30, or Kane.

⁵See also Marion Sichel's *The History of Children's Costume*, especially pp. 47-55.

⁶Fitzgerald included the description of the "baby-faced girl," the "Blatz Wildcat," and the Old Mill as snippets in his *Notebooks* (224).

⁷This is one of two indications that the events in "A Night at the Fair" could not have happened to Fitzgerald as a fifteen-year-old. Ye Old Mill didn't open until the 1915 Fair, meaning that Fitzgerald—born in September of 1896—would have been almost 20 when the ride opened, unlike the fifteen-year-old Basil (Delage). In addition, the Blatz Wildcat/Stutz Bearcat the boys ogle was first produced in 1914.

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AN APPRECIATION: JAMES SEATON (1944-2017)

MARCIA NOE

With great sadness, I write to report that James Seaton died of cancer on March 29, 2017. An obituary was published in the *Lansing State Journal* on April 2, 2017 and is available online. I, like many of you, have known Jim since the '80s; those of you who are newer SSML members may have known him from the Law of Literature panels he organized and presided over in recent years at our annual conference, or as a fellow Editorial Committee member and peer reviewer for the Society's journals. Others may know him from his publications as a thoughtful, insightful, provocative, and productive scholar. For me, James exemplified the gentleman scholar in the best sense of that term; he was invariably pleasant and cordial, respectful of those whose opinions differed from his own, helpful to the younger scholars and a very active member of SSML for over four decades who richly deserved the MidAmerica award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern Literature, which he won in 2008. I deeply mourn his passing, am grateful to have known him, and am honored to have been able to call him a colleague

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PHILIP A. GREASLEY is a retired Associate Professor of English, Dean, University Extension, and Associate Provost for University Engagement at the University of Kentucky. He has served as General Editor of the *Dictionary of Midwestern Literature* and has published widely on Midwestern writers, the Chicago Renaissance, and modern poetics.



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