THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

A Study of F. Scott Fitzgerald
and James Baldwin

by

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ABSTRACT

The rapid settlement of North America in the seventeenth century was motivated by the dream of success—a dream which the numerous possibilities of that virgin land inspired. The new land of America suggested the possible achievement of a heaven upon earth: the realization of the Utopian myth of timeless perfection. Throughout the subsequent growth of the Republic, this American dream, because of its tremendous strength and of its powerful influence as myth, completely captivated the imagination of the Americans. Consequently, a unique pattern of thought evolved in America; one that has given form and significance to the political, cultural, social, and religious life of the nation; one, in fact, that has moulded the entire history of the United States of America.

In this thesis, The American Nightmare, I have attempted to illustrate the effect of the American dream on American literature, particularly on the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald and of James Baldwin. To do this successfully, however, I found it necessary to define the American dream: to trace its origins and subsequent development. Moreover, I have suggested that the American dream,
once a vital force because it was relevant to the facts of life in America (or apparently so), has, in the twentieth century, become a nightmare, dedicated to illusion and hypocrisy. Indeed, the literature of the chosen writers reflects not only their preoccupation with the American dream and its influence, but also their desire to reveal and to analyse the apparent failure of this dream and the disillusionment, the despiritualisation, and the inhumanity which the quest for success has engendered in America. The society depicted in the novels I have selected for discussion is a bewildered one—an "incoherent" one. The authors themselves, despite their insight into the problems of American life, are indeed victims of the Medusa-like American dream.

The thesis is divided into four sections. Section One, "The American Dream," discussing the settlement of America in the seventeenth century, examines the origins of the dream. Moreover, it traces the development and increasing secularization of the dream in the eighteenth century, witnesses the westward expansion of American settlement and its effect upon the nineteenth century vision of America's future, and, finally, reveals the failure of the dream and the subsequent fear, disillusion and
bewilderment in twentieth century America. In short, this section shows how the American dream, once a vital force in American life, has now become a "nightmare"--a mirage which frequently lures many to self-destruction.

Sections Two and Three treat specific works of Fitzgerald (This Side of Paradise and The Great Gatsby) and of Baldwin (Giovanni's Room and Another Country) respectively in the light of the American dream.

The thesis concludes with a brief survey of the lives of the two writers, and an evaluation of the effect of the American dream upon their careers.
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INTRODUCTION

James Baldwin has not only established himself as an essayist, playwright, and novelist but as an effective public speaker. On June 24, 1963, during a National Educational Television broadcast on "The Negro and the American Promise," Dr. Kenneth Clark, professor of psychology at the City College of New York, introduced this man as "a writer who, through the magic of his words and the purity of his artistry and truth, has communicated the full passion of the Negro's insistence." Most people have indeed considered Baldwin as the spokesman for the emerging Negroes in America. Few critics, however, like Robert A. Bone, have given some recognition to his sincere attempts to analyse and to make recommendations for the improvement of the apparently unhappy conditions of contemporary American life.

At the invitation of the Cambridge Union Society of Cambridge University, Baldwin has once participated in a debate on the motion: "The American Dream is at the expense of the American Negro---" a
slightly condensed version of which has been published in The New York Times Magazine, March 7, 1965. This fact alone confirms his keen interest in the fascinating topic of the American dream. Further evidence of his preoccupation with this theme can be found not only in his essays but in his novels and his plays.

It is surprising that no one has thought it fitting to make comparisons between the work of James Baldwin and that of F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose novel, The Great Gatsby, is the supreme incarnation of the American dream myth.

In this thesis, I shall attempt not only to compare the way in which each of these two authors deal with the American dream theme but also to consider the influence of the myth upon the lives of the authors themselves.

I have found it necessary to divide my paper into three sections: Section one attempts to reveal the origins of the American Dream, to trace its development during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to explain its apparent failure after the closure of the American frontier, and finally to discuss the obvious disillusionment that followed in the twentieth century. Section one, in fact, presents the thesis that the American Dream has now become a nightmare.
Section two comprises an examination of the American dream theme in Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*.

Section three summarizes the influence of the American dream on Baldwin and its effect upon him as an artist.
SECTION ONE: THE AMERICAN DREAM

CHAPTER I

The Origins

Since the early part of the seventeenth century, Americans have been busily recording their intellectual history. "It is in written words," writes Tyler, "that these people, from the very beginning, have made the most confidential and explicit record of their minds." Because of these abundant records, in which they have transmitted to us "a faithful picture of their opinions, their manners, and their laws," one is able not only to follow "the natural and tranquil growth of the society" but also to trace in the various


2Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York, 1956), 1, p. 28.
attitudes and motivations of the early settlers the origins and developments of the phenomenon known as the American Dream.

The first settlements of the New World, by the Dutch, Spanish, French and English, were largely attempts to establish a colonial empire subservient to the mother country; to make her "economically independent of foreign countries, and therefore richer and more secure."\(^3\) In North America, however, it was the English colonies that largely determined the future shape of the American society and of the American dream, and therefore it is these settlements with which we must be particularly concerned.

In 1606 the desire for colonial expansion, the hope of finding a passage to the South Sea, and the dream of national supremacy promoted the foundation of the Virginia Company in London. To realize these aims settlers were needed, and the London Company sought men to go in search of new land in America. Promises of personal wealth were therefore made to attract potential settlers to the New World. Michael Drayton's "Ode to Virginia" seems representative of the hopes and

anxieties of many sympathetic Englishmen: "And cheerfully at sea," he wrote,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Success you still entice,} \\
\text{to get the pearl and gold,} \\
\text{And ours to hold,} \\
\text{VIRGINIA,} \\
\text{Earth's only paradise.}^{4}
\end{align*}
\]

Similarly, when the Council of Virginia was burdened with difficulties in 1607, they requested "succours" be sent with all speed, "least that all devouring Spaniard lay his ravenous hands upon those gold showing mountains."\(^5\) The settlement of Virginia aroused both the public and private interests of the early colonists. Unfortunately, however, the appeal to the cupidity of these early settlers had attracted the character of man who preferred to "starve for hunger than lay hands to labor."\(^6\) Inevitably, therefore, difficulties arose: there was "a grave omission of duties which it was absolutely necessary to perform to insure the perpetual existence of the community."\(^7\) The public aims and the ideal of the


\(^5\)Brown, pp. 107-108.

\(^6\)Brown, p. 355.

Virginia settlement were obviously being defeated by the propaganda and the get-rich-quick ideas which it promoted.

Faced with the apparent failure of the early settlement, the Council of Virginia was forced to seek more honest and more stable settlers. A period of intense propaganda was therefore initiated. Broadsides were published which once again fired the imagination of adventurous Englishmen with the promise of prosperity and financial advancement in America. In return for each man's service, "houses to live in, vegetable gardens and orchards, and also food and clothing at the expense of the Company," were promised. Each man was assured a share of all products and profits and a share in the division of lands.

Moreover, the New World was advertised in England as a personal paradise. The beauty and the fertility of the land were frequently celebrated. "Heaven and earth," boasted one colonist, "never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation." Captain John Smith proclaimed Virginia as

8 Brown, p. 248.

A place, a nurse for soldiers, a practice for mariners, a trade for merchants, a reward for the good; and that which is most of all, a business most acceptable to God, to bring such poor infidels to a knowledge of God and his holy gospel.  

This idea of missionary work among the Indians, Bruce suggests, was published purely "with a view to stimulating interest in the declining fortunes of Virginia."  

Robert Rich, celebrating the arrival of Sir Thomas Gates and Captain Newport to England in 1610, advised his fellow citizens thus:  

To such as to Virginia  
Do purpose to repaire;  
And when that they shall hither come  
Each man shall have his share,  
Day wages for the laborer,  
And for his content,  
A house and garden plot shall have . . . .  

From the earliest period of the Virginia settlement, there was an obvious conflict between the public and the private aims, between the facts of Virginia and the ideal of the settlement. That most of the advertisements of the new land was basically propaganda is most  

11 Bruce, p. 68.  
obvious. However, they do reveal the attitudes and hopes of the early settlers. One can detect in such language an almost Utopian vision—a dream of an ideal life in an earthly paradise where trees yielded "gums pleasant as Frankincense," and possessed "great virtue in healing green wounds and aches." America had become a symbol of opportunity, and the overflow of population, which threatened England with all the vices and sins of overcrowding, travelled to the New World "where they were finding opportunities for improving their condition that were not open to them in their native country."^14

The seventeenth century American dream, as reflected by the Virginia colonies, was primarily a materialistic one. It was a personal as well as a national dream, and encouraged not only individualism but also selfishness. To the loyal Englishman at home, the Virginia settlements provided an opportunity for realizing his dream of colonial empire, which would be not only


^14 Bruce, p. 61.
exceeding pleasant for habitation, but also very profitable for commerce in generall; no doubt pleasing to Almightye God, honourable to their sovereign, and commodious generally to the whole kingdom.  

To the early settlers in Virginia, the new land of America offered unlimited opportunity: to become wealthy and to better oneself, to gain land and to make quick profit, to escape all difficulties, punishments and oppressions experienced in their former life, and to begin life anew. However, the dichotomy of public and private dreams was unfortunate: the one tended to defeat the other.

*  

While the settlement of Virginia was based mainly on mercenary motives, the foundation of the New England colonies was "a novel spectacle, and all the circumstances attending it were original and singular." In 1775 Philip Freneau, in his Dialogue, "The Rising Glory of America," explains that the pilgrims, who landed on the eastern shore of America in 1620,

16 de Tocqueville, p. 32.
The ardent patriotism and enthusiasm which inspired the writing of these lines are quite evident. The Pilgrims of 1620, as William Bradford has explained, had come from England by way of Holland, to avoid the ruthless persecution to which they were exposed in England. To them, indeed, England's shores might have been "hostile". Yet the great companies of Puritans who came to New England subsequent to 1620 held no grudge against their mother country. Like the Plymouth settlers, these early Massachussetts Bay colonists had considered America as the promised land where they would be free to worship according to their own ideals and beliefs. This new opportunity is the "liberty" to which Freneau refers: the New England Puritans believed that since "their condition was ordinarie: their ends were good and honourable; their calling lawfull, and urgente;"¹⁸ They might expect the blessings of God in


their daring venture. Emboldened by this sense of special destiny therefore they asserted that they were "the germ of a great nation wafted by Providence to a predestined shore." This conviction of being God's chosen people ultimately led to Puritan intolerance.

The militant attitude with which these Puritans pursued their religious beliefs is clearly reflected by the imagery used in Edward Johnson's thesis, "Wonder-Working Providence." Christ, he asserted, had stirred up his servants to make this "proclamation for Volunteers:"

Oh yes! Oh Yes! All you the people of Christ that are here Oppressed, Imprisoned and scurrilously derided, gather yourselves together, your Wives and little ones, and answer to your several Names as you shall be shipped for his service, in the Westerne World, and more especially for planting the united Collonies of new England; where you are to attend the service of the King of Kings, upon the divulging of this Proclamation by his Heralds at Armes."

Here Johnson is summoning all those who are willing to enrol as soldiers in God's army, and offering in return an opportunity to live a life free from all stigmas and burdens in New England, the place where "the Lord will

19 de Tocqueville, p. 34.

20 The Puritans, p. 144.
create a new Heaven, and a new Earth in, new Churches, and a new Commonwealth together.\textsuperscript{21} The Puritans believed that they were elected to build God's new kingdom on earth, a kingdom which England had failed to build, but which nevertheless would still be England's. One can immediately feel the fervent patriotism that inspired Johnson's prayer:

\begin{quote}
Lord Christ, here at thy command, they go, this is the door thou has opened upon our earnest request, and we hope it shall never be shut: for England's sake they are going from England to pray without ceasing for England. O England!\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Having found their promised land, the Puritans were determined to construct their earthly Eden strictly according to Puritan blueprints. These men had refused to remain in England under the conditions available to them as dissenters: they had resolved "to extirpate utterly and mercilessly all other pretended versions of Christianity," their own version being the only true one as authorized by the Bible.\textsuperscript{23}

Consequently, there was no religious toleration.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21}\textit{The Puritans}, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{22}\textit{The Puritans}, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{23}\textit{The Puritans}, p. 184.
\end{flushright}
The divine service was made compulsory, and severe punishment was meted out to all who were determined to worship God in any way different to their own. The fates of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams in the 1630's are vivid manifestations of the stringent doctrines and religious persecution enforced by the early Puritan settlers in the name of truth.

The Puritan dream in the early seventeenth century was basically a national as well as a personal one. Unlike the Virginia settlement which thrived on the principles of individualism and selfishness and (despite the obvious intolerance just mentioned), this primarily religious settlement had nourished a kind of democracy. In New England, there was no feudal hierarchy like that which still survived in Europe; magistrates and other officers were elected by the members of the "elect". In fact, de Tocqueville claims that "Puritanism ... was almost as much a political theory as a religious doctrine;" that this community which "approximated more and more the novel spectacle of a community homogenous in all its parts" had set up in America a democracy "more perfect than antiquity had dared to dream of," while the ancient feudal societies still existed in
Europe. 24

Such homogeneity and superiority were indeed short-lived. While America continued to be the symbol of opportunity—opportunity to escape oppression and injustices, to obtain freedom and to pursue one's life in accordance with one's moral, religious and political convictions—New England in reality proved to be much otherwise. The highly moralistic and idealistic dream of the Puritans engendered a self-righteousness that soon hardened into an orthodoxy which, though tough in moral ribre, lacked the necessary theological framework.

Puritan theocracy had been founded upon the hypothesis of original sin: that man had not maintained his original state, the "Moral Image Concreated in him," 25 but had suffered an unhappy fall. He therefore needed civil laws to direct him and civil authority to lay compulsion on him; that "necessity requires, and the Political happiness of a People is concerned in the establishment of a Civil Government;" 26 that the elect, on receiving the grace of God, entered into a state of

24 de Tocqueville, p. 36, p. 37, p. 37.
25 The Puritans, p. 251.
26 Ibid.
civil, federal, or moral liberty: he was free to obey God's edicts, and must therefore commit himself to abide by the authority of church and state, since all freely-elected officers and magistrates received their authority from God and must govern according to their interpretation of God's laws and of their own. Eventually, since many of the society did not belong to the true elect, the practice of social compact deteriorated into the hands of few. Only a small minority was allowed membership in the congressional system and a voice in their own administrative affairs.

The "half-way covenant" of 1648 is an adequate index of the problems faced by the Puritan society. With the increasing desire for wealth and comfort, the rigors of self-discipline and self-denial were gradually relaxed. Material success, attributed to the grace of God, rendered the basic religious experience less accessible to the second generation. As wealth became more widely distributed, the distinction between the "regenerates" and their less fortunate fellows gradually disappeared, and men displayed greater interest in the affairs of men and less in the affairs of God. A new generation of Americans born in America and molded by the conditions of life in America appeared. The flames of religious ardour, which
blazed in the hearts of the first generation of settlers, burned lower and lower.

Slowly, the "theological version of political principle" gave way to "the purely rational and naturalistic variant." The theory of the fall of man gave way to that of the rise of man. Man was then God's "Favourite Animal on Earth," the "Subject of the Law of Nature," and "the dictates of Right Reason" was a divine gift. Such ideas were extended by writers such as Bernard and Mayhew, who argued that man now had the authority to use some "reasonable way" to vindicate his "liberties and just rights," even if it meant the deposition of a ruler who, by violating the contract of the people, had imposed unjust restraints and oppressions on his subjects. In New England, during the latter half of the seventeenth century, the moral virtue and self-righteousness of the Puritans had largely lost its religious motive to a materialistic one.

America, at the close of the century, was still the land of opportunity, where all men hoped to attain

27 The Puritans, p. 193.

28 The Puritans, p. 259.

29 The Puritans, p. 280.
goals which had previously seemed beyond their grasp. The colonists everywhere were greatly inspired by their dream of success, the success of achieving the particular life of their choice. Here for the first time was the possibility of making a new life; moreover, the visions before them seemed attainable. Besides, the new confidence in the natural goodness of man added fuel to the dreams which already glowed in the imaginations of the young Americans. The philosophies which prevailed at the turn of the century heralded the Age of Reason and Enlightenment, the age of the self-made man, and the age which witnessed the true birth of American nationalism and the ratification of its democratic principles.
CHAPTER II

The Age of Enlightenment

While a few die-hard Puritans early in the eighteenth century deplored the degeneration of American society, the majority of the inhabitants were convinced that America was thriving and would continue to do so for a very long time, and that Americans were destined to be not only the most happy, prosperous and powerful people in the world, but a shining light to guide other peoples.

Benjamin Franklin, for example, enraptured by the prospects of American society, made this prophesy in 1751:

There are supposed to be now upwards of One Million English Souls in North America .... This Million doubling, suppose but once in 25 years, will, in another Century, be more than the people of England, and the greatest number of Englishmen will be on this Side of the Water. What an Accession of power to the British Empire by Sea as by Land. What increase of Trade and Navigation! What Numbers of Ships and Seamen! 30

Later, in 1782, de Crevecoeur, in his letter, "What is an American?", paints a most revealing picture of the eighteenth-century situation in America. As the title itself suggests, Americans had become so unique that only an American himself could provide the answer to the question. The outsider would be completely baffled as to the true nature of these people. This letter indeed reflects the enthusiasm with which the dream of an American Eden was supported. The society was already being proclaimed as a most 'perfect' one! The ideals of freedom, equality and property were loudly asserted in this great "American asylum" to which the poor, the destitute, the homeless and the oppressed from other parts of the world, all came to seek refuge.

American society was then not "composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess everything, and of a herd of people who have nothing." "Here, \[\text{in America}\]," wrote de Crevecoeur,

are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very invisible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe. Some few towns excepted, we are tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators
scattered over an immense territory, communicat-
ing with each other by means of good roads and
navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of
mild government, all respecting the laws, without
dreading their power, because they are equitable.
We are all animated with the spirit of industry
which is unfettered and unrestrained, because
each person works for himself .... We have
no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed:
we are the most perfect society now existing
in the world. Here man is free as he ought to
be; nor is this pleasing equality so transitory
as many others are.31

According to de Crevecoeur, the European, coming
to this land of equal opportunity, severed all connect-
ions with his past mode of life and adopted a new one.
Here his labours were rewarded with land; and this land
conferred upon him the title of 'freeman'. Life for the
immigrants to the New World became meaningful. "Every
thing," he explains.

has tended to regenerate them; new laws, a mode
of living, a new social system; here they are
become men: in Europe they were as so many useless
plants, wanting vegetative mould, and refreshing
showers; they withered, and were mowed down by
want, hunger, and war; but now by the power of
transplantation, like any other plants they have
taken root and flourished! Formerly they were
not numbered in any civil lists of their country
except in those of the poor; here they rank as
citizens.32

31J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, "What is an American?"
Letters From An American Farmer (Garden City, New York, n.d.),
pp. 46 & 47.

32de Crevecoeur, p. 48.
The plant imagery in his passage most powerfully conveys the ideas of regeneration, of new beginnings and of growth. Individuals from all countries, on coming to America, were "melted into a race of man, whose labours and posterity" were expected to "one day cause great changes in the world." Americans were now distinct people, who were destined "to finish the great circle which had long since begun in the East." "The Americans," boasted de Crevecoeur, "were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared, and which will hereafter become distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit."33

In eighteenth-century America, a spirit of individual enterprise which prevailed, a belief in the rough equality of opportunity, the general prosperity and energy of the people, and the atmosphere of freedom "imparted to Americans a fresh and buoyant optimism and aggressive self-confidence."34 In fact one can detect in this certainty of a glorious future, the origins of the theory of Manifest Destiny which helped to motivate the westward trek across the continent late in this century,

33de Crevecoeur, pp. 49-50.

34Nevins and Commager, A Short History of the United States (New York, 1956), pp. 54-55.
and, with increasing rapidity, in the nineteenth century. Americans, it was believed, in completing 'the great circle', must travel westward towards the Orient, where civilization originated.

These characteristics of life in the eighteenth century can be partly attributed to some innate qualities of the early English settlers, but mostly to the new enlightened opinion of himself which man now entertained. The spirit of individualism, characteristic of the British colonists, had indeed been considerably increased by the pressures of life in the somewhat wilder settlements. On the other hand, man no longer believed that he was doomed to be a failure from birth. Convinced of his natural goodness he sought to improve himself not only materially, but morally, and not by looking for divine grace through covenants of God, but by abiding by the dictates of reason. Since the gift of intellect was not equally distributed, the capacities of men varied. But since the means of putting such capacities into use were fairly equal at this time in America, each man had a fair opportunity of sharing the most highly respected positions in society. Such logic indeed greatly nourished the American dream of success and gave great impetus to the actual development of the country. How-
ever, it is this very logic which was to persist most perversely in the minds of Americans when the actual situation had changed.

