Gothic *Gatsby*: Demystifying the Darkness in Fitzgerald’s Oeuvre

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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read Gothic *Gatsby*: Demystifying the Darkness in Fitzgerald’s Oeuvre by Deanna Stewart Colombo, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in English: Literature at San Francisco State University.

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As America becomes a dynamic new world power after World War I, the fallout of the war lingers in the hope and promise of the economically successful Roaring Twenties. The Great War shadows many of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s protagonists, including Amory Blaine (This Side of Paradise), Jay Gatsby (The Great Gatsby), Anthony Patch (The Beautiful and Damned) and Dick Diver (Tender is the Night); all are World War I veterans, and each is haunted by his experience at war. This specter looms over their varied career, marital, and societal successes, condemning each to a shallow existence stripped of any true meaning. Focusing specifically on his first and last published works, This Side of Paradise (1920) and Tender is the Night (1934), I explore how Fitzgerald utilizes the Gothic to represent the haunting of characters who served in the Great War. Through using antiquated Gothic elements, Fitzgerald is able to blend Romanticism and Realism into an American Modernist voice that traverses the cultural trauma experienced by Americans at home and abroad.
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Introduction

At first glance, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s work is all flappers, diamonds, champagne, and unrequited love, poetically wrapped up in heartbreaking prose. However, diving beneath the veneer of Fitzgerald’s shiny subject matter, one finds that there is more than meets the eye. Many of the themes that Fitzgerald wrote about are serious and often sad, though there is a deeper, foreboding element of darkness at work in his prose—that of the Gothic. Gothic literary motifs are littered through Fitzgerald’s body of work. In his first published novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Fitzgerald includes a doppelgänger figure, phantom apparitions, and sets his story at the Collegiate Gothic-styled Princeton University. Short stories such as “The Ice Palace” (1920) and “A Short Trip Home” (1927) also feature spectral characters in suspenseful settings. “One Trip Abroad” (1930), *Tender is the Night* (1934), and *The Last Tycoon* (1941) each focus on twisted doppelgänger characters, as well as Fitzgerald’s most celebrated work, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). *Gatsby* and “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” (1922) each feature doubles, and both revolve around the Gothic tension between a tortured creator and his creation. Fitzgerald also shows an obvious reverence for Edgar Allan Poe, writing a clear imitation of Poe’s “Murder at the Rue Morgue” (1841) with his first published work, “The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage”¹ (1909). Fitzgerald’s “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” (1922), could also be read as a loose retelling of Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839). There are plenty of examples

of Gothic elements within F. Scott Fitzgerald’s work- but why are they there? Through rereading select novels and shorts stories as pieces of Gothic literature, we can reevaluate Fitzgerald’s attitude towards the Jazz Age, and discover that his assessment of the Roaring Twenties was multi-faceted.

When considering the implications that a Gothic tone might have upon Fitzgerald’s work, it is helpful to consider where he lands on the literary spectrum. There is division among scholars as to whether Fitzgerald is a Realist or a Romantic figure. Traditionally, Fitzgerald is considered a Realist writer; he painted realistic portrayals of Americans and American expatriates, wrote about addiction, changing gender dynamics, poverty, death, and despair. He was immensely famous for writing accurately about the Jazz Age, a term he helped to popularize. To this day he is associated with the excess of the 1920s, and is nearly as famous for his personal life as for his writing. In fact, much of his personal life did appear in his writing, further cementing his Realist approach. Yet Fitzgerald also displays very strong characteristics of Romanticism. Many of his characters are themselves Romantic heroes. Gatsby, his most celebrated character, is the epitome of the Romantic hero in that he believes in the limitless potential of the individual, and always strives for a better, more perfect tomorrow. It is telling that Fitzgerald contains elements of both Realist and Romantic literary movements, as the genre of American Gothic literature itself is oriented somewhere between Realism and Romanticism.

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2 John Kuehl, in his essay “Scott Fitzgerald: Romantic and Realist,” identifies Fitzgerald’s dual style as the following: “Social realism came to Fitzgerald from two literary sources: the English tradition of the novel as exemplified particularly by Butler and Thackeray, and American realists and naturalists. Some of his romanticism is in the American tradition, but for the most part, he reached back to the early nineteenth-century English Romantic poets and their successors, the latter-day romanticists of the Victorian period. With various modifications, additions, and changes of emphases, he took over much of the aesthetic of the Romantic poets: the use of the artist’s personal experience as subject matter; the stress on the individual and his private world; the importance of the hero and
While traditional English Gothic literature preceded Romanticism and provided an answer and alternative to the Realism that was prevalent at the time, American Gothic literature naturally responded to different subjects than its English forebearer. Common themes found in American Gothic are Puritanical vs non-Puritanical values, the frontier vs the city, New World vs Old World, and rationality vs the irrational; conventions include madness, miraculous survivals, fear, the supernatural, and psychological anxiety. Fitzgerald features many of these components in his work, including the evil characters of the double/doppelgänger figure, specters, and succubae. Fitzgerald also makes some clear homages to his favorite Gothic characters in literature, specifically, to the John Keats ballad “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (1819). My question is… why? Why is a Modern writer with a finger on the pulse of a thoroughly avant-garde generation utilizing literary tropes from a literary movement far before his time?

One answer to this question is that Fitzgerald would have been educated in Romantic writers such as John Keats, and would have been familiar with their work. Fitzgerald also was born towards the end of the popular period of Victorian Gothic literature, which also may have played a role in his academic exposure. However, I argue that Fitzgerald utilized the Gothic in his writing with far more purpose than merely being exposed to it as a writer. Fitzgerald intentionally employs Gothic motifs in his prose to bring a sense of the haunted to post-World War I America, and Americans abroad. In Charles L. Crow’s *History of the Gothic: American

heroism; the conflict between the world as it is and as it might be (the real and the ideal); the importance of the moment; the importance of wonder (man’s capacity to respond to the infinite possibilities of his existence).”

Gothic, he examines the evolution of the Gothic genre as an American method: “American Gothic is no longer defined as a narrow tradition bound by certain props (ruined castles, usually in foreign lands, and imperilled maidens). It is now usually seen as a tradition of oppositional literature, presenting in disturbing, usually frightening ways, a sceptical, ambiguous view of human nature and of history. The Gothic exposes the repressed, what is hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten, in the lives of individuals and cultures” (Crow 2). While Fitzgerald certainly does incorporate some of the props mentioned by Crow, he focuses primarily on creating a world of repressed horrors rather than penning literal ghosts. Fellow Modernist William Faulkner helped to pioneer the Southern Gothic genre by writing about the American South and its inhabitants, which are both haunted by the institution of slavery. I argue that Fitzgerald found a specter haunting Americans at home and abroad—though the sins that invited this ominous presence differ from their Southern compatriots.

As America becomes a dynamic new world power after the war, the fallout of WWI lingers in the hope and promise of the economically successful Roaring Twenties, even following American expatriates overseas. WWI shadows many of Fitzgerald’s protagonists, including Amory Blaine (This Side of Paradise), Jay Gatsby (The Great Gatsby), Dick Diver (Tender is the Night), and Anthony Patch (The Beautiful and Damned); all are World War I veterans, and each is haunted by his experience at war. This specter looms over their varied career, marital, and societal successes, condemning each to a shallow existence stripped of any true meaning. Each of Fitzgerald’s protagonists are faced with the same question by the end of their story: how do you create meaning in a meaningless existence? By exploring Fitzgerald’s works chronologically, we can examine Fitzgerald’s own view on this question as he ages as a
man and a writer. This question also corresponds with how the genre of the Gothic expands and contracts within Fitzgerald’s body of work. Beginning with Fitzgerald’s first published work, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), we find a youthful and optimistic Amory Blaine, teetering between adolescence and manhood amid WWI. Fitzgerald liberally employs Gothic elements and settings, creating a fantastical world of dark Romanticism for Amory to come of age in. Written in part while he awaited deployment to Europe, *This Side of Paradise* features a still hopeful, boyish voice that is desperate to prove himself through combat. That voice turned decidedly darker as Fitzgerald, and the nation, aged and grew around the pervasive shadow of WWI.

