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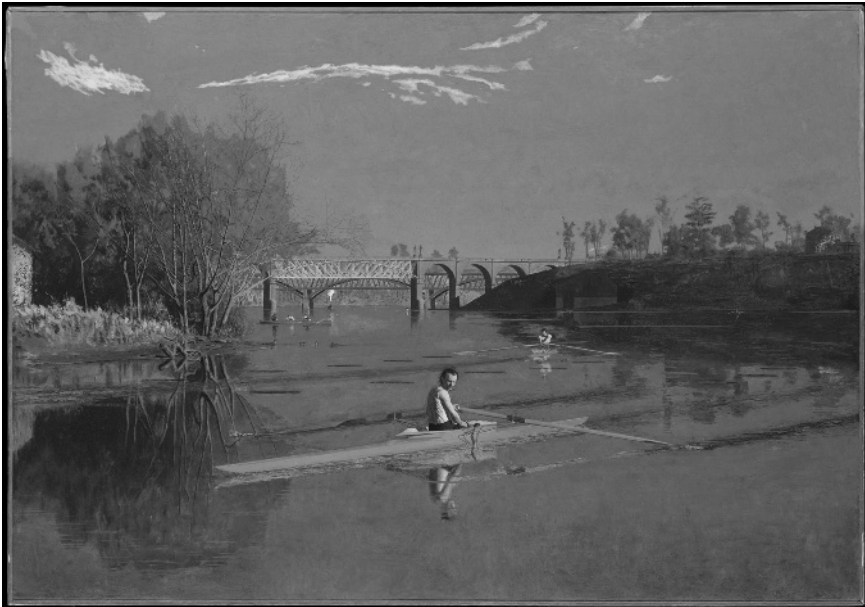
Trains, Worlds Fairs, and a Boy Named Basil

Painter Thomas Eakins was unapologetically American. Though he studied in Paris for a few years and travelled to Spain to gaze at the works of luminaries such as Diego Velázquez, he never strayed from making America – its industry, ideas, people, culture, and character – the subject of his art. His experiences abroad only hastened him back to his hometown of Philadelphia to paint and teach. As he advised his students at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, “if America is to produce great painters and if young art students wish to assume a place in the history of the art of their country, their first desire should be to remain in America to peer deeper into the heart of American life.”¹ (Such a credo would surely have been embraced by F. Scott Fitzgerald.) Eakins produced his first large oil painting of rowing, a popular weekend sport in Philadelphia, shortly after his return. *The Champion Single Skull (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)* (1871) features rowing champion Max Schmitt in the foreground in one boat and Eakins in the distance, poised to pull his oars. The reflective blue water accentuates the beauty of the golden brown trees and the wisps of white clouds overhead. In the background, a railroad bridge spans the river. Its trellis of white ironwork mirrors the color of the clouds, and even the earthy shades of arched stonework and rust-colored beams blend with the natural landscape.

Only two years earlier, transcontinental travel became possible for the first time in the United States, and the complementary colors of this painting suggest that this new technology can work in tandem with nature and humanity. While the bridge appears harmonious with its surroundings, other details hint at the dangers of transportation technology. The boat farthest in the distance emits a blast of steam, and smoke spews from a far-off factory stack in the upper right corner. More significantly, the hillside by the bridge is mostly dark as if scarred by a recent fire. The blackened stone structure in the middle of the hill appears to be

1 Qtd. in Hughes, 287.

made of the same stone as the bridge, suggesting a link between the development of new technologies and environmental harm. In fact, the canvass creates a semi-circle progression from left to right to reinforce this message. The left side features lush trees, ducks, and calm water. The backdrop in the center offers images of impending technology – the steamboat, factories, and trains. Finally, the burned landscape on the right casts a shadow on the water that practically swallows two other boaters. Even the contrasting motion of the central figures—Eakins moving toward the hillside/bridge and Schmitt gliding toward the natural landscape—captures some of the country’s ambivalence about industrialization.



Thomas Eakins, *The Champion Sculls* (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull), 1871, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In this way, Eakins demonstrates a kind of Fitzgeraldian ability to celebrate modern life while inviting audiences to be wary of its costs. The advent of trains did not occur without trepidation. The first steam-powered engine, named the “Best Friend of Charleston,” carried nearly 200 people in South Carolina in 1830, and it reached a dizzying 35 miles an hour. Many people feared such speeds would asphyxiate passengers, and they worried about the impact of its black, noxious smoke on nearby livestock. Likewise, the blaring sound of the steam valve and sparks from the undercarriage often frightened onlookers. Yet the extraordinary potential of this technology captured the public imagination. It conjured up

dreams of exploration, westward expansion, untapped raw materials, and extraordinary possibilities for economic growth. Trains began increasing the speed of communication by carrying mail as early as 1832. During the Mexican–American War and more significantly the Civil War, they revolutionized the battlefield by transporting troops and providing medical care for the wounded.² In fact, some historians have attributed the massive casualties of the Civil War directly to trains. “The railroads,” as Christian Wolmar explains, “greatly increased the fighting power of armies, allowed them to operate much farther from their supply depots than previously, and gave the side with the best railroad supply line a clear strategic advantage” (118).

Just a few years later in 1869, the first transcontinental railroad – a hookup between Union Pacific and Central Pacific – connected the east and west coasts. Even though the first complete cross-country journey by rail “was not possible until the bridge over the Missouri was completed in 1872, finally relieving passengers of the need to transfer to a rickety old ferry,” the profound impact of trains on everyday life was already being felt throughout the nation (Wolmar 155). Prior to transcontinental travel, a journey from coast-to-coast took anywhere from five to six months by stagecoach or wagon train. Many people did not survive this harrowing journey, succumbing to illness, the treacherous terrain, harsh weather, and violent encounters with other settlers or Indigenous people. Yet the massive network of track by 1889 made such a trip possible for most Americans in approximately four days.

The implications of this were staggering. One could now earn a living miles away from a city. An aspiring farmer could move to Nebraska and sell his corn crop in Chicago the next day. A prospector could try his luck hunting for gold out west with greater ease. And families could stay connected while venturing farther away from home. Trains even changed the way the nation told time. Prior to 1883, “local mean time” had been the national standard. Each town used the sun’s position directly overhead to determine noon, but the imprecise nature of this method, as historian Alan Trachtenberg has noted, “formed a crazy-quilt pattern across the nation” that became increasingly problematic and impractical for trains (59). In response, the railroads jointly decided to reduce the roughly 50 extant time zones to 4 in 1883 – without consulting the government or legal system. Eighty-five percent of all cities adopted “railroad time” within one year, and the rest of the country soon followed. (Congress did not pass the Standard Time Act until 1918.)³

Numerous railroad pioneers made the rapid growth of trains possible – though typically with the assistance of government land grants and laws. James J. Hill,

² Wolmar, 20–21, 115–116, 118.

³ *Ibid.*, 60.

for instance, built the Great Northern line that ran from St. Paul, Minnesota (the hometown of Fitzgerald), to Seattle, Washington, by 1893. Hill arrived in St. Paul from Ontario in 1856 with plans to join a team of fur trappers. When he missed the expedition, he decided to settle down and get involved in the town's merchandizing and transportation industries. Energetic, eccentric, and indefatigable, the one-eyed Hill (who lost sight in his right eye from a bow and arrow injury at nine-years-old) used his connections with the banking industry and investors in Canada to purchase the bankrupt St. Paul and Pacific. He soon earned the name "Empire Builder" with his business savvy and willingness to get his hands dirty. In fact, Hill not only built his train lines efficiently and profitably – even during the financial panic of 1893 – but he also provided second-class cars for immigrants and land-seekers. For the latter, he offered discounted rates to settle near the railroad.⁴

Hill's position and prestige in St. Paul society put him in close contact with other business leaders, including Fitzgerald's grandfather Philip Frances McQuillan. McQuillan also built an empire out of nothing. He emigrated from Ireland in 1842 and first settled in the small town of Galena, Illinois, before making his way to St. Paul. He then began working for the wholesale grocery outlet Beaupré & Temple at the age of 23. Once he climbed the ranks from bookkeeper to owner in 1872, the business thrived under his leadership. Within just three years, he owned the city's largest building (at a whopping five stories), and he made a fortune by 40.⁵ The impressive rise of "P.F." McQuillan – as he was known by friends such as Hill – was cut short by poor health due to chronic nephritis and tuberculosis. He died just one week after his forty-third birthday, leaving his wife and five children an estate worth nearly \$270,000 or over \$6 million today.⁶ P.F.'s death appeared prominently in local papers. Nearly 40 businesses closed for the day of his funeral, and as biographer Andrew Turnbull notes, "Large numbers were turned away from the Church and a procession of a hundred carriages followed the coffin to the cemetery" (4). The McQuillan family retained their elevated position among St. Paul's elite despite his wife's aversion to high society. (She preferred attending daily mass and wearing black.) Annabel, one of McQuillan's daughters and the younger sister of Fitzgerald's mother, would serve as maid of honor at the wedding of Hill's daughter.

Trains captured the imagination of young Scott. How could they not with the Hills as family friends? The Fitzgerald family relied heavily on railroads in their personal lives as well. They moved almost annually throughout Scott's childhood, and his mother enjoyed taking him on trips to visit relatives and to retreat to

4 Stover, 78–79.

5 Le Vot, 7–8.

6 Brown, 18.

warmer climates. Not surprisingly, trains – though typically overlooked in analyses of Fitzgerald’s fiction – appear throughout his works. They embodied both the Gilded Age and the modern era’s investment in transportation technology, and Fitzgerald used the way trains radically transformed American culture to raise questions about social hierarchies.