A typical example of the eighteenth century self-made man is Benjamin Franklin. "From the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and in which I have passed my earliest years," he wrote in his autobiography, "I have raised myself to a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world."35 Like Franklin, many rich men at this time in America were formerly poor, many had spent a youth absorbed in business before they found the pleasure of a life of leisure. De Tocqueville asserts that there was "no class, then, in America, in which the taste for intellectual pleasures was transmitted with hereditary fortune and leisure and by which the labors of the intellect were held in honor."36 Moreover, men, like Franklin, were often willing and anxious to hand on to posterity the means they employed to gain their success in life. Franklin never doubted the existence of a Deity, but he was convinced that "the most acceptable service to God was the doing good to man ...."35 In his "Poor Richard Almanacs,"

36 de Tocqueville, p. 54. 37 The Autobiography, p. 92.
therefore, he repeatedly preached against the evils of poverty, idleness and luxury, and earnestly urged men to be virtuous. Through such an altruistic attitude, Franklin hoped to inculcate the virtues of self-discipline and self-interest into his fellow-citizens. Instead of merely supplying exhortations to be good, he offered them practical advice and example as to the manner and the means of becoming virtuous. Franklin thereby hoped to create a "new virtuous People" who would naturally develop "public Spirit"\(^3\) and so become the ideal citizens. In this way, he believed, the perfect society could be achieved.

Sharing de Crevecoeur's optimism about his country's future, Franklin was convinced that "America will, with God's blessing become a great and happy country,"\(^3\) that people, coming to America, would find numerous opportunities which Europe did not and could not afford. "Multitudes of Poor," he claimed,

from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany have by this means in a few years become wealthy Farmers, who, in their own Countries, where all the Lands are occupied, and the Wages of Labour low, could never have emerged from the poor Condition wherein they were born.
Free land, he maintained, was the saving grace of his country; the husbandman he always held in high esteem. Consistently, he argued,

Great Establishments of Manufacture require great Numbers of Poor to do the Work for small Wages; these Poor are to be found in Europe, but will not be found in America, till the Lands are all taken up and cultivated, and the Excess of People, who cannot get Land, want Employment. 40

In Franklin’s opinion, the fulfillment of America's destiny could be achieved as long as there was land to be cultivated and men to do the necessary cultivation. This, indeed, is the popular American eighteenth century agrarian dream which reached its climax in the nineteenth century. Jefferson, for example, argues in his "Notes on Virginia,"

In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not of choice, to support the surplus of the people. But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman.... Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He made his particular deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. 41

40 The Writings, VIII, pp. 608-611.

These cultivators, in his opinion, were the rocks upon which the American future was to be built. The government should therefore foster agriculture and remove all obstacles in the way of expansion towards the West. In this way alone could the depravity of overcrowded Europe be escaped.

The comments of Franklin and Jefferson most vividly reflect the characteristics of the agrarian dream. The vision of a glorious future for America, it was believed, could only be realized through the medium of agricultural development. This would, in turn, necessitate a westward expansion, which would be in keeping with the theory of Manifest Destiny and which, at the same time, would provide the necessary distance from the depraved and degenerate societies of the Old World. Furthermore, this westward movement would offer a "safety valve" which would eliminate the possibility of overcrowding and all the evils associated with it. According to Nash Smith, the American version of the age-old praise of husbandry, "during the period of the Revolution, gave them a nationalistic coloring by insisting that the society of the new nation was a concrete embodiment of what had been in Europe but a utopian dream."}

Americans, in speaking of their country, now displayed attitudes of superiority and self-righteousness. America, the "virgin land", had now become a symbol of purity and integrity. "My God!" Jefferson wrote to Colonel Munroe from Paris,

how little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people of the earth enjoy. I confess I had no idea myself. While we see multiplied instances of Europeans going to live in America, I will venture to say, no man living will ever see an instance of an American removing to settle in Europe, and continuing there. Come then, and see the proofs of this, and on your return add your testimony to that of every thinking American, in order to satisfy our countrymen how much it is in their interest to preserve, uninfected by contagion, those peculiarities in their governments and manners, to which they are indebted for those blessings ....

The image of disease and infection clearly conveys the feelings of contempt with which these eighteenth century Americans regarded the older civilization to which they had once belonged. The conditions in Europe were believed to be "very much inferior . . . to the tranquil, permanent felicity with which domestic society in America blessed most of its inhabitants."^44

^43 Jefferson, p. 367.

^44 Jefferson, p. 382.
At the end of the eighteenth century, the American dream of a glorious future had already taken firm hold of the imagination of the nation. Americans dreamed of the days to come when their already 'perfect' society would thrive in the greatest continental empire in the world, an empire in which all the poor, the destitute and the suffering would find refuge and eventual happiness, an empire upon which the eyes of the world would be turned for guidance. However, although America was now closest to the realization of the dream, its impracticability was soon to assert itself.

The eighteenth century dream in America was a national one. It was the dream of a continental empire in which the 'most perfect' society would live. It was a vision of moral, political and religious achievement; yet it was basically a vision of success in materialistic terms. Philip Freneau's tribute to "The Rising Glory of America" reveals a picture of the future as it existed in the minds of most Americans of this century. Proudly he wrote,

Say, shall we ask what empires yet must rise,  
What kingdoms, powers and STATES, where now are seen  
Mere dreary wastes and awful solitude,  
Where Melancholly sits, with eyes forlorn,  
And time anticipates, when we shall spread  
Dominions from the north, and south, and west,  
Far from the Atlantic and the Pacific shores  
And shackle half the convex of the main.
Later, in the voice of Acasto, he prophesied,

I see, I see
Freedom's establish'd reign; cities and men,
Numerous as sands upon the ocean shore,
And Empires rising where the sun descends!
The Ohio soon shall glide by many a town
Of note; and where the Mississippi stream,
By forests shaded, now runs weeping on,
Nations shall grow, and STATES not less in fame
Than Greece and Rome of old!\(^45\)

America, in the eighteenth century, became a nation responsible unto itself. The Revolution and Declaration of Independence, indeed, symbolises the complete rejection of the mother country by the American colonists, who had once been most loyal to her. And in rejecting the mother country they rejected their past. This rejection reinforced the idea of American innocence, which was soon to become a major theme of the literature of the country, an innocence, which it was believed, could only be preserved by a constant disassociation from Europe, the symbol of sinfulness and depravity.\(^46\)

\(^45\) Freneau, pp. 14 and 15.
\(^46\) Jefferson, p. 367.
CHAPTER III

The Frontier and Its Closure

In the early half of the nineteenth century, one can witness the rapid development of trends begun in the eighteenth century. The American imagination was completely captivated by the vision of a glorious future, and such a future, in the minds of Americans, became increasingly more distinct and more attainable. The steady advance across the continent toward the Pacific represented a definite withdrawal from the influence of Europe and "a steady growth of independence on American lines." 47

The history of the nineteenth century is indeed the history of the American frontier. According to Turner's thesis on the frontier,

The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development .... This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion Westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive

Until late in the previous century the land West of the Mississippi had remained almost a mystery to provoke the imagination of writers and other men. Soon, however, the idea of direct communication with the East gave new stimulus to the interest in the West. Trade with China, it was thought, would lead to further interesting and profitable discoveries. Despite the popularity of the agrarian theory, which conceived the development of the West in simple agricultural terms, many people were convinced of the commercial possibilities of this part of the continent. The access to Asia became the "symbol of freedom and of national greatness in America," for throughout history, "the nation which has commanded the trade of Asia in each successive era has been the leader of the world in civilization, power and wealth." The principle of Manifest Destiny, of the succession of empires here involved, provided the rationale for western expansion. Only after "expansionism had reached the natural boundary of the ocean," did the nation experience a "transition ... from an outward-looking to an introspective conception of empire."  

\[48\text{Turner, pp. 1-2.  } 49\text{Nash Smith, p. 25, 26, 31.}\]
One must turn to the writings of Walt Whitman to observe the most passionate and highly imaginative expression of the theme of westward expansion. In "A Promise to California," he writes, "For these states tend inland and toward the Western sea, and I will also."50

"Facing West from California's shores," he meditates:

Inquiring, tireless, seeking that yet unfound,
I, a child, very old, over waves, toward the
house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,
Look off the shores of my Western sea, (the
circle almost circled;)

Now I face the old home again, very pleased and:
joyous ... (p. 92)

In tribute to the pioneers of the west, the "Western youths/ So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship," he proudly sings,

All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied world,

Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O Pioneers! (p. 184)

"God's purpose from the first" he describes, in "Passage to India," as

50 Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (New York, MLCE, 1950), p. 106. Further references to this book would be documented within the text.
The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,
The races, neighbours, to marry and be given in
marriage,
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
The lands: to be welded together. (p. 322)

In Whitman's opinion, "The course of Time and nations"
was garnered for America; everything was "the heirdom
all converged" in her (p. 296). And so, "America"
must be

Centre of all daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young
or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the earth, with Freedom, Law
and Love,
A great, sane, towering, seated Mother,
Chair'd in the adamant of time. (p. 395)

The exuberance with which Whitman wrote these passages
taken from *Leaves of Grass* does indeed reflect "the
intrepid idealism that so triumphantly enabled Whitman
to see in the march of the pioneer army a prelude to
peace and the brotherhood of nations."51

Whitman's pioneer army was America's response to
the force of that irresistible destiny which the nation
then acknowledged. "Each frontier," Turner explains, "did
indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of es-
cape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and con-

51Smith, p. 51.
fidence, and scorn of older societies, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons" did indeed accompany these pioneers of the West. Determined to end all identification with the culture and the civilization of the older nations, the American surrendered his past. But since he had rejected his past, he could no longer evoke a myth of his own. Consequently, he devoted himself to the future; his myth became the myth of the future. Unfortunately, he had then lost his identification and had destroyed whatever firm ground he had to stand upon in the shifting sands of time.

Even as the frontier activity decreased the country's dependence on Europe, it "promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people," for in "the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality or characteristics." Mumford Jones, in support of this theory of 'the melting pot', claims that

Frontier life ... dissolves inherited patterns, notably the patterns of European life transported to America, and the European, once he is in the novel environment, is compelled to forget his past and begin all over.

The frontier, therefore, was "an effective agent in democratic equalitarianism."\textsuperscript{55} Moreover, as early as 1837 and the writing of Horace Greeley's "Go West, young man, go forth into the Country," the West was promoted as a "safety valve", as a means of emancipation from poverty and unemployment in the East. And so, after the War of Independence, when the economic policy pursued in America was no longer in the interest of England, the new American nationalism had "embraced the humanitarian concept of the West as a refuge for the oppressed of all the world.\textsuperscript{56}

One can easily trace in the history of the nineteenth century the extension and development of concepts which first appeared early in the eighteenth century. As the idea of a glorious future pushed its roots deeper into the minds of Americans and the American dream gained complete predominance over the American psyche, "the image ... of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history," came into greater prominence. Inspired by recent scientific discoveries and nourished by the

\textsuperscript{55}Jones, p. 30. \textsuperscript{56}Smith, p. 236.
enlightened philosophies of life then prevalent, the American strove to attain his dream, conscious of "a conscience unsullied by the past." 57

This American dream, as long as it was relevant to the reality of the situation or, at least, appeared to be so, was one of tremendous strength. Not only did it fortify the citizens to bear the burdens of life then but it also inspired them to pursue their goals in life with greater enthusiasm and utmost confidence. It did, therefore, play a very vital part in the foundation and the development of the American nation, but it was destined to become unrealistic, a perversion of the earlier more realistic dream, dedicated to illusion and the escape from reality.

After the American Civil War, it was obvious that the dream of a perfect democracy, of a heaven on earth, in America was doomed to failure. Gradually the reality of the situation that had bred and nourished this dream deteriorated and finally disappeared. The Homestead Act of 1862 which was supposed to make immense improvements in the condition of labour, to lessen poverty and unemployment, and to increase the number of self-supporting,

independent farmers, failed to produce the expected results. While the land speculator and the big businessman prospered, many small landowners were forced to become tenants. Hofstadter observes in *The Age of Reform* that

> The fathers of the Homestead Act and the fee-simple empire had acted upon a number of assumptions stemming from the agrarian myth which were out of date even before the act was passed.

And so the idealized figure of the yeoman suffered a great setback as his descendants began to leave the rural districts and move to the city, the centres of sin and depravity. Moreover, the Industrial Revolution which had been taking place reduced the optimism of the agrarian theorists considerably.

To quote Hofstadter once more, the disciples of the agrarian myth did have

> the satisfaction in the early days of knowing that in so far as it was based upon the life of the largely self-sufficient yeoman the agrarian myth was a description of a reality as well as the assertion of an ideal.

However, this dream which was first "propagated with a


59 Hofstadter, p. 30.
kind of genial candor, later acquired "overtones of insincerity."

Strangely enough, the influence of this myth increased widely as the myth itself became more and more fictional.

In addition to this obvious failure of the agrarian myth, the frontier had pushed itself to the furthest point possible, to the Pacific seaboard. With the closure of the frontier and the rapid disappearance of virgin land, of free land, came the reversal of many a trend and the failure of many an expectation. Deprived of the edge of the frontier, Americans could no longer find the opportunity for new beginnings; the "safety valve" was closed and all avenues of escape from the pressures of life in society were destroyed. The possibility of such a closure had indeed been most remote in the minds of the earlier Americans. De Creveceour, for example, had exclaimed,

Many ages will not see the shores of our great lakes replenished with inland nations, nor unknown bounds of North America entirely peopled. Who can tell how far it extends? Who can tell how the millions of men whom it will feed and contain? for no European foot has as yet travelled half the extent of this mighty continent!

60 Hofstadter, p. 30. 61 de Creveceour, p. 47.
Franklin had boasted that the 'Poor' such as were found in Europe would never be found in America "till the Lands are all taken up ...." Yet so enraptured was he by the dream of the glorious future of America that he never gave any real consideration to the possibility of the event. In the late nineteenth century, the land was all but taken up. "the great circle" all but completed. America, however, seemed no closer to the realization of her Manifest Destiny. The movement away from the influence of Europe and the bondage of the past was halted, and a retracing of steps seemed inevitable.

The spirit of altruism and the sense of justice upon which the success of the American vision so largely depended had failed to develop. Instead, the frontier life had bred a rugged individualism. The strongest incentive in the rapid development of the American societies, as observed before, were the opportunity to begin again, the opportunity to find the solution to one's problems and to improve one's self. According to Turner,

Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is antisocial. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control.

62 The Writings, VIII, p. 611.
And so, he continues,

the democracy born of free land, strong in selfishness and individualism, ... pressing liberty beyond its proper bonds, has its dangers as well as its benefits. 63

The self-made man still prevailed in America, but he no longer shared Franklin's enthusiasm to help his fellow-citizen to achieve a virtuous nature and so to create a perfect society.

Moreover, after the Civil War and the closure of the frontier, a rapid industrialization and urbanization of the nation took place. Before 1870, there was still "a rather broad diffusion of wealth, status, and power, in which the man of moderate means, especially in many small communities, could command much deference and exert much influence. Soon after, big business, the corporation and the monopolists took over the control of the nation's enterprise and there was a complete revolution in the distribution of power and prestige. America was still the land of opportunity, but the rough equality of opportunity which once seemed to exist had ended. Many of the better class of men who lived by the best standards seemed to have lost their influence. The "well-to-do, 63

Both quotations from Turner, p. 15.
well-educated, high-minded citizen, rich enough to be free from motives of ... 'crass materialism', whose family roots were deep not only in American history but in his local community" saw himself ousted by a class of grandiosely rich men. The clergy not only suffered in all outward ways but lost much of their influence as the moral and intellectual leaders of the age. Americans had begun to realize that

one could no longer live within the framework of the aspirations and expectations that had governed American life for the century past. Americans had grown up with the placid assumption that the development of their country was so much unlike what had happened elsewhere that the social conflicts troubling other countries, bothering other countries could never become a major problem in their country. 64

They were indeed aware that profound changes were taking place in the nation's way of life.

With the closure of the frontier, America, for the first time, was left "to stew in its own juice," 65 yet, ironically, the melting pot then ceased to boil. America was no longer a crucible for the rapid alchemization of immigrants into good American citizens. Too often the

64 Hofstadter, p. 135, 140, and 166.

immigrant failed to shake off his old identity and adopt the American way of life with the rapidity called for by the ideal of Americanization. Becoming suspect of the methods by which help was offered to him by members of the society, he more often than not became the victim of the political boss whose practical methods he could more easily understand. Politics in America, he seemed to believe, was a means of bargaining for concrete, personal gains. The government, in his opinion, was either indifferent or opposed to his interests; only those of the ruling class seemed to matter.

This was the age of the "muckraker", who was determined to reveal the sordid reality of American life behind the "created reportable events" and the "elevated events" published by the editors of the popular newspaper columns. Yet these men, who were working in a time of great material prosperity, were actually no great reformers. They loved their country and were more eager "to understand and to make sure than to dream of utopias ...." What they hoped to do was not to inspire any drastic action but to appeal to "the mass sentiments of respons-

66 Hofstadter, p. 189.

ibility, indignation and guilt" supposedly shared by all Americans. Hofstadter explains that their "framework" of reforms was limited by their desire to ensure that there were no "structural alterations in American social and economic system." What seems evident here is a fond belief that all the country's difficulties would eventually be solved as long as it continued to prosper materially.

The muckrakers, nevertheless, did introduce to many an "innocent" American the squalor and incredibly horrid conditions that existed in his "perfect" society. For there were many men who, in their daily struggle to obtain the bare necessities of life, saw nothing in their environment which promised a very happy future. In fact, everything seemed to discourage the effort of looking ahead. In the eyes of many suffering thousands at this time America was no longer the land of opportunity.

The failure of the American dream should come as no surprise to the student of American history for this dream did contain the seeds of its own destruction. As mentioned before, this dream of an American Eden did involve a complete rejection of the past. Yet many of the customs, traditions and characteristics of the Old World had been so deeply implanted into the American society

68 Hofstadter, pp. 196, and 197.
that it was difficult for these people to completely shake off the influence of the past. Moreover, because Americans rejected their past, at least in theory, they lost all perspective and now had no firm ground on which to stand in the rapidly shifting sands of time. Consequently, they lost that sense of belonging somewhere; they lost their identity. And so, even while the self-righteous American boasted of the increasing material prosperity of his country and about his ideal society, he experienced strong feelings of insecurity. Having no cultural past to cling to, he loudly proclaimed the virtues of the tough masculinity bred by the frontier life. He regarded with suspicion all those who tended towards the fields of literature and art. Even as they became more isolationist and more anti-European in character, they also became the victims of increasingly strong feelings of nostalgia. As the westward expansion threatened to consume all the vacant land available, fear of becoming subject to the very sins and depravity they had tried to avoid became greater and greater. The very concepts which had originally inspired and nourished the dream in the earlier years now proved to be the very elements which led to its failure. This indeed is the Medusa-like quality of the American dream which made itself
manifest at the close of the seventeenth century. Ironically enough, as the possibilities of fulfilling their envisioned destiny grew dimmer and dimmer, Americans clung with greater tenacity to the dream of a glorious future.
CHAPTER IV

Disillusion and Nightmare

One must not assume, however, that there were no genuine attempts at reform in the late nineteenth century. Hofstadter actually refers to the period between 1890 and the second world war as "the age of reform," "the expression of agrarian uprising" in the last decade of the nineteenth century being the Populist reform movement, and "the broader impulse toward criticism and change"--a movement which emerged in the twentieth century--being the Progressivist movement. 69

The Populists, being products of the agrarian myth, pursued a more conservative policy--one which revealed how far the American dream had been pushed from reality. Their hope was to restore the conditions of life which existed in the "golden age" before the phenomenon of industrialization had taken place: they "looked backward with longing to the lost agrarian Eden, to the

69 Hofstadter, p. 4-5.
republican America of the early years of the nineteenth century." They refused to acknowledge the facts and the practicability of modern organizations. They criticised big industrial leaders, yet they possessed a "half-suppressed feeling of admiration and envy for the captains of industry who had after all done no more than fulfill the old dream of heroic ascendancy." Again one notices how completely materialistic and personal the American vision of success had tended to become. In the twentieth century, moreover, the American dream had become a paradox. Dedicated to the future but conscious of the inevitability of the failure of the dream, Americans became nostalgic for some past in which the perfect society was supposed to have been achieved.

The Progressives, who were of Puritan stock inherited "the moral tradition of rural evangelical Protestantism." They lived among all the iniquities which the agrarian myth had prepared them to find in an urban society. And they could not permit them to exist. They hoped to achieve traditional ideals with which they were familiar under novel conditions, by inculcating in people a true "sense of moral responsibility". And "to

70 Hofstadter, pp. 62, 219.
keep all the benefits of the emerging organization of life and yet return to the scheme of individualistic values that this organization was destroying.\textsuperscript{71}

America, indeed,

had engendered a national image keyed to epic dimensions, a soul unhappy without novelty and daring, raised on the conquest of a continent, the settlement of an immense domain, the creation within the life span of one man of a gigantic system of industry and transportation. Its people had pioneered, improvised and gambled their way across the continent.

In the twentieth century, now that the continent had been completely traversed, now that the people could no longer avoid the confrontation of all the problems that had evolved with the building of the nation, the question with which the young generation was faced was this:

... were they to accept a dispensation under which there was nothing but safe investment, to adapt themselves passively to a life without personal enterprise even on a moderate scale? How, then, was the precious spiritual bravura of the whole American enterprise to be sustained? And if it could not be sustained, what would become of America?

The Progressives, very much like the Populists, were

\textsuperscript{71}Hofstadter, pp. 204, 218.
determined to make "at least one brave attempt to recapture that bright past in which there had been a future."\textsuperscript{72}

In this desperate attempt to recapture what Americans considered to be the moment of fulfillment in the past and to recreate this golden past, one finds evidence of how completely the American dream had captivated the imagination of the American societies. Because of its early strength and of its tremendous qualities as myth, this dream persisted even after its realization was beyond all expectations, even after it had lost all relevance to the facts of life in America.