Fourteen years after *TSOP* was published, Fitzgerald released what would be his last completed novel, *Tender is the Night* (1934). *TITN* marks a stark difference to *TSOP*, both in maturity and reflection. Through Fitzgerald’s utilization of Gothic themes and conventions, we can track a shifting understanding of the underlying cultural trauma inflicted by the Great War upon American society. While *TSOP* eagerly looks forward to the promise of the future, escaping the war with seemingly limited interaction, *TITN* explores the insidious individual and collective cultural trauma that is haunting Americans at home and abroad. What was overlooked and diminished in the pursuit of Amory Blaine’s youth, is found in Dick Diver’s adulthood.
Chapter 1

*This Side of Paradise* tells the story of Amory Blaine, a Princeton student who survives World War I and returns home consumed with the question of what he will do with his life. The first half of the novel focuses primarily on Amory’s experience at Princeton, an establishment with which Amory identifies much of his personality. Fitzgerald, a Princeton alumnus himself, took great care in conveying a Gothic portrait of Princeton that wasn’t entirely accurate. The word “Gothic” is used three times in the chapter titled “Spires and Gargoyles,” a segment devoted to defining the ominous setting for Amory’s education. Fitzgerald writes, “The night mist fell… clustered about the spires and towers, and then settled below them, so that the dreaming peaks were still in lofty aspiration toward the sky. Figures that dotted the day like ants now brushed along as shadowy ghosts, in and out of the foreground. The Gothic halls and cloisters were infinitely more mysterious as they loomed suddenly out of the darkness, outlined each by myriad faint squares of yellow light” (*TSOP* 53). It is curious that there is such an emphasis on Gothic architecture in the text, as Princeton is not known for containing many examples of Gothic buildings. David McKay Powell wrote on the influence of Henry Adams and his “Gothic disposition” upon Fitzgerald, writing that “Fitzgerald amended the architecture of his textual Princeton to represent better what he thought a university ought to look like: Fitzgerald’s medieval Princeton, its spires rising out of a romantic mist, is really much closer to… glamorized Oxford” (Powell 99). Why does Fitzgerald go out of his way to romanticize his former campus in a Gothic styling? In *This Side of Paradise*, the Gothic is brought in to highlight the youth and knowledge present on the campus. “Fitzgerald’s descriptions of the Princeton campus seem
influenced by [Henry] Adam’s attitude that the Gothic was not an expression of ‘religious
gloom’ but of youth and idealism” (Powell 94). I believe that Fitzgerald utilized the Gothic to
express a tension between American youth and idealism during and after WWI; this tension is
central to understanding the impact of Gothic literature upon Fitzgerald’s work as a whole.
Princeton becomes a microcosm of post–WWI America, representing a clash between the
progressive ideals of youth and the status quo of yesteryear and Victorianism. In Carol Margaret
Davison’s expansive work History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764-1824, Davison quotes
Elizabeth Napier’s claim that “the Gothic is ‘centrally concerned with problems of power,
authority, and institutional (especially Catholic) oppression’” (Napier, in Davison 66). An Ivy
League school embodies many of the American notions of power, authority, and institutional
oppression, and easily functions as a stand-in for the state of American society, on which
Fitzgerald frequently sought to comment. The apparent Gothic architecture of Princeton
simultaneously serves as a source of power and defeat to Amory, and both “inspired and deflated
him, caused him to understand the ideal while convincing him that he could never attain it”
(Powell 100).

After arriving at Princeton, Amory educates himself on Romantic poets such as John
Keats. We’re told that Amory found “the ‘Belle Dame sans Merci’ [and] for a month was keen
on naught else” (TSOP 51). A key component of Amory’s education at Princeton involves his
self-teaching of Romantic authors and Gothic stories. Amory takes great pleasure in identifying
as a Romantic, and mentions several times throughout the novel that he is a Romantic. Amory
exists in a strange, liminal space between the past and the future. He is enamored of “the gray
walls and Gothic peaks and all they symbolized as warehouses of dead ages” (TSOP 54). Yet the
Gothic architecture is emblematic of the purpose of Gothic art in general; “The Gothic symbolizes infinite reaching toward an ideal, an upward striving toward a geometric point existing only in theory; and for Amory Blaine, education was a matter of symbolically striving upward, not toward concrete knowledge, but toward an abstract perfection” (Powell 98). Amory is caught between the warehouses of dead ages, and the infinite reach towards the ideal; he is constantly torn between antiquity and progress.

Highlighting the tension between the old and new, the Great War begins when Amory is a freshman at college. Amory himself tells us: “Beyond a sporting interest in the German dash for Paris the whole affair failed either to thrill or interest him. With the attitude he might have held toward an unamusing melodrama he hoped it would be long and bloody. If it had not continued he would have felt like an irate ticket holder at a prizefight where the principals refused to mix it up. That was his total reaction” (TSOP 55). Fitzgerald’s emphasis that Amory’s childish response to the war was “his total reaction” indicates how disconnected Amory is from the gravity of war and the reality of the global conflict. Amory is uninterested in the dynamics of international relations, yet is enthralled by the societal standings at Princeton. The pinnacle of the upper crust at Princeton is a student named Dick Humbird. Dick functions as the ideal man of society for Amory, who describes Dick as “a perfect type of aristocrat” (TSOP 77). We’re told that Dick “possessed infinite courage, an averagely good mind, and sense of honor with a clear charm and noblesse oblige that varied it from righteousness” (TSOP 77). And it’s not just Amory who is fixated on Dick; the narrator observes that “people dressed like him, tried to talk as he did” (TSOP 77). Amory considers him “the eternal example of what the upperclass tried to be” (TSOP 78). Despite Dick having no speaking lines in the novel, his significance to Amory cannot
be overlooked. Yet Dick seems to be marked for death from the very beginning of his introduction in the text; Amory observes of Dick: “‘He’s like those pictures in the Illustrated London News of the English officers who have been killed’” (TSOP 78). Amory creates an interesting association here between his assessment of Dick’s “infinite courage” and “sense of honor” with the ultimate sacrifice of the English soldiers. It’s curious then that within pages of Dick being introduced in the novel, he dies at the wheel of a drunk driving accident. When Amory pulls up behind Dick’s car moments after the accident, we’re told that “all that remained of the charm and personality of the Dick Humbird he had known – oh, it was all so horrible and unaristocratic and close to the earth. All tragedy has that stain of the grotesque and squalid – so useless, futile…” (TSOP 86). It’s important that Dick’s “unaristocratic” and “grotesque” death is described by Amory as being “useless” and “futile.” In his examination of the role of automobile accidents in Fitzgerald’s work, Richard M. Clark points out that because of Amory’s earlier association of Dick and the dead English soldiers, “Dick prefigures the young American men who will die in the Great War” (Clark 43). The noble Dick Humbird is reduced to an “unaristocratic” and “grotesque” senseless death; if Dick’s death foreshadows those who will die in the war, we can assume that their deaths, like his, will also be “useless” and “futile”. While Dick figuratively prefigures the young men who will die in the war, he also literally prefigures two. His passengers on the night of the car wreck, Jesse Ferrenby and Fred Sloane, miraculously survive the accident, only to later be killed in combat. The death of Dick, and Amory’s adulation of the wasted student who represented more dead young men to come, is further made horrific when we encounter Dick’s double later in the novel.
As Pearl James notes in “History and Masculinity in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s This Side of Paradise,” Fitzgerald “abruptly passes on to other scenes, as if Dick’s death is quite forgotten” (James 14). However, Dick’s death “haunts Amory, and that haunting becomes more pronounced as the novel departs from an otherwise realistic mode of narration and takes on increasingly gothic proportions” (James 14). It is when the war begins to directly affect Amory, and the students of Princeton, that the Gothic enters the narrative at full force. In April, the first of the young men enlist: “Kerry Holiday left college and sailed for France to enroll in the Lafayette Esquadrille. Amory’s envy and admiration of this step was drowned in an experience of his own to which he never succeeded in giving an appropriate value, but which, nevertheless, haunted him for three years afterward” (TSOP 109). Amory’s only reaction to a fellow student leaving Princeton to serve in WWI was a flash of begrudging approval of the move. However, Amory’s ability to fully recognize the significance of his friend and classmate going to fight in the Great War, amidst his ability to reconcile that desire for himself, is overlooked by a strange incident. Fitzgerald builds up the moment, noting that “strange things are prepared even in the dead of night, and the unusual… was so inexpressibly terrible, so unbelievable, that afterward he never thought of it as experience; but it was a scene from a misty tragedy, played far behind the veil, and that it meant something definite he knew” (TSOP 110). During an evening out in New York City with Fred Sloane (who is on borrowed time following his death drive with Dick Humbird) and two girls, Amory notices a “pale” middle-aged man “watching their party intently. At Amory’s glance he smiled faintly” (TSOP 111). When the party later heads back to one of the girls’ apartments for sandwiches, brandy, and “temptation,” Amory looks up to see the man suddenly sitting in the living room; “There was a minute while temptation crept over him like a
warm wind, and his imagination tuned to fire, and he took the glass from Phoebe’s hand. That was all; for at the second that his decision came, he looked up and saw, ten yards from him, the man who has been in the café, and with his jump of astonishment, the glass fell from his uplifted hand. There the man half sat, half leaned against a pile of pillows on the corner divan” (TSOP 112). The man appears to have been summoned the moment that Amory accepts a drink from his amorous date for the evening, seemingly about to give in to the temptation mentioned. The apparition is described as having the coloring of a “virile pallor” like “a strong man who’d worked in a mine or done night shifts in a damp climate” (TSOP 112). The other members of the party cannot see the man, carrying Amory “far beyond horror” (TSOP 115).