Trains in Fitzgerald’s Fiction

Inspired by his relationship with the Hill family, Fitzgerald associated trains with the entrepreneurial spirit of the self-made man. James Hill is even referenced in several works, including the short story “Absolution” (1924), which Fitzgerald considered using as a prologue for *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *The Great Gatsby* itself. In the former, Hill occupies a place second only to God in the Midwest, which 11-year-old Rudolph Miller makes clear when contemplating his father’s professional failures: “Hill was the apotheosis of that quality in which [Mr. Carl] Miller himself was deficient – the sense of things, the feel of things, the hint of rain in the wind on the cheek. Miller’s mind worked late on the old decisions of other men. ... His weary, sprightly, undersized body was growing old in Hill’s gigantic shadow. For twenty years he had lived alone with Hill’s name and God’s” (84). Miller not only lacks Hill’s instinct for the changing times, as suggested by his inability to sense either a subtle or sudden shift in weather, but he also lives in the world of “old decisions” by “other men.” Jay Gatsby’s father uses Hill as a point of comparison as well when considering his son’s potential: “If he’d of lived, he’d of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He’d of helped build up the country” (168). This comment associates greatness not with wealth but with building something meaningful for others. Gatsby, of course, has no desire to “build up the country.” He is too absorbed with winning Daisy’s love and erasing her past to care about anything else. Instead, his myopia signals a tragic flaw in the world of Fitzgerald’s fiction: the failure of the wealthy to live up to their individual and social potential. For Fitzgerald, Hill – a self-made visionary, inspiring leader with professional and practical acumen, and a harbinger of the modern age – embodied the boundless possibilities for achieving and inspiring great change in America.

Just as Fitzgerald celebrated the technological advancements of his time, he also recognized their potential dangers. In “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” (1922), the Transcontinental Express from Chicago takes on quasi-religious significance for the small town of Fish, Montana. This barren place is described as “beyond religion,” but the railroad creates some degree of “wonder.” Even its employees seem to possess mythic dimensions such as “the Great Brakeman, whom, had they defied any one, they might well have chosen as their celestial protagonist” (131). Percy’s father, Braddock Washington, uses this remote location to help shield his

extraordinary fortune, which he has acquired and maintained through unscrupulous means, but the technology of trains, cars, and planes ultimately causes his destruction. They bring threats from the outside world, including military planes that bomb his property at the end of the story. Furthermore, Washington's age, as Ann Petry notes, links him with "a host of other exploiters of American resources, including James J. Hill (born 1838), Andrew Carnegie (1835), and John D. Rockefeller (1839)" (88). The connection with these business magnates is important to Fitzgerald's message about the excesses of capitalism, yet Petry's assessment of Hill fails to recognize the author's admiration for him. To mask his shame about his own father's professional failures, for instance, Scott once told a college roommate that "his father was an engineer for Jim Hill, the Western railroad builder."⁷ The Washington of "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," in other words, is not Hill. He emerges as the antithesis of Hill for corrupting the ethos of the self-made man through greed, material gain, and hubris.

Fitzgerald presents the train as a symbol for personal and environmental harm in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Trains, like cars, get used to break the emotional bonds between people. They facilitate Tom's affair with Myrtle, and they pull Nick away from Gatsby just moments before his death: "I didn't want to leave Gatsby. I missed that train [for work], and then another, before I could get myself away" (153). Nick links trains with the ashen wasteland of Queens as well: "Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight" (23). Here trains are both consumed by and contribute to this detritus, offering a reminder of the destructive impact of industrialization on the environment. The ash-gray men, who sacrifice their humanity to clear away the unsavory waste of modern living, become ghastly warnings about the dangers of "progress." This stop forces people to "stare at" the foul river, the "chimneys and rising smoke" of factories, and arguably smoke from the train itself: "The valley of ashes is bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let the barges through, the passengers on waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour. There is always a halt there of at least a minute" (24). This delay not only introduces Tom's mistress to Nick (since they leave the train for several minutes to fetch her), but as the polluted river suggests, it also forces riders to contemplate the environmental costs of technology. Trains had certainly been replaced by cars as the primary mode of transportation in the 1920s. (No one takes a train to attend Gatsby's parties, after all.) But they still played a vital role in urban life and modern pollution.

7 Qtd. in Brown, 24.

Fitzgerald returned to the train in *Tender Is the Night* (1934) as an image for the important place of travel technology in America. Early in the novel, the narrator describes the first-class compartments of European trains as “stifling” in comparison with the American railroad: “Unlike American trains that were absorbed in an intense destiny of their own, and scornful of people on another world less swift and breathless, this train was part of the country through which it passed” (20–21). Once again the figure of James J. Hill looms large here. American trains had become symbols for the energy, drive, and wealth associated with empire building, yet this novel maps the gradual decline of America during the Depression through Dick Diver’s fall into obscurity. This tension involves trains elsewhere in the text, too. Movie starlet Rosemary Hoyt has a youthful fling on a train that torments Dick, and Maria Wallis shoots her lover in a Paris train station just as “the engine whistled sharply and the train began to move, momentarily dwarfing the shots in significance” (96). The fact that it takes the train “a hundred yards to stop” after the shooting mirrors the sluggish response of the onlookers. Nicole considers it “foolish” to get involved, and Dick only does so to impress Rosemary (97). In truth, they don’t care. They simply want to get back to their own agenda just as the machinery of the modern world keeps churning regardless of the human cost.

On the Road: The Itinerant Childhood of F. Scott Fitzgerald

P.F. McQuillan’s eldest daughter, Mary “Mollie” McQuillan, grew up in a world of refinement and respectability. Her family’s Victorian mansion on Summit Avenue, the most selective and well-to-do street in St. Paul, announced their important place among the upper echelon of the community. Accordingly, Mollie had every advantage. She learned etiquette, music, and fashionable dances. She attended Manhattanville College, an elite Catholic girl’s school in New York City, and she travelled to Europe several times. After all, her family was considered one of the most religiously devout in the city, and Mollie’s mother insisted on paying their respects to the Pope with regular trips to the Vatican.

Mollie herself cared little for society life. She was not considered conventionally attractive with her moonlike face, thick eyebrows, piercing green-gray eyes, and frizzy, unkempt hair. Neighborhood girls would warn their mothers: “For heaven’s sake, comb up your hair or you’ll look like Mrs. Fitzgerald!”⁸ Her future husband, Edward Fitzgerald, would sometimes remark that Mollie “just missed being

⁸ Qtd. in Turnbull, 27.

beautiful.”⁹ Photographs capture hints of mischievousness, even capriciousness, in her expression, but by in large, she comes across as foreboding. Mollie rarely smiled. Her attire and bearing did not help matters either. She gave little thought to her appearance. She wore frumpy, ill-fitting black dresses that dragged in the dirt and droopy hats adorned with feathers. Coffee stains were noticeable on her sleeves, and sometimes she appeared with only one manicured hand – insisting that the beauty parlor paint only the fingernails on her right hand because, as Scott Donaldson explains, “she could do the left herself” (*Fool*, 3). Her footwear became a staple of town gossip as well. She often appeared with unlaced, mismatched shoes – to break in new pairs one at a time – and she always carried an umbrella, rain or shine. It is little wonder that some kids, including a few of Scott’s friends, called her a witch – though behind her back just to be safe. Such rumors only intensified when they moved into a house on Highland Avenue in 1905 with a turret “that resembled a witch’s hat” and with the blinds almost always drawn.¹⁰

Furthermore, Mollie only seemed to go to two places: the library and church. A voracious though indiscriminating reader, she devoured romance novels, religious books, popular fiction, and sentimental poetry. She also had a notorious reputation for saying “whatever came into her head,” as one relative put it.¹¹ She was quick to insult the color of a newly painted house or to offer sartorial advice if she disliked someone’s hat or dress. One afternoon, while riding in a streetcar with a friend whose husband was seriously ill, she appeared lost in thought. The friend asked what was on her mind, and Mollie replied flatly, “I’m trying to decide how you’ll look in mourning.”¹² Such eccentricities ensured her marginal place among St. Paul’s most respected families, and they gradually became a source of consternation for Scott as a child.

Nearing the age of 30, when Mollie’s romance with an army officer fizzled out, she turned her attention to longtime suitor Edward Fitzgerald. The dapper Edward, nearly seven years her senior, seemed to embody all the characteristics of a Southern gentleman. He was well-mannered, soft-spoken, and gracious. He wore tailored suits with shined shoes, and his neatly trimmed Vandyke beard, along with a walking stick, helped give him an air of respectability. He had a pedigree that differed from the McQuillans as well. His mother, Cecilia Ashton Scott, descended from prominent Maryland families dating back to the seventeenth century, and his great-great-grandfather was the brother of Francis Scott Key, who wrote the lyrics for “The Star Spangled Banner.” Additionally, as David Brown notes, young Edward, along with most of his hometown of

9 Qtd. in Mizener, 2.

10 Turnbull, 13, 65.

11 Qtd. in Mizener, 2.

12 Qtd. in Donaldson, *Fool*, 3.



The formidable and eccentric Mollie McQuillan Fitzgerald.

Rockville, Maryland, sympathized with the South during the Civil War, and the nine-year-old had a front row seat to the last gasps of the Confederacy. He rowed Southern spies across the Potomac, helped a soldier escape capture, and “cheered on Jubal Early’s army as it drove off Union forces at the Battle of Monocacy just outside of Frederick (July 1864) and proceeded to march on nearby Washington” (22). Edward’s cousin also happened to be the son-in-law of Mary Surratt, the first woman executed by the federal government for her alleged complicity in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Once Mollie decided to get down to the business of having a family, she started to apply some not-so-subtle pressure to encourage Edward. The family maintained various stories about their engagement, but they all share a similar theme: Mollie took charge. During a walk along the Mississippi River one evening, for

instance, she threatened suicide by throwing herself into the water unless he proposed.¹³ Scottie, Scott and Zelda's daughter, told her biographer that "Daddy said that his father told him that he was sitting in the parlor one night with Mollie ... and talking about this and that when she called her parents in ... and announced how wonderful it was that she was engaged to marry Ed; and that he had been too much a gentleman to know how to get out of it."¹⁴ Regardless of the truth, the couple married in 1890 at the McQuillan winter home in Washington, DC, and they honeymooned in France and Italy. On one of their days in Paris, Edward tried to hurry Mollie out of the hotel to enjoy a stroll along the Champs-Élysées, but she protested, "I've already seen Paris!"¹⁵

Tragedy, however, marred their early marital life. In the summer of 1896, their daughters, Mary and Louise, died during an influenza epidemic. A shattered Edward wrote to his mother: "I wonder sometimes if I will ever have any interest in life again. Perhaps so but certainly keen zest of enjoyment is gone forever."¹⁶ Mollie internalized her grief, never speaking of her lost children again. On 24 September 1896, just three months after burying her girls, she gave birth to a son, Frances Scott Key Fitzgerald, at her family home in the Summit Avenue section of St. Paul.¹⁷ He would later describe this home as "a house below the average/Of a street above the average,"¹⁸ but this neighborhood ensured that his childhood playmates came from the wealthiest, most powerful families in St. Paul. Mollie devoted herself wholeheartedly to her son, to the point of excess. The loss of her daughters undoubtedly made her overprotective and rather indulgent with Scott. Her sister Annabel McQuillan tried her best to impose some discipline on the lax Fitzgerald household but to little avail.