The history of the twentieth century thus far reveals the disillusionment of the modern American, his vain efforts to disguise or to avoid such disillusionment, and the vicious effect of such attempts. Despite a few genuine attempts to relink the ideal of the dream with the reality of the situation, Americans have now become the victims of illusions. In their desperation to maintain a self-created image, they are completely unaware of the unfortunate situation in which they now exist. They fail to see that the once powerful and attractive American dream has now become a nightmare.

\textsuperscript{72}All quotations in this paragraph from Hofstadter, p. 227.
The isolationist policy adopted by the nation in 1914 was indeed in keeping with the requisites of its past ideals; all contact with the depravity and the vices of the outside world had to be avoided at all costs; American innocence and perfection had to be protected. Although President Wilson couched his arguments in favour of intervention in glowing terms of idealism, it proved to be fatal to his government. Americans, indeed, never did seriously believe that they could promote the growth of representative governments abroad; nor did they seriously accept any responsibility to do so.73 Wilson, denying all selfish interests proclaimed that "America, the only idealistic Nation of the world, "would fight to protect "the rights of mankind and for the future peace and security of the world.74 He first suggested that American principles were not the principles of a "single continent" but also "the principles of liberated mankind." Wilson by these words had dared to violate the sacred American doctrine of isolationism. He had thus endangered all the "modern, progressive, moral, and democratic"75 institutions

73 Hofstadter, p. 279, n.5.
74 Quoted in Hofstadter from The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson (New York, 1925-7), V.22.
75 Hofstadter, pp. 279, n.5. 280.
of America. In 1920, therefore, the inevitable repudiation of his government occurred, and a temporary lull in the reforming enthusiasm of the nation followed.

Americans, conscious of the failure of their vision and stung with hurt pride, yet still as self-righteous as they had ever been, sought avenues of escape, and scapegoats on whom they could throw the responsibility for the failure of their dream. The Prohibition laws of the early twenties, "a symbol of moral overstrain of the preceding era,"76 are a clear manifestation of the deterioration of reforming zeal into mere 'peevishness'. The Ku Klux Klan, a by-product of Puritan enthusiasm and religious zeal, and their bitter campaigns against minority groups such as Catholics, Jews, and Negroes can be safely attributed to the disillusionment that followed an unrealized dream. They are part of the nightmare that prevails today.

After 1939, America was forced to take cognizance of the reality of the world beyond; the security to which they had been so long accustomed and which they so dearly cherished was at last disturbed. In many ways they have sought to initiate a rediscovery of the early

76 Hofstadter, p. 292.
hope in people and institutions. Yet there are many who still believe that the life which was once better than their own could be re-established and others who strive desperately to preserve the image of a perfect society in the face of all conflicting evidence.

Boorstin summarised the American dilemma quite effectively. He agrees that the New World had given Americans "a grand, unique beginning;" that in the past they had been saved "from the menace of ideology by the elusiveness and the promise of the American dream." Today, in the place of dogmas by which men live elsewhere, they have substituted "the images" among which they live. In such a world as theirs, the image has more dignity than the reality which was original, and "fantasy is more real than the reality" itself. Everyday they create illusions to deceive themselves. Consequently, a state of "national self-hypnosis" now exists in America and "a thicket of unreality" now exists between the American and the reality of his life. Americans, though conscious to some degree of their bewilderment, do not dare to confront it and look into it because their "ambiguous experience is so pleasantly iridescent, and the solace of belief in contrived reality is
so thoroughly real. 77

In the twentieth century, "America" has become synonymous with "world": Series of activities in which Americans alone take part are now dubbed "World" series. Americans are still largely convinced that their country is the 'most perfect' in the world, that all its products, customs and institutions are the best ever, that its people are the happiest and most fortunate of all, and that the ideals of freedom, equality and property still prevail. It is also their firm conviction that the success of democracy and the freedom of all nations can only be achieved through the institutions of their country. One wonders to what degree the powerful influence they exert in the world today is the result of their prestige, and not of their self-created image.

One may argue that the American dream of success in any of its versions was never realizable. One cannot, however, deny that this dream was once vital and as such was an asset to the development of the American republic. Throughout the history of the American nation, this American dream has inspired a pattern of thinking

which has given both form and significance to the morals, the politics, the religion, the culture and the literature of the American societies. Even after the failure of the dream appeared to be certain, the theme of the American dream remained alive in the literature of America. It is indeed the influence of the dream and the authors' preoccupation with it that has given a quality of distinction to the literature of America.
SECTION II: FITZGERALD AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

CHAPTER V

Amory Blaine

The increasing secularization of the American dream through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries culminated in the quest for material prosperity, which characterises the American ideal of the twentieth century. The Utopian vision, once conceived in terms of the universe and the eternal, had become, in America, temporal and localized. The work and person of Benjamin Franklin reflect the passion for material success and for personal aggrandizement which typified the eighteenth century American dream. Yet involved in this dream was an implicit confidence in the possibilities of life and in human perfectability. Inspired by such confidence, Jefferson and his contemporaries had prophesied optimist-
ically on the future of their country. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, as the impracticability of the dream became increasingly obvious, Americans most perversely surrendered themselves to the illusion that everything symbolized by the grail that lured them on in life could be eventually attained through material prosperity. The disillusion frequently experienced by these people was therefore inevitable.

In the American dream, therefore one can detect a Medusa-like quality: the very elements that gave brilliance to the American vision of the future, to the grail of success, are the ones which frequently distorted the proper perspective of the questors and finally led them into the nightmare world of disillusionment and self-deception. The seductive qualities of the 'grail' are such that they become more irresistible as the failure of the quest becomes most definite. Indeed, many a noble questor has thus been led to complete bewilderment and eventual self-destruction.

It is with this strange and tragic feature of American life that F. Scott Fitzgerald seems to be most pre-occupied. In fact, his novels, *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*, can be described as 'quest' books and
the heroes of both novels as questors dedicated to the pursuit of a grail. Fitzgerald himself explains that,

In the quest book the hero set off in life armed with the best weapons and avowedly intended to use them as such weapons are usually used, to push their possessors ahead as selfishly and as blindly as possible, but the heroes of the 'quest' books discovered that there might be a more significant use for them. ¹

Edwin Fussel argues that the quest in Fitzgerald's novels is "the search for romantic wonder (a kind of febrile secular beatitude), in terms proposed by contemporary America; that in "the social realm, the pattern of desire may be suggested by such phrases as 'the American dream' and the pursuit of happiness;" that there are "two symptomatic goals" involved in this quest: eternal youth and beauty, and money; and, moreover, that the quest for such romantic ideals is equated on the level of natural ideology with a transcendental and Utopian contempt for time and history, and on the religious level... with a blasphemous rejection of the very conditions of human existence. ²

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York, (1960), p. 120. All further references to this text will be documented in the text as (TSP).

One may indeed argue that these two goals mentioned above are actually one, because of the fallacy of American thought that money can purchase everything, even beauty and grace. Money, therefore, is the prime goal of all quests.

Fussel's arguments are based on the observation that the belief in human perfectibility, which inspired the eighteenth century American to pursue his goals with great confidence and sincerity, has in the twentieth century, as Marius Bewley puts it, been romantically elevated to the impracticable point "at which the material and the spiritual have become inextricably confused." In fact, America in this century has provided "secular objects for the religious imagination to feed on, as it also has provided tawdry objects for the aesthetic imagination." 

Fussel insists that one must be prepared to read "the story of his Fitzgerald's representative life" and the "confessions" contained in Fitzgerald's novels as American history, and reciprocally, "to read American

3 Mizener, p. 125.
4 Mizener, p. 47.
history as a tale of the romantic imagination in the United States."

Fitzgerald does seem to be especially pre-occupied with the phenomenon known as the American dream. He examines its Medusa-like qualities; that is, he reveals its seductive but corrupting qualities. Moreover, he contemplates the failure of the dream and depicts the frustrations and disillusionment which the people of his generation suffered as a result of this failure. The quest portrayed in these novels, like a Medusa, corrupts and destroys its victims with the very elements through which it seduces them. Gatsby, for example, is fascinated by the glitter of Daisy's world, and especially by Daisy herself; eventually, it is this very world which blinds and leads him to his destruction. Fitzgerald's quest heroes are, therefore, "the product and the manifestation of the seductive and corrupting motivations involved in the "American dream." Gatsby and Amory Blaine belong to "that tribe of Fitzgerald's heroes who are in pursuit of an elusive dream which, even though sometimes within their grasp, continues somehow to evade them."

5Mizener, p. 43; 6Mizener, pp. 46-7.

Amory Blaine, hero of *This Side of Paradise*, seems at the beginning of the novel, to be symbolic of the American ideal of youth. Gifted with a peculiar brightness and charm, he also possesses the romantic qualities of grace and beauty for which so many yearn. From his mother, he has inherited every trait, especially her glamour. She indeed belongs to "the last of those days when the great gardener clipped the inferior rose to produce one perfect bud." Besides enjoying the privileges of wealth and social status, Amory has "a facile imaginative mind and a taste for fancy dress" (*TSP*, p.4). Typical of the age, his family is attached to no particular city.

Amory is quite a poseur, but he is convinced that he is "a boy marked for glory." As a young man, he quite resembles America in its youth. He walks on "the air-cushions that lie on the asphalts of fourteen." Lying in bed, he would listen to "indefinite, fading and enchanting" voices and lapse into dreams of future success (*TSP*, p. 17). Amory displays the confidence of future glory and the sense of special destiny which characterised his forefathers, but lacks the vitality and the sincerity which they possessed. Like his
eighteenth century progenitors, Amory is particularly concerned with the fulfillment of his self. He maintains that "his best interests are bound up with a certain variant, changing person, whose label, in order that the past may always be identified with him, is Amory Blaine". At the age of fifteen, he possesses "a rather Puritan conscience" (TSP p. 18). Among other things, he displays "the desire to influence people in almost every way, ... a certain coldness and lack of affection ... a shifting sense of honor ... an unholy selfishness ...". "Vanity ..., a sense of people as automatons to his will, a desire to 'pass' as many boys as possible and get to a vague top of the world ..." guides his footsteps as he passes into the world of adolescence (TSP, p. 19).

Amory is a product of "the democracy born of free land, strong in selfishness and individualism," which Turner suggested was bred by frontier life in America. His sense of superiority and his concern for status are both typical of the American culture which has been shaped by the American dream. In Minneapolis, Amory has been exposed to "the crude, vulgar air of Western

\[8\] Turner, p. 15.
civilization ...--in his underwear, so to speak" (p. 8). Like his forefathers, he is fascinated by the idea of becoming wealthy. His main interest in his relationship with his father and mother is the family fortune. Remote beauties of Geneva easily divert his grief over his father's death; however, news of the exhaustion of the family millions leaves him completely distraught.

At Princeton, Amory cultivates the virtues of courage, honour, and noblesse oblige in his anxiety to fulfill his philosophy of "aristocratic egotism" (TSP, p. 18). His only objection to the "glittering caste system" in Princeton is that he is not one of the "bunch of hot cats on top" (TSP, p. 45). Realities such as death are, in his opinion, "all so horrible and unaristocratic and close to earth" that he does not concern himself with them. Charm and personality are the chief ideals of his world. Looking at Burne, who seemed "to be climbing heights where others would be forever unable to get a foothold" (TSP, p. 132), Amory almost chokes with romantic joy.

Yet for all this enthusiasm and apparent ambition, Amory is an embodiment of the frustration and the disillusionment of his age. Amory, like his creator, hails from the Middle West, from "the more prosperous strata of
those cities" where there is "a structure of millionaire residences, brilliant expensive hotels and exhilarating social activities built ... simply on the flat Western land." Consequently, he exhibits "a sensitivity and eagerness for life without the sound base of culture and taste; ...—the pre-occupation with display, the appetite for visible magnificence and audible jamboree, the vigorous social atmosphere of amiable flappers and youths comparatively untainted as yet by the snobbery of the East."\(^9\) His career throughout the novel is a constant attempt to find himself and to discover what patterns of behaviour and what ideas it is best to imitate. Amory, indeed, seems to have no sense of identity. Behind his pose and the image of himself he displays is a complete dissatisfaction with himself. As he says goodbye to Eleanor and realizes that he hates her as much as she hated him, he also realizes that "what he \(\not\) hates is \(\not\) only a mirror," for he had loved himself in her. At this moment all his poses are "strewn about the pale dawn like a broken glass" (TSP, p. 246). For one brief moment Amory has seen beyond his superficial gloss into his own naked soul.

\(^9\) Both quotations from Mizener, p. 82.
What he sees there pains him and causes him to turn away. This indeed seems to be Fitzgerald's own plight, for even as he reveals the unpleasantness and weaknesses of his generation, he never totally removes the superficial glitter which makes it attractive.

Amory's world is a corrupt one; consequently, he is damned. This corruption, however, is so completely mixed with Amory's own weakness, that one has to look very closely to discern it. Despite his romantic visions, life becomes aimless and meaningless; since

the existing order does not give him scope for his aesthetic perceptions and his emotional desires, he finds love, business, politics and religion all futile. 

So completely materialistic has the society become that it has lost the human capacity to feel. Emotions such as love, pity, public spirit, and altruism have all been lost in the mad struggle for status and financial advancement. The American dream of perfection has deteriorated to such a completely mundane state that vitality and the pursuit of ideals can only lead to frustration and disillusionment.

Fitzgerald, in portraying this disillusionment, also reveals the Medusa-like quality of the quest, of the American dream. In this novel, beauty, the object of the quest, has become "inseparably linked with evil." Every time Amory reaches after such beauty, whether it be of art, of joy, or of women, "it leers out at him with the grotesque face of evil" (TSP, p.280). Rosalind (and indeed Isabella, Clara, and Eleanor in turn) becomes the focus of his dream: she becomes the symbol of the grail he pursues. Yet this fairy 'princess', who lives in a room of pink and cream motifs, who dreads the possibility of having to live "shut away from the trees and flowers, cooped up in a little flat" (TSP, p. 195), and who loves "sunshine and pretty things and cheerfulness" (TSP, p. 196), is no princess at all. Beneath the glittering surface of her romanticism lies a dull, hard core of selfishness and callousness, a fear of responsibility and a passion for wealth and security. The objects upon which Amory's imaginative faculties have to dwell are in no way equivalent to his aesthetic vision. He is therefore doomed to be frustrated.

When Rosalind loses Amory, subsequent to her own
rejection of him, she feels that she has lost something valuable. Why she has this feeling and what she has lost she does not know. She unknowingly has lost the earnest desire for aesthetic and moral perfection which Amory epitomises. She feels, however, that the "very qualities" for which she loves Amory "are the ones that will always make him a failure" (TSP, p. 193). Fitzgerald, in these words, seems to be commenting on the uncongeniality of the modern American climate to the cultivation of such ideals as Amory pursues.

Amory and Rosalind belong to a generation over which the spirit of the past broods. They are inhabitants of "a muddled, unchastened world, still fed romantically on the mistakes and half-forgotten dreams of dead statesmen and poets" (p. 282). The early American dream, despite its irrelevance, still pervades the minds of these young Americans. Nourished "on the stuff of the nineties" (p. 157), however, this generation seems to have grown harder and harder. In their world, "social barriers" have been set up "as artificial barriers made by the strong to bolster up their weak retainers and keep out the almost strong" (p. 43). In such a world, equality of opportunity no longer prevails. No longer can the poor and the destitute find an 'asylum'
here, or an opportunity of beginning again. As Amory puts it, "Poverty may have been beautiful once, but it's rotten now. It's the ugliest thing in the world. It is essentially cleaner to be corrupt and rich than to be innocent and poor" (TSP, p. 256). This is indeed the voice of a most ardent disciple of the Goddess of material success—a voice which reveals how perverse and corrupt the American ideals have become.

In the light of the words of de Crevecoeur's prophecy and of the expectations of Franklin and of Jefferson, the world of This Side of Paradise is a world of "real moral letdown" (TSP, p. 59). Here, the problem of evil manifests itself as the problem of sex. The desire for moral perfection which gave so much vitality to the earlier dream has now degenerated into gross self-righteousness and moral squeamishness, which haunt the 'innocents' of Amory's age. After kissing Isabella, Amory experiences feelings of revulsion. In his opinion, none of the Victorian mothers "had any idea how casually their daughter was accustomed to be kissed" (TSP, p. 58). He sees girls "doing things that even in his memory would have been impossible." (TSP, pp. 58-9). A desire to make the fullest of an evening in a girl's apartment conjures up horrifying visions of
evil and death before his eyes. Even Eleanor, who seems to be a source of poetic inspiration for him, turns out to be evil under her mask of beauty.

Amory, like his forefathers, has fallen into a dream; in their tradition, he pursues an ideal. The earlier settlers, however, were keenly aware of the possibilities of the New World. They believed that there were many victories to be won in the name of God and for the benefit of all men who were desirous of improving their lot. And so they approached their task of building a paradise in the new land with maximum confidence and optimism. Amory, like his generation, has grown up "to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken ..." (TSP, p. 282). In such an environment as this, the pristine dream could never thrive.

At the end of the novel, Amory claims to have achieved the blessings of self-knowledge. He confesses that he is "a product of a versatile mind in a restless generation" (TSP, p. 278). He preaches Socialist theories, condemning all the shortcomings of his materialistic society. He deplores the predominance of the wealthy class, to which he once belonged—"those who by inheritance or industry or brains or dishonesty have become the moneyed class" (TSP, p. 270). He reminds his
audience that there are other things besides money that bring out "the best in man" even in America. (TSP, p. 274). He advocates the equality of opportunity for all, arguing that "however the brains and abilities of man may differ, their stomachs are essentially the same" (TSP, p. 275). Finally, he criticizes the reactionary policies of the rich, who have no "clear logical ideas on one simple subject except a sturdy, still opposition to all change," and the easy optimism of their laissez-faire doctrine that "it will turn out well in the end" (TSP, p. 278). His most valuable experience, he explains, is "the experience of the race" (TSP, p. 277); life, he argues, may be "a damned amusing game" if it isn't a seeking for the grail" (TSP, p. 278).

Actually, however, Amory's Socialism, his recently developed altruism, is to use Edmund Wilson's terminology, merely a "gesture of indefinite revolt." The fact that the "big man" to whom he is preaching turns out to be the father of his former school-mate immediately outweighs all the injustices and disfavours that he represents. Amory is so completely blinded by the brill-

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11 Mizener, p. 81.
liance of his own visions that he fails to see the horrible conditions that exist behind the superficial glamour of his age. So completely seduced is he by the quest for future glory that he cannot possibly reap the proper benefits of his past experiences. What is, in his opinion, self-knowledge is actually self-deception.

Amory is indeed typical of his disillusioned generation and of the perversity of his period.

Amory never realizes that the grail which lures him on is only a mirage of the original. At the end of the novel,

There was no God in his heart, he knew; his ideas were still in riot; there was ever the pain of memory; the regret of his lost youth—yet the waters of disillusion had left a deposit on his soul, responsibility and a love of life, the faint stirrings of old ambitions and unrealized dreams. But—oh, Rosaline! Rosalind! (TSP, p. 245).

Through this longing cry for his past love, Amory reveals that he still longs to hold within his grasp the elusive ideal for which he has always passionately yearned. His frustration is evident as he stretches out his arms "to the crystalline, radiant sky" (p. 282). Amory himself realizes that there was much left in life, "if only this revival of old interests did not mean that
he was backing away from it again—backing away from life itself" (TSP, p. 212). Amory, like his contemporaries, having failed to realize his dream, now lives with some vain hope of recapturing the moments of some vague past when his vision seemed to be most real. The irony of the situation is that such a past never really existed. Yet it is quite obvious that Amory will not endure his frustrations for a long time: that the questor will soon resume his quest—now, however, for some imaginary golden past. Amory, like his contemporaries, lacks the vitality to make the attempt to remold his dream in terms of the reality of his world and thereby to make his fulfillment a possibility.

Amory Blaine is indeed symbolic of the American society of the early twentieth century. Many critics have agreed that This Side of Paradise is autobiographical and that Amory is a projection of Fitzgerald himself, who, according to Mizener, felt that life was "unendurable without a belief in the possibility of realizing some romantic dream of meaningful existence, and ... life [conspired] to make such a belief impossible ..."12

One can argue that such a dream is not peculiar to

12Mizener, p. 10.
Americans. What is unique however is the series of ambiguities associated with the pursuit of such a grail in America. Amory is indeed a product of the unique past of his country.
CHAPTER VI

Jay Gatsby

The failure of the American dream and the subsequent disillusion experienced by his generation persist as predominant themes in the entire work of Scott Fitzgerald. The Beautiful and the Damned (1922), for example, reveals the author's "emerging disenchantment with the Paradise ideal,"¹³ as in The Diamond As Big As the Ritz (1922) he most brilliantly depicts the inhumanity, the corruption, the vulgarity and the absurdities upon which the power of the American propertied class was founded.

However, it is in The Great Gatsby (1925) that Fitzgerald presents his maturest vision of the United States of America, perhaps the most magnificent statement in all our literature of the cruel modernity of the 'new world', its coldness, unreality, and absurdity nourished ... by the great mass of neurosis known as 'the American Dream'.