While Amory flees from the building, much to the dismay of his date for the evening, the figure follows him onto the street. Confronted with the phantom, “before his eyes a face flashed over the two feet, a face pale and distorted with a sort of infinite evil that twisted it like flame in the wind; but he knew... that it was the face of Dick Humbird” (TSOP 116). The instance with Sloane and the girls, the drinking and the invitation of casual sex seems to stir the ghost of Dick Humbird—the finest man Amory knew, the Victorian ideal of manhood. The phantom Dick appears when the lines of Victorian sensibility are about to be crossed between young Amory and Phoebe, scaring Amory into leaving the apartment altogether. Clark asserts that it is “the devil” who appears “in the form of this dead young man, a representative of the many young men who would die in the war” summoned “during an evening of sexual temptation, strengthening the beauty-sex-evil equation and linking it not just to death but to World War I deaths specifically” (Clark 44). It’s critical to note that this experience with Dick’s doppelganger is the incident that Amory references as having diminished any consideration he could give to
Kerry Holiday leaving Princeton to join the war. The double of Dick Humbird appears as a warning not just of loosening morality, but “of the demonic, of destiny, and of traumatic repetition” (James 14). He is a critical link between the war, shifting cultural attitudes and norms, and an omen of more dead young men to come.

Leaving New York as quickly as possible after seeing Dick’s phantom double, we’re told that Amory “nearly cried aloud with joy when the towers of Princeton loomed up beside him” (TSOP 118). The Gothic realm of the school provides a comfort for Amory, yet also a harbor for the phantom that follows him back to Princeton. That evening while Amory and his pal Tom are catching up, Tom sees a figure illuminated in the lightning strike, staring at Amory through their dorm window. Amory confides in Tom that during his trip, he had “seen the devil or – something like him” (TSOP 119). After this experience, we’re told that Princeton undergoes a “transition period… during Amory’s last two years there” where “he saw it change and broaden and live up to its Gothic beauty” (TSOP 121). It’s during this phase, that “slowly and inevitably, yet with a sudden surge at the last, while Amory talked and dreamed, war rolled swiftly up the beach and washed the sands where Princeton played” (TSOP 147). Fitzgerald pointedly links the summoning of Dick Humbird and the peak of Princeton’s Gothic qualities to the arrival of war upon the university’s campus. In the chapter titled “The End of Many Things,” Amory remarks that “‘The grass is full of ghosts tonight. The whole campus is alive with them’” (TSOP 153). The ghosts of Princeton represent the men like Kerry Burke, who have departed the liminal space of the college to fight in the Great War. Utilizing the word “ghosts” also suggests an ominous foreboding for those who have left. Amory understands that in leaving Princeton and entering the war, a final cord will be cut between his generation and the ones preceding it. He remarks that,
“What we leave here is more than this class; it’s the whole heritage of youth. We’re just one generation- we’re breaking all the links that seemed to bind us here to top-booted and high-stocked generations” (TSOP 153). Fitzgerald describes a youth trying to distance themselves from those that came before them. WWI was a modern war with incredible technological advancements that distinguished it from preceding wars. James Keech writes on the evolution of the Gothic genre with particular regards to Modern Gothic literature; he discusses the impact of scientific advancement on the genre, noting that “science, with its nuclear bombs and nerve gases, is one of today’s monsters. The relationship between science and the Gothic response is an old one, existing as early as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*… A Gothic atmosphere was thus seen very early as a means of symbolically expressing the cold objectivity of science and the sense of fearful power resident in the control of natural forces” (Keech 142). Amory’s generation is responding to a war that had progressed farther and faster than society was prepared for. The gas warfare utilized in World War I had been devastatingly effective, propelling the Great War into a different type of warfare than previous generations had witnessed. Fitzgerald’s use of the Gothic in an academic setting links scientific advancement with fear and the unknown. The students of Princeton become ghosts in a foreshadowing of the many dead young men to come, as a direct result of the dreadful technological advancements society achieved.

The only details we are given of Amory’s time during the war is included in the “Interlude: May, 1927 – February 1919.” It consists of a letter from Amory’s mentor Monsignor Darcy to his mentee, significant for telling us that Amory is a second lieutenant in the 171st Infantry. We also read a letter from the end of the war, written by Amory to his friend Tom, while Amory is waiting in France to return home. There is no description of the war or what
Amory has seen, other than a toll of the dead Princetonians. We’re told that Kerry, the first of the young men to leave for the war and part catalyst of Dick Humbird’s ghostly apparition, died in action. We’re also told that Jesse Ferrenby, one of Dick’s passengers in the car wreck, was killed in combat. While we’re given no mention of Amory’s time spent during the war, we’re quickly introduced to his romantic endeavors when he returns stateside. Amory visits the home of a Princeton colleague, Alec Connage, where we’re introduced to his sister Rosalind, the soon-to-be great love of Amory’s life. Much like the Shakespearian heroine she is named after in *As You Like It*, Rosalind rejects traditional femininity as it would have been defined at the time of publication. When Alec asks their younger sister Cecelia if Rosalind “behaves herself,” Cecelia answers “Not particularly well. Oh, she’s average—smokes sometimes, drinks punch, frequently kissed—Oh, yes—common knowledge—one of the effects of the war, you know” (*TSOP* 170). A drinker, smoker, and a flirt, Rosalind’s behavior is expressly mentioned by Cecelia as being a direct effect of World War I. Rosalind’s association with war is further reinforced when she declares her bedroom a “No Man’s Land” (*TSOP* 174). A “No man’s land” is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the terrain between two opposing (usually entrenched) armies” (*OED*). Clark adds that in WWI context, this would have been “an area often littered with rotting dead bodies” (Clark 48). In associating Rosalind’s bedroom with the violence of war, “Fitzgerald makes explicit his equation of the horrors of the war in Europe with the terrifying battle of the sexes” (Clark 49).