Meanwhile, Edward's ongoing financial troubles around the turn of the century contributed to the restless, itinerant life of his family. Lacking natural business acumen and the right temperament for a competitive marketplace, the Maryland native floundered professionally. His furniture company, the American Rattan and Willow Works, had been struggling since the 1893 economic depression. By 1898, it folded, and Edward took a position as a wholesale grocery salesman for Procter & Gamble in Buffalo, New York. His subsequent business failures would relocate the family to Syracuse in 1901, back to Buffalo in 1903, and to St. Paul in 1908, where they lived off the estate of his wife.¹⁹ But this only tells part of the

13 See Mizener, 2.

14 Qtd. in Brown, 20.

15 Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Epic*, 12.

16 Qtd. in Turnbull, 7.

17 Bruccoli, *Epic*, 12.

18 *Life in Letters*, 33.

19 Bruccoli, *Epic*, 12–13.

story. The Fitzgeralds rented a different apartment or house almost annually in St. Paul. In fact, they never owned a home, and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald would follow the same pattern, never purchasing a piece of property throughout their lives.

Young Scott ended up spending 10 years of his childhood in upstate New York. After the Fitzgeralds first moved to Buffalo, they did not leave the region until 1908, when he was nearly 12 years old. These formative years have received little attention, but as John Kabot notes, “it was in upstate New York where young Fitzgerald first encountered the social and economic elite and his first loves; where he developed interests in reading, theater, and history; where he began to write. Fitzgerald’s childhood experience in Buffalo and Syracuse laid the foundation for the themes and interests he would continue to explore for the rest of his life” (89).²⁰ Scholars have examined the importance of regionalism for Fitzgerald, particularly in relation to the South,²¹ but to understand Fitzgerald’s Northern roots, a more nuanced exploration of his time in New York is warranted – not merely the New York of his Manhattan sojourns as an undergraduate and his journey there from struggling writer to Jazz Age celebrity.

Buffalo, the second-largest city in the state and eighth-largest in the country at the end of the nineteenth century, was home to some of the most important factories and mills in the nation. The Lackawanna Steel plant in downtown Buffalo produced vital materials for the railroads, from nuts and bolts to steam engines. Manufacturers Edwin Ross Thomas and George N. Pierce, who eventually produced the luxury Pierce-Arrow car, contributed to the burgeoning automobile industry. The city also had one of the largest ports for grain in the world, which kept the Buffalo River teeming with grain elevators and freighters.²² This bustling city certainly held a powerful place in young Fitzgerald’s imagination. One event, in particular, focused the nation’s attention on Buffalo at the time – the Pan-American Exposition – and the Fitzgerald family attended. Oddly enough, their first apartment in Buffalo was converted into a hotel for the event, which transformed the city into a major tourist destination and became the place where tens of thousands witnessed the assassination of a US president.²³

20 For treatments of Fitzgerald’s Buffalo years, see Turnbull, 6–17; Le Vot, 6–16, 27.

21 Kirk Curnutt and Sara A. Kosiba, for example, have recently argued that “perceived differences in regional identity allowed the Fitzgeralds to transmute their romance into fiction,” and this aspect of their relationship reflected a broader “romanticized regionalism” in America about the division between North and South (10).

22 Kabot, 89–90, 92.

23 *Ibid.*, 93.



Fitzgerald in Buffalo, New York in 1899.

Popular Culture and the Influence of the Pan-American Exposition

The Pan-American Exposition ran from May through November 1901, and it was constructed on a 350-acre plot of land next to Delaware Park. A Buffalo railroad speculator first convinced the Exhibitors Association to host the exposition there. He presented maps showing how nearly 40 million people could reach the city by train in less than 12 hours. That, along with the proximity of Niagara Falls, which could be used to provide electricity for the event, convinced the committee. In total, over eight million people visited, paying an entrance fee of 50 cents (around \$18 today) – though Sunday admission was eventually cut in half to attract working-class families.

Architect John Carrère and his team designed the grounds with one entrance to establish a cohesive narrative about progress, from primitive man to modern

civilization.²⁴ In the tradition of previous world's fairs, the Pan-American Exposition presented America as the apex of civilization, and it did so, in part, through color. Nicknamed the “Rainbow City,” the grounds linked vibrant, provocative colors with so-called primitive cultures and shades of white with Western society. One reporter for the *Buffalo Enquirer* explained that “the general color scheme ... placed the harsh, bright colors at the southern end of the grounds and in the lower parts of the buildings.”²⁵ In other words, various shades of orange and red appeared at the entry, and as patrons moved northward, the colors lightened into gentle greens and yellows for the buildings dedicated to modern technology. Fairgoers ultimately arrived at the “Electric Tower,” gazing up at its white, ivory, and gold colors. This 375-foot, hydroelectric-powered structure celebrated electricity, and it was fittingly adorned with thousands of lights. It even housed an elevator that could propel visitors to the highest point on the fairgrounds.²⁶



“Night View at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, New York, 1901.” Photographer: Oscar A. Simon & Bro.

²⁴ Rydell 128–129, 131–132.

²⁵ Brush, 8. For a historical overview of the exposition, see Rydell, 126–153.

²⁶ Creighton, 24.

This link between technology and Western culture went hand in hand with exhibits that aligned progress with whiteness. Most notably, the midway featured numerous ethnological displays, including the Filipino Village that allowed visitors to ride carts pulled by water buffalo, and a village referred to as “Darkest Africa.” Across from Darkest Africa, one could tour the Old Plantation. Its entrance featured a representation of a colonial mansion from the Antebellum South. Inside, one saw cotton and corn fields with real crops as well as slave cabins occupied by roughly 50 “genuine Southern negroes.” Live music, dancing, and “Laughing Ben” entertained audiences as well. According to Margaret Creighton, Ben, a “diminutive and gray-haired [man], was an honest-to-goodness ex-slave. Opening his mouth wide – wide enough that visitors could count his nine teeth – [he] spent hour after hour roaring with mirth” (124). This portrait of Southern life showed African Americans as content and carefree – much like the myth of “happy slaves” promulgated by the South during slavery. One could also purchase miniature cotton bales as souvenirs, offering, as Robert Rydell notes, “a not-so-subtle reminder of how blacks would fit into the economic structure of the Pan-American utopia forecast by the exposition’s directors” (147). Midway Day, which featured a parade to promote its various attractions, included a watermelon float from the Old Plantation. Fifty feet in the length, this halved watermelon featured black seeds that were the smiling faces of African American performers. The float was followed by 100 members of the Old Plantation dancing the cakewalk.²⁷

At the time of the exposition, Edward Fitzgerald had been transferred to Syracuse where his daughter Annabel was born, but despite this move, the Fitzgerald family returned to Buffalo for the Pan-American Exposition in August 1901.²⁸ Shortly after, on 6 September, President McKinley was shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz in front of the Temple of Music at the exposition. Despite the fair’s celebration of electricity, the on-site hospital had no electric lighting. The team of surgeons trying to save McKinley relied on sunlight, and one doctor used a small handheld mirror to help illuminate the wound. Eventually, a light was installed, but it only provided eight watts. Though Buffalo had several X-ray machines in the city, Edison Laboratories sent one from New Jersey to assist with the president’s medical needs. It arrived a few days later, but at that point, the doctors felt no need to use it. McKinley seemed to be recovering. However, in the early hours of 14 September, the twenty-fifth man to lead the US government died from damage to his pancreas as well as gangrene. Czolgosz, a recent Polish immigrant, would be executed by electrocution within two months – several days before the official closing of the fair – and his ethnicity sparked national debates about the need for

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46–47.

²⁸ *Ledger*, 155.

stricter immigration restrictions for “undesirable” populations. More than 1,000 people petitioned to witness the execution, though such requests were denied.²⁹

Another irony emerged at this moment. As Creighton explains, “the Pan-American Exposition, whose designers had worked so hard to demonstrate all the beautiful things electricity could do, became suddenly linked with the way electricity could kill” (199). The darker implications of this technology did not dissuade an additional two million people from visiting in the aftermath of the assassination. On Railroad Day, over 100,000 people went to the Temple of Music to hear speeches about the railroads and eulogies for the fallen president. Crowds then made their way to watch “the human bomb” get hurled into the sky before parachuting back to earth and a young couple get married with a pride of lions as groomsmen.³⁰ It is easy to imagine the Pan-American Exposition resonating for an impressionable young Fitzgerald. Just a year earlier, the four-year-old went to the navy yard in Atlantic City and subsequently dressed as a sailor for his birthday party – where he “told enormous lies to older people about being really the owner of a real yacht.”³¹ At the exposition, he visited the site of only the third successful assassination of an American president. He witnessed a dazzling display of electrical lighting and undoubtedly absorbed some of exposition’s messages about ethnicity, modernity, technology, and frivolity.