Gatsby, like Amory, has been seduced by the quest for an ¹³Mizener, p. 33.
ideal—an ideal that has no proper objective in his particular world. The story of Gatsby's life presents to the reader "the ironic contrast between the wonder of the New World (to its Old World discoverers) and what Americans (who all came from the Old World in the first place) have made of it." In the modern world of Jay Gatsby's America, the old island "that flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes—a fresh, green breast of the New World," has lost all its trees. In their place such monstrosities as Gatsby's house now stand. Such trees had once "pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams". Beholding this continent of virgin land, man must have held his breath for a "transitory enchanted moment," "compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood or desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder," The tragic fact of Gatsby's life and of his entire generation is that there is no longer in America anything commensurate to the capacity for wonder which still survives.

Nick Carraway explains that Gatsby has been endowed with

14 Both quotations from Mizener, p. 49.

15 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1953), p. 25. All further references to this book will be documented within the text as GG.
... some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. (p. 92)

Fussel points out that the image of the seismograph here used

... is as integral as intricate; for if Gatsby is to be taken as the product and manifestation of the seductive and corrupting motivations in 'the American dream', he is also the instrument by means of which Fitzgerald will register the tremors that point to its self-contained possibilities of destruction; its fault (flaw) in the geological sense. 16

In The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald not only discusses the American dream and the disillusionment of his age but he also analyses this dream and reveals the destructive elements contained in even its purest form.

Gatsby, like Amory Blaine, is a product of early American culture. Unlike Amory, however, Gatsby is not born into the privileges of the wealthy class. Gatsby, indeed, is

... a contemporary variation of an old American pattern, the rags-to-riches story exalted by American legend as early as Crevecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer ... and primarily fixed in the popular mind by Benjamin Franklin. 17

16 Mizener, p. 46.  17 Mizener, p. 48.
One can easily recognise the similarity between the resolutions written by Gatsby on the fly leaf of his copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* and those of the youthful Franklin as published in his autobiography. In fact, Jay Gatsby is merely Jay Gatz's "Platonic conception of himself" (GG, p. 99). Gatz, at the age of seventeen, dressed in torn green jersey and canvas pants, had "invented" the sort of person he had most liked to be. Born of "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people, his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (GG, p. 99). The young Gatsby, in the manner of his forefathers, has rejected his past and given up his identity. Consequently, like them too, he dedicates himself to the myth of the future, "to the following of a grail" (GG, p. 149).

Gatsby, like Amory and the early settlers of New England, cherishes a sense of special destiny. Driven by "an overwhelming self-absorption" (GG, p. 99), he is haunted by "most grotesque and fantastic conceits" (GG, p. 99); each night, "a universe of ineffable gaudiness" spins itself out in his brain, adding to "the pattern of his fancies" (GG, p. 100). Yielding to "the drums of destiny, to destiny itself" (GG, p. 100), Gatsby drifts to a spot where he witnesses all "the beauty/and glamour
in the world" (GG, pp. 100-101), in the form of Dan Cody and his yacht. His subsequent relationship with Cody provides him with "a singularly appropriate education; the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man" (GG, p. 102).

And so, this "son of God" decides to be "about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" (GG, p. 99). This beauty he eventually finds in the person of Daisy. Like Cody, Daisy becomes an image of the grail which he seeks. Her personal beauty, her attractive house, the aura of mystery that pervades her environment, "the bought luxury of starlight" (GG, p. 149) which makes her porch bright, all these completely seduce him. In the eyes of Gatsby, "a penniless young man without a past," with "no comfortable family standing behind him," and "liable to be blown anywhere about the world" (GG, p. 149), Daisy epitomises all the magical glory of life. Daisy, "excitingly beautiful in a material setting of wealth and splendour," becomes for him a symbol of "a distant and inaccessible world."18

Yet Gatsby soon has an experience which seems to promise him the fulfillment of his dreams. Walking along

18 Miller, p. 78.
a sidewalk "white with moonlight" (GG, p. 112), with Daisy, Gatsby pauses to stare in her eyes, but sees out of the corner of his eyes,

that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees--he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder. (GG, p. 112)

Kissing her, he realizes that once he has "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (GG, p. 112). Fitzgerald ensures that no one misses the religious implications of this passage by adding that, at the touch of her lips, she "blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete" (GG, p. 112). On reading this, one cannot but be shocked by the blasphemous nature of such implications, for there is nothing divine about either Gatsby or Daisy. Gatsby has allowed his capacity for wonder to blow itself up beyond the bounds of reality. He recognises in Daisy "the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves" (GG, p. 150). He is completely hypnotised by Daisy, "gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the
poor" (GG, p. 150). Fitzgerald, through the language mentioned above, effectively conveys impressions of the secularity, the materialism, and the artificiality of Daisy and her world and, consequently, of Gatsby's ideal. Gatsby, however, develops "unqualified faith in Daisy's ideal and in her absolute reality ...." 19

Gatsby becomes a victim of his own uncontrolled capacity for wonder. To realize his dreams, to gain possession of the elusive grail he pursues, he must win Daisy for himself. The Daisy he desires, however, is non-existent; she is merely a projection of his own overblown romantic ideals. Like Amory, Gatsby falls in love with the reflection of his own imaginative conceptions in the mirror of a girl. Gatsby, however, is even more of an 'innocent' than Amory: he lacks his sense of evil, and as a result, cannot see beneath the superficiality of the beauty he pursues. He fails to detect the Medusa-like quality of his grail and is therefore doomed.

Gatsby possesses all the basic 'innocence' and the tremendous vitality of the early American dream. Yet, like the Americans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he succumbs to the illusion that every-

19 Mizener, p. 114.
thing symbolised by the grail which lures him onto success, glory, love and happiness—can be purchased with money. Listening to Gatsby talk, Carraway has vague memories of "an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago" (p. 112). However, "what he almost remembers is incommunicable forever" (GG, p. 112). Gatsby's dream, like the old dream, is doomed to fail. In fact, Gatsby's vision is a dead one.

Gatsby's vision represents a modern version of the early American dream as it existed in the imagination of the early settlers. One must agree with Raleigh in his essay when he writes:

The Great Gatsby, then, begins in a dramatization, as suggested, of the basic thesis of the early Van Wyck Brooks: that America had produced an idealism so impalpable that it lost touch with reality (Gatsby) and a materialism so heavy that it was inhuman (Tom Buchanan). The novel is another turn in the screw on this legend, with the impossible idealism trying to realize itself, to its utter destruction, in gross reality.  

Gatsby's story is indeed symbolic of the abortive attempt of the modern American to realize his dream by desperately trying to recapture a golden past which was supposed to have existed at some time in his country's history. Yet Gatsby believes "in the green light, the orgiastic future

that year by year recedes before us" (GG, p. 182). The more it eludes his grasp, the faster he runs after it and the further he stretches out his arms. This indeed is the paradox of the modern American who, although he is dedicated to the cult of the future, can only find salvation in a nostalgic passion to re-establish the past.

Gatsby comes to West Egg, determined to "recover something, some idea of himself—perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy" (GG, p. 111). His life, after he had been separated from her by the war, has been confused,

but if he could return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was .... (GG, p. 111-112)

Gatsby is quite convinced that his quest will be a success since he believes that one can indeed "repeat the past" (GG, p. 111).

The great house, the beautiful shirts and the gorgeous pink rag of a suit, the fabulous parties, are all manifestations of the wealth that Gatsby has amassed in the hope of purchasing his "incorruptible dream" (GG, p. 155). So dedicated is he to the service of "meritric-
ious" beauty that he is completely unaware of the corruption and the crime involved in his profit-making pursuits. Because of the intensity of his "romantic readiness" he is blind to the "foul dust" (GG, p. 2) that floats in the wake of his dream.

The green light that burns at the end of Daisy's dock is a symbol of Gatsby's grail, of the golden past he must recapture. One must not miss the suggestion of the vitality of the past dream that is suggested here by the colour green. Fitzgerald in his anxiety to emphasise the importance of the light as a symbol almost explains it away. He informs us that, as Gatsby puts his arm through Daisy's on the occasion of their first meeting, it possibly occurred to him that "the colossal significance of that light had vanished forever" (GG, p. 94). Because of the distance that previously separated them, the light had seemed as close to Daisy "as a star to the moon" (GG, p. 94). Now, because of their proximity, it loses its charm; his "count of enchanted objects has diminished by one" (GG, p. 94). Again, one must take note of the author's particular choice of imagery. Sun and moon are natural objects that belong to the heavens; Daisy and the light are equally artificial and mundane. The illusion from which Gatsby suffers is therefore sug-
gested to us by the imagery.

Gatsby, despite his apparent disillusionment, fails to realize that vitality alone, no matter how much there is of it, can never reawaken a dream that has long been dead. At the moment of his reunion with Daisy, when he seems to have almost realized his dream, Gatsby passes through a state of embarrassment to one of joy and wonder at her presence. Carraway explains that Gatsby

had been full of the idea so long, dreamed it right through the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. Now, in the reaction, he was running down like an overwound clock. (GG, p. 93)

Soon, there is a look of bewilderment on Gatsby's face "as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness." (GG, p. 97) Nick puts his finger on the center of Gatsby's disillusion when he informs us that after five years Daisy is beginning to tumble short of his dreams,

not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart. (GG, p. 97)
Gatsby's quest is therefore a futile one because it is not related to the reality of his life.

Gatsby is particularly enchanted by Daisy's voice, by her "deathless song." In his opinion, it could not be overdreamed because of its "fluctuating feverish warmth" (GG, p. 97). Gatsby himself explains the significance of Daisy's voice: "Her voice is full of money" (GG, p. 120). Once more we have evidence of the distortion of Gatsby's vision by the perversion of his values. Carraway observes that the 'money' in her voice was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, ... the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it .... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl .... (GG, p. 120).

The fairy-tale imagery of the above passage is very reminiscent of the description of Rosalind in This Side of Paradise. Daisy, like Rosalind, has all the surface glitter and the romantic veneer of the fairy princess. Like Rosalind too, Daisy is symbolic of the grail which seduces the quest hero with its magical glory. In these words quoted above, Carraway has exposed the "basic insincerity" of her words, of her voice. She, like Rosalind, is no true princess. "Her romantic facade, so adequate in appearance to the dreams Gatsby has built
around it, is without reality. She has no belief in it herself, and so it means nothing.\footnote{Mizener, p. 114.}

Daisy cries with joy at the sight of Gatsby's shirts and is completely swept off her feet by the display of all his possessions, because she believes in "the symbols themselves, and not in the purer reality which (for Gatsby) they only faintly embody."\footnote{Charles F. Shain, \textit{F. Scott Fitzgerald} (Minneapolis, 1961), p. 33.} The romantic posture of the movie star at Gatsby's party fascinates her, but she is offended by the rest—and inarguably because ... \footnote{She is appalled by West Egg, ... appalled by its raw vigour ...} She \footnote{She sees something awful in the very simplicity she fails to understand} (\textit{GG}, p. 108). Daisy is attracted by the romantic possibilities which her world does not possess, but which she finds in Gatsby; yet, like Rosalind, she is not willing to surrender materialistic security for such romanticism. Daisy, like Rosalind too, is typical of her generation which had grown so hard.

Eventually, Gatsby is broken by the very illusions he had created. Refusing to deny her love for her husband, Tom, as Gatsby has asked her to do, Daisy withdraws
with Tom into their "rather distinguished secret society" (GG, p. 18), seeking the comforts of the sophistication, of the wealth, and of the carelessness of her world. After listening to Tom's denunciation of Gatsby, she deserts him not because of any moral questioning of his "illicit trades" but because his source of income is not sufficiently secure. Furthermore, Gatsby does not qualify for membership in the moneyed class; he is an outsider.

Yet Gatsby's "dead dream" fights on, trying to touch what is no longer tangible, "struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward the lost voice across the room" (GG, p. 135). After the fatal accident, while Daisy and her husband sit within their residence with "an unmistakable air of natural intimacy" about them as if they "were conspiring together," Gatsby stubbornly maintains his vigil in the moonlight, "watching over nothing" (GG, p. 146). The moonlight here is most suggestive of the intangibility of the romantic ideal which Gatsby so perversely pursues.

Even though his dream is obviously smashed beyond repair, Gatsby refuses to admit defeat. Desperately, he tries to argue that Daisy's love for her husband is just "personal"; stubbornly, he struggles "to save a
fragment of the spot she had made lovely for him" (GG, p. 153), even though he knows that he has lost "that part of it, the freshest and the best, forever" (GG, p. 153). Possibly, as Nick suggests, Gatsby does realize "the high price he had paid for living too long with a single dream," and that he "had lost the old warm world," forever (p. 162). Perhaps, in the final moments of his life, he does get one fleeting moment of insight into the true nature of his romantic perception of life. One can imagine the horror with which he must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the created grass.

The reality which pierces his eyes in the raw sunlight must have been most strange and frightening. For one terrifying split second, before his death, he must have perceived that the world in which he lived was a new world,

material without being real, where poor ghosts breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about .... (GG, p. 162).

For Gatsby, the moment of revelation coincides with the moment of his death. One does wonder if Gatsby, had he
lived, would have admitted defeat and abandoned the pursuit of the grail.
CHAPTER VII

Nick Carraway

Jay Gatsby, however, is not the only one who pursues his vision of a holy grail. Nick Carraway may not be endowed with Gatsby's "great romantic readiness" but he certainly has a romantic vision of his own. Driven by restlessness after the Great War, Nick leaves the West and comes East in search of some uniformity and some sort of "moral attention forever." (GG, p. 2).

Actually, the true motivation for Nick's journey East is the hope of achieving financial gain. He intends to learn the bond business from books, which are like "new money from the mint." In these books he hopes to find "the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew" (GG, p. 3). The materialistic implications of such imagery are quite obvious. Nick is desirous of improving himself in all respects; he intends to return to literary pursuits and "to bring back all such things and become again ... the 'well-rounded man'" (GG, p. 4). Yet he never forgets the importance of profit-making throughout his career in the novel.
Foremost in his mind is that "wholesale hardware business" (GG, p. 3), upon which his family fortunes were founded.

At the beginning of the story Nick is situated on the periphery of the story. His cottage is adjacent to Gatsby in West Egg and he is in some way related to the Buchanans of East Egg. Despite his determination to live a detached life, Carraway soon finds himself "within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (GG, p. 36). As his intimacy with the Buchanans increases, through his friendship with Jordan Baker, and as he develops a relationship with Gatsby, Nick is able to observe the conditions of life around him and to make comments about them. He sees more and more into the world of the aristocracy.

Yet, as Geismar observes in The Last of the Provincials, "it is worth noticing that it is the same crude, vulgar air of Western civilization which had once caught Amory Blaine 'in his underwear,' so to speak, which now gives Nick his sense of perspective."23 Although he perceives the gross corruption that lies beneath

the glamorous facade of the society, he is still, to a certain degree, seduced by it. A visit to the Buchanan's place leaves him confused and a little disgusted, yet he is quite fascinated by the elegance and splendour of the environment. The insincerity of Daisy's words displeases him, but the warmth that flows from her stirs him and her breathless voice thrills him. He detects the frustrating anti-climax of Tom's life and "the touch of 'paternal contempt'" (GG, p. 7) in his voice, and comments on the failure of Tom's "physical egotism" as a source of nourishment for his "peremptory heart" (GG, p. 21). He, nevertheless, speaks admiringly of "the enormous power of his body" (GG, p. 7). The artificiality of Jordan's poise does not escape his notice and, moreover, he is fully aware of her basic dishonesty. However, her "exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from him" (GG, p. 9).

In fact, Nick's ambivalent attitude to society is suggested by the imagery he uses in describing the Buchanan's house. Images, such as "frosted wedding-cake," "bright rosy-colored space" (GG, p. 8), and the buoyed up young women, do suggest a certain amount of
splendour, brilliance, and delicacy; however, they also create impressions of insubstantiality, fragility and artificiality.

Throughout the story, there is evidence that whatever Nick's "intellect or experience of life rejects" his imagination willingly entertains. He seems to be convinced that regardless of how corrupt the society may be there must be some promise of success, some virtue, in all its vitality and excitement. Even as he feels the "haunting loneliness" of New York and witnesses "the young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most prominent moments of night and life," he is, at the same time, enchanted by the "warm darkness" of the "metropolitan twilight." He thrills to the "racy adventurous feel" of the city at night; "the constant flicker of men and women and machines" (GG, p. 57) give satisfaction to his restless eyes. His imagination allows him to enjoy a secret romantic intimacy with the romantic women from crowds and to experience a share of their gaiety and intimate excitement.

In Carraway's eyes, Gatsby, the archetype of the American spirit, represents everything for which he has "an unaffected scorn," yet he is charmed by Gatsby's

\[24\] Mizener, p. 116.
"extraordinary gift for hope" and "romantic readiness" (GG, p. 2). The mystery that surrounds Gatsby and the "quality of eternal reassurance" in his smiles fascinate him. As Gatsby's elusive dream slips further and further away from his grasp, Nick's sympathy for him steadily increases. Eventually, Carraway, at the age of thirty, with "the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair" rejects Jordan Baker, who was too wise "ever to carry well forgotten dreams from age to age" (GG, p. 136), condemns the rest of her crowd, but finds himself alone on Gatsby's side. Gatsby, he finally decides, is "worth the whole damn bunch put together" (GG, p. 154).

And so, Nick's interest in Gatsby has grown steadily as he sees more and more of the hypocrisy of the society of Toms and Daisys. The intensity with which Gatsby seeks his goal gives Nick some hope that he will succeed. So completely seduced is he by the vitality of Gatsby's dream that he fails to see that some of the "foul dust" in the wake of Gatsby's dream is Gatsby's.

Carraway defines the central issue of Gatsby's disillusionment, the high price of "living too long with a single dream" (GG, p. 162), and considers it tragic that
such vitality and such hope should come to waste. Yet, in defining Gatsby's tragedy, he reveals his own great disillusionment: in his closing ironic observations, Carraway regretfully admits that such romantic greatness as Gatsby's can never be achieved in this modern world. He expresses in more complete terms the frustration of the generation to which Amory Blaine belongs. Nick himself is completely frustrated after Gatsby's death. For him, the East becomes "haunted" and "distorted beyond his eyes' power of correction" (GG, p. 178). Still restless, he decides to retrace his steps to the West. However he is determined to "leave things in order" (GG, p. 128), and to sweep away all the refuse before he leaves. His last act is most significant: he erases the obscene word of the steps of "that huge incoherent failure of a house" (GG, p. 181). Carraway, indeed, seems to be making one last effort to make amends to Gatsby and to preserve the image of his vision in all its purity. The failure of Gatsby's dream does not seem to have discouraged Nick's desire to see the world "uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (GG, p. 2). Nick, at the end of the novel, is still a questor at heart. He indeed displays the perversity with which the
Americans of Fitzgerald's age clung to a dream that was in no way relevant to the existing situation.
CHAPTER VIII

Social Breakup

Kenneth Eble, in his book *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, makes the following observation:

Fitzgerald's attitude makes *The Great Gatsby* almost a fictional counterpart of Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History*. Being deprived of that edge of the frontier against which energies, ambitions, ideals, can be freshly honed, the American character must undergo change.... The myth of second chance which misleads both Gatsby and Carraway grows out of the common Western experience of pulling up stakes one place and trying it again further West.25

*The Great Gatsby* is indeed a story of Westerners. Nick Carraway, descendent of the Duke of Buccleuch, hails from Minnesota; Gatsby comes from North Dakota. Tom, Daisy, and Jordan, Nick tells us, are also Westerners. With the loss of a rural paradise in the West, no longer "the warm center of the world" (*GG*, p. 3), they have pulled up stakes and moved to the now superior East in the hope of finding a better life there. In the novel,

therefore, one notices that the direction of the trek has been reversed, for the pioneers of the West had travelled from the East in search of better living conditions. The East has now become the "safety valve" in place of the West.

Fitzgerald's Westerners, however, suffer from "some deficiency in common which makes them subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (GG, p. 177). Eble suggests that "Fitzgerald's 'fable' contrasts America's romantic Western past with her unromantic Eastern present." The 'fable' does more than this; it reveals all the reversals experienced by Americans as a result of the closing of the frontier. With this closure, new fields of opportunity grew scarce, avenues of escape from the immediate difficulties of life were closed, and the freshness and the confidence which the frontier engendered were all destroyed. As Walter Prescott Webb puts it, "The Metropolis had destroyed the Frontier and now for the first time ... must stew in its own juice." In The Great Gatsby, the corrupt

\[26\] Eble, p. 96.

"metropolis", the East, has already destroyed the frontier and has now been stewing in its own juice for a long while.

Gatsby's story, according to Eble, is the story of Western energies which at one time went into settling the continent; at the time of Dan Cody, into exploiting it; and, at Gatsby's time, into illicit activities in the East on the one hand and vain pursuit of an ideal on the other.

"For Gatsby," Eble continues, "the frontier is closed, and the frontier virtues are not adequate for the civilised world in which he has to pursue his dream." 28

The civilised world of The Great Gatsby is a corrupt one; the society is a broken one. In such a world, vitality is strangled and the pursuit of ideals leads to frustration. In the novel, the world of the "green" past has degenerated into the contemporary world of ash grey heaps--a world where "ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air." In this wasteland, small grey clouds take on fantastic shapes and scurry

28 Eble, p. 96.
and hurry here and there in the faint dawn wind. This restlessness is indeed typical of the ash grey men who pursue their "obscure operations" (GG, p. 23) in this desolate land under the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg.