Further adding to her threatening air, Rosalind is described as “a sort of vampire” by her sister Cecelia (*TSOP* 170). The vampiric accusation is later reinforced when a dejected suitor of Rosalind’s explains her sudden disinterest in him by accusing, “You’re a vampire, that’s all”
Rosalind’s vampiric attributes seem to be directly correlated with her modern behavior. Indeed, when Amory and Rosalind later veer towards a breakup, Fitzgerald writes of the effect on Amory: “Amory’s friends have been telling him for ten days that he ‘looks like the wrath of God,’ and he does. As a matter of fact he has not been able to eat a mouthful in the last thirty-six hours” (TSOP 190). The decline in Amory seems to stem from his and Rosalind’s unreconcilable approaches to the world. Amory, still believing himself a Victorian man with Romantic ideals, cannot understand Rosalind’s modern views on romance. Rosalind explains that society has changed and that the rules for courtship have shifted forever. She notes that “There used to be two kinds of kisses: First when girls were kissed and deserted; second when they were engaged. Now there’s a third kind, where the man is kissed and deserted. If Mr. Jones of the nineties bragged he’d kissed a girl, every one knew he was through with her. If Mr. Jones of 1919 brags the same every one knows it’s because he can’t kiss her anymore. Given a decent start any girl can beat a man nowadays” (TSOP 181). Rosalind represents a more liberated woman, not as tethered to societal constructs as her mother and grandmother would have been. The chivalric days of courting that Dick Humbird represented, Rosalind declares: “those days are over” (TSOP 181). During the breakup, Amory is described as “a little hysterically” accusing Rosalind of “spoiling our lives” (TSOP 195). Rosalind responses with “A hard note in her voice” that Amory is “being a baby” (TSOP 196). The language used during the break-up of Rosalind and Amory “appears in gendered terms that mark Rosalind as masculine (hard, firm, matter-of-fact) and Amory as feminine (hysterical, histrionic)” (James 22). The inability to reconcile shifting gender roles post-WWI leads to the demonization or, in this case, vampirization of Rosalind, who desires a more traditionally masculine existence.
The next female figure in Amory’s life only compounds the Gothic influence present in Rosalind. Younger than Rosalind, Eleanor represents an even more liberated and independent American woman. After her mother suffers a mental collapse, Eleanor is sent to live with her grandfather, who hovers “on the near side of senility” (TSOP 232). Eleanor is left without the influence of adults, particularly older male guardians, and spends her time encouraging male suitors, eventually beginning a romance with Amory. The two meet when Eleanor overhears Amory reciting “Ulalume,” an Edgar Allan Poe poem “noted for its Gothic imagery and hypnotic rhythm” (Britannica). Hearing the poem, a hidden Eleanor cries out, “‘Somebody’s there! Who are you?– Manfred’” (TSOP 225). Another Gothic reference, Manfred is the titular figure of a ghost-centric poem written by Lord Byron. The “Faustian poetic drama Manfred (1817)” features a protagonist that exhibits “Byron’s own brooding sense of guilt and the wider frustrations of the Romantic spirit doomed by the reflection that man is ‘half dust, half deity, alike unfit to sink or soar’” (Marchand). Initially, Amory and Eleanor are united by their shared appreciation of Dark Romanticism, which ultimately dams them. They even get into an argument over who is more Romantic, with Amory again repeating his distinction that he is “‘not sentimental – I’m as romantic as you are. The idea, you know, is that the sentimental person thinks things will last- the romantic person has a desperate confidence that they won’t’” (TSOP 229). Just like Rosalind, Eleanor informs Amory how the world has changed regarding sexuality. Yet she also laments the societal restrictions that she is still beholden to; she questions Amory as to why he can “lope about and get bored and then lope somewhere else, and you can play around with girls without being involved in meshes of sentiment, and you can do anything and be justified- and here I am with the brains to do everything, yet tied to the sinking ship of future
matrimony” (TSOP 237). Eleanor also comments that “just one in fifty has any glimmer what sex is. I’m hipped on Freud and all that” (TSOP 238). Amory uses Eleanor’s sexual awareness as an excuse to make a move on her, to which she calls him “an old hypocrite” (TSOP 238). Then, swept up in a Romantic flair for the dramatic, Eleanor attempts to commit suicide by riding her horse off the edge of a cliff. The bizarre, dark conclusion appears to be too much for Amory, who notes that his “love waned slowly with the moon” as he walked Eleanor home (TSOP 240). The narrator describes Eleanor as being “the last time that evil crept close to Amory under the mask of beauty” (TSOP 222). Clinton S. Burhans explains, “Eleanor’s beauty… apparently leads him into a sexual relationship with her through which beauty in women becomes one with their sexual appeal and thereby associated with its connotations of evil” (Burhans 617). Eleanor’s progressive beliefs regarding the autonomy of women are so out of place in the narrative that she is labelled as an evil figure. Her sexuality and bitterness towards her place in society are such a departure from the Victorian beliefs that Amory holds onto, that Eleanor is implied to be an agent of the devil, bringing Amory on a “walk to the cross-roads” where devilish deals are typically made4 (TSOP 229). While increasing options for women in society mark a shift in the status quo of America in the early twentieth century, other expected societal shifts are noticeably absent from the narrative.

David Rennie writes that while WWI may have radically shifted the societal structure that Amory is familiar with, the importance of the schism means membership within “the generation

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that has witnessed this upheaval simultaneously furnishes a powerful new means to conceptualize themselves and the generation to which they belong” (Rennie 183). When asked by Mrs. Lawrence, an older friend of the family, what effect the war had on him, Amory replies, “the idea that men can stand anything if they get used to it, and the fact that I got a high mark in the psychological examination” (TSOP 211). Here, Amory is being honest in his assessment; his comment could be taken as an acceptance of the changing world around him. This mild acknowledgement of the radically shifting world around him is reinforced when Amory is speaking candidly with Tom, a member of his own generation, and speculates, “I’m not sure that the war itself had any great effect on either you or me- but it certainly ruined the old backgrounds, sort of killed individualism out of our generation” (TSOP 213). Again, Amory is able to recognize the distinct shift in society that the war has created, yet his own personal reaction to the war is limited. Arthur Mizener criticized *This Side of Paradise*, saying that it “was in many ways a fake; it pretended to all sorts of knowledge and experience of the world its author did not in fact have” (Mizener, in Bloom 97) Yet Fitzgerald, through Amory, admits this shortcoming: Amory reflects that “his ideas were still in riot; there was ever the pain of memory; the regret for his lost youth- yet the waters of disillusion had left a deposit on his soul, responsibility and a love of life, the faint stirring of old ambitions and unrealized dreams” (TSOP 282). So much has been stirred up by the war, that everything Amory had previously believed to be true is now “in riot.” Amory is marked by the trauma he has experienced, yet he also stills feels the stir of his pre-war drive and ideals. When Amory returns to Princeton at the end of the novel, he finds that:
“Long after midnight the towers and spires of Princeton were visible, with here
and there a late-burning light- and suddenly out of the clear darkness the sound of
bells. As an endless dream it went on; the spirit of the past brooding over a new
generation, the chosen youth from the muddle, unchastened world, still fed
romantically on the mistakes and half-forgotten dreams of dead statemen and
poets. Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the creeds,
through a revery of long days and nights; destined finally to go out into that dirty
gray turmoil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the
last to the fear and poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods
dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken…” (TSOP 282).

In Fitzgerald’s final assessment of the world in TSOP, the spirit of the past lives on in a few
select youth, fed by the poets of previous days. The new generations are condemned to
antiquated creeds and doomed to repeat past behavior. Yet their payoff results in less than
previous years: their religions mean nothing, they fight for nothing, and they lack a core belief in
anything to buoy them through the void. While this description is a beautiful, dark description of
the state of America post-WWI, I believe that the character of Amory Blaine walks away from
TSOP with only a little less than what he started with. Amory does not seem to be deeply
impacted by the war because he was written by an author who was still too young to fully
understand the psychological impact of the war. Fitzgerald wrote of a shifting cultural tide
during and post-WWI, but the individual effect of the war on himself and his veteran characters
was still too abstract to immediately pen when This Side of Paradise was published in 1920. This
knowledge would later materialize in Fitzgerald’s 1934 work *Tender is the Night*, written by a man who had aged and experienced 14 years under the fallout of World War I.
Chapter 2

Published in 1934, *Tender is the Night* would be the last of Fitzgerald’s completed novels. The title is taken from the John Keats’s poem “Ode to a Nightingale,” the “prototype of romantic poems” (Kuehl 418). This ode represents not only many of the themes that Fitzgerald himself struggled with, but is emblematic of the issues confronted in *TITN*. Keats’ poem addresses the fleeting nature of youth and beauty, the comfort and perceived safety of alcohol, and the eternal struggle of the artist. The foundation for *TITN* appears to have been pulled from a short story Fitzgerald published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1930, titled “One Trip Abroad.” “One Trip Abroad” is notable for Fitzgerald’s use of the doppelgänger, as well as its depiction of Europe as a dangerous place for Americans to exist after WWI. The short story, like *TITN*, is set primarily in Switzerland, and colors the nation with the taint of war: “This is the story of a trip abroad, and the geographical element must not be slighted…Switzerland is a country where few things begin, but many end” (Fitzgerald 594). While Switzerland is the beginning of the end in *TITN*, the novel opens instead in a lonely section of the French Riviera in June of 1925. The setting is the Hotel Gausse, which is located away from anything else, “through the darkening banks of trees, set one behind another in many greens, the moon already hovered over the ruins of the aqueducts…” (*TITN* 15). This description creates a sense of mysticism and antiquity surrounding the hotel: isolated under the moon, it exists amongst the ruins of a civilization long since passed.