World’s fairs, state fairs, and amusement parks appear throughout Fitzgerald’s fiction as part of his examination of American life, yet the influence of the Pan-American Exposition, in particular, has largely been overlooked. Fitzgerald had an uncanny ability to mine popular trends for their cultural insights, and he was certainly aware of the ongoing allure of world’s fairs throughout his life. He recognized that popular culture often reflected the country’s aspirations and desires while communicating its anxieties and fears. He understood its power and potential to shape contemporary thinking. As a writer, he sought to be part of the popular milieu as well as its spokesperson. He would reach millions of readers through his short fiction alone. The *Saturday Evening Post* had a circulation of 2,750,000 copies a week in the 1920s when Fitzgerald became one of its most celebrated authors.³² His success in this genre reflected his ability to speak to modern tastes and to help audiences make sense of them.

In the late 1920s, when he decided to turn to his childhood as inspiration for a new series of stories about an alter ego named Basil Duke Lee, he chose the setting of a state fair in “A Night at the Fair” (1928) for exploring some of the hierarchies

29 Creighton, 20, 99, 105, 202.

30 *Ibid.*, 158.

31 *Ledger*, 155.

32 Bruccoli, *Epic*, 103.

shaping contemporary life.³³ For Fitzgerald, world and state fairs seemed to put every aspect of the nation – from its current practices to its vision for the future – on display in the same time and place. In fact, while he was working on this series, news coverage of the Pan-American Exposition once again captivated the public. Chiquita, the “little Cuban,” who was actually a 26-inch Mexican woman and who had been crowned “The Mascot of the Pan-American Exposition,” died in 1928. One Buffalo newspaper reminded readers of her fame at the turn of the century, describing the “gaping hordes [that] milled and jostled to see when she appeared ... in Buffalo in 1901.”³⁴ Ultimately, whether through the grandiosity of their architecture and celebration of modern technology or their messages about race and gender, these fairs provided a vehicle for some of Fitzgerald’s most searing commentary on American excess and inequality.

An early example of the influence of fairs and the Pan-American Exposition can be seen in “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” (1922). Fitzgerald captures Braddock Washington’s greedy excesses, in part, by presenting his compound as a kind of world’s fair with its spectacle and racist underpinnings. World’s fairs and expositions were always designed around central themes, and they imparted clear messages about cultural, technological, and racial hegemony. On the surface, the Washington chateau evokes the kind of architectural splendor of world’s fairs: “the chiselled wonder of a thousand yellow windows with their oblongs and hexagons and triangles of golden light, the shattered softness of the intersecting planes of starshine and blue shade, all trembled on John’s spirit like a chord of music. On one of the towers, the tallest, the blackest at its base, an arrangement of exterior lights at the top made a sort of floating fairyland” (134).

The lighting and intersecting planes of shaded colors recall the color scheme of the “Rainbow City.” Even the emphasis on geometric shapes hints at the layout for the Buffalo Exposition. The original plan for the Iroquois dwellings involved a “hexagonal stockade,” and the grounds themselves were structured around numerous cross-axis points as well as buildings with domes and phallic structures.³⁵ Later in the story, Fitzgerald reveals that the chateau was ultimately designed by a “moving-picture fella” (152) – a detail that dovetails perfectly with world’s fairs. The film industry, like the architects behind these expositions, designed their work to reach viewers on a visceral level. Robert A. Martin notes

33 The magazine rejected the original entry in the Basil series, “That Kind of Party,” because, according to Arthur Mizener, “the editors did not care to believe that children of ten and eleven played kissing games” (“Introduction,” *Basil and Josephine*, viii). When Jackson R. Bryer and John Kuehl first collected the two series in 1973, they included a revised but unpublished version of “Party” from 1937 in which Fitzgerald changed his hero’s name to Terrence R. Tipton (*Basil and Josephine*, 1–14).

34 Qtd. in Creighton, 245.

35 Rydell, 132, 138.

that the illiterate and ill-mannered “moving-picture fella,” much “like his fellows in Hollywood ... was catering in a direct way to his audience. If that audience demanded a dream world removed from reality, he knew how to deliver it” (133). The team of architects for the Pan-American Exposition, under the stewardship of Carrère, designed a dream world through details such as the geometric layout of the grounds, the Court of Fountains, a color scheme that evoked the Spanish Renaissance, and the Electric Tower. Hollywood could have done no better.

Other details of the Washington compound give it the feeling of a midway. John T. Unger, a guest of Washington’s son Percy, cannot fathom the decadence of the place. Its bathrooms have bathtubs made up of aquariums where one can bathe in rose-colored water while watching a movie (137–138). Music also seems to float through the air at all times. His first impression of the chateau, including its tallest tower, is accompanied by the “sound of violins [drifting] down in a rococo harmony that was like nothing he had ever heard before” (134–135). Later, through the bathroom window, John hears “flutes dripping a melody that was ... cool and green as the room itself” (138). All of this music contributes to the fair-like quality of the grounds.

In addition to the seemingly endless opportunities for distraction and entertainment (music, lights, motion pictures, aquarium-bathrooms), the Washington midway includes a plantation with slaves, much like the Pan American’s Old Plantation. Shortly after the Civil War, Braddock’s father and the estate’s founder, Col. Fitz-Norman Culpepper Washington, sent his brother to find “darkies who had never realized that slavery was abolished. To make sure of this, he read them a proclamation that he had composed, which announced that General Forrest had reorganized the shattered southern armies and defeated the North in one pitched battle. The negroes believed him implicitly” (140). This kind of ploy seems right out of the P.T. Barnum playbook – although Barnum mostly duped audiences with exhibits such as “What Is It?” (a developmentally disabled African American man presented as a missing link) and Joyce Heth (the woman billed as the 161-year-old nurse of George Washington).³⁶ In “Diamond,” John receives a tour of the “slaves’ quarters” while Braddock lectures him on the inherent differences between the races. He has concluded that “[w]ater is not good for [African Americans] – except as a beverage” (146). He also maintains control by allowing only a few of his nearly 250 slaves to learn English.

While the exploits of the Washington family reflect the legacy of antebellum racism, Braddock’s language mirrors the advertisements for the Old Plantation at the Pan American: “The darkies of the South do not take as kindly to the public rouge box. They all love the beat of a bass drum and a limber-jointed abandon of a

36 Bogdan, 134–142; Reiss 33–41.

cake-walk, but the Southern negro is a stay-at-home darky.”³⁷ Such offensive gibberish is akin to Braddock’s theories on water, but, more important, the slave quarters provide a reminder of the history of economic gain in the United States built on a foundation of racial oppression and exploitation. The “Braddock Exposition,” if you will, inverts the message of progress celebrated by the Pan American. Instead, his America privileges materialism and the acquisition of riches at all costs. It promotes greed, ruthlessness, and intolerance, and as Fitzgerald suggests, such values rob people of their humanity.

In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Fitzgerald links Jay Gatsby’s house with world’s fairs and amusement parks to warn against some of the more superficial and corrosive aspects of modern American life. Nick Carraway famously observes that his neighbor’s house was

blazing with light ... from tower to cellar. ... But there wasn’t a sound.

... Only wind in the trees, which blew the wires and made the lights go off and on again as if the house had winked into the darkness. As my taxi groaned away I saw Gatsby walking toward me across the lawn.

“Your place looks like the World’s Fair,” I said.

“Does it?” He turned his eyes toward it absently. “I have been glancing into some of the rooms. Let’s go to Coney Island, old sport. In my car.” (81)

The blinking lights of the house, which make it flash in and out of the darkness, mirror Gatsby’s own insubstantiality. He appears out of nowhere (“Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” [130]), enabled by his fortune as a bootlegger, and he vanishes just as quickly – as if he did not exist at all, as if he were nothing more than a light winking out in the darkness. At the end of the novel, no one attends his funeral other than Nick, Gatsby’s father, and the party guest known for his “owl-eyed glasses” (174).

These lights reflect Fitzgerald’s commentary on the way electricity was changing the nation. At the start of the 1920s, as David E. Kyvig explains, “47 percent of urban dwellings had been wired to receive and employ electricity,” and that number would jump to 85 percent by 1929 (66–67). Electricity in the home inspired radical changes in daily life, providing greater flexibility for work hours, increasing literacy rates, and creating a thriving home appliance industry. Electric irons, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and sewing machines began to appear in middle-class homes across the country, but some appliances remained too expensive for most people. Refrigerators cost a staggering \$450 in 1923, when the average income for American families was roughly \$2,000.³⁸ The interior

³⁷ Qtd. in Rydell, 146.

³⁸ Drowne and Huber, 120.

of Gatsby's home features some of these exclusive acquisitions, including a "machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb" (39–40). Like his butler-operated appliances, Gatsby's carnival of lights reveals his house, like the man himself, to be a kind of spectacle.

Visitors at world's fairs marveled at the architecture, and Gatsby's home has a similar effect with its "high Gothic library, paneled with carved English oak, and probably transported complete from some ruin overseas" (45) as well as its "Marie-Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons" (91). Such décor evokes the kind of homage to Greek, Roman, and European designs at the Pan-American Exposition. Yet the interior of Gatsby's mansion seems, on the surface, incongruous with its modernity. One continuously hears a phone ringing with long-distance calls (a prohibitive expense for most people at the time) – and let us not forget that juicer! It is little wonder that Nick describes the place as a "huge incoherent failure of a house" (179). Such contrasts, however, played an integral part in every world's fair. Their architecture celebrated the artistic accomplishments of the past while exhibits presented glimpses of the future. The Ferris Wheel, an engineering marvel, was introduced at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 included a telephone with a line to New York City, allowing people on the East Coast to hear the Pacific Ocean.³⁹ This tension between past and present mirrors the conflicting impulses of Gatsby himself – a man trapped in the past who exploits the contemporary marketplace for illegal alcohol, a man who longs for the respectability of old money but wears a pink suit. Gatsby has, in effect, built a world for himself based on the types of things a visitor might see at a world's fair. He has collected replicas of the old and trinkets of the new while he himself remains trapped somewhere between the two.