The eyes of Dr. Eckleburg which remind Wilson of the omniscience of God are of great symbolic significance. Like Gatsby's "business", there is nothing divine about them. They are pale and enormous, and they look out of no face, but instead from a pair of enormous spectacles, which pass over a non-existent nose. Carraway suggests that they may have been left there by some "wild wag of an oculist" who has now sunken himself into "eternal blindness" (GG, p. 23) and has forgotten them. These eyes now dimmed by sun and rain, continually "brood" over the "solemn" scene. The fact, that Wilson speaks of God as he looks at them, seems to suggest that Fitzgerald, in describing the attitude of the oculist, is making a subtle comment on the apparent impersonality of the God of his day. God, who had given special aid to the earlier settlers who were his chosen servants, now seems to be sitting aloof, completely disillusioned by the desecration of his virgin land, America. He seems to be watching and brooding, without being part-
cularly interested in the fate of the present generation.

The entire world of The Great Gatsby seems to be tainted. The city of New York rises "in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of non-olfactory money." The significance of the images of heaps and sugar is suggested by Carraway's further comment that the city seen for the first time is the city seen "in all its first wild promise of all the mystery and beauty of the world" (GG, p. 69). This remark would suggest that the virtues of the city are only superficial. Beneath the whiteness of the heaps there is the rot; the sweetness of the sugar lumps can only provide one serving. The visitor to New York soon discovers that the fruits which fall into his hands in this "sensuous" city are "overripe" and have begun to rot. The horror and the decadence of the city are therefore revealed by such descriptions.

Tom and Daisy Buchanan represent the moneyed class of Fitzgerald's generation. They actually belong nowhere, for they have "drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together" (GG, p. 6). The emptiness and insecurity of such a life are very obvious. Dyson argues that Tom's restlessness is "an
arrogant assertiveness seeking to evade in bluster the deep uneasiness of selfknowledge." He is here referring to the fallacy of self-deception to which the disillusioned resorted after the close of the nineteenth century. The arrogance of Tom's eyes, the enormous power of his body, his husky gruff voice with the "touch of paternal contempt" (GG, p. 7) are qualities all typical of the tough masculinity of the frontier world. His determined but wistful search for "the dramatic turbulence of some irrevocable football game" (GG, p. 6) indicates his need to expend the energy which had once gone into the development of the West. His pretentious book-knowledge may well suggest a nostalgia for the old culture which his country had rejected a few centuries before. His basic hypocrisy is revealed in the cliches he uses to condemn the very shortcomings of which he is guilty. Like some virtuous innocent, he remarks,

I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out .... Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have inter-marriage between black and white. (GG, p. 130)

Once more Tom resorts to the comforts of self-righteousness in his anxiety to avoid knowledge of himself and of

29 Mizener, p. 113.
his sins.

Daisy displays all the sophistication, the carelessness, the craze for wealth, and the uneasy security of her "rather distinguished secret society" (GG, p. 18). Her world is basically one of emptiness and frustration. "What'll we do this afternoon?" she cries, "and the day after that, and the next thirty days" (GG, p. 118)? Like her associates, she has no interest in the welfare of those outside her class. The spirit of altruism which the early dream had evoked in such Americans as Benjamin Franklin is now dead. She is a product of "the artificial world ... redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year, summing up the sadness and suggestiveness of life in new tunes" of the world of wailing saxophones, of "golden and silver slippers" and "the shining dust," of rooms that throb with the "low, sweet fever, while fresh faces drift here and there like rose petals blown by the sad horns around the floor". The image of rose petals does create a vivid impression of the lack of vitality in this withering society which perhaps bloomed like a full rose at one time. Daisy's life has indeed been shaped by the force of "love, of money, of unquestion-
able practicality" (GG, p. 151), all of which qualities she found embodied in the bulkiness of Tom Buchanan. The value of life for her is symbolised by the glitter of the movie world and the fake beauty of pearl necklaces.

Dyson points out that "the social breakup at this level of Tom's and Daisy's world is paralleled in the working class. Myrtle, Tom's mistress, is the quintessence of vulgarity. Her 'class' is no strong peasant culture, but a drifting wreckage of the spiritless and defeated." Myrtle's one saving grace, her vitality, has now been "converted into impressive hauteur" (p. 31). Through her affectations of the manners of the moneyed class, Myrtle reveals how far the corruption of that class has deteriorated into vulgarity. She speaks of "boy" and "girl" dogs, and refuses to use the word "bitch" which Tom uses. She complains that her husband knows nothing of breeding and is not "fit to lick her shoe" (p. 35). Yet she continually violates the sanctity of her marriage, carries on an affair with another woman's husband, and invites her sister to enjoy the possible seduction of a stranger. The pity of her case is that vitality, the once great American virtue, should now corrupt and destroy American citizens. It is in death

30Mizener, p. 114.
that Myrtle expends that "tremendous vitality she had stored up so long" (p. 138).

In fact, it is Gatsby's vitality that hurls him towards his inevitable end. Lionel. Trilling observes that to "the world it is anomalous in America, just as in the novel it is anomalous in Gatsby, that so much raw power should be haunted by envisioned romance."31

So haunted is Gatsby by his vision that he is completely unaware of the wrongness of the illicit profit-making activities through which he hoped to purchase his grail. Gatsby, the associate of the notorious Mr. Wolfsheim, has obviously been
derailed by values and attitudes held in common with the society that destroys him .... In short, Gatsby is somewhat more than pathetic, a sad figure preyed upon by the American leisure class, The novel is neither melodrama nor bathetic, but critical. The unreal values of the world of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, to a very considerable degree, are Gatsby's values too, inherent in his dream. 32

Gatsby is himself Fitzgerald's fullest criticism of the American dream.

Gatsby, in attempting to satisfy his romantic appetite, is indeed being a devoted son about the business of his "fathers"--the early settlers of his country.

31Mizener, p. 17. 32Mizener, p. 47.
He is a "son of God", but he is certainly not a servant of God, as these Pilgrim Fathers had shown themselves to be. The virgin land of the New World, with its abundant supply of fish, fowl, and other meat, with its many valuable plants, and with a soil rich in mineral wealth, was the object on which their religious and aesthetic imagination fed. Gatsby's dream, in contrast, is nourished by the charm and glitter of Daisy's corrupt World. In such a world as this his dream "cannot possibly remain pristine."\(^{33}\)

What makes Gatsby appear to be heroic and, consequently, sets him apart from the rest of the society is his sincerity and his great confidence that his quest will be a success. Carraway, armed with his provincial squeamishness, can detect the corrupt and repulsive elements in Gatsby's vision, yet the intensity of Gatsby's pursuit of this vision is to him a promise of success. What Carraway does not realize, until perhaps the end of the novel, is that this very intensity which makes Gatsby larger than the rest also makes him vulnerable. He is, therefore, completely disillusioned when Gatsby's dream disintegrates into the very dust of which it is composed.

\(^{33}\)Mizener, p. 47.
Fitzgerald, in *The Great Gatsby*, seems to be evoking, in highly imaginative and poetic terms, a sense of the basic goodness of the early American dream. At the same time, he also seems to be offering its most destructive criticisms. One can detect in the novel itself the feeling of regret which the author, like Carraway, experiences as he depicts the failure of a dream which once involved the greatest possibilities—a dream which can still evoke such beautiful and highly imaginative language as we find in *The Great Gatsby*. The deficiencies which the author exposes in Gatsby are the very deficiencies "inherent in contemporary manifestations of the American vision itself—a vision no doubt admirable, but stupidly defenseless before the equally American world of Tom and Daisy." Marius Bewley argues that Gatsby's deficiencies of intelligence and judgment bring him to his tragic death—a death that is spiritual as well as physical. But the more important question that faces us through our sense of the immediate tragedy is where they have brought America.  

In fact, when Gatsby dies hardly anyone mourns

34 Mizener, pp. 140-1.
his death or comes to witness his burial. If Gatsby can be accepted as the embodiment of the American dream, can it not also be that Fitzgerald, through Gatsby's story, is expressing his concern for the apparent lack of interest in—or, perhaps we should say, the complete unawareness of—the failure of the early American dream in the society of his day? Like his contemporaries, Fitzgerald himself seems to be so bewildered by the situation that he has no idea as to what steps should be taken to make up for such a failure. Instead, like Carraway (who to a large degree seems to be Fitzgerald's mouthpiece in the novel), he seems to be cherishing, in the midst of his bewilderment, a fond hope that the American quest may one day be successfully fulfilled, despite the most unfavourable conditions which prevail in America of the twentieth century.
Like Scott Fitzgerald, James Baldwin is very concerned with the "conundrum" of contemporary American life—a conundrum which reflects the deficiencies "inherent in contemporary manifestations of the American vision ...."\(^1\) Baldwin, in his essays and his novels, attempts to create an intellectual picture of the "nightmare" into which the American dream of the past has now deteriorated. Moreover, he ventures to make suggestions as to how the American people of today could meet the "challenge" of their peculiar situation and so achieve their salvation.

Baldwin, in his writings, repeatedly refers to the great American illusion that the American state arouses

\(^1\)Mizener, p. 140.
the envy of other people because Americans are powerful and rich. He confesses that he is often tempted to believe that "this illusion is all that is left of the great dream that was to have become America." He asserts that whether this is so or not, "this illusion certainly prevents Americans from making America what they say want it to be."\(^2\)

Baldwin describes the "ash grey men" of Fitzgerald's wasteland as an "incoherent" people living in an "incoherent" country—a country in which "the equation of success with the big times reveals an awful disrespect for human life—and human achievement"(NKMN, p. 61), a country in which the youngsters search "desperately for the limits which would tell them who they were, and create for them a challenge to which they could rise" (NKMN, p. 120). The author contemplates not only the bewilderment but the inhumanity of the modern American.

In an essay, "In Search of A Majority," Baldwin examines the American past when a so-called "majority" did create "the standards by which the country lived or created the standards to which the country aspired"(NKMN, p. 129). This "majority", in his opinion, was formed by

\(^2\)James Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961), pp.99. All further references to this book will be documented in the text as (NKMN).
the aristocracy of Virginia and New England, who created the American heritage. Such people, he argues, "kept alive and bore witness to two elements of man's life," realities which are no longer respected in America: "social forms, called manners," and "the interior life or the life of the mind" (NKMN, pp. 129-30). These vanished standard bearers, nevertheless, had limitations, none the least of which was that

their standards were essentially nostalgic. They referred to a past condition; they referred to the achievements, the laborious achievements of a stratified society; and what was evolving in America had nothing to do with the past. (NKMN, p. 130)

Baldwin here puts his finger on the strange paradox of the American past: the apparent rejection of the past and the dedication to the future, despite the obvious persistence of the influence of the Old World ideals and traditions.

According to the author, these standards of early America were easily swept away by the onrush of the European tidal wave. To use his exact words,

Everybody was here in America suddenly in the melting pot, as we like to say, but without any intention of being melted. They were here because they wanted to leave wherever they had been and they were here to make their lives, and achieve their futures, and to establish a new identity. (NKMN, p. 130).
America, the land of opportunity, offered to them escape from the past, refuge for the present, and hope for the future. Baldwin here is reminding us of the great American 'asylum' which de Crevecoeur and his contemporaries in America had proclaimed with rousing optimism. According to Baldwin, however, history witnessed at this time an unprecedented "conglomeration of hopes, fears, and desires" (NKMN, pp. 130-1).

Like Turner and Jones, historians of the American frontier, Baldwin observes the peculiar effect of the New World on the European immigrants. He argues that despite their large numbers their influence was slight; that since it became "their necessity to make themselves over in the image of their new and unformed country" they were soon forced to take places as a minority. Consequently, universally accepted standards and forms completely vanished and Americans could no longer achieve an identity. Status became "a kind of substitute for identity," and "money and the things money can buy" were accepted as symbols of status. (NKMN, p. 131). Yet, Baldwin argues somewhat paradoxically, modern Americans are more metaphysicals than materialists because of the miracles that they expect from things. Perhaps, there-
fore, he would consider Gatsby to be the greatest metaphysical of twentieth century American literature.

Baldwin himself admits that his analysis of the American past is a very simplified one. Yet one must agree that he has touched upon the most significant factors of the history of the American people—a history which resulted in the "social panic" of today. He has recognised the destructive elements that were inherent in the early American dream of future glory: the paradox of the past and the present, the loss of identity, the failure of the melting pot, and above all the fallacious trust in the omnipotence of financial prosperity. The Goddess of success which the Americans have always worshipped has indeed been transformed by the touch of the American Midasses.

The author points out that the modern American still asserts that his country is the land of opportunity, the land of freedom, "where all inequalities vanish before the determined will" (NKMN, p. 61). The theory of the equality of opportunity which inspired the earlier settlers still prevails despite the overwhelming evidence of its non-existence. Nevertheless, the American is constantly haunted by the fear of losing his status in
society—a fear which, according to Baldwin, sometimes amounts to social "paranoia." "One," in America, he explains,

cannot afford to lose status on this peculiar ladder, for the prevailing notion of American life seems to involve a rung-by-rung ascension to some hideously desirable state. If this is one's concept of life, obviously one cannot afford to slip back one rung. When one slips, one slips back not a rung but back into chaos and no longer knows who he is. (NMBN, p. 133)

This fear of losing one's status Baldwin holds largely responsible for the status of the less privileged American minorities, like the Negroes. It is indeed the position of these people which indicates the bottom, beneath which the majority of Americans should not fall. Baldwin, therefore, is suggesting that, contrary to popular belief and to the usual boast of equality in America, the stability of the American society depends upon a necessary inequality of its people, that a race of selfish and inhuman people has been engendered by the American past; and, finally, that the American asylum has now become instead a jungle where a constant struggle for survival persists.

Baldwin argues that "the national self-image" of contemporary America, which suggests "hard work and good
clean fun and chastity and piety and success," has, in fact, nothing to do with "what or who an American really is," with "what life is"; that beneath this admirable image, "a great many unadmitted despairs and confusions, and anguish and unadmitted crimes and failures hide" (NKMN, p. 132). This indeed is a complete denial of the American virtues proclaimed by de Crevecoeur in the eighteenth century: Baldwin, by reference to this national self-image, reveals how tenaciously the nation has clung to a collection of myths--myths which can be totally recognised as a reflection of the old American dream

...that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen, or that Americans are invincible in battle and wise in peace, that Americans have always dealt honorably with Mexicans, Indians and all other neighbours and inferiors, that American men are the world's most direct and virile, that American women are pure.

The author makes it clear that Americans, deep within themselves, know that such myths are false. However, they cling to them in order to console themselves with this false sense of superiority and to find security in an unworthy glorification of power and wealth. The author, speaking as a citizen of the United States of
of America, confesses,

We are controlled here by our confusion, far more than we know, and the American dream has therefore become something much more closely resembling a nightmare, on the private, domestic, and international levels. Privately, we cannot stand our lives and dare not examine them; domestically, we take no responsibility for (and no pride in) what goes on in our country; and internationally, for many millions of people, we are an unmitigated disaster. 3

Baldwin here supports Boorstin's diagnosis of the "national hypnosis" from which his country appears to be suffering.

Baldwin does not believe that such a situation is beyond salvation. He recognises in the tragic American situation one of the "irreducible facts of life:"

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or thought one knew; to what one possessed or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free ... for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

(NKNN, p. 117).

Americans must therefore "crack the American image and find out and deal with what it hides" (NKNN, p. 132).

3Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (New York, 1963), pp.115,103. All further reference to this book will be documented in the text as (The Fire).
They must decide what they really think is real, and what they really want out of life for themselves. Regretfully, he claims that

the nation has spent a large part of its time and energy looking away from one of the principal facts of life. This failure to look reality in the face diminishes a nation as it diminishes a person, and it can only be described as unmanly. *(NKMN, p. 116)*.

All Americans must be willing to give up attitudes and beliefs which have become an integral part of their lives; they must embark upon the most difficult task of self-examination, self-recognition and self-mastery. Uncertainty, according to Baldwin, makes a man desperate in his efforts to protect himself, but what the lost American tries to protect is not himself but an "image" of himself and a "system" of reality he has himself evolved. America therefore (if I be permitted to use Blakean terminology) must "cleanse the doors of its perception" and accept the reality with which it is faced, before it can rescue itself from the nightmare which it now experiences.

Baldwin himself neatly sums up the entire American situation in the following words:

There is an illusion about America, a myth about America to which we are clinging which has nothing
to do with the lives we lead and I don't believe that anybody who has been brought up against it—and almost all of us have one way or another—this collision between one's image of oneself and what one actually is is always very painful and there are two things you can do about it, you can meet the collision head-on and try and become what you really are or you can retreat and try to remain what you thought you were, which is a fantasy, in which you will certainly perish. (NKMN, p. 153).

This, as Baldwin sees it, is the tragic situation in America today: the American's vision of himself is no longer relevant to the reality that exists and, consequently, his dreams cannot be pertinent to the facts of his life. Hence, they can never be realized. Instead, the persistence of dead dreams in such an environment is only a perversity which would eventually corrupt and destroy the one in whose imagination they exist.

Baldwin recognises the suffering, the self-denial, and the many hardships necessary for the achievement of such maturity and self-knowledge as he advocates. He admits that it is difficult to accept the fact that life is tragic and that death, as well as love, birth and the struggle for survival, is a constant. So tremendous had been the promise of a great future for America which existed in the earlier years of its history! Yet Baldwin
insists that this "impossibility," which he advocates, must be achieved if America wishes to save itself. Baldwin, therefore, in suggesting how his country can escape the nightmare which now threatens to destroy it—the nightmare which was once the early American dream, seems to be presenting his own version of an American dream.

In an essay, "The Discovery of What it Means to be an American," a title which seems to disprove the validity of the answer to the question provided by de Crevecoeur, the author discusses the responsibility of the American writer to his country. He argues that "the rich confusion" of the American society "in which nothing is fixed and in which the individual must fight for his identity," offers "unprecedented opportunities" to contemporary writers (NKMN, p. 11). He considers the tensions and the possibilities of American life to be tremendous. The importance of the writer in America today, Baldwin maintains, is this: "that this country is yet to be discovered in its real sense" (NKMN, p. 153). The writer should, therefore, strive to discover the true America and to describe things that others are too busy to describe. Baldwin therefore has offered a new frontier and new opportunities to his contemporaries—opportunities
which ironically enough do not invite the participation of tough masculinity of the earlier frontier days but that of the literary man. Baldwin, however, regrets that the writer too often becomes a "symptom" of the very tensions rather than an examination of them. This indeed seems to have been the case with Scott F. Fitzgerald. Baldwin's literary dream, like the earlier American dream, does possess Medusa-like qualities. The grail which seems to be seducing him can well prove to be fatal.

Baldwin, in his own writings, earnestly tries to reveal, for the benefit of his fellow-countrymen, those truths which he believes he has discovered in America. The question of colour which seems to be predominant in most of his work is only taken up because "the question of colour, especially in America operates to hide graver questions of the self" (NKMN, p. xiii). He repeatedly denies that

the Negro problem in America can be even discussed coherently without bearing in mind its context; its context being the history, traditions, customs, the moral assumptions and pre-occupations of the country; in short, the general social fabric.

However, he realizes that since social affairs are not the
first concern of a writer,

it is absolutely necessary that he establish between himself and these affairs a distance which will allow, at least, for clarity, so that before he can look forward in any meaningful sense, he must first be allowed to take a long look back.

The past, Baldwin explains, is all

that makes the present coherent, and further, that the past will remain horrible for exactly as long as we refuse to assess it honestly.4

All Americans who deny themselves the knowledge of the past are therefore doomed to perish in illusions of the present—in the nightmare that now exists.

The Negro question therefore is one of the many avenues through which the modern American avoids the disturbing realities of his life. The negro's position has become the only "fixed" one in "the perpetually shifting and bewildered populace" (NKMN, p. 20), since ironically it tells them where the bottom is in this land of frightening incoherence. "I think," writes Baldwin,

if one examines the myths which have proliferated in this country concerning the Negro, one dis-

4Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son (Boston, 1955), pp.86. All further reference to this book will be documented in the text as (NNS).
covers beneath these myths a kind of sleeping terror of some condition which we refuse to imagine. In a way, if the Negro were not here, we might be forced to deal within ourselves and our own personalities, with all those vices, all those conundrums, and all those mysteries with which we have invested the Negro race. (NKMN, p. 133).

According to Baldwin, therefore, the future of the United States of America—a future which now seems destined to be even more chaotic than the present state of affairs—is especially involved with the future of the Negro in America. Similarly, the present state of the Negro in America today is a definite outgrowth of the American past and a vivid reflection of the many intricacies of the conundrum that is America today. The Negro problem, therefore, finds a place in the work of James Baldwin only because of its relevance to the American problem in its entirety—because of its relevance to the intricacies of the American dream.
CHAPTER X

Giovanni's Room

Baldwin's Giovanni's Room is largely a story about homosexuality. Unlike Another Country, in which this theme is subjected to a much more complex analysis, there are no Negro characters in this novel. In fact, the problem of colour is not mentioned once throughout the entire novel. In this novel, Baldwin not only reveals the confusion and the bewilderment of the modern American but also the complete reversal of trends and the corruption of ideals associated with the earlier American dream.

Jefferson, like most of his contemporaries, had believed that America offered not only an escape from the bondage of the past but a freshness and a confidence that could never have been found in the Europe of his time. Consequently, he urged his fellow-citizens to protect, at all costs, their permanent felicity, their morals, and their health from the contagion of inferior European life. He even dared to boast that "no man living
will ever see an instance of an American removing to settle in Europe, and continuing there." Baldwin, like Henry James and others before him, reveals in *Giovanni's Room* how completely wrong such national optimism has proven to be in terms of modern America.