We are introduced to the story through the voice of Rosemary Hoyt, a teenage actress coming off the success of her first film, *Daddy’s Girl*. We are told that both Rosemary’s father
and stepfather died during the war, yet she never mentions this fact directly. In fact, Rosemary barely speaks of the war at all. Rosemary seems to function as an extension of the audience; despite her elevated status as an actress, her youth and naivete serve to present her as an everyday American youth. She represents a younger generation of Americans who are forced to live within the shadow of the impact of the war, yet were not directly involved in it. She is one of those “sensible outsiders who often appear in Gothic fiction to establish a baseline and represent the values of readers as they enter the Gothic narrative” (Crow 79). On her first day at the Hotel Gausse, Rosemary describes a lunch where she and her mother “were both overwhelmed by the sudden flatness… no stimuli worked upon them, no voices called them from without, no fragments of their own thoughts came suddenly from the minds of others, and missing the clamor of Empire they felt that life was not continuing here” (TITN 13). Indeed, we are told that “up north the true world thundered by” (TITN 14). The hotel seems to create a time vacuum to which Americans are particularly susceptible. In this secluded realm, Rosemary is intrigued to find two separate companies of Americans staying at the hotel. While on the beach one day, she is immediately drawn towards one of the groups; this unit features a young woman with a face that was “hard and lovely and pitiful” that “shone in the sun,” a “fine man” with a “golden, leonine head,” and a group dynamic that exudes an overall magnetic pull that compelled the other beach dwellers to send “out antennae of attention” towards the young group (TITN 6). The other company of Americans is markedly older, defined by a “white-haired woman in full evening dress,” a “hairy man” sporting a monocle, and “one of those elderly ‘good sports’ preserved by an imperviousness to experience and a good digestion into another generation” (TITN 7). Rosemary, “forming a vague antipathy” towards the older group, probes the allure of the younger
group, deciding that “something made them unlike the Americans she had known of late” (*TITN* 6). Clearly, “there is a clash between the past and the present, suggesting, it seems, the evolving future of the Western world” (Doherty, in Bloom 191). From the very first pages, Fitzgerald creates a schism between the aging and youthful generations. The older crowd is out of place with their inappropriate beach clothing and dated eyewear. One woman is even described as being “preserved” into the next generation, suggesting a type of decay and artificial existence. By contrast, the younger crowd is shining and golden, with innate power and strength comparable to a lion. Most intriguing is the palpable allure of the younger group, who create a pull strong enough that “even the children knew that excitement was generating under that umbrella and turned toward it” (*TITN* 11).

We soon learn that the most alluring members of the young group are Dick and Nicole Diver, Americans residing at a villa near the hotel. They are credited with “inventing” the scene, persuading the hotelier to remain open in the summer (*TITN* 19). Rosemary is immediately smitten with the Divers, and is described as “her naïveté responded whole-heartedly to the expensive simplicity of the Divers, unaware of its complexity and its lack of innocence” (*TITN* 21). The Divers’ intrigue adopts a sinister slant when the text reveals that the “expensive simplicity” of the Divers was obtained “as part of a desperate bargain with the gods and had been attained through struggles she could not have guessed at” (*TITN* 21). From their earliest introduction the Divers are associated with Faustian bargains5, creating an air of

otherworldliness around them. Further adding to their intrigue, Dick and Nicole are the only members of either group of Americans to reside outside of the Hotel Gausse. Their abode, Villa Diana, is even more isolated than the hotel, as we are told that “beyond the inky sea and far up that high, black shadow of a hill lived the Divers” (*TITN* 40). The solitude of their location is later reinforced by Nicole’s sister Baby as being “up on a hill way off from anybody” (*TITN* 214). Their home is described as a type of fortress, with “exterior walls [which] were untouched so that from the road far below it was indistinguishable from the violet gray mass of the town” (*TITN* 26). Once the “ancient hill village of Tarmes,” the drama of their location is heightened by a cliffside that drops several hundred feet to the “ghostly wash of the Mediterranean Sea far below” (*TITN* 35). Upon arriving at the Divers’ home for a dinner party, Rosemary seems to have entered another dimension, falling “under the spell of the climb to Tarmes” (*TITN* 26).

Fitzgerald placing the home of the Divers in a castle-like setting certainly heightens the drama of the scene at Villa Diana. J.M.S. Tompkins, quoted in *Gothic Literature 1764-1824*, details the Gothic significance of a castle in Freudian terms: the castle is a “symbol of neurosis” that it functions as a “gigantic symbol of anxiety, the dread of oppression and of the abyss, the response to the political and religious insecurity of disturbed times” (Tompkins, in Davison 71). Castles also typically house monsters, creatures that propel the drama and terror of the narrative forward. The monster in Gothic literature provides a “cultural medium for an imaginative expression and resolution of social anxieties” (Davison 75). We seem to identify *TITN*’s monster by the language Fitzgerald utilizes to describe Nicole. Nicole is frequently depicted as being otherworldly and animalistic: “her chow’s hair foaming and frothing in the candlelight” (*TITN* 32); “Nicole knew about it but only darkly and tragically, hating him a little in an animal way,
yet wanting to rub against his shoulder” (TITN 169); “Struggling a little still, like a decapitated animal…” (TITN 294). While Nicole entertains the party guests, Dick seems to act as a procurer for her. He is described as sweeping Rosemary “on up toward the terrace where he delivered her to Nicole…” (TITN 38). Tommy Barban, friend of the Divers and Nicole’s eventual second husband, is mentioned as being “one of those men that Dick’s passed along to Nicole” (TITN 43). Rather than being utilized as friends, shopping companions, or lovers, the characters presented to Nicole are written to sound as if they are offerings or sacrifices to abate her.

Included in Arthur Mizener’s biography of Fitzgerald, The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1951), is Fitzgerald’s sketching of a “General Plan” for TITN. Fitzgerald writes that Nicole “has a curious homicidal mania toward men caused by an event in her youth. Aside from this she is the legendary promiscuous woman” [emphasis Fitzgerald’s] (The Far Side of Paradise 366). Alluding to a legendary femme fatale, Fitzgerald seems to be pointing towards Keats’ “La Belle Dame Sans Merci.” A “beautiful lady without mercy” is a recurring theme in Fitzgerald’s work, and he seems to have been particularly fond of the Keats ode about a succubus who seduces a knight, resulting in his death. The poem’s titular fairy robs the knight of his vitality, growing stronger as he, in turn, withers and ultimately dies. It is no coincidence that Dick comments on Rosemary’s vitality, before delivering her to Nicole: “We’ve been excited about you… That vitality, we were sure it was professional- especially Nicole was” (TITN 38).

In a truly Gothic sense, the attendees of this dinner party appear to be the metaphorical meal for Nicole, rather than guests. Reinforcing the power of the succubus, the Divers seem to emit a potent attractiveness that renders their guests in some sort of pleasurable fog. Our narrator marks that during dinner “a perceptible change had set in- person by person had given up something, a
preoccupation, an anxiety, a suspicion, and now they were only their best selves the Diver’s guests” (*TITN* 32). The couple also seems to resist the limitations of a human corporeal form later in the evening, as “the two Divers began suddenly to warm and glow and expand” (*TITN* 34). The party comes to a sudden conclusion when the Divers disappear, and a guest witnesses something unspeakable transpire in the bathroom between Nicole and Dick. As the other guests begin to gossip, Tommy issues a ghoulish warning: “It’s inadvisable to comment on what goes on in this house” (*TITN* 36). The ominous threat alludes to something wicked happening in the Diver home, reinforcing the setting of a haunted house or castle full of generational secrets. One of the “common elements” of the Gothic “is the particular quality of the Gothic response of fear, a fear characterized by a necessary presentiment of a somewhat vague but nevertheless real evil. It is a fear of shadows and unseen dangers in the night. Explicitness runs counter to its effectiveness, for Gothic fear is not so much what is seen but what is sensed beyond sight” (Keech 132). By allowing some of the tension to build without explicit explanation, the horror of whatever transpired in the bathroom is felt more acutely through its mystery. Fitzgerald is able to capture the fear of the genre through keeping the reader in a state of unknowing and suspense.

It is not until Part II that we discover how Dick and Nicole came to be joined. Fitzgerald opens the second section of the novel in the spring of 1917, with Dick working as a doctor at a private clinic in Zurich. In the first paragraph, we are introduced to Dick as a young man; Fitzgerald writes, “Years later it seemed to him that even in this sanctuary he did not escape lightly, but about that he never fully made up his mind- in 1917 he laughed at the idea, saying apologetically that the war didn’t touch him at all” (*TITN* 116). This admission of significance is striking in the casual manner in which it is presented. We witness both the fleeting confidence of
youth, where nothing uncomfortable sticks for too long, contrasted with the later, wizened voice of realization, acknowledging that the trauma of war is inescapable. As with This Side of Paradise, we are given no prose dedicated to Dick’s time in service, while he was stationed in France treating shock patients. After the war, Dick returns to the clinic in Zurich that he had been working at prior to being deployed to France. A German colleague, Franz, questions Dick about his experiences during the war, asking if he is “changed like the rest?” (TITN 119). Dick asserts that he “didn’t see any of the war;” giving us our first indication of a self-perceived flaw in Dick (TITN 119). We’ve been told that Dick served as a doctor during the war, yet he maintains that he didn’t actually experience war. Dick’s resistance is met with a half joking rebuttal from his friend: “That doesn’t matter- we have some shell-shocks who merely heard an air raid from a distance. We have a few who merely read newspapers” (TITN 119). Franz is being comical, suggesting that they cater to a rich set of clientele who can afford to treat their indirect trauma from the war in luxury. Yet he also is attempting to reassure Dick that the war affected everyone on the continent- particularly a young doctor of enlistment age, working with psychiatric patients being churned out from battle. This is one of many distinctions in the text between those who experienced combat in the war, and those who did not. Hypermasculine men like Tommy Barban, professional soldier and already itching to fight the next war, are described as “leonine” (TITN 6). In an age where strict Victorian ideals were beginning to fade out of popular culture, masculinity was being redefined. The war appeared to many young men as “the ideal opportunity for American men to reestablish their masculinity. Here, perhaps, was the chance to reclaim manliness on the battlefield” (Joseph 65). Fitzgerald himself longed for the opportunity to prove himself a man at war after a difficult breakup, writing in his journal that one of his “two juvenile
regrets” was “not getting overseas during the war” which then “resolved [itself] into childish waking dreams of imaginary heroism” (*The Crack-Up* 70). Dick’s need for heroism appears to later manifest itself in assuming control over Nicole’s treatment.