This comparison with world's fairs reinforces the novel's philosophical exploration of time. These events, despite their dazzling splendor and excesses, were temporary. The Ferris Wheel, which remained on the grounds of the World Columbian Exposition until the spring of 1894 before being moved to the north side of Chicago, was dismantled for scrap in 1905 – though it was given one more chance to dazzle crowds at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904.⁴⁰ In a similar fashion, the fairgrounds of the Pan American decayed gradually, and they had been reduced to a virtual wasteland by the spring of 1902. Just as some aspects of Gatsby's vision remain unattainable, most notably his desire to erase Daisy's history with Tom, he has crafted an unsustainable fiction about himself. His

³⁹ Larson, 240–241; Rydell, 227.

⁴⁰ Larson, 380.

new money, tainted by the criminal element of Meyer Wolfsheimer, repels Daisy. She finds his parties reminiscent of carnivals with their “raw vigor,” hedonism, and chaotic pleasures. Even Nick recognizes that Gatsby’s guests largely “conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks” (41). This disgraceful treatment of his home captures Gatsby’s failure to understand that money, in and of itself, does not buy respect. This gap is captured powerfully in the juxtaposition of Nick’s description of Gatsby’s house as a “world’s fair” and Gatsby’s suggestion that they go to Coney Island. As noted earlier, world’s fairs presented themselves as educational vehicles to celebrate the nation’s progress and culture. Coney Island, by contrast, was about escapist pleasure and entertainment for the masses – an amusement park where all walks of life gathered for rides, freak shows, and cheap food. Gatsby mistakes the spectacle of one for the other, and accordingly, his performances of upper-class refinement, whether through colored shirts or the affectation “old sport,” ring false.

“A Night at the Fair,” written in 1928 as part of the Basil Duke Lee series, draws heavily on Fitzgerald’s childhood from age 11 when he was living in Buffalo to age 17 when he entered Princeton in 1913. In this story, the Minnesota State Fair provides the backdrop for 15-year-old Basil’s anxieties about having long trousers, a car, and a pretty girl to kiss. Fitzgerald begins the story by describing this fair as extraordinary: “[B]ecause of the agricultural eminence of the state, the fair was one of the most magnificent in America” (69). Fitzgerald’s language endows it with the scope of a world’s fair, and the Minnesota State Fair did play a role in the Pan-American Exposition. Not only did the replica of its state capital, crafted completely out of butter, amaze crowds, but the exposition asked the Minnesota State Fair for its “eighteen-foot-tall replica of historic Fort Snelling, made entirely of apples, with crabapple cannons,” to help boost attendance after McKinley’s assassination.⁴¹

Fitzgerald does not mention food replicas, but the description of the fair underscores his central theme:

There were immense exhibits of grain, livestock and farming machinery; there were horse races and automobile races and, lately, aeroplanes that really left the ground; there was a tumultuous Midway with Coney Island thrillers to whirl you through space, and a whining, tinkling hoochie-coochie show. As a compromise between the serious and the trivial, a grand exhibition of fireworks, culminating in the representation of the Battle of Gettysburg, took place in the Grand Concourse every night. (69)

41 Creighton, 129.

In many respects, this coming-of-age story focuses on the tension “between the serious and the trivial,” and Basil must learn to distinguish between the two. The fair’s celebration of the “agricultural eminence of the state” with “immense exhibits of grain, livestock and machinery” reflects the crucial role of farming in America. It sustains the country and provides work for millions. It also reminds fairgoers of their own responsibility to care for the planet. These messages seem overshadowed, though, by frivolous exhibits such as “the six-legged calf ... where the man rides the motorcycle around” and the fireworks display (73).

Likewise, the automobile races do more to inspire consumer desire than awe in this burgeoning technology: “their eyes were caught and held by a small car, red in color ... which indicated both speed of motion and speed of life. It was a Stutz Bearcat, and for the next five years it represented the ambition of several million American boys” (70).⁴² In fact, between 1908, the year Henry Ford introduced the Model T, and 1927, the number of automobiles in the country skyrocketed from 200,000 to 26 million.⁴³ The automobile in 1911, in other words, was still a marvel reserved for a select few, but its value here comes from romantic associations with a “chariot” that can whisk away a “baby-faced girl” (71). Automobiles become just another means for youth culture to pursue its primary interests: flirting and kissing. Even the airplane gets trivialized as visitors substitute this demonstration of flight for Coney Island thrill rides that “whirl you through space.”

Basil’s obsession with long trousers further reinforces Fitzgerald’s message about needing to strike a compromise between the serious and the trivial in order to become a man. Long trousers function as the central image for young adulthood in the story: “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” (70). As such, Basil pleads hysterically with his mother to buy some: “I’d rather be dead than go away to school without them” (76); “A boy is simply utterly helpless without them” (77); “He would not go to the fair without his suit ... – he would look back with infinite regret upon that irretrievable hour” (80). Death, helplessness, and lost possibilities seem an awfully big price to pay for not having long trousers, but Basil is merely reacting to the superficial expectations of the teenagers around him. After wearing pants for only seven days, Basil’s friend Riply feels entitled to mock him as a “little boy” (74). Basil’s resentment stems not from injustice but from a desire to have the same means for excluding others – “a liberation from ... the companionship of one who was ... still a boy” (70).

42 In the original magazine version that appears in Bryer and Kuehl’s collection, the car is given the fictional name “Blatz Wildcat” (70).

43 McCarthy, 30.

For Basil, young adulthood means participating in a culture of exclusion, and Fitzgerald uses this to raise questions about the social construction of masculinity. Sociologist Michael Kimmel's study *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* traces the history of the "self-made man" as enshrined by the fiction of Horatio Alger, and he argues that "fears of failure, weakness, and timidity have always haunted the promise of upward mobility in America, shaping men's actions in harmful ways" (9). Kimmel concludes that men must forge a democratic masculinity instead. This vision of inclusivity offers the possibility of linking "what it has historically meant to be a man – strength, a sense of purpose, a commitment to act ethically, controlled aggressiveness, self-reliance, dependability – with such newer masculine virtues as compassion, nurturing, and a fierce egalitarianism" (334). In many respects, Fitzgerald's male characters struggle to achieve this balance. Basil's journey to become a man requires seeing beyond the trivial and constructing a version of manhood for himself that includes compassion.

The dangers of such superficial markers for maturity are encapsulated in the story by Elwood Leaming, the "dissipated" boy who drinks, smokes, and frequents burlesque shows. Despite his half-closed eyes, which suggest the limits of his own vision as well as that of the boys who look up to him, Elwood appears to be "a man of the world" to Basil and Riply (71). After Elwood suggests that they "pick something up," Basil studies his calculated approach to romance: "Several pairs of strolling girls met his mature glance and smiled encouragingly, but he found them unsatisfactory – too fat, too plain or too hard" (72). Basil mirrors this objectification (picking "something" up) the following night when he immediately considers his blind date "a fright, squat and dingy, with a bad complexion brooding behind a mask of cheap pink powder and a shapeless mouth that tried ceaselessly to torture itself into the mold of charm" (81–82). Basil has learned from Elwood to evaluate girls purely on physical beauty – much like the belly dancers of the hoochie-coochie show at the Minnesota State Fair and the dancing women at the Pan-American Exposition, which included hulu dancers from Hawaii, Mexican señoritas, and "hip-wrigglers" from Maori.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, armed with his long trousers and false sense of superiority, Basil deigns to kiss his blind date on the Ferris wheel because "he was unable to hurt anyone whom he thought of as an inferior" (82).

Basil defines "inferior" here in terms of physical appearance, but it has important class implications as well. In order to go on this blind date, Basil has turned down an invitation to attend the fair with Gladys Van Schellinger, whose family lives in "the city's second largest mansion" (78). He reconnects with her to watch the reenactment of the Battle of Gettysburg, and after joining her in the Van

44 Creighton, 27.

Schellinger's box, Basil mocks the idea that "anyone could have preferred the society of those common girls" (84). He then convinces himself that he loves her: "Sitting beside Gladys in the little seats [of their limousine], he loved her suddenly. ... She seemed 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" (86). He is drawn not to her but to her affluent lifestyle, and her wealth becomes a way to justify or "compensate for" the fact that he finds her tiresome and "unexciting." When Gladys invites him to visit the next day, she asks if he can bring the "fascinating" Hubert Blair – who "possessed the exact tone that all girls of fourteen and a somewhat cruder type of grown women, find irresistible" (83). Fitzgerald uses this moment to condemn Basil's mercenary self-interest, subjecting him to the same dismissive treatment that he bestowed on his blind date earlier that evening. The story thus suggests that growth and maturity will require leaving behind the superficial cruelties of making snap judgments and of using others for personal gain. Instead, Basil will need to cultivate sensitivity and compassion. He will need to place less value on long trousers, bobbed hair, and fast cars and more on behaving ethically.

Just as Fitzgerald uses the nightly historical reenactment of the Battle of Gettysburg as a metaphor for the war between the sexes, it also captures the tension between past and present in American culture. Historical reenactments played a significant role at most world's fairs. The Indian Congress and Village at the Pan American offered a clear didactic message about westward expansion "with its sham battles and famous 'living heroes,' including Geronimo and a variety of United States military scouts" (Rydell 149). The amphitheater for the Indian Congress seated 20,000 and offered daily performances of military reenactments. One of the more sensational events involved a highly advertised, Indian dog feast. After gathering nearly 700 dogs from pounds, dogcatchers, and strays, the feast began when Geronimo used a bow and arrow to kill two dogs. Some of the other Indigenous people used rifles to kill the animals.⁴⁵

By contrast, the Gettysburg event in Fitzgerald's story holds little interest for these teenagers. Basil provides almost no description of it, and no one mentions the significance of this battle as a turning point in the Civil War. Instead, while the reenactment is taking place, Basil focuses on the "monstrous procession" of Hubert Blair, Olive, Riply, Basil's blind date, Elwood, and another girl on the field. Basil describes it as "a sort of Lilliputian burlesque of the wild gay life" because his friend Riply has been saddled with an unattractive blind date. Riply vacillates between silly laughter and wearing a "pained expression" on his face "as if he doubted that, after all, the evening was a success" (85). Once again,

45 *Ibid.*, 156.

success is measured by being seen with an attractive girl and kissing her at the end of the evening. In this way, the girl becomes a prop as insubstantial as wearing long trousers or the Battle of Gettysburg reenactment. It is little wonder that this performance of masculinity leaves Riply hollow. It is an expression of manhood devoid of feeling.