In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, one can observe the descendents of the western pilgrims, who were destined to complete the "great circle" of civilization, retrace their forefather's footsteps as they travel East in search of material prosperity. Gatsby and his contemporaries have most certainly lost the felicity, the freshness, and the innocence which their ancestors were once supposed to have possessed. In their mad pursuit of the elusive grail of success, in their frenzied attempts to realize their dreams, they seem to court the immorality and the depravity which was once identified with the Old World--the very evils which their ancestors sought to avoid in their journey West. David, the protagonist of *Giovanni's Room*, goes even a step further.

David's ancestors had "conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an

5Jefferson, p. 367.
ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past." Yet "this great American football player" (GR, p. 44) makes a desperate attempt to evade something in his past which shamed and frightened him by not "looking at the universe, by not looking at _himself_, by remaining in effect, in constant motion" (GR, p. 30-31). Eventually tiring of such motion, David takes a boat to France in the hope of finding his true self there. Because of his bewilderment, David leaves his "garden of Eden" (p. 36) in America and returns to the land of bondage from which his forefathers had emigrated. The dream of future success which gave such impetus to the early years of American development has now become a nightmare which drives the modern American to seek salvation in the mystery of his past.

David, as a young boy, has had a brief insight into his true self, into his future. What he sees frightens him, for it jeopardizes "that immaculate manhood which is his pride and joy"--that tough masculinity which his ancestors had cherished from the infancy of their country. As a result, he turns away from it and tries to avoid it. Yet it remains at "the bottom of

his mind like a decomposing corpse;" it changes, it thickens, it sours "the atmosphere of his mind" (GR, p. 24). David becomes secretive and cruel; he avoids the intimacy of even his father, for he does not want to be known. Anxiously he fights to create the image of his life which he "most desperately needed to believe" (GR, p. 30). Slowly he realizes that his capacity for love, as well as his innocence, is dying. In his desperation to avoid himself and to protect his self-created image, David resorts to a life of action, but he soon tires of

... the joyless seas of alcohol, wearied of the blunt, bluff, hearty, and totally meaningless friendships, wearied of wandering through the forests of desperate women, wearied of the work, which fed him only in the most brutally literal sense. (GR, p. 31).

And so, unable to accept his role, as distinguished from his place, "in the extraordinary drama which is America" (NKMN, p. 5), David travels to France—to Paris, "the city, in brief, where all become drunken on the fine old air of freedom" (NNS, p. 127). David hopes to discover himself from the vantage point of Europe.

In Europe, David tries desperately to avoid his past. He enjoys a sort of intimacy with Hella, a young
American girl; he protests that he loves her and makes himself believe it. Yet he realizes that what he thought of as love was really

... nights in bed, of the peculiar innocence and confidence, which will never come again, which had made those nights so delightful, so unrelated to the past, present, or anything to come, so unrelated, finally, to his life since it was not necessary for him to take any but the most mechanical responsibility for them. And these nights were being acted out under a foreign sky, with no one to watch, no penalties attached .... (GR, p. 9-10)

He asks Hella to marry him, but only, as he later confesses, to give himself "something to be moored to," for he finds his freedom "unbearable" (GR, p. 10). Actually neither David nor his girl, Hella, is capable of love: "she resents her dependence on men; he fears to lose his independence in her." Consequently, when she leaves him to go to Spain, he submits to a homosexual relationship with Giovanni, who, though he is beautiful, "is presumed to be less demanding." 7

His relationship with Giovanni, like the rest of his life, is based upon "one particular lie among many lies" he has told--"told, lived and believed" (GR, pp.10-11). David professes that he has never slept with a boy. But he had! David's future, the very one he had fore-

7 Both quotations from "Black Man's Burden," (anon.) TLS, Sept. 6, 1963, p. 672.
seen in the black cavern of his mind—the future he tried to reject for a life of frenzied, meaningless action—catches up with him. This time, however, he temporarily submits to it, because of the privacy he enjoys in France and, moreover, because he believes that he would be free of all obligations and responsibilities.

When Giovanni proves to be somewhat demanding, David does not hesitate to leave him. Once more he tries to avoid the reality of his situation by returning to his relationship with Hella, who has now resolved to have him. This too inevitably fails. Giovanni, distraught by David's desertion, commits murder; he is soon caught and put to death. Hella, rejected by the guilty David, leaves him to face an even more uncertain future, even more confused and more incapable of love than before. David still does not completely accept himself for what he is. He is left with "the dreadful weight of hope" on his shoulders—the hope that "the heavy grace of God, which has brought him to this place, is all that can carry him out of it" (GR, p. 223).

The tragedy of the final situation of this novel is that the sacrifice of Giovanni's beauty and of his life has resulted in no gain for anyone—"not even an insight
into their own true nature for, to tell the truth, their very natures have become lies, fighting for what they least want." One wonders if Baldwin, in this novel, is not suggesting that the sacrifice of European beauty, culture, and traditions, on the part of the American, has no positive results and will never have until he becomes capable of an honest self-examination. Baldwin indeed still fears that without such honest self-examination America, like David, "may yet become one of the most distinguished and monumental failures in the history of nations" (NKMM, p. 116).

David does seem to be symbolic of the contemporary American "whose principle is action and whose jewel is optimism" (NKMM, p. 224). Giovanni describes him as one of those Americans, who have "a funny sense of time—or perhaps ... no sense of time at all ...." He observes that David acts "as though with enough time and all that fearful energy and virtue [his] people have, everything will be settled, solved, put in its place." He then explains that the word 'everything' involves "all the serious, dreadful things, like pain and death and love, in which [the] Americans do not believe" (GR, p. 48).

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
Baldwin is pre-occupied with the blind optimism typical of the American who has clung more tenaciously to his dream of future glory even as he sees the chances of its realization grow less and less—of the American who, rejecting his past in the Old World, has completely dedicated himself to the myth of the future.

David is very much aware of the power and the potentialities of his country; in his opinion, America is "very high and new and electric—exciting," and "very—twentieth century" (GR, p. 46). While in Paris, he is conscious of "the time gone by"—for Paris is "old, is many centuries," in America, he feels "all the time to come" (GR, pp. 46-7). His whole existence is dependent upon the future, when everyone else would be tired and "the world—for Americans— is not so new" (GR, p. 47). David, in short, has not only rejected his immediate past lived on the American continent, but also "that other past, irrevocable now on the shores of Europe ..." (NNS, p. 136).

Giovanni reminds him: "After all you are merely emigrants. And did not leave Europe so long ago." David retorts, "We have led different lives than you; things have happened to us there in America which have never happened here in Europe" (GR, p. 47). David is here
parroting one of the cliches that has been long associated with the peculiar growth of the nation—a cliche that paradoxically is the product of the American dream but has also added fire to the flames of American enthusiasm in the earlier years of the nation's existence. In David's opinion, Americans have now become "a different people" and he must believe this to maintain his confidence in his country and himself. He fails to see that this kind of self-hypnosis is fast dehumanising his people and himself. As Giovanni puts it,

Ah! If it had only made you a different people! ...
... But it seems to have turned you into a different species. You are not, are you, on a different planet? (GR, p. 47).

Baldwin himself argues in "A Quest Of Identity" that the one fallacy which keeps his contemporaries alive is this:

Only America is alive, only Americans are doing anything worth mentioning in the arts, or in any other field of human activity: to America only, the future belongs. (MNS, p.136)

David refuses to look at the present even as he tries to repress the past. He avoids the sight of his true self because it would be "like looking at the naked sun" (GR, p. 212). He is contemptuous of other people's sufferings. France, he observes, is not the
"land of opportunity" that America is: the youths there are not provided for and, consequently, are in a difficult position. David denies the accusation that time, for the American, is like the sea in which "the big fish eat the little fish and the ocean doesn't care." Instead, he argues that in America "the little fish have gotten together and are nibbling at the body of the whale." What David cannot understand is that the result of such nibbling, as Giovanni points out, "will be that there will no longer be any grandeur anywhere, not even at the bottom of the sea" (p. 49). David cannot recognise the corrupting and destructive forces contained in the struggle for status and for existence in American society today.

The self-righteous attitude and the sense of superiority, so typical of the modern American who is most anxious to hide whatever human limitations and weaknesses he may possess and so to protect his image, are both vividly displayed by David. In a letter to his father, he writes, "I don't dislike the French, it's just that you don't think they have our virtues--I might add, they don't." (GR, p. 164) Public demonstration of affection on the part of the young in France is "sort of a shock at first;" yet it is "sort of nice."(GR, p.177).
One can easily detect the note of innocence and of condescension that is sounded in these phrases.

Giovanni sees through David's pretensions and also realizes how desperately he is trying to protect his "lying little moralities" (GR, p. 187). He detects the emptiness of his smile and his inability to appreciate the idea of life, "dripping and bursting, and beautiful and terrible--" (GR, p. 184) a characteristic which as Giovanni suggests, is the unfortunate heritage of Americans. He even claims that Hella is so "innocent" that she would think that "babies come out of cabbages--or frigidaires" (GR, p. 188). David, Giovanni believes, lies to such an extent that he accepts all his lies as the truth; he is in love with his purity, with his mirror, and acts "like a virgin" who is afraid of "the stink of love" (GR, pp. 186-7).

David cannot stand the fact that Giovanni looks at him as an American and therefore as a rich man. He complains that Giovanni has a "thing" about him and takes him for a God. Baldwin seems to give the answer to this strange feeling in his essay, "A Quest Of Identity". He explains that there is a "catch" for the American in Paris freedom:

that he becomes here in Paris a kind of revenant to Europe the future of which continent, it may be, is in his hands.
Because of the American's "definitely lonely sensibility" and of his need to be liked *as a person* and not as part of the "so diverse phenomena which make up his country;" a painful dilemma is thereby thrust upon his shoulders. (NNS, p. 129). David is no exception. He knows that Giovanni has recognised some common quality which makes him an American, and this strikes in him "a nerve that did not throb in Giovanni." David indeed is equally disturbed when Giovanni teases him about not being a true American. David himself outlines this hopeless paradox of which he is a victim, when he confesses:

> And I resented this: resented being called an American (and resented resenting it) because it seemed to make me nothing more than that, whatever that was: and I resented being called not an American because it seemed to make me nothing. (GR, p. 117)

David is so completely lost in his confusion that he has no sense of identity. He is completely puzzled by the nature of American women. Whereas he had some sense of their "individual womanhood" while they were in America, "even the most ferociously accomplished" of these very women, in Paris, seems now

> to be involved in some ice-cold or sundried travesty of sex, and even grandmothers seemed to
have no traffic with the flesh. And what distinguished the men was that they seemed incapable of age; they smelled of soap, which seemed to be their preservative against the dangers and exigences of any more intimate odor; the boy he had been shone, somehow, unsoiled, untouched, unchanged, through the eyes of the man of sixty .... (GR, p. 118).

David suspects that this facade of perennial innocence, purity, and youthfulness is only part of the truth; he recognises that beneath this veneer of perfection "was power and sorrow, both unadmitted and unrealized, the power of the inventors, the sorrow of the disconnected" (GR, p. 119) David does seem to be symbolic of the incoherence and the disillusionment of the contemporary American.

At the end of his career in France, David, now alone, sits before a darkening window looking at his reflection. He searches for "the germ of the dilemma" which had resolved itself into his flight from America. He senses that it is somewhere before him locked in the reflection he was watching in the window; that it was trapped in the room with him; that it "always had been, and always will be," and that it is yet "more foreign to him than those foreign hills outside." (GR, p. 17). David moves into his bedroom and undresses. He becomes terribly aware of the mirror as he visualizes the last
few terrible moments of Giovanni's life. David himself explains what happens next:

The body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body, which is under sentence of death. It is lean, hard and cold, the incarnation of a mystery. And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: But when I became a man, I put away childish things. I long to make this prophecy come true. I long to crack that mirror and be free.

(Gr, p. 223)

James Baldwin is by no means an exponent of symbolism. Yet one can here recognise a dilemma which, though it is not only an American dilemma, is especially related to the contemporary American situation.

David, contemplating Giovanni's plight, experiences a feeling of guilt. For the first time in his life, David submits himself to the ordeal of self-examination: he exposes his naked self and looks at its reflection in his mirror. What he sees in the mirror is not an image of purity, not the figure of a little virgin, nor that of an "unsoiled, untouched, unchanged" (Gr, p. 118) American youth, covered with soap and carrying "some precious metal" between his legs. (Gr, p. 187). The lean, unattractive body which contains the mystery of his
identity and of his existence appears before him. He now knows that the truths he seeks are locked within himself and will soon reveal themselves despite his efforts to prevent this, for "the journey to the grave is already begun, the journey to corruption is, always, already, half over" (GR, p. 223). David seems, for the first time, to have become aware of the reality of death and of the tragic facts of life. He now experiences a sense of doom. The urgency of the situation forces itself upon him; he realizes that it is time to put away childish dreams, to achieve maturity and to behave as a mature person. This maturity, however, evades him. He must crack his mirror: he must destroy the self-created image he struggles to preserve. He must lose the innocence which he has tried so desperately to "salvage from the storms of life" (NKMN, p. 217). He must accept his limitations and his failures; he must find out what he really wants to achieve in life and what he really thinks is real.

David, however, ends his ordeal of self-examination by moving away from the mirror and covering his nakedness. The deeper mystery of himself, the truths which he glimpses, are too frightening and bewildering for him to cope with. He places his entire hope for salvation upon "the heavy
grace of God" (GR, p. 223), upon whom he also places the responsibility for his present position. The rest of his life he is destined to spend with "the dreadful weight of hope" (p. 224) upon his shoulders. Once more he turns his eyes away from the reality of the present and looks forward with expectations towards the future. David is indeed a staunch disciple of the cult of optimism; he indeed worships the doctrine of self-evasion.

David, like the contemporary American he symbolises, is so fascinated by his "ambiguous experience" and so dependent upon "the solace of contrived experience," that he refuses to face his dilemma and to try to remove the mist of unreality that fills the space between himself and the facts of his life. Baldwin, through this novel, seems to be urging his fellow Americans to accept their past, to destroy their illusions, and to take a more mature and realistic look at the present. He acknowledges that "the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect on the world". However, he maintains that the "new sense of life's possibilities" which America entertains must be counterbalanced by "a sense of the mysterious and inexorable limits of life,

9Boorstin, p. 37.
a sense, in a word, of tragedy" (NKMN, p. 12).

David's dilemma is America's. The key to his salvation lies in his flesh even as the key to his country's lies in the hearts and minds of the people who make it up. Baldwin warns that if America is to be transformed, it will not be transformed "by an act of God" but by the conscious effort and action of the citizens themselves (NKMN, p. 154). Americans therefore must now recognise the nightmare in which they now struggle for existence as a reality. They must reconsider and reinterpret their dreams in the light of such a reality and so make a more definite effort to revitalize and to achieve their vision of success. The grail, in Baldwin's opinion, is not beyond their reach. How much of its brilliance and splendour remains, he does not pretend to know.
CHAPTER XI

Another Country

Two centuries ago, America, with greatest confidence and vigorous optimism, dreamed of the future glory of "Freedom's established reign."\(^{10}\) One century later, and only one century ago, Walt Whitman prophesied that America would be

Perennial with the earth, with Freedom, Love and Law
A great, sane, towering, seated Mother
Chained in the adamant of time.\(^{11}\)

Today, a voice from *Another Country*, most recent novel of James Baldwin, child of this noble 'Mother', cries,

This isn't a country at all, it's a collection of football players and Eagle Scouts. Cowards. We think we're happy. We're not. We're doomed.\(^{12}\)

This voice, indeed, echoes the despair and dejection, the disillusionment and the disenchantment, of the author and of his age. James Baldwin is horrified and distressed by

the nightmare with which he must struggle in this country today. Beneath the facade of glamour and material success, the author has discovered an "incoherence"—the incoherence such as occurs when one is "absolutely frightened to death, and there is something which is happening or about to happen that one doesn't want to face ..." (NKMN, p. 150). Modern Americans, in his opinion, seem to be floundering in "the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order, against which dream, unfailingly and unconsciously, they test and very often lose their lives" (NKMN, p. 218).

James Baldwin's words, in short, reveal how completely the eighteenth and the nineteenth century American dream of success has failed to materialize. His words, moreover, reveal how completely the great "asylum" promised to the suffering and the oppressed of the world has become, instead, a cold, loveless, and indifferent jungle, in which the mad struggle for survival breeds fear, bewilderment and inhumanity, and in which vitality, once a virtue and a creative force, now corrupts and destroys. In an essay, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," Baldwin has commented on the urgency of the situation:
The country will not change until it examines itself and discovers what it really means by freedom. In the meantime, generations keep being born, bitterness is increased by incompetence, pride and folly, and the world shrinks around us.

It is a terrible, an inexorable law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own: in the face of one's victim, one sees oneself. (NKMN, p. 71).

In Another Country, the author has presented a most vivid picture of the inhumanity, the bitterness, the incompetence, the pride and the folly, which has created the American nightmare of today. The author, in depicting the dilemmas and the confused lives of modern Americans, exposes the frightening 'horror' of modern American life--the public horror accumulated by generation upon generation, the private horror carried in every individual heart, the horror which is the past, the present, and the future.

The action in this novel, for the most part, takes place in New York, "the world's most bewildered city" (AC, p. 145). This city, though beautiful by night, is cold and ugly in the revealing light of day. Here there is nothing to sing or be happy about. The splendour, the glamour and the brilliance that can be observed along the streets are most superficial. The cinema still remains a place of worship, and the movie
stars and Broadway and T.V. performers, "along with the mile-high names of the vehicles which carry them into immortality" (AC, p. 4) still are sacred objects of worship.

Cass Selinski, one of the major characters of the novel, explains that this city is a "perfect example of free enterprise gone mad" (AC, p. 231). Yet, as Mr. Nash, a minor character, observes,

God knows there is nothing free about it and nothing enterprising about the lot of citizens. (AC, p. 356).

In this world of crass materialism--this city "without oases, run entirely, insofar, at least, as human perception could tell, for money," one's identity and one's purpose of existence can be easily distorted and destroyed. The people here have lost the right to "renew themselves," and any person who attempts "to cling to his rights" must live in exile--"in exile from the life around him; and this paradoxically, has the effect of placing him in perpetual danger of being banished from any real sense of himself" (AC, p. 316).

The great buildings of this city stand erect, "blunt like the phallus or sharp like the spear," (AC, p. 4) guarding the city which never sleeps; yet the weight
of the city is oppressive, and many are crushed beneath its falling towers. One can feel "the presence of some cancer ... operating ... invisibly, all along," in the people who spend their lives here. The people today seem to dream

the same dreams they had dreamed ten years before, clothe these in the same arguments, quote the same masters; and dispense the same charm they possessed before their teeth began to fall and their hair began to fall. (AC, p. 29.)

New York, as Baldwin sees it, is a dangerous jungle, of which the natives lonely, bewildered and frustrated, become suspicious, hostile and violent. Those who try to live a natural life perish and no one mourns their loss. "Bright kids," who can "go places," the intellectual and talented ones, receive no welcome from the majority, who are busy, "scuffling, making that change, they think it's going to last forever" (AC, p. 67). These citizens display no Christian charity, no "publick Spirit", for "everybody's out for himself, to make a buck, whether they say so or not" (AC, p. 262). Few, however, are honest enough to admit to such gross selfishness, yet each man seems to bear upon his face the mark of "some intolerable burden; their private lives
scream from their hot discontented faces" (AC, p. 269). Many a man often yearns to leave this land of "nowhere people" to find a place where a man is treated like a man—to leave the "cold trees", the "cold parks", the proud towers, the "grasping antennae", and all those things which seem to be so "pale and profitless" beneath their superficial glitter. In fact, people vanish each day: they return to "the havens from which they fled"—that is, to those native lands from which the promise of a new life in America had lured them.

In this modern America that Baldwin presents, the melting pot has ceased to boil and the immigrants today, who swell the ranks of the confused populace, have become lonely, afraid, and contemptuous of each other. Many, like Richard Selinski, in their frenzy to qualify as true Americans—that is, to reach the highest rung of the ladder of success—strive desperately to remove the stigma that is now attached to the foreign name. Minority groups, aware of the fact that they are being exploited by the majority—a small core of the privileged and powerful—and aware of the fact that they are the innocent victims of some rabid social paranoia, have now become suspicious, over-sensitive, and aggressive. In their anxiety to escape the yoke of oppression and to get
revenge on their tormentors, they lose whatever dignity they may have and often destroy themselves.

America, in Another Country, is a degenerate and decadent country, a situation which can be attributed to the perversity of the people themselves. Afraid to look into the past, to realize and to accept their failures and shortcomings, they completely avoid the reality of the present. They argue that in America great strides have been made under the system of free enterprise and, persisting in self-deception, they refuse to acknowledge the failure of the early American dream of a perfect society. For these modern Americans, reality seems to be too frightening a condition to live with.