We learn that Dick and Nicole met through a strange, chance meeting: as Dick was exiting the clinic on his departure to France, Nicole, a patient, happened to lock eyes with him, becoming intrigued by the handsome doctor. She obtained his information and wrote him letters during the war. Upon Dick’s return, the staff of the clinic are concerned by the potential doctor-patient tryst. Franz warns Dick that he will “devote half your life to being doctor and nurse and all” (*TITN* 140). They understand Nicole’s psychiatric treatment will be a lifelong commitment, but there seems to be a more sinister, all-encompassing threat beyond Dick serving as Nicole’s husband and caregiver. In the context of the shifting gender roles occurring after WWI, it may make sense that Dick would gravitate towards a woman in a state of recovery. It’s possible that after the self-perceived failure of never experiencing firsthand the violent combat of war, Dick is seeking out opportunities to assert his masculinity, one of which will be assuming control of Nicole’s care. At the turn of the twentieth century, “Victorian notions of manhood and womanhood were destabilized and challenged… In 1918 England 700,000 of the 1.3 million employed women were in jobs previously filled by men; a similar situation undoubtedly existed for American women as well” (Joseph 65). Not only were men returning home from the war with “shell shock,” they also returned to a home where power balances had shifted, and women occupied many roles previously held by men. It’s plausible that Dick sought out a woman who had not been empowered by the war, and who instead, had been sheltered away from it in a confined space lorded over by male authority figures. We are told that “Nicole has been ‘re-
educated’ by Dohmler and the ghostly generations behind him” (TITN 153). When Dick and Nicole meet, Nicole is a schizophrenic whose condition is explained as a product of an incestuous relationship with her father after her mother dies. Tom Coleman, in his article examining Nicole as a stand-in for Fitzgerald’s opinions on women, writes that “Nicole, the goddess who failed, is postulated in the novel as a schizophrenic in an attempt to explain her double role as Fair Lady and Dark, her two faces, angelic and diabolic, the melting and the grinning mask” (Coleman 37). The egregious crime of incest is notable in that it reflects the horror of the Gothic genre: “The fearful response in the better Gothic novels is marked by the common element of intensity. They depict violations of moral and religious norms that are fearful by their excess. The acts that create fear and presage even more in the Gothic novel are supreme. They are grievous sins, not mere wrongs” (Keech 133). Due to the contamination of her father’s incestuous actions, Nicole is marked by his crime. She is tainted by the corruption of the patriarch, a systemic abuse which is later reinforced by Dr. Dohmler and those “ghostly generations behind him.” Fitzgerald makes a point to align the clinic, psychology, and the war, by representing Dick in his most militant portrayal when he interacts with the director of the clinic. When Dick must meet with Professor Dohmler, Dick responds to his superior as he would have in the service: he “stood formally, thrown back to the army” (TITN 139). It appears that Dick will take the role of male authority figure from Professor Dohmler, and assume control of Nicole. The vague, mysterious threat of Nicole’s psychoanalytical trauma signals the sharp decline into the Gothic that the novel soon will turn.

When we are first introduced to Nicole Warren the patient, she exists in a shadowland: “the black shadows of stripling walls and the fantastic shadows of iron chairs slithered down in a
gladiola bed. From the figures that shuffled between the rooms Miss Warren emerged first in glimpses and then sharply when she saw him; as she crossed the threshold her face caught the room’s last light and brought it outside with her” (*TITN* 133). Nicole emerges as a shapeshifter, not taking a full form until she sees Dick. She steals the room’s only light and takes it with her outside, compelling Dick to follow her. Yet there seems to be a transference of dark power when Dick and Nicole “went down two steps to the path- where in a moment a shadow cut across it. She took his arm” (*TITN* 134). Nicole seems to shift from a shadowy figure, to one that needs protecting- namely, Dick’s protection. In her article regarding “Fitzgerald’s Women in *Tender is the Night*” Mary Verity McNicholas notes that here Nicole has “slipped–and certainly not by accident–from the role of lovely innocent to that of designing woman” (McNicholas 64). We are given hints as to Nicole’s future debilitating power when Dick is first trying to size her up; Fitzgerald writes, “as Dick became less and less certain of his relation to her, her confidence increased” (*TITN* 135). From the very beginning, Fitzgerald creates a sense of a symbiotic relationship between Dick and Nicole, with Nicole growing more confident and powerful as Dick’s confusion and disorientation arises. In the most salient assessment of Nicole that Fitzgerald offers, Dick refers to Nicole as a “scarcely saved waif of disaster bringing him the essence of a continent…” (*TITN* 136). Fitzgerald is depicting Nicole as a fragment of something much larger. Nicole represents so much more than a power imbalance, evolving gender roles, or madness: she represents the symptoms of a sick continent, diseased by war and trauma, haunting those who made it through the war alive. Much like the lingering effects of war, the doctors understand Nicole’s psychiatric treatment will be a lifelong commitment; however, there seems to be a more sinister, all-encompassing element to Nicole’s situation.
A meeting between doctors Dohmler, Franz, and Dick concludes with the consensus that Dick should be “most kind and yet eliminate himself” (*TITN* 141). Initially we read this believing that Dick will extricate himself from the relationship, and allow Nicole to move on without him. However, the phrase “eliminate himself” takes on a new meaning when Dick encounters Nicole outside of Dohmler’s office. An inhuman beauty, Nicole is described as “a creature whose life did not promise to be only a projection of youth upon a grayer screen, but instead, a true growing; the face would be handsome in middle life; it would be handsome in old age: the essential structure and the economy were there” (*TITN* 141). Again, Nicole is described as a creature, something nonhuman, whose life force will continue to grow. We are told that the “essential structure” is in place to enable her to continue to bloom, as well as the economy. The usage of “economy” suggests that Nicole requires goods to consume for her growth, which delivers new meaning to Dick’s proposed elimination of himself. We can speculate that the transfer has already occurred, as the effects of Nicole’s charms seem to have addled Dick’s mind; we are told “He tried to arrange an attitude but no logic seemed forthcoming” (*TITN* 142). Nicole’s advances are described as “the right to invade implied” (*TITN* 154) and Dick is soon occupied territory. Not only is he taken by force, much as invaded land, but he is also stripped of autonomy. When Nicole and Dick finally embrace, “there were now no more plans than if Dick had arbitrarily made some indissoluble mixture, with atoms joined and inseparable; you could throw it all out but never again could they fit back into atomic scale” (*TITN* 155). Nicole and Dick cease to be two separate entities, as Nicole “curved in further and further toward him, with her own lips, new to herself, drowned and engulfed in love, yet solaced and triumphant, he was thankful to have an existence at all, if only as a reflection in her wet eyes” (*TITN* 155). In this
one sentence description we are given both Nicole’s and Dick’s point of view during the embrace, exhibiting the unified being they have now become. In his article “Dissolving Subjectivities: Imagined Selves in F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Keats,” Mark Sandy notes that Fitzgerald “shares with Keats a fascination with those almost imperceptible inward spaces of feeling contained within the ‘brief and tremulous moment’ of blossoming tragic romance” (Sandy 45). Immediately after the joining of Dick and Nicole, a storm rolls in. In true Romantic fashion, nature seems to react as “the storm came swiftly, first falling from the heavens, then doubly falling in torrents from the mountains… with it came a dark, frightening sky and savage filaments of lightning and world-splitting thunder, while ragged, destroying clouds fled along past the hotel. Mountains and lake disappeared- the hotel crouched amid tumult, chaos and darkness” (TITN 156). This natural reaction indicates that something otherworldly is at work, some boundary has been crossed. We are given a clue as to who this unnatural being is when Dick retires to bed that night: “the silence of the storm ceasing woke him about three o’clock and he went to the window. Her beauty climbed the rolling slope, it came into the room, rustling ghostlike through the curtains…” (TITN 156).