Finally, the trials and tribulations of youthful romance get captured in some of the rides that allude to the Pan-American Exposition. The boys in “A Night at the Fair” particularly enjoy the Old Mill – a water ride with miniature boats that glide along an artificial river. The “long echoing darkness” of the interior has “romantic” and “mysterious” qualities. It allows each boy to put his arm around a girl’s shoulder (74–75). The boats eventually slide “into a red glow – a stage set of hell, with grinning demons and lurid paper fires” (75). On one level, the depiction of hell captures the torment of youthful romance from its anxieties about long trousers to the awkwardness of not knowing how to talk to girls. Riply’s only contribution to one conversation is “an occasional burst of silly laughter,” for instance (73). On another level, this staging of hell may allude to one of the more thrilling exhibits on the midway of the Pan American. The “Darkness and Dawn Under-World” presented visitors with “seas of fire” and “brown-suited young men wearing painted skeletons.” They even had an encounter with the dark lord himself, Satan. These terrors gave way to the “Grotto of Dawn”: “a heavenly city of ‘soft light,’ ‘flowing fountains,’ and ‘walls of jasper.’ At the conclusion, ‘the mist-like forms of floating angels’ pointed the way back to the thoroughfare of the Pan” (Rydell 151). Basil and the other boys in this series of stories hope to come out of the experiences of adolescence into a dawn filled with romance, self-understanding, and confidence. But the uncertain terrain of love often leaves them feeling burned and tormented.

Fathers and Sons

The Fitzgerald family returned from the Pan-American Exposition to their home in Syracuse. They would rent three different apartments in less than three years, continuing a lifelong pattern of transitory housing, and in 1903 they moved back to Buffalo when Edward was transferred once again by Procter & Gamble.⁴⁶ In that same year, the Wright brothers first took flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, flying 852 feet in 59 seconds;⁴⁷ Luna Park opened in Coney Island,

⁴⁶ Kabot, 95; Brucoli, *Epic*, 12.

⁴⁷ McCullough, 106.

dazzling audiences with its architectural splendor, quarter of a million electric lights, bright colors, animal shows, and thrilling rides;⁴⁸ Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* premiered, giving audiences a new sense for the possibilities of film with its variety of locations and camera shots;⁴⁹ and Coca-Cola, which began as a nerve tonic after the Civil War, removed cocaine from its formula.⁵⁰

In this year, Scott noted several formative experiences in his *Ledger*. He made a memorable trip to Maryland and participated as a ribbon-holder at his cousin Cecilia's wedding. He felt a deep affection for Cousin Ceci and for his father's side of the family, and he greatly admired Ceci's brother for becoming a Jesuit priest. As Matthew Bruccoli observes, Catholicism played a significant role in Scott's boyhood given the devout nature of the McQuillans. He always went to the best Catholic schools and attended weekly Mass with his mother. Nevertheless, literature held a greater enchantment for him. His father read him the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe and Lord Byron, and "Scott became an eclectic reader and would try to imitate the stories that impressed him" (*Epic*, 16). He found early inspiration in history books as well. His father had enjoyed regaling him with tales of the Antebellum South, and in 1903 he gave him a book on the Revolutionary War. This inspired Scott to become a member of the National Society of Children of the American Revolution, and he began putting on plays with boyhood friends about the Revolution. In his *Ledger*, he recalls "the attic where he had a red sash with which he acted Paul Revere" (158).⁵¹

On 4 July of that year, a few months before leaving Syracuse, Scott sought some degree of independence by running away from home. He later recalled his punishment:

I ran away when I was seven on the Fourth of July – I spent the day with a friend in a pear orchard and the police were informed that I was missing and on my return my father thrashed me according to the custom of the nineties – on the bottom – and then let me come out and watch the night fireworks from the balcony with my pants still down and my behind smarting and knowing in my heart that he was absolutely right. Afterwards, seeing in his face his regret that it had to happen, I asked him to tell me a story.⁵²

48 Kasson, *Amusing*, 66–71.

49 Sklar, *Movie-Made*, 27.

50 Pendergrast, 89.

51 Mizener, 10.

52 "The Death of My Father," *A Short Autobiography*, 120.

This account, written upon the death of his father, presents the spanking as a moral but anguished choice. For Scott, he recognized in his father the idea that upholding a moral code comes at a personal cost, and his own empathy reveals Scott's acceptance of and investment in this belief. Yet father figures are largely absent or dead in Fitzgerald's fiction. Basil, for example, notes in "A Night at the Fair" that "Riply's father, like his own, was dead" (74). Some of Fitzgerald's fictional fathers provide important moral grounding – though they mostly do so from a distance. *The Great Gatsby* opens with Nick's meditation on his father's advice:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages you've had." He didn't say more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. (1)

Nick's inability to follow this advice – even in the next paragraph when he criticizes some people for having an "abnormal mind" – is less important than the fact that his father's words come from a memory. Nick calls up his voice as one might a ghost at a séance, and other than pragmatic information about financing Nick's trip East, his father promptly disappears into the ether.

In a similar fashion, Dick Diver's father in *Tender Is the Night* only becomes a presence when Dick learns of his death via telegram:

Dick loved his father. ... In the summer father and son walked downtown together to have their shoes shined – Dick in his starched duck sailor suit, his father always in beautifully cut clothes – and the father was very proud of his handsome little boy. He told Dick all he knew about life, not much but most of it true, simple things. ... He was one of those about whom it was said with smug finality in the gilded age: "very much the gentleman, but not much get-up-and-go about him." (232)

The biographical connections reveal some of Scott's views on his own father. Though he recognized Edward's professional failings, he cherished his memories of getting their shoes shined on Sunday mornings. Just as Dick's recollections in *Tender* leave him "wishing he had always been as good as he had intended to be" (204), Scott considered his own father to be a moral compass.



Fitzgerald with his dapper father, Edward. His father embodied Scott's vision of the Southern gentleman.

Friendships, First Loves, and Early Writings

The Fitzgeralds moved to Buffalo shortly after his seventh birthday, and he attended school at Holy Angels Convent “under the agreement that he need go only half a day and was allowed to choose which half” (*Ledger*, 158). This must have involved

some impressive negotiations since Scott cried so hard on the first day of nursery school three years earlier that his mother pulled him out altogether. He forged some important relationships in Buffalo. One of his closest friends was a boy who shared his love of theatre, Hamilton Wende. Every Saturday, Wende received two complimentary tickets for the matinee show at the Tech Theatre, and he always took Scott with him. The boys ran home after each performance to reenact what they had seen. Scott had a good memory for dialogue, and as Turnbull notes, “he was also a good prop man who, with a pillow case and a scarf of his mother’s, could transform himself into a Turk or a pirate or a cavalier” (12). The importance of these experiences has been memorialized in *This Side of Paradise* when Amory and Frog Parker attend weekly shows at the stock company.

At the same time, Mollie Fitzgerald made sure that her son had access to the most prominent families in the city by enrolling him in Mr. Van Arnum’s dancing class at the Century Club in 1905. She herself had taken dance in her youth and recognized its importance among the social elite. Dancing not only introduced Scott to this higher social circle but also to his first taste of romance. He met Nancy Gardener on the dance floor, and as he recorded in the November 1905 entry of his *Ledger*, he “fell in love” with her. The following month he “fussed with her brother on the toboggan slide” because he wanted to ride alone with Nancy (160).

The Fitzgeralds had just rented a house on Highland Avenue when Scott’s romance with Nancy reached the stage of pushing siblings off a toboggan, and this move precipitated his transfer from Holy Angels to another private Catholic school in Buffalo. Around this time, the nine-year-old Scott began fantasizing about his origins. He imagined being an orphan with royal lineage, left on the doorstep of Edward and Mollie Fitzgerald. The only clue to his identity could be found on his swaddling blanket with the Stuart coat of arms sewn into the fabric. Scott’s fascination with royalty certainly speaks to his own concerns about the differences between his mother’s and father’s familial origins. He always admired his father’s link with the Southern Confederacy, and later in life, the notion of Anglo-Saxon superiority, as promoted in lectures at Princeton and cemented in the popular imagination by magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, stayed with him. He went so far as to claim such an affiliation, describing himself and Zelda as “Nordic” on various occasions.⁵³ In an oft-quoted letter to John O’Hara in 1933, Fitzgerald explains his conflicted feelings about his Irish heritage:

I am half black and half old American stock with the usual exaggerated ancestral pretensions. The black Irish half of the family had money and looked down upon the Maryland side of the family who had, and really had, that certain series of reticences and obligations to that go under the

53 Brown, 37–38.

poor old shattered word “breeding.” ... So being born in that atmosphere of crack, wisecrack and counterack I developed a two-cylinder inferiority complex. So if I were elected King of Scotland tomorrow after graduating from Eton, Magdalene to Guards, with an embryonic history which tied me to Plantagenets, I would still be a parvenue.⁵⁴

It comes as little surprise that Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* describes his familial link to the Dukes of Buccleuch at the opening of the novel. Nick has an origin to take pride in, and the lineage of belonging recurs throughout Fitzgerald’s writing.