In this country, even the "young seem most blighted" of all." The boys move as "a parody of manhood" (AC, p. 231). In their "self-righteous" attempts to attract the girls, they succeed in attracting each other. Men seem to wear corsets; women gleam and glitter. The former are lonely; the latter are constantly drifting. Everything, even the music of love, has become "syncopated, synthetic" (AC, p. 73), and mechanical. Freedom has been completely lost in this mad pursuit of the grail of success. Love, no
longer a natural phenomenon, has become a duel or a battle. The Law seems to be manipulated for the maintenance of the status quo; that is, in the interest of the privileged minority.

Whitman's noble "Mother", it would seem, has turned out to be a commoner and a cheat, a full-fledged prostitute, not "chained in the adamant of time,"\textsuperscript{13} but "frozen in her history like Lot's wife was trapped in salt" (AC, p. 219). Her children, moreover, seem to be "at home with, accustomed to, brutality and indifference, and to be terrified of human affection. In some strange way they do not seem to feel that they are worthy of it" (AC, p. 231).

At the end of the first chapter of the novel, Rufus, a handsome negro, standing at the centre of the Brooklyn bridge, raises his eyes to Heaven and thinks, "Ain't I your baby too?" (AC, p. 87)? Bursting with anguish and realizing that "the pain will never stop" (AC, p. 87), he lifts himself upwards and plunges into the black water, seeking the relief he could not find on earth in the mystery of eternity. Having failed to find the paradise which early America had promised, Rufus, in desperation, rushes headlong into the darkness of death, searching for the "Godalmighty bastard" (AC, p. 88) who

\textsuperscript{13} Whitman, p. 395.
seems to have forsaken him.

Rufus, in his youth was bright and beautiful, the pride of his people. They had expected "great things" from him. Of this he was very conscious, and he always hoped to live up to their expectations. His one dream was to make his people proud of him--"And that's all he ever wanted in this world" (p. 106). Refusing to submit to the horror of his environment, Rufus had "fled, so he thought, from the beat of Harlem, which was simply the beat of his heart." As he ventured abroad, he always dreamed that the splendour he had recognised in his sister--"a splendour incalculably older than the grey stone of the island on which they had been born"--would "come into the world again one day, into the world they knew" (AC, p. 27).

Rufus, for a short while, pursues a career, as a drummer, in the world of music. However, just when the realization of his dream seems to be a possibility, his contract is terminated. On this very night, he enters upon a relationship with a woman--an affair which results in his fatal dilemma. He soon becomes lost in confusion; he violates and eventually destroys the object of his desire, of his love; finally, he ruins his own life and destroys himself.
It is through this love affair between Rufus and Leona (and through other such relationships) that Baldwin seems to be making his significant comments upon "the altogether savage paradox of the American Negro's situation"—in fact, upon the dilemma of the entire American situation, for, according to him, "Negroes are Americans and their destiny is the country's destiny." Baldwin believes that the relationship between the white and negro American is not simply

the relationship of oppressed to oppressor, of master to slave, nor is it motivated merely by hatred, it is also, literally and morally, a blood relationship, perhaps the most profound reality of the American experience, and we cannot begin to unlock it until we accept how very much it contains of the force and anguish and terror of love. (NNS, p. 42).

And so, in Another Country, it is through the themes of colour and of love that the author examines and discusses the American problem.

Leona, a white Southern girl, comes to New York to escape the horror of her past life and "to try to make a new life" for herself (AC, p. 13). She loves the city and dreams of owning it all. At first she appears to be "a wild animal who didn't know whether to come to the outstretched hand or to flee" (AC, p. 12). Soon, however,
she seems to find a haven and a promise of future happiness in the strength and wonder of Rufus' love. This love, therefore, becomes the key to the fulfillment of Leona's hopes and dreams.

Rufus, as he observes Leona for the first time, sees her as "a princess". Standing on the balcony with her and looking down at the city beneath them, he seems to be standing on a cliff in the wilderness, seeing a kingdom and a river which had not been there before. He could make it his, every inch of the territory which stretched beneath and around him now .... (AC, p. 20)

Fortified by the strength of this vision, Rufus invites Leona to come and get the "all" she desires. Soon each of them, in their love, was struggling to "reach a harbor"; but "there could be no rest until this motion became unbearably accelerated by the power that was rising in them both" (AC, p. 21). Baldwin seems to be suggesting that the fate of these two people depends entirely upon the vitality of the love which is to develop between them, and that their happiness could only be secured through the permanence of this love. (One must note at this point that love, for Baldwin, seems to be a mystery which reveals itself through sexual or physical relationships).
Yet, from the moment in which this love has been born, one can detect the germs which will eventually blight it and finally lead to its disintegration. Despite the apparent ecstasy of the two people, there is no real communication between them. Rufus, despite the fact that he feels for Leona and needs her, feels himself to be in the presence of an enemy and feels the need to humiliate her; in the act of love, he curses the "milk-white bitch" who fills him with passion. In spite of himself, however, he is drawn closer to her in the whirlpool of passion. He longs to hear her story, yet, at the same time, he does not want to hear more about her. Desperately he pushes all the questions he wants to ask her into the back of his mind, yet he clings to her and invites her to stay with him.

Rufus, before meeting Leona, had never thought "at all about the world and its power to hate and destroy" (AC, p. 27). When he first meets her, he does not think of their future because he does not believe that they have one. Eventually, however, when he is faced with the problem, he realizes the high price he would have to pay to make it a reality. For the first time in his life, Rufus wonders if he could possibly be ashamed of his colour. But he immediately withdraws the question
and so evades the reality of his situation.

Rufus and Leona soon become the victims of protesting stares and contemptuous glances. Leona understands that such behaviour merely reflects the miserable plight of people who are "just bored and lonely, don't know no better" (AC, p. 30). She realizes that such people would probably jump at the opportunity to become their friends; Rufus, on the other hand, all too quickly takes offence at these people. So completely involved is he with the problem of colour and with the popular image of himself as a negro that he becomes over-sensitive, aggressive, and even vicious.

Nevertheless, Leona is still a necessity for Rufus. Because of her, he knows who he is—he has an identity. He knows that he is her boy, and he expects her to be good to him. She, in turn, promises to do so and makes an honest effort to provide the love and the companionship he so desperately needs. Rufus, however, is hounded by a sense of guilt and of inferiority. Soon he begins to fall. He fights with Leona and abuses her "in what ever way he feels would humiliate her most."(AC,p.53). Still dissatisfied with himself, he resorts to excessive drinking in bars; but, even here, no one applauds his triumphs or condemns his guilt. Consequently, he becomes
vicious; he picks fights with innocent white men and is thrown out of the bars.

Rufus, however, is fully aware of his deterioration, for the eyes of his friends told him that he was falling. His own heart told him so. But the air through which he rushed was his prison and he could not even summon the breath to call for help. \[AC, p. 53].\]

Yet he does nothing to pull himself together. Tortured by an increasing sense of guilt, he wallows in self-pity. In his confusion and frustration, he allows himself to become the victim of the same elements of life he has tried so desperately to avoid: the problem of his colour and of his past.

Rufus eventually destroys Leona, "the unwitting heiress of generations of bitterness." His dream is now shattered against the very obstacles with which he has failed to come to grips. He sinks lower and lower into the horror of the nightmare which surrounds him. Under the pretence of trying to pull himself together, he resorts to walking the streets. Driven by hunger and loneliness, he even consents to "bleakly physical exchange\[AC, p. 42], he "peddles" his ass. But nobody cares what he does. He grows more and more aware of his failure;
he becomes physically weaker and weaker. Like a con­
demned criminal, he avoids the law, his family, and his friends.

Rufus himself cannot explain what he suffers. He realizes that

it's not possible to forget anybody you were hung up on, who was that hung up on you. You can't forget anything that hurt so badly, went so deep, and changed the world forever. It's not possible to forget anybody you've destroyed. (AC, pp. 50-1).

He returns to his friends, but in their company he feels "black, filthy, foolish." He wishes that he were miles away or dead. His thoughts of Leona come "in waves like the pain of a toothache or a festering wound." (AC, p. 78). He begins to understand the loneliness that Eric, a white Southerner who had loved him once, felt when he had rejected him. Much too late for his own good he discovers that

Eric had loved him; as he now remembered that Leona had loved him. ... And he used against her the very epithets he had used against Eric; and in the very same way, with the same roaring in his head and the same intolerable pressure in his chest. (AC, p. 46).

Moreover, he feels himself "nearly strangling with the desire" to (AC, p. 50) hurt Vivaldo, the only real friend he had ever had.
Rufus had felt himself slip gradually downwards until now he hit the bottom. Here no one could survive. He now recalls the days when people came to him "to bawl their appreciation and to prophesy that he would do great things" (AC, p. 77). But he knows now that he has completely failed. Yet Rufus does not completely accept the guilt for his present condition; nor is he prepared to suffer the punishment for his misdeeds. Instead of submitting himself to the excruciating experience of taking stock of his present condition and trying to make a new life, he runs away and finally surrenders himself to the elements.

What then is the significance of Rufus' tragic life? Rufus, though a Negro, is an American and has been created by the American situation, past and present. Rufus' future, therefore, is synonymous with the future of his country. Baldwin seems to be warning his country which seems to be precariously poised at the high point of fortune, of materialistic prosperity that is, that it may soon come tumbling downwards with a crash.

Rufus' dream was to be a success in life: to regain the manhood, the pride and the dignity, which his people have lost in America. He, like his sister, ages and ages ago, "had not merely been the descendant of slaves," but
could well have been a monarch" (AC, p. 7). Yet "black flesh" had been exploited in the world, especially in America. The obstacle, therefore, in the way of the realization of Rufus' dream is the colour of his skin and the problem of the Negro past in America. The splendour of Rufus' dream can only be achieved in a future America, in which there is no white or black. The reality of the present offers no such opportunity.

Baldwin, in The Fire Next Time, complains that although America, of all the Western nations, today is in the best position to prove "the uselessness and obsolescence of the concept of color" (The Fire, p. 107), too many citizens seek refuge in this greatest of delusions. Many white Americans, uncertain of their identity and bewildered as to their status in society, have created a system of reality and a self-image which they must protect at all costs to comfort themselves and to compensate for their shortcomings. Such a system involves the equating of virtue and material success. Blinded by such a false sense of superiority, the white man presumes that he can do no wrong, that he is greatly envied and that it is his destiny to control the lives of the less fortunate minority groups.

The Negro, on the other hand, is well aware of the
white man's dilemma. He realizes that, despite his limited power, he is in a good position "to precipitate chaos and ring the curtain on the American dream (The Fire, p. 102). One cannot help but note here that Baldwin still finds it difficult to believe that the curtain has already been rung. Convinced that his one salvation lies in his power, especially his power to intimidate, the Negro has developed a set of attitudes which, unfortunately, can only lead to his further confusion and eventually to his self-destruction. The American Negro's vision of success has therefore become a distorted one, even as the white man's has. The entire country, plagued by this disease of colour consciousness, is now being strangled by a nightmare.

Rufus, too conscious of the country's image of him as a negro, surrenders himself to this image and so destroys the possibility of any other reality for himself. He fails to make "the paradoxical adjustment" of realizing that "the dark and dangerous and unloved stranger is part of himself forever." (NNS, p. 42). He makes no attempt "to contain and even, in the honourable sense of the word, to exploit the 'nigger!'" in himself. (NNS, p. 43). Instead, he allows it to debase him. He surrenders "his birthright as a man no less than his birthright as a black
man" (NNS, p. 38). He allows his rage to destroy him, instead of harnessing the energy spent in such a rage and using it in the pursuit of his dream.

Rufus hates all the white men, who, as he believes, have got "the world on a string" (AC, p. 67), and are trying to tie the string around his neck. Completely aware of the inhumanity and the callousness which the mad struggle for material success has engendered, Rufus hates the life in the city. He wishes that a bomb would fall and so silence the "noise". He longs to make the people there moan, to see them bleed and choke, and to hear them cry "for somebody to come and help them." (AC, p. 68). The tragic irony of the situation is that Rufus, who is completely offended by and opposed to the injustice and inhumanity of which the entire fabric of his society is woven, resorts to similar injustice and inhumanity in his fight for survival. He becomes vicious and bitter. Like "a bird dog, tense, pointing, absolutely silent, waiting for a covey of quail to surrender to panic and fly upward, where they could be picked off by the guns of the hunters," he waits upon the words of his friends, turning whatever they might say "into an opportunity for slaughter" (AC, p. 63). Leona, speaking of Rufus to Vivaldo, says,"He's just lost and he beats me up
because he can't find nothing else to hit" (*AC*, p. 59). The frustration of life in the jungle of the city makes Rufus behave like a cornered animal. The disillusionment he has suffered proves to be fatal. America, like an insane mother, not only deserts her child in the time of need but drives him to the point of self-destruction.

The picture of America presented by Baldwin through the tragedy of Rufus' life is a dark and gloomy one. Yet the author does seem to believe that the nightmare of American life can be dispelled and, moreover, that the early American dream of success can be revitalized and perhaps realized in terms of the world in which we live today. The country, however, must first make a true appraisal of itself; it must discover and accept its limitations, its failures, and its guilt; and, finally, it must reinterpret its dreams in terms of the reality of modern life.

In *Another Country* Baldwin seems to be exploring and illustrating these possibilities in terms of a relationship similar to that of Rufus and Leona. Vivaldo, a white American of Italian descent, and Ida, Rufus' younger sister, (and therefore an American negress), attempt to realize their dreams together. They too are bewildered and frustrated by the horror of life in the city—especially
by the problem of colour. For a time, they, like Rufus and Leona, seem fated to be destroyed. However, unlike the other couple, they come to grips with the reality of the situation, they face the elements that threaten to destroy them and, consequently, capture the elusive grail they so long pursued, tarnished though it may be.

Vivaldo, like Rufus, had hoped to be a success in life: he hoped to write a successful novel. But he had a problem:

He did not seem to know enough about the people in his novel. They did not seem to trust him. They were all named, more or less, all more or less destined, the pattern he wished them to describe was clear to him. But it did not seem clear to them. He could move them about but they themselves did not move. He put words in their mouths which they uttered sullenly, unconvinced .... They were waiting for him to find the key, press the nerve, tell the truth. Then, they seemed to be complaining, they would give him all he wished for and much more than he was willing to imagine. (AC, p. 127).

Vivaldo, therefore, experienced a kind of paralysis--a paralysis from which only the discovery of the truth could release him.

Rufus' death left Vivaldo grief-stricken. He experienced a sense of guilt, for he felt that "maybe he could have saved him if he had just reached out a quarter of an inch between them ..., and held him,"
the night before his death (AC, pp. 342-343). But he had been too "tired of Rufus' story, tired of the strain of attending, tired of friendship." And so, he had withdrawn from the real problems of a friend in need "to the people he was inventing, whose troubles he could bear" (AC, p. 71).

Driven by feelings of guilt, Vivaldo resolves to make amends for his cowardly behaviour by showing Rufus' sister that "the world's not as black as she thinks it is .... Or as white" (AC, p. 125). He hopes that by loving her he could make her forget the "something" in her life she must forget in order to be happy.

Until now Vivaldo has succeeded in avoiding the difficulties of life by pretending to be living. To quote the author,

His dangerous, overwhelming lust for life had failed to involve him in anything deeper than perhaps a half a dozen extremely casual acquaintances in about as many bars. (AC, pp. 132-133)

Now, instead of merely "taking refuge in the outward adventure," Vivaldo determines to brave "the clash and tension of adventure proceeding inexorably within."
He understands now that his relationship with Rufus had been a "game in which Rufus had lost his life. All the
pressures that each had denied had gathered together and killed him" (AC, p. 133). This time he intends to submit himself to these very pressures and so win out of his experience a new life for himself and Ida. Desperately intent on learning about life, Vivaldo wants something 'real' to happen to him. And so, he thinks of Ida, "dreaming of Ida, rushing ahead to what awaited him with Ida" (AC, p. 126).

Vivaldo's dream of becoming a successful writer, therefore, is now synonymous with his dreams of Ida, since he hoped to find truth in his love for Ida--the truth which alone could free him from his paralysis.

Ida, like Leona, has her dreams. She knew in her childhood days that she couldn't "end up like all the other girls who can't find anyone to protect them," for she had Rufus to rescue her. Rufus, therefore, was the symbol of Ida's success in life. In her opinion, Rufus' beauty was too much to be wasted. Yet wasted it was! Rufus died and "all the light went out of the house, all of it" (AC, p. 416). In order to survive, Ida, like her brother before her, was forced to flee the hopelessness of life in the ghetto and to seek a future in the city beyond. Ida blamed her misfortune upon the inhumanity of the white world, which kept her people in
prison, stunted and starved them, and finally drove them either to death or insanity, while they themselves went around, "jerking themselves off with all that jazz about the land of the free and the home of the brave," and expecting that she would jerk herself off with "that same music," but keep her distance. (AC, p. 351).

Ida is therefore well aware of the falseness and of the insecurity of the white man's existence in America. She knows what is happening: that she is living in one of "the world's great jungles," in which people are continually fornicating and living degenerate lives, or dying every minute;

that the whole world was one big whorehouse and the only way for you to make it was to decide to be one of the biggest, coolest, hardest whores around, and make the world pay you back that way. (AC, p. 347-348).

Ida, like Rufus, seems to have become a disciple of the theory of violence; she seems to have placed her faith in the power to intimidate. She believes that a world like this has no right to exist, and so she often wishes to turn herself into "one big fist and grind \[that\] miserable country to powder" (AC, p. 351). Ida too seems destined to become the victim of her own rage.

She blames Vivaldo and all the other whites, who did
not know what was happening, for her brother's death. However, though she hates Vivaldo, she eventually grows to love him, or rather to need him. The tragic paradox which had proven fatal in her brother's case, now threatens to destroy her. She herself explains her dilemma to Cass:

If one white person gets through to you, it kind of destroys your--singlemindedness. They say that love and hate are very close. Well, that's a fact. (AC, p. 350).

Ida's one chance of salvation, therefore, rests upon her acceptance of her colour as a necessary part of herself. In order to survive, she must forget the image of herself that has been created by her countrymen and make an honest effort to discover and live in accordance with the truth which lies hidden in her heart.

This popular image of the negro seems to be the "thing" that Vivaldo hopes to make her forget. Before he can do this however, he must first look into his own heart; he must go back over his past, "looking at it, trying to put it all together, to understand it, to express it." Vivaldo, however, has "left something of himself back there on the streets of Brooklyn which he was afraid to look at again" (AC, p. 111). Baldwin seems to be suggesting that the success of Vivaldo's dream--
the completion of his novel and the fulfillment of his love for Ida—depends upon an honest self-examination, self-recognition, and self-mastery on his part.

Vivaldo, a product of the so-called melting pot of America, had struggled hard to survive life in the jungle of New York. In the neighbourhood where he was born, "you had to be tough, they'd kill you if you weren't, people dying around you all the time, for nothing" (AC, p. 111). Vivaldo, therefore, has used his vitality—the vitality that had helped to found the American nation and which had once seemed destined to create a glorious future for its people—"to prove that he had been cut out for masculine pursuits" (AC, p. 129). The energy which should have been directed to his creative efforts has indeed been wasted in a desperate endeavour to disguise his true nature. For Vivaldo knew that talented kids with literary ambitions were not welcome in his environment. The American tradition of masculinity had been so well preserved that one "had to be a man ..., and you had to prove it, prove it all the time" (AC, p. 111). In this frenzied passion to prove himself, Vivaldo had indulged in acts
that amounted to violence and crime. Vivaldo could never forget the "fear of those days, the fear of everything, covered with a mocking, staccato style, defended with the bullets of dirty words" (AC, p. 270). Nor could he forget his father, who "spent all his time pretending--well, I don't know what he was pretending, that everything was great, I guess--..." (AC, p. 111). Vivaldo's past had been one of fear, hatred, bewilderment and frustration. The great promise of America had also failed to come true for him as for many others.

As a man, Vivaldo was lonely. Whenever he sought the company of women, he always got involved with "impossible women--whores, nymphomaniacs, drunks"--as Cass points out to him, "... in order to protect himself--from anything serious" (AC, p. 96). The act of love for Vivaldo provided neither peace nor satisfaction; instead, it had become "a descent into confusion," for neither he nor the "frozen girl" with whom he battled dared "to pause and begin a discovery of each other" (AC, p. 131). Too terrified of the unknown were they. All that he could manage in his self-righteous bewilderment had been "the maximum of relief with the minimum of hostility" (AC, p. 132).
The question of colour had also been part of Vivaldo's nightmare. His frequent journeys "uptown" always ended in frustration, for "however pressing may have been the load he carried uptown, he returned home with a greater one, not to be easily discharged." Yet he believed that "the history written in the colour of his skin contorted his rights" to visit the dark streets of Harlem. He deceived himself into thinking that, because of the dangers there, he was "snatching his manhood from the lukewarm waters of mediocrity and testing it in fire" (AC, p. 132). Moreover, Vivaldo often remembered "occasional nightmares in which [his] Negro buddy pursued him through impenetrable forests, came at him with a knife on the edge of precipices, threatened to hurl him down deep stairs to the sea. In each nightmare he wanted revenge" (AC, p. 134). Baldwin seems to be suggesting here that a sense of guilt about the negro past and present in America has always existed in Vivaldo's unconscious mind.