The novel then shifts timelines away from Nicole and Dick first falling in love at the clinic in Switzerland, to present day back in France. The Divers decide to leave Rosemary and their friends at the Riviera behind in favor of Switzerland and residing at the clinic permanently, Nicole becomes even more dependent on Dick. Fitzgerald seems to be meditating on the insidious nature of mental illness when he comments that “One writes of scars healed, a loose parallel to the pathology of the skin, but there is no such thing in the life of an individual. There are open wounds, shrunk sometimes to the size of a pin-prick but wounds still. The marks of
suffering are more comparable to the loss of a finger, or of the sight of an eye. We may not miss
them, either, for one minute in a year, but if we should there is nothing to be done about it”
(*TITN* 169). While this description testifies to the seemingly never-ending battle that a disorder
like schizophrenia wages, Fitzgerald also appears to be speaking to a cultural loss. Individuals
may heal from physical war wounds, yet there are wounds that cannot be mended, and losses that
cannot be regained. The individuals of this story are part of a cultural trauma, inflicting
Americans and Europeans alike. Nicole and her psychiatric illness embody the pervasiveness of
the aftermath of WWI. She feeds on Dick, a vampire of trauma, never allowing Dick to move
forward, forget the past, or fully recover. John F. Callahan, writing about the evolution of the
American Dream in Fitzgerald’s work, comments that Nicole’s “personality reinforces rather
than compensates for what is missing in [Dick]” (Callahan 385). Even in dreams, those affected
are unable to distance themselves from the past. Fitzgerald writes, “Dick awoke at five after a
long dream of war, walked to the window and stared out it at the Zugersee. His dream had begun
in sombre majesty; navy blue uniforms crossed a dark plaza… Presently there were fire engines,
symbols of disaster, and a ghastly uprising of the mutilated in a dressing station. He turned on his
bed-lamp light and made a thorough note of it ending with the half-ironic phrase: ‘Non-
combatant’s shell-shock.’” (*TITN* 179). Dick has attempted to repress his memories of war and
his feelings of pain and loss so stringently that their only outlet is through his dreams. In Gothic
literature, “the waking Victorian suppresses his passions (for sex, for violence, for anarchic
freedom) and pays in guilt when these impulses reassert themselves in his sleep” (Crow 79). We
certainly see some guilt and shame on Dick’s part, by Fitzgerald noting that Dick’s self-
diagnosis of shell-shock is “half-ironic.” Dick’s dream, combined with his training in
psychoanalysis, enables him to correctly diagnose himself with trauma from the war. It is significant for the text that Dick’s self-diagnosis in the novel is directly mirrored with the escalation of Nicole’s Gothic attributes.

The day after Dick’s dream, the family attends a carnival. Upon arriving at the chaos of the evening carnival, Nicole transforms into a terrifying monster: “Her lips drew apart into a sudden awful smile, and [Dick’s] belly quailed” (TITN 188). Nicole’s madness reaches a peak when she climbs aboard a ferris wheel, laughing maniacally as a horrified crowd watches: “She was alone in what was momentarily the top boat of the wheel, and as it descended he saw that she was laughing hilariously; he slunk back in the crowd, a crowd which, at the wheel’s next revolution, spotted the intensity of Nicole’s hysteria” (TITN 189). As Dick drives the family back to the clinic, his inner monologue debates whether Nicole needs to resume her psychiatric treatment. He has decided that Nicole must return to the strictest guidelines of treatment, beginning the next day, when the car wildly begins to swerve out of control, crashing into a tree. Dick accuses Nicole of manufacturing the incident, accusing her “You!!” (TITN 192). She responds by “laughing, hilariously, unashamed, unafraid, unconcerned… ‘You were scared, weren’t you?’ she accused him. ‘You wanted to live!’” (TITN 192). It’s ironic that “Nicole’s taunt should in a sense foreshadow for Dick a different kind of death—a death of spirit and aspiration that she would help to complete—and for herself a certain indestructability: a capacity for rebirth” (McNicholas 67). In many ways Dick hindered his career by electing to become Nicole’s primary caregiver. It is only in this moment that he can realize the lengths that he has gone to in order to cater to Nicole, and likewise, the lengths that Nicole will go to in order to keep their power dynamic intact.
After the car wreck, when Nicole is closest to madness, transformed into a nonhuman, murderous monster-like entity, Dick is confronted with the war again. That night, Dick “slept deep and awoke to a slow mournful march passing his window. It was a long column of men in uniform, wearing the familiar helmet of 1914, thick men in frock coats and silk hats, burghers, aristocrats, plain men. It was a society of veterans going to lay wreaths on the tombs of the dead. The column marched slowly with a sort of swagger for a lost magnificence, a past effort, a forgotten sorrow. The faces were only formally sad but Dick’s lungs burst for a moment with regret for… his own youth of ten years ago” (TITN 200). Confronted with a parade of ghostlike figures, Dick is unable to deny the effect of the war any longer. He’s rendered breathless with the death of his innocence via the horror of modern warfare. It is at this point that Dick feels compelled to leave the clinic, and Nicole, for a trip abroad. Yet even after fleeing Nicole, traveling through Europe away from the clinic, Dick is stalked by ghostlike women, each representing the same threat as Nicole. Victor Quinn writes in his article “Graveyard Writing and the Rise of the Gothic,” that in Gothic literature “night represents escape whereas daytime brings disappointment” (Quinn 45). Upon arriving at a hotel in Innsbruck, Dick wanders the garden at night. Yet even in Dick’s night-borne fantasies he cannot escape Nicole: “A figure detached itself from the black shape of a tree and he knew it was the woman whom he had passed in the lobby coming out. He was in love with every pretty woman he saw now, their forms at a distance, their shadows on a wall. Her back was toward him… He scratched a match that she must have heard, but she remained motionless.” (TITN 201). This ghostlike figure of a woman seems to function as a proxy of Nicole. As Dick “moved closer, the shadow moved sideways… His heart beat loud in contact with the unprobed, undissected, unanalyzed, unaccounted for.
Suddenly he turned away, and, as he did, the girl, too, broke the black frieze she made with the foliage” (*TITN* 202). The mysterious woman has no qualities other than a shadowy, figureless form, much as Nicole was represented when Dick first met her in the clinic. The shadow girl mirrors Dick’s movements, creating a trinity between Nicole, Dick, and herself. Dick even refers to the derivative element of the phantom girl, thinking upon the interaction later and asking “Why... why start that now? With a wraith, with a fragment of my desire? Why?” (*TITN* 202). It appears that the allure of the succubus no longer tempts Dick as it once did. His attempt to reassert his masculinity by taking ownership of Nicole has backfired, and Dick’s descent into madness begins.

Dick continues the Gothic voyage by travelling to Rome, making a pilgrimage “through the foul tunnel up to the Spanish Steps, where his spirit soared before the flower stalls and the house where Keats had died” (*TITN* 220). It is telling that Dick’s spirit finds the house where Keats died, as Keats’ learned life philosophy so closely follows the same structure as Fitzgerald’s and Dick Divers’. Fitzgerald “found in the texture of Keats’ poetic language and thought the means to elegise his own actual and imaginary lost worlds, to depict their visionary moments as tantalizingly present and irrecoverably past. By the end Fitzgerald realized, as did Keats, that the negatively capable imagination can as easily destroy as create fictions of the self, stripping away our Romantic delusions until we experience the tragic reality of the contingent ‘sole self’ bound to time, change and circumstance. Early twentieth century anxieties about an age that felt too much or did not feel enough, especially in the inter-war years, echo Keats’ Romantic debate about rational detachment and imaginative engagement” (Sandy 59). Dick is no longer able to fictionalize himself, thus returning to his “sole self,” stripped of both his delusions
that he “didn’t see any of the war” and anticipating his own demise via Nicole. Switzerland may have been the beginning of the end, but for Dick, like Keats, Rome is where he will die.