Also, 1906 was the year film became a significant part of Scott’s life. He received a “moving picture machine” from his uncle, and “he used to go to the Wild West movies” (*Ledger*, 161). In many respects, Scott was participating in the national craze over film that started with “nickel madness.” The first nickelodeon (a fabricated word combining the cost of admission with the Greek term for theater) opened in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1905. These makeshift, storefront theaters could seat sometimes a hundred people or more, and they primarily appealed to working-class and immigrant communities because of the cost and because one did not need to speak English to enjoy them. These “films,” a hodgepodge of moving images such as dancing, carriage rides, speeding trains, ocean waves crashing against the shore, and historical reenactments, ran approximately 15–20 minutes. Their popularity quickly crossed class barriers, though. Vaudeville, a largely middle-class entertainment, began integrating moving pictures into its variety shows, and soon larger theater venues began screening them for middle-class audiences. According to film historian Lary May, “New York’s small theaters increased from 50 in 1900 to over 400 by 1908, showing movies to approximately 200,000 daily.”⁵⁵

Scott began to see himself more and more as a writer at this time. Early in 1907, he began drafting his own history of America and received praise for a school essay on George Washington and Ignatius Loyola. He dabbled in detective fiction as well, penning part of a story about a stolen necklace hidden beneath the floorboards. Meanwhile, dance classes continued in earnest at the Century Club, and they led to his next romance, with Kiddy Williams. He recorded some of these experiences in his *Thoughtbook*, a 26-page diary he kept between the summer of 1910 and early 1911. Scott gave her a box of chocolates for Christmas – a bold gesture that made him feel “scared silly” at the time. A few months later, he heard rumors that Kiddy considered him “third in her affections,” and he became determined to reach the top of the list. One afternoon at a “kissing party,” he made his move: “we played postoffice, pillow, clap-in-clap-out and other foolish

⁵⁴ *Letters*, Ed. Turnbull, 503.

⁵⁵ May, *Screening*, 35.

but interesting games. It was impossible to count the number of times I kissed [Kiddy] that afternoon. At any rate when we went home I had secured the coveted 1st place.”⁵⁶ After this, he believed that she loved him, and this happened in the same month that he and his mother attended a Princeton glee club concert, which planted the seed for his interest in the university.

A few weeks later, news that Edward lost his job stunned the Fitzgerald household. Scott notes in the March 1908 entry of his *Ledger* that “his father’s services were no longer required by Proctor & Gamble. He remembers the day, and that he gave his mother back his swimming money after he heard her at the phone” (162). In a 1936 interview with the *New York Post*, Fitzgerald reflected on this time, explaining that he returned the quarter for swimming because “I knew something terrible had happened and I thought she could not spare the money now. Then I began to pray, ‘Dear God,’ I prayed, ‘please don’t let us go to the poorhouse; please don’t let us go to the poorhouse.’” For Scott, this moment forged a lifelong link between masculinity and money, between self-worth and professional success: “That morning [my father] had gone out a comparatively young man, a man full of strength, full of confidence. He came home that evening, an old man, a completely broken man. He had lost his essential drive, and his immaculateness of purpose. He was a failure the rest of his days.”⁵⁷

Indeed, the 55-year-old Edward never truly worked again. The Fitzgeralds moved back to St. Paul, and the McQuillan family secured a position for him as a wholesale grocery salesman. However, this job was largely to keep up appearances. Edward never seemed to have any customers, and he relied on a roll-top desk in his brother’s real estate office to keep samples of rice, dried apricots, and coffee. He even charged stamps to his wife’s account at the nearby drug store because of his own flimsy credit. It is no wonder Scott heard his mother repeatedly mutter, “If it wasn’t for your Grandfather McQuillan, where would we be now?”⁵⁸ The specter of poverty would stay with Scott for the rest of his life.

In their first few months back in St. Paul, Scott and his sister Annabel lived with Grandmother McQuillan while their parents stayed with a nearby friend and looked for a house. Behind the McQuillan’s estate, Scott had a view of the stables across the alleyway, and he enjoyed watching the coachmen clean the carriages and brush the horses for some of the wealthiest families in the city. The Fitzgeralds eventually rented a place in the same Summit Avenue section of town, and they would move almost every year after this, seeking increasingly economical leases in the area. These moves were certainly a sign of the dwindling financial resources of the McQuillan legacy, but that did not stop Mollie from pursuing the best for her son. She enrolled him in St. Paul Academy, a private

⁵⁶ *The Last Kiss*, 4–5.

⁵⁷ Mok, “A Writer Like Me,” 296–297.

⁵⁸ Turnbull, 18; Le Vot, 12; Mizener, 16.

school that catered to some of the most prominent families in the city. Acutely aware of his own family's financial difficulties and lack of pedigree, Scott tried to compensate by becoming a success at school. These efforts often backfired as his penchant for bossing people around and showing off rubbed other students the wrong way. One classmate wrote in the school paper, *St. Paul Academy Now and Then* (so named for its erratic publication schedule): "If anybody can poison Scotty or stop his mouth in some way, the school at large and myself will be obliged."⁵⁹

At first, Scott tried to distinguish himself through extracurricular activities. He played football for a team organized by his friends and broke a rib. He was a third-string basketball player and a second-string baseball player for his school at a time when both teams had horrible seasons. Even though "his athletic career was an unbroken series of unadmitted defeats," as Arthur Mizener describes it, Scott formed some successful clubs – most notably the Scandal Detectives and later the Gooserah. The Scandal Detectives, which later inspired the Basil Duke Lee story by the same name, first gathered in a loft at his friend Cecil Read's barn and subsequently in the attic of the Read home on Summit. Here, Scott taught the club how to fence based on his reading of *The Three Musketeers* and how to be detectives and gentleman burglars in the style of fictional character Arsène Lupin. They even plotted an attack on rival Reuben Warner, whom a local girl liked more than Fitzgerald, and their efforts resulted in a call to the police.

Despite Scott's officious nature, he made many friends who appeared in the Lee stories. Cecil Read became the basis for Riply Buckner's character, and the girls Margaret Armstrong and Marie Hersey became Imogene Bissell and Margaret Torrence, respectively. Another important friendship at the time was with Richard (Tubby) Washington. They had a shared love for the stage, and Tubby owned a toy theater with cardboard figures that he faithfully moved around as Scott improvised scenes. Later Tubby would play a small role as the Mexican bandit in his melodramatic western play, *The Girl from Lazy J*. Tubby's inability to pause at the critical moment for his line – "Now I will have revenge – but wait!" – drove Fitzgerald mad.⁶⁰ Some of these friendships were forged in his dance classes at Ramaley Hall with Professor Baker, a round, nimble man who often carried a whiff of rum on his breath. Mollie again insisted on such lessons, and Ramaley Hall proved to be another place where the wealthiest children in St. Paul gathered. Scott couldn't help but notice the black carriages with chauffeurs and coat-of-arms displayed prominently on the doors that dropped off and picked up some of his friends. The less wealthy students rode the streetcar or walked, carrying their dance shoes over their shoulders to protect them.⁶¹

59 Qtd. in Brucoli, *Epic*, 23.

60 Mizener, 20.

61 Turnbull, 23.

Scott started to find some success at St. Paul Academy through writing. His first published story, “The Mystery of Raymond Mortgage,” appeared in the October 1909 issue of *Now and Then*. He could hardly contain his excitement when it came out: “I read my story through at least six times, and all day I loitered in the corridors and counted the number of men who were reading it, and tried to ask people casually, ‘If they had read it?’”⁶² He followed this detective story with “Read, Substitute Right Half” in the February 1910 issue of the paper, a story about a second-string football player who gets off the bench to bring home the big win for his team. This piece of “wish-fulfilment,” as Brucoli calls it, offers an early example of the way Fitzgerald “was learning to use writing as a substitute for action” (*Epic*, 26). One month later, “A Debt of Honor,” a tale about a Confederate soldier who redeems himself after falling asleep on duty, was published. His final story, “The Room with the Green Blinds,” came out in June 1911, and this re-imagining of the fate of John Wilkes Booth drew on his own family’s strange connection with Lincoln’s assassination. At the end of the summer, he helped put on a production of his first play, *The Girl from Lazy J*, with the Elizabethan Drama Club – a local group named after its founder and drama enthusiast Elizabeth Magoffin. Scott played the starring role, and it took place in Magoffin’s backyard. This would be the first of several plays he would write for this club.

Fitzgerald took up smoking and got long trousers in 1911 – something he recorded twice in his *Ledger* entries – and he now considered himself “an inveterate author and a successful, not to say brilliant debater and writer” (168). His literary and verbal successes did not translate into good grades or any kind of disciplined approach to schoolwork. In fact, instead of paying attention to class, Scott mostly scribbled notes in the margins of his textbooks. He jotted ideas for stories and poems on notepads when he should have been solving math problems and practicing declensions for Latin. Fitzgerald would eventually blame his mother’s overindulgence for not helping him develop the kind of work ethic needed to succeed in school. Even if the parent in me wants to cry foul on that claim, the truth is that his genius – his aptitude for writing, ability to finish projects, and ear for learning from other literary models – was the only thing that drove him. It was the only thing that inspired his focus and dedication.

Boarding School and Basil Duke Lee

Scott’s poor grades at St. Paul led to a family intervention, and the Fitzgeralds, with the help of Aunt Annabel’s money, decided to send Scott to the Newman School in Hackensack, New Jersey in the fall of 1911. Wealthy families from around the

62 Qtd. in Brucoli, *Epic*, 25.

country enrolled their children in this Catholic boarding school, which offered a college preparatory curriculum geared toward admission to Ivy League schools. Fitzgerald hoped for a fresh start at Newman, but making all the same mistakes he did at St. Paul, he promptly found himself unpopular and bullied. He got into several fights, and the other boys always seemed to cheer on his rival. Like Basil's character in "The Freshest Boy," Scott was miserable in his first year at Newman and often found himself "[sobbing] into his pillow" (99).

The Basil Duke Lee stories are richly autobiographical, and it can be tempting to read them purely in those terms. However, Fitzgerald's ability to mine his personal history in order to craft compelling, insightful fiction about the difficulties of adolescence deserves further examination. The bullying in "The Freshest Boy," for instance, can be heart-wrenching at times, particularly as Basil struggles



Fitzgerald at 15-years-old. During his time as a student at the Newman School, he met the most significant influence on his early career – Monsignor Cyril Sigourney Webster Fay.

to understand “what made him the most detested boy in school. Among boys and masters there seemed to exist an extraordinary hostility toward him [... but he had not] been able to lay his hands on its underlying cause” (93). Basil chronicles fights, insults, harmful gossip, and acts of exclusion. As he probes the depths of his unpopularity, he admits to himself that he had “boasted,” “pointed out people’s mistakes,” and “shown off” (94). Fitzgerald uses this bullying as a springboard for the story’s central themes about the importance of personal hardship and compassion.