Emerging from such a past, Vivaldo now realizes that the "great question that faced him ... was whether or not he had ever, really, been present at his life. For if he had ever been present, then he was present still, and his world would open up for him" (AC, p. 128).
On meeting Ida, Vivaldo can no longer avoid the reality of the moment, nor, in fact, of the past. He sees that wherever he walks with her, "their passage raised small clouds of male and female hostility which blew into their faces like dust" (AC, p. 145). When Ida questions him about the progress of his novel, he grows aware of "implications he scarcely dared to trust." (AC, p. 148). For he does appreciate the advantages of success. He hates the "eminence" of men like Ellis, who though not really much older than he was, was powerful and famous and worked hard." He often wonders how much he is willing to give to be as privileged as Ellis is: "to be powerful, to be adored, to be able to make it with any girl he wanted, to be sure of holding any girl he had." Yet Vivaldo does realize that success, as far as he is concerned, is not a question of "what he was going to 'get' but how he was to discover his possibilities and become reconciled to them" (AC, p. 164).

Ida becomes an increasing source of strength and inspiration for Vivaldo. Her shy, confiding smile makes his heart move up "until it hung like a Ferris wheel, lookin down at the fair" (AC, p. 146). Being with her and in love with her makes him feel as though he was coming
to the "end of a long tunnel in which he had been travelling so long" (AC, p. 147). And so, he tells her, "I want to be with you, ... I want you to be with me. I want that more than anything in the world" (AC, p. 149).

At this point, Ida becomes firmly established as the object of his dream. She becomes a symbol of his future success. Yet, in Vivaldo's eyes, Ida is quite an enigma. As Baldwin explains it:

Her face would be, forever, more mysterious and inpenetrable than the face of a stranger. Stranger's faces hold no secrets because the imagination does not invest them with any. But the face of a lover is an unknown because it is invested with so much of oneself. It is a mystery, containing, like all mysteries, the possibility of torment. (AC, pp. 171-2).

Vivaldo wonders about her past, about her secrets; he believes they would soon learn everything about each other in time, yet he thinks that any revelation on her part would be intended to pacify and also to frustrate him;

to frustrate, that is any attempt on his part to strike deeper into the incredible country in which, like a princess of fairy tales, sealed in a high tower and guarded by beasts, bewitched and exiled, she paced her secret round of secret days. (AC, p. 173).

In order to be a success in life, Vivaldo has to scale
these towers and invade that "incredible country". He knows full well that

if he could enter this secret place, he would, by that act, be released forever from the power of her accusations. His presence in this strangest and grimmest of sanctuaries would prove his right to be there; in the same way that the prince, having outwitted all the dangers and slaughtered the lion, is ushered into the presence of his bride, the princess. (AC, p. 313)

However, Vivaldo, the prince, can only free the princess, Ida, from her own confinement and so win himself a bride, if he climbs down from the "makeshift ivory tower," in which he, terrified by the "thing" of his past, has isolated himself from the reality of the present.

Meanwhile, Ida continues to pursue her own pattern of life. Vivaldo, wallowing in self-pity and shaken by his bewilderment, experiences stronger feelings of insecurity. He begins to suspect Ida of having an affair with Ellis, the agent who has promised to help her realize her own ambitions. However, he is not brave enough to investigate his own suspicions.

Life becomes increasingly difficult for Vivaldo and Ida. As the author puts it,

There was speedily accumulating between Ida and Vivaldo, great areas of unspoken, vast minefields which neither dared to cross .... Ida
and Vivaldo buried their disputes in silence, in the minefields. It seemed better than finding themselves hoarse, embittered, gasping, and more than ever gasping, and more than ever alone. (AC, p. 320)

They seem to get in each other's way and to get on each other's nerves, yet their need for each other does not in any way grow less. To quote Baldwin again,

They were both, as it were, racing before a storm, struggling to "make it" before they were sucked into that quicksand, which they saw all around them, of an aimless, defeated, and defensive bohemia." (AC, p. 268).

Vivaldo becomes even more aware of the failure of his novel to move; he becomes completely bewildered as to its purpose and its meaning. Yet "he could not let go of it, nor could he close with it, for the price of that embrace was the loss of Ida, or so he feared" (AC, p. 317).

The relationship between Ida and Vivaldo at this point seems to be headed for a violent disintegration. Vivaldo's dream seems about to be shattered upon the very rock--his love for Ida--upon which he had hoped to build his future. But Vivaldo and Ida do escape this unhappy fate which now seems so inevitable.

Vivaldo grows tired of his isolation and of his bewilderment and eventually climbs down from his "ivory
castle." He realizes that beneath all his frustrations was the void where anguish lived and questions crouched, which referred only to Vivaldo and no one else on earth. Down there, down there lived the raw unformed substance of creation of Vivaldo, and only he, Vivaldo, alone, could master it. (AC, p. 305-6)

And master it he does. He recalls the "thing" of his past about which he had so often dreamed. He remembers these dreams. He knows that the "thing", his homosexual desires, is still there, and that he probably isn't frightened of it any more. Eventually, he comes face to face with his problem and eventually sees into its mysteries. Lying in bed with Eric, he experiences a dream which "teeters on the edge of a nightmare" (AC, p. 386) --a dream in which Rufus lies beside him, opens his arms, and he, Vivaldo, submits himself "to this sweet and overwhelming embrace ..." (AC, pp. 382-3). Immediately, the dream dissolves and Vivaldo awakes to realize that he has surrendered to the male embrace in reality. A tinge of shame and a "terrible sorrow" fills his heart as he understands that he had created the dream "in order to create this opportunity; he had brought about something he had long desired" (AC, p. 383). Too late to avoid the ghost he had now so peacefully evoked, he submits
himself voluntarily to "the flaming torpor of passivity" (AC, p. 385).

And so, Vivaldo completely immerses himself in the destructive element he so desperately fought to avoid. He steps into another mystery at once "blacker" and purer than any other; he feels a "sense of his own power" returned by the childish and trustful vigour of Eric's body. Immediately the doors of perception which had been so long closed to Vivaldo are opened. He sees beyond the mystery of the male body, of his own body. He becomes aware of "its possibilities and its imminent and absolute decay, in a way that he never thought of it before" (AC, p. 384). For the first time, he seems to see

vastly and horribly down, into the bottom of his heart, that heart which contained all the possibilities that he could name and yet others that he could not name. (AC, p. 385).

Vivaldo has finally made the dreaded journey within himself; he sees, recognises and accepts the true self he meets there. Soon Ida too grows weary of her self-exile in the land of deception. She pulls her barriers down and reveals the innermost chambers of her private castle. Within these chambers, Vivaldo discovers many
things that surprise and hurt him. However, he fights back his desire to strike back, accepts the pain that threatens to destroy him, and uses it to his advantage.

Once he is able to do this, Vivaldo comes into contact with the reality of experience he longed to find, yet so desperately avoided. After he listens to Ida's confession, he sees her for the first time as she really is. Immediately, his paralysis is cured:

> a detail he needed for his novel, which he had been searching for for months, fell, neatly and vividly, like the tumblers of a lock, into place in his mind. It seemed impossible that he should not have thought of it before: it illuminated, justified, clarified everything. (AC, p. 427).

Yet, as Vivaldo recognises the tarnished grail he now sees before him as the very one that lured him onwards with its superficial glitter, he experiences new feelings of bewilderment. He wonders at the fact that he had at last got what he wanted, the truth out of Ida, or the true Ida; and he did not know how he was going to live with it.

For the first time, he recognises the ambiguity of his vision—a fusion of the real with the ideal. Ida, at the same time, has recognised and accepted her true self. She admits that she has always loved Vivaldo; that it is
this love that finally moved her to make a confession to him, and that she is giving him a "tough row to hoe" (AC, p. 4), but at the same time she makes it quite clear that she wants neither his understanding nor his kindness but only to be accepted as the person she really is. Consequently, she reaches out to him searching for the love she so desperately needs. Ida indeed has eventually learnt to forget the "thing" which had hitherto frustrated her dreams and threatened to destroy them.

Vivaldo has a much bigger price to pay before he can enjoy the fruits of this bitter journey into "another country"—before he can appreciate, that is, the full value of the grail he now possesses. He must lose his innocence: he must realize that the world is not as ambiguous as he had considered it to be; he must be able to distinguish the real from the ideal. Finally, he yields to "the unnameable heat and tension" which flashes "violently alive between them, close to hatred as it was to love" (AC, p. 431), and takes her in his arms. Immediately, he bursts into tears of anguish as Ida comforts him and strokes his innocence out of him.

Baldwin, at this point, reveals the irony of the relationship between Vivaldo and Ida—an irony which reflects the irony of the present American situation. Iron-
ically, it is the very black girl, whom Vivaldo had determined to show that the world is neither as black or as white as she thought, that finally makes him recognise and accept the blackness of his life as a necessary part of himself and of his dreams. And so, like "two weary children," Vivaldo and Ida find the fulfillment of their dreams in each other's arms.

Baldwin, through this story of Vivaldo and Ida's love, of their journey to "another country", seems to be attempting to reveal the real obstacle in the way of the spiritual blossoming forth of America. Americans must first surrender their greatly cherished "innocence" and involve themselves in the ambiguous experience of their past and of their present, before they can transcend the petty barriers, especially the question of colour, and reach the happy fields of which they have so long dreamed. America must desist from her desperate effort to prove herself in the light of her self-created image. She must look beyond this image into herself, into the mystery of her experience, into the nightmare which is herself, and accept the "blackness" she discovers as an integral part of herself. The irony of the American situation seems to be that America can only realize her dreams through the acceptance of the very "blackness"
which she so anxiously tries to make white for herself and for others—whether this blackness be the blackness of skin or of the soul. She must first immerse herself in the very element which now threatens to drown her before she can avoid the destruction which now seems inevitable.

In *Another Country* Baldwin presents two other pictures of the complex phenomenon called love: a conventional marriage and an apparently genuine relationship between two young men. Once more, through these themes of marriage and of homosexuality, the author attempts to probe into the depths of the American psyche.

Cass, "the most beautiful, the most golden girl on earth," marries Richard Selinski, "the greatest, most beautiful man" (*AC*, p. 268). This "high born" lady from New England takes pride in the memory that her ancestors had once burned a witch. The fairy-tale element of the narrative here is by no means incidental. Cass is a true American, a genuine product of the American past—of the American dream. Richard, fifth son of a carpenter from Poland, who a hundred years ago would have continued in his father's trade, is now so affected by the desire "to get ahead", which is typical of American life today, that he struggles desperately to achieve
a career as a literary writer. Following in the tradition of his forefathers in America, Richard rejects his past: in his youth he was quite ashamed to speak his native language.

Cass, in her youth, had lived a very sheltered life, an "empty life," a "meaningless life" (AC, p. 358). She hardly even knew that Central Park existed. But her man soon came and took her away. This man, whom, in her parent's opinion, was far beneath her, was Cass's Antony—"His face was like the Heavens, wherein were set the stars and moon." To her, he was all in all. As swiftly as if it happened in a dream, Cass becomes his wife and the proud mother of two sons. Soon, however, Richard becomes so completely involved in his quest for success that a lack of communication develops between them. Ironically the situation worsens when he publishes his book and receives acceptance into a circle of literary figures. Neglected, frustrated and lonely, Cass sees the splendour of her dream gradually dissolve and the future grow dimmer and dimmer. Consequently, she seeks pleasure in the intensity of the moment in an affair with Eric, knowing full well that there is nothing further to be gained. She consoles herself by thinking, "Perhaps if we take now we can have a future, too. It depends on
what we mean by 'future' (AC, p. 287). Baldwin indeed seems to be preaching to his fellow-countrymen through the lips of Cass.

Eventually, after Richard discovers her infidelity and subjects her to excruciating obscenities, she is left alone to face an uncertain future; she can no longer find comfort in Eric's arms, due to the arrival of his lover from France. Alone, with the memories of her recent affair with Eric, she experiences a feeling of impending doom, which threatens herself and all Americans alike. Her disillusionment is complete; she knows that there can be no hope for herself or for her country as long as their hearts remain empty.

Once more, Baldwin has revealed the agony of the American's experience today. Cass and Richard have suffered the fate of those, who, revelling in their dreams of glory and of future success, have been rudely awakened to face the reality of their situation. Painful disillusionment is the necessary price of such an experience. Richard, in his enthusiasm to fulfil the American prescription of success, has completely lost the sense of himself. He never grows up; instead, he allows his somewhat perverse ambition to make him almost inhuman. He drives his wife away from him, destroys his family and,
like a hurt child, refuses to face the situation, to accept his guilt, and to pay the price. Instead, he becomes bitter, self-pitying, abusive; he runs away.

The irony of Cass's story is that all the while she has not been in love with Richard, "a lonely, limited man who loved her" (AC, p. 372), but with the Richard she had triumphantly created in her own image. Too late she realizes that "innocent, upright" she has contributed and still does contribute "to the misery of the world" (AC, p. 406). Sadly she confesses,

> And I saw that I'd love him like that, like a child, and now the bill for all that dreaming had come in. How can one have dreamed so long? And I thought it was real. Now I don't know what's real. And I felt that I'd betrayed myself, and you, and everything--of value, everything, anyway, that one aspires to become, one doesn't want to be simply another grey, shapeless monster .... Oh, God. It's a miserable world. (AC, p. 404).

Richard is indeed a complete failure. He writes a book he does not believe in, yet one that represents "the absolute limit of his talent". He never faces this fact. As Cass points out, Richard writes this book because he is "afraid of things, dark, strange, dangerous, difficult, and deep" (AC, p. 112). In his frustrations, he accuses his wife of being a "New England snob and a mankiller" (AC, p. 274). He becomes hostile to Vivaldo,
whose true talent he recognises, and criticises his friendship with Ida, simply because he suspects that Vivaldo doesn't like his book. Richard must pay the price of living a dishonest life and of neglecting the reality around him. When his self-esteem is hurt, he is not man enough to avoid trying "to pay back." Like Rufus, he attacks the object of his love and flees from the situation. Like Rufus, he has been a victim of the pattern of modern American life.

Cass has felt the triumph of creating a man become intolerable; she has seen a marriage founded on the rock of lies crumble and collapse; she has been completely humbled by "the baffling reality" (AC, p. 313) of her husband; yet, she finds the courage to be honest and to bring things into the open. For such maturity, however, she pays the price of rejection and desertion. Her experience is indeed most "frightening" and painful.

Once more, Baldwin seems to be revealing both the danger of living in a world of illusions, and the agony which must follow any subsequent disillusionment. Such disillusionment, however, in the author's opinion, seems to be a necessary step towards ultimate revitalization, whether it be of an individual or a nation.

The theme of homosexuality in Another Country is
developed along lines most similar to those in *Giovanni's Room*. Here too, the author seems to be attempting to expose the frustration and the perversity, which the inhumanity of the modern day America can produce. Such "conundrums" as Eric and David, it would seem, are indeed unique, but genuine, products of their country.

Like so many other of Baldwin's characters, Eric has some dark past, "buried in some deep, dark place" (*AC*, p. 193). This place in fact is Alabama, where Eric, as a child, found the affection he could not find among the "cold white people" in the arms of "the warm, black people, warm at least for him, and as necessary as the sun ..." (*AC*, pp. 193-194). But Eric was "terribly frightened, obscurely and profoundly frightened," because he knew that it was wrong for a little white boy to feel affection for a grown coloured man. This feeling of affection thus became his secret. He knew that he alone of all his friends could feel the curious terror and pleasure of the male body, especially of a Negro.

Eric's dream was to become an actor; from childhood, he had enjoyed the fantasy of becoming other people under the cover of darkness. Because of this desire, Eric felt even more guilty of violating the American
tradition of tough masculinity. Consequently his
strangeness and his aloofness increased, as he himself
believed, largely due to "the extreme unpopularity of his
racial attitudes—or, rather, as far as the world in
which he moved was concerned, the lack of any respons-
ible attitudes at all". Eric was daring to be an indiv-
idual and, therefore, could not be tolerated. He was
doomed to be exiled. As Baldwin explains it,

His dreams were different--subtly and cruelly
different: this was not known yet, but it was
felt. He was menaced in a way that they were
not, and it was perhaps this sense, and the
instinct which compels people to move away from
the doomed, which accounted for the increasing
distance, increasing with the years which
stretched between himself and his contemporaries.  
(AC, p. 200).

Driven by the loneliness of life in the South, Eric
submits to the love of another boy, a negro and a
stranger. This act, for Eric, was an transformation,
"the beginning of his life as a man" (AC, p. 206).

But, what kind of life? A life of chaos, a life
of being used by and of using lonely men in "a darkness
deeper than the darkest night". Though he often thought
of love, he knew that such acts were but the shadow of
love and that they were all dying from the lack of love.
Often he dreamed of walking out of the drama in which he was involved, but he found that all exits were barred by avid men; "the role he played was necessary, and not only to himself" (AC, p. 211). Such encounters as he experienced "took place, at last, between two dreamers, neither of whom could wake the other, except for the bitterest and briefest of seconds" (AC, p. 212).

And so, for Eric, there was no honour "which the world would recognise." His life, passions, trials, loves, were, at worst, filth, and, at best, disease in the eyes of his countrymen. Life, for this child of the nightmare world of America, became a most bewildering paradox. He was rejected and scorned by the people of his country; yet, in this very country, there was nothing which offered him proper standards, or promise, or hope, or security. A child of chaos, he could only shore up his ruins by himself and through his own efforts:

He saw no one around him worth his envy, did not believe in the vast, gray, sleep, which was called security, did not believe in the cures, panaceas, and slogans which afflicted the world he knew; and this meant that he had to create his own definitions as he went along. It was up to him to find out who he was, and it was his necessity to do this, so far as the witchdoctors of the time were concerned, alone. (AC, pp. 212-215).

Eventually rejected by the one man who had dared to know
him, Eric, like David, flees to France, aware of the fact that he had a life to make, but without the tools to do so. Once again, the reversal of the earlier pattern of the westward trek in America could be here noticed. With this I have already dealt in my comments on Giovanni's Room. After a life of peace and comfort with a young man, Yves, eventually Eric returns to America to pursue a career as an actor. From this point, Baldwin uses Eric as a sort of consciousness through which he presents a picture of the incoherence, the loneliness, and the tension of modern American life. Eric perceives here a "strange climate"—one created by the necessity to "fight very hard in order not to perish of loneliness," one in which there is no sense whatever of "the eagerness of human life," one where people longed for "the sense of others, the human touch," even though they were being constantly jostled by each other (AC, p. 230).

To the very end of the novel, Eric remains a mystery, to himself as well as to others. But he has experienced the anguish of growing up. He learns that one has "got to be truthful about the life you have. Otherwise, there's no possibility of achieving the life you
want ... Or think you want" (AC, p. 336). Eric realizes that he can never be satisfied with Cass's love even though it may offer peace and restfulness. He admits that he has often dreamed of escaping the abnormality of his life through his relationship with Cass. But he cannot delude himself about loving anyone else but Yves. He knows too that Yves has dreams of his own and will eventually leave him "in order to become a man" (AC, p. 339). And he is prepared to let him go. Until then, however, he must live according to his great promise and love him. Consequently, he returns to Yves.

Eric, therefore, recognises and accepts his own darkness. Because of this he becomes an exile from society. Ironically, it is to this exile that both Cass and Vivaldo come in their moments of bewilderment and despair. It is this exile, too, which eventually helps them to look into themselves and, as a result, to face the frightening reality of their lives with greater confidence. Eric, though he is as uncertain of the future as any of the others are, is strong enough to enjoy the intensity of the moment, and to seek into the "unanswerable and unconquerable riddles" of love (AC, p. 291). Through his example, both Cass and Vivaldo find the strength and courage to do the same.
Baldwin is most sympathetic towards Eric. Despite his rejection by society, he seems to suffer least and to succeed most; he gains the maturity necessary to survive life in the jungle. Baldwin, indeed, seems to be speaking through Eric's lips when he says,


Baldwin in this novel presents a world in which life is almost "unbearable;" yet he seems to be suggesting that one must accept this life before one can hope to survive. What seems in his opinion to be the most destructive element in the entire jungle of New York and of the entire American country is the impersonality and the inhumanity which the present struggle for survival has bred. Moreover, Baldwin seems to believe that such impersonality and inhumanity are direct products of the early American dream, now distorted into a mere nightmare. Baldwin writes,

But it is only love which could accomplish the miracle of making life bearable--only love, and love itself mostly failed. (AC, p. 404).

And love, according to Baldwin, is not romantic love, such as Hollywood glorifies, but a most private, rare, and
difficult process, a most complex phenomenon, which involves the giving of one's true self to another, and the acceptance of another for what he is, and not as one wants him to be or thinks he is. Such love cannot thrive where pride, selfishness, deception, discontent, or gross materialism prevails. According to Baldwin's portrayal of his country, they all prevail in America today. Moreover he fears that such conditions will continue to flourish in America until Americans rouse themselves from their long period of dreaming, and receive and pay the bill for such dreaming: they must be prepared to look into the reality, into the nightmare, with which they are now faced; they must recognise and accept as a necessary part of their life, past, present and future, the blackness they now struggle to escape.

At the end of the novel, Yves, a handsome Italian youth, has just landed in America, confident that he "will become very rich there" (AC, p. 213). Indeed, the dream of material prosperity still continues to lure many a European to America. Yves passes through the barriers "more high-hearted man he had ever been as a child, into that pity which the people from heaven had made their home" (AC, p. 436). The tragic irony of his situation is most obvious. Already, the American passengers, whose
friendship had filled Yves "with an extraordinary peace and happiness" (AC, p. 433), no longer knew who he was. He indeed needs the "Good Luck" wished him by his seatmate, for his story, which had been accepted in the air, now seemed rather suspect