Metaphorically, Dick Diver, as we know him, ceases to exist after Rome. While there, he begins a descent into disarray, getting in fistfights, winding up in jail, and attempting dangerous physical stunts. The hierarchy in the relationship of Dick and Nicole also seems to have shifted; rather than Nicole being portrayed as the feral, dangerous animal, we find that Dick has assumed the role. When Dick and Nicole are reunited, “She put out her hand as if to rub his head, but he turned away like a suspicious animal. Nicole could stand the situation no longer; in a kitchen-maid’s panic she ran downstairs, afraid of what the stricken man above would feed on while she must still continue her dry suckling at his lean chest” (TITN 279). Nicole seems to have subverted Dick into a feeding demon like herself; yet there is no longer a symbiotic relationship. Nicole is no longer able to pull from Dick, as his lifeforce has run dry. Dick is also demasculinized through the description of Nicole metaphorically attempting to nurse at his chest. Dick has “lost his vitality helping people who have given him nothing in return. Nicole, whose ‘transference’ to her husband has saved her, is even more of a ‘vampire’ than the friends and acquaintances” (Kuehl 422). Dick is now the one who is forced to feed upon others, drawing life from the vitality of youths. Nicole observes that Dick “was somewhat tired, that it was only the closeness of Rosemary’s exciting youth that prompted the impending effort- she had seen him draw the same inspiration from the new bodies of her children” (TITN 282). The youth that Rosemary and the Diver children embody is critically distanced from the war. Just as Rosemary was repelled by the aging generation wasting away on the beach at the Hotel Gausse, Nicole’s and Dick’s generation are similarly tainted. The process of “defining themselves as belonging to
the generation that has witnessed this upheaval simultaneously furnishes a powerful new means to conceptualize themselves and the generation to which they belong” (Rennie 183). The war and its impact built a divide between the generations who fought in it, and the children who were protected by time. Dick hints at this distance when he asks Rosemary if she had heard that he’d “gone into a process of deterioration?” (TITN 285). He offers the following explanation as to how he has “cracked up”: “‘The change came a long way back- but at first it didn’t show. The manner remains intact for some time after the morale cracks’” (TITN 285). Again, Dick suggests the war as an instigator for his demise. Gone is the belief that the war never touched him, and instead Dick feels the long-submerged trauma of battle grabbing the reins.

By this point in the novel, Dick is reduced to such an inhuman state that he ceases to live; we are told that Nicole feels “Dick’s ghost prompting at her elbow” (TITN 293). It seems that Dick is finally completely tapped of vitality. No longer is he the “inexhaustible energy, incapable of fatigue” that Nicole once fed upon (TITN 300). The transformation is finally complete, with Nicole comparing her stable, healthy self with Dick’s angry, emptiness; “her health and beauty against his physical deterioration, her unscrupulousness against his moralities- for this inner battle she used even her weaknesses- fighting bravely and courageously” (TITN 301). Dick’s “magnanimity is corrupted by modern times and Nicole recovers only at the expense of her husband’s equilibrium, reputation, and self-control. In Fitzgerald’s reworking of Keat’s central theme in ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ and Lamia, Nicole vampirically drains to the dregs the intellectual, professional, and emotional resources of Dick’s personality” (Sandy 58). Still- the battle between Nicole and Dick is described as an “inner battle”; the two psyches are forever entwined. As Dick says early in the novel, “Nicole and I have got to go on together. In a way
that’s more important than just wanting to go on” (*TITN* 75). Nicole is not just the haunted past, but the threat and promise of the shifting future. She is trauma and change, or as Fitzgerald wrote of the tension of the time, “the contradiction between the dead hand of the past and the high intentions of the future” (*The Crack Up* 70).
Conclusion

Clearly there is a heavy dose of Gothic feeling at work in Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* and *Tender is the Night*. I’ve examined the ways in which Fitzgerald created a Gothic haven at Princeton University, turning an ordinary American college into a hotbed of ghosts and doubles. In *Tender is the Night*, Europe became a dark playground for American expats, both drawn in and repelled by the continent. By examining both a youthful and older American character, we gain insight as to how trauma and cultural attitudes shifted in response to the Great War. To further this insight, by exploring Fitzgerald’s works chronologically, we can examine Fitzgerald’s own views as he ages as a man and as a writer. In 1941, the posthumously published collection of essays titled *The Crack-Up* revealed a candid Scott grappling with his meteoric decline. Reflecting on the initial promise of post-war America, Fitzgerald wrote that “a fresh picture of life in America began to form before my eyes. The uncertainties of 1919 were over – there seemed little doubt about what was going to happen- America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history and there was going to be plenty to tell about it. The whole golden boom was in the air- its splendid generosities, its outrageous corruptions and the tortuous death struggle of the old America in prohibition” (*The Crack-Up* 87). Yet even amidst the joy of the war ending, and a new burgeoning United States, something dark lingered in the boom. Fitzgerald writes that “all the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them- the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Thomas Hardy’s peasants. In life these things hadn’t happened yet, but I was pretty sure living wasn’t the reckless, careless
business these people thought—this generation just younger than me. For my point of vantage was the dividing line between the two generations, and there I sat—somewhat self-consciously” (The Crack-Up 87). Fitzgerald seemed to sense devastation under the veneer of promise. In the “reckless, careless” existence of the glamor and splendor and money and flapping of the 20’s, Fitzgerald saw a doomed existence.

Derek Lee, in the article “Dark Romantic: F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Specters of Gothic Modernism” posits that the Gothic presence in Fitzgerald’s work functions as an expression of Fitzgerald’s conservative values in an increasingly modernizing world. This explanation is plausible when interpreting some of Fitzgerald’s stories as cautionary tales of social climbing, rampant capitalism, marital strife, and fast living. Lee’s argument is possibly most effective when considering that Scott died at the age of 44, likely from poor health due to a lifelong alcoholism, while his wife died in a mental hospital. Yet I think chalking up Fitzgerald’s fears to that of Irish Catholic conservatism may be slightly reductive. Conservative characters such as Amory Blaine and Dick Diver, are indeed full of Victorian sensibility, and accustomed to the male-dominated worlds of education, military, and clinician life. Yet the stories of Amory Blaine and Dick Diver are not cautionary tales; instead, they are testaments to every man struggling to make sense of life when they “find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken.” I believe Fitzgerald wrote in a Gothic vein to describe his generation’s response to the historical tides they found themselves in. This Side of Paradise and Tender is the Night are unique in their “ability to represent history,” not through a dry Realism, but through a “‘sense of living in history’—his ability to transform his and his generation’s ‘actual experiences’ into narrative” (James 25). Living through a horrific war, surviving the trauma of the age whether you were in
combat or waiting at home, created a cultural anxiety. It is the “awareness of living in a flawed world, while tantalized by a perfect one just beyond our outstretched fingers, [that] is the source of what is called ‘Romantic agony’, which, in turn, can be seen as one impetus behind the Gothic. Gothicism records our disgust or rejection of a fallen, haunted, cursed, or diseased world that we know should be something else.” (Crow 8). For Amory and Dick, their “perfect” worlds existed prior to the war. These worlds took the form of Princeton for Amory, and Dick’s “beautiful lovely safe world [that] blew itself up” (TITN 67). In the face of acknowledging the loss of these perfect worlds, “a creature of powerful intellect, suffering this Romantic agony, could be driven to misguided, cruel deeds, trying to set the world right, or to avenge a sense of outrage or betrayal” (Crow 8). This compulsion to set the world right can be seen in Amory’s hysterical unwillingness to bend to societal changes regarding women’s sexuality; it can also be seen in Dick Diver’s attempted control over his wife and patient, Nicole.

Fitzgerald himself related to the agony of navigating a new life post-WWI. He writes that, “my self-immolation was something sodden-dark. It was very distinctly not modern- yet I saw it in others, saw it in a dozen men of honor and industry since the war” (The Crack-Up 81). Fitzgerald directly links his own self-implosion, and the torment of other men, to a byproduct of WWI. In a modern age, “the Gothic becomes an apt evaluation for the nature of existence. The ordinary man is seen as a powerless victim of life’s incomprehensible forces” (Keech 142). Fitzgerald counts himself and his compatriots as victims of the war, powerless at the hands of what they’ve witnessed or experienced. Even though he never made it overseas, Fitzgerald witnessed the damage occurring in his generation. One of the best assessments of fear in Gothic literature is described as ‘a fear not only of supernatural powers but also of social forces so vast
and impersonal, that they seem to have supernatural strength” (Davison 66). Through applying Davison’s assessment of the Gothic towards Fitzgerald’s work, we can uncover a new meaning in his celebration of the Jazz Age. Fitzgerald both celebrates the excesses of his time, and throws caution to the wind regarding trauma plaguing Americans. Fitzgerald utilized a medium effective in conveying otherworldly fear in order to make sense of his world.


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