On a trip to New York to see a Broadway show, Basil’s experiences with two people – Ted Fay, the lovelorn Yale football captain, and Mr. Rooney, his drunken football coach and chaperone – become significant milestones in this coming-of-age narrative. Basil, given his own reputation for cowardice on the football field, views Ted as a hero, and he follows him and his girlfriend to the tearoom at the Knickerbocker Hotel. Hiding behind a potted fir, Basil overhears her end their relationship because she intends to marry someone else. He comes to realize “that life for everybody was a struggle, sometimes magnificent from a distance, but always difficult and surprisingly simple and a little sad” (109). In short, even heroes can have their hearts broken. Yet Ted will go back to Yale and “knock out home runs with the bases full this spring” (108), and Basil becomes determined in this moment to do the same – to face the hardships at school and not to lose sight of his dream of “molding his own destiny” (108). This need for facing hardship as a crucial component for growth and maturity recurs throughout the Basil Duke Lee stories.

Basil’s relationship with Mr. Rooney, the drunken football coach who repeatedly advises Basil to “get wise to yourself” (101), underscores Fitzgerald’s theme about compassion. After the train ride to New York where Rooney criticizes Basil’s “fresh” demeanor and cowardice on the football field, he abandons his charge to attend to some “business” while Basil sees a play. Rooney returns to the theater drunk and noticeably dissipated, as if he has gotten into a fight: “Mr. Rooney had, in fact, gone a little to pieces,” wearing a different hat with his shirt untucked and necktie askew (105). Rooney agrees to wait in the bar next door during the final act of the play, and Basil later finds him passed out at a table there. This time, when Rooney slurs his recurring insult to “get wise to yourself,” Basil replies, “I am wise to myself.” He then “coaches” Rooney to clean up in the washroom and to accompany him to the train where he can get some more sleep. Basil demonstrates genuine sympathy for Rooney at this moment, helping him get back to the school and keeping quiet about the incident. Like his experiences with Ted Fay, Basil recognizes their shared humanity. Even teachers can be damaged, hurt, and self-destructive. Even teachers need wisdom – to “get wise” to themselves.

In the closing moments of the story, one of the boys at school calls Basil an affectionate nickname (“Lee-y”), and Basil realizes that kindness is an essential part of community: “It isn’t given to us to know those rare moments when people are wide open and the lightest touch can wither or heal. A moment too late and we can never reach them any more in this world. They will not be cured by our most efficacious drugs or slain with our sharpest words” (110). Just as we need hardship to give us the strength to meet the challenges of life, we have a responsibility to care for one another. The consequences of not doing so can harden people to the world and to others. It can make the world a less caring, nurturing place.

Fitzgerald tried to distinguish himself at the Newman School through sports. Having read numerous books about heroic athletes, particularly Cinderella stories of young, mistreated, overlooked boys who win the big game, Fitzgerald wanted to secure popularity and respect through football despite his lack of aptitude and size. The efforts were disastrous. One afternoon, he developed a reputation for cowardice after going out of his way to avoid a tackle. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald maintained a lifelong admiration for the game and hero worship of football stars. Scott cherished the ticket stub for the Princeton–Harvard game in 1911, for example, citing that game as one of the major factors in his decision to attend Princeton.⁶³ And he often used athletics in fiction to compensate for his own shortcomings on the field. The opening of “The Perfect Life” casts Basil as a star football player, leading the team’s efforts in an impressive game, even though it did not result in a win. A former alumnus then encourages Basil to use his newfound popularity to influence the boys around him “to lead clean, upright, decent lives” (159). Athletic prowess provides a platform for offering moral leadership off the field.

One outlet did provide Scott solace during his struggles with school popularity: the theater. With the Newman School less than an hour away from Manhattan by rail, he regularly attended Broadway shows. He recorded notes about numerous plays at the time, including *The Little Millionaire*, *The Quaker Girl*, and *Little Boy Blue*. His trips gave him a glimpse into New York nightlife with its cabaret clubs, dance halls, and lobster palaces. These trips also inspired him to write librettos for musical comedies in the style of Gilbert and Sullivan. He came across the Triangle Club libretto for *His Honor the Sultan* at this time, and this Princeton club, which produced an original musical every year that toured during the Christmas season, solidified his desire to attend the school. As he later recalled that libretto “was enough for me. From then on the university question was settled. I was bound for Princeton.”⁶⁴ This passion for the theater spilled into the summer. On the

63 Ibid., 31.

64 Qtd. in Brown, 48.

train back to St. Paul for the break, Fitzgerald drafted a complete play for the Elizabethan Drama Club entitled *The Captured Shadow* with Scott playing the lead character as a gentleman burglar. Elizabeth Magoffin directed the play in August at Mrs. Backus's School for Girls, and this event served as a fundraiser for the Baby Welfare League. This play and these experiences would become the basis for his Lee story of the same name.

Scott made big strides during his second year at Newman socially, academically, and athletically. He won his second track-and-field meet and made the football team, though not as a starter. He also became good, lifelong friends with quarterback Charles "Sap" Donahoe. During breaks, they bonded during long train rides as Scott returned to St. Paul and Sap visited family in Seattle. This friendship vastly improved Scott's reputation on campus. Sap happened to be the editor of the *Newman News* as well, and this campus paper gave Fitzgerald the opportunity to distinguish himself on campus through writing. He published three stories in the 1912–1913 school year, and Brucoli argues that two of these stories, "A Luckless Santa Claus" and "The Trail of the Duke," illustrate Fitzgerald's "rapid progress toward a distinctive style and controlling tone" (*Epic*, 33).

The most important friendship that Fitzgerald formed in this year was with Father Cyril Sigourney Webster Fay. The portly, perfumed Fay offered Scott a vision of the Catholic church that was glamorous, intellectual, and fun. He could shift seamlessly from probing discussions about philosophy and medieval history to silly jokes. He enjoyed eating, singing, and playing the piano, and because of his own family income, he maintained a luxurious lifestyle that helped him cultivate relationships with the upper echelon of the Catholic community.⁶⁵ Fay soon became a mentor and father-figure for Scott. Though Fay was living in Washington, DC, when they first met in November 1912, he had recently been appointed to the board of trustees at the Newman School and would subsequently take over as headmaster. Scott visited him in DC, and there he was introduced to Henry Adams and Irish writer Shane Leslie. In fact, Fay and Leslie helped change Scott's view about his Irish heritage by making it appear respectable. As André Le Vot explains, "Fay, whose mother was of Irish ancestry, and [... Shane], son of an Irish baronet and newly come down from King's College, Cambridge, insistently proclaimed the superiority of Irish Catholicism over Anglo-Saxon Protestantism" (26). Fay greatly supported Scott's writerly aspirations. He listened to Scott. He engaged with him as an intellectual equal, and he validated the young writer's sense of self-importance. In fact, he and Leslie encouraged Scott to view himself as a brilliant young writer with an important career ahead. Some of this flattery was playful on their part. Years later, Leslie admitted in an interview that "the

65 Turnbull, 39.

Monsignor and perhaps myself induced Fitzgerald to believe he was the future Catholic novelist for the United States.”⁶⁶ For Fitzgerald, he never doubted their sincerity, and both of these men would remain loyal supporters of his work.

Scott’s love of Fay is captured, in part, through his portrait of Father Darcy in *This Side of Paradise*:

Description fails. ... Catholics thought him an inspiring preacher; aristocratic Catholics said that he was the type of priest of which there should be more. Children adored him because he was like a child; youth reveled in his company because he was still a youth and couldn’t be shocked. ... At present he was a very moral, very religious (if not particularly pious) clergyman, making a great mystery about pulling rusty wires and appreciating life to the fullest, if not entirely enjoying it. (30)

Darcy enchants everyone from stodgy aristocrats to children, and his inability not to be shocked – an important marker in Fitzgerald’s fiction for the gap between youth and adulthood – makes him special indeed. Equally important, Monsignor Darcy takes on the role of moral guide. He provides the kind of ethical grounding that Fitzgerald saw in his own father and endows to some of his fictional fathers as well. Not only did Fitzgerald dedicate *This Side of Paradise* to Fay, but he also included several of Fay’s letters and a poem almost verbatim into the text. Every biographer of Fitzgerald has echoed some version of Mizener’s statement that Fay, until his death in 1919, “was probably the greatest single influence on Fitzgerald” (45).

At the end of 1912, Fitzgerald started experimenting with drugstore cherry and other liquors. His poor academic performance, failing four classes in two years, had a sobering impact on him as his application for Princeton neared. He did some “cribbing” for his entrance exams and hoped for the best. Meanwhile, as he travelled back to St. Paul that summer to wait for word from the university, he wrote another play for the Elizabethan Drama Club – a Civil War melodrama entitled *Coward*. The first performance, at the St. Paul YMCA, received kind reviews in a local paper, and Fitzgerald considered the second performance at the White Bear Yacht Club a success. Together, the events raised \$150 for the Baby Welfare League. Meanwhile, the tension in the Fitzgerald family over where to send Scott to college was resolved, in part, by the death of Grandmother McQuillan. Mollie’s inheritance, roughly \$125,000 or nearly \$4 million today, meant that Scott would not have to rely on support from Aunt Annabel, who would only pay for his education at a Catholic university.

⁶⁶ Qtd. in Brown, 40.

Fitzgerald readied himself to become the next stellar undergraduate at Princeton, but Princeton was less certain. They deemed his entrance exams too weak for admission, requiring several make-ups as well as a personal interview. Fitzgerald visited the campus for this new round of tests in September and failed again. Unwilling to concede defeat and tapping into a charm that he already possessed, he pleaded his case to the admissions committee, stating that it would be too cruel to deny him a place in the freshman class on his birthday. They granted a conditional acceptance based on passing make-up exams in algebra, French, Latin, and physics in December. He wired his mother on 24 September 1913: “ADMITTED SEND FOOTBALL PADS AND SHOES IMMEDIATELY.”⁶⁷ Fitzgerald had gotten his wish. He was, at long last, a Princeton man.

67 Qtd. in Bruccoli, *Epic*, 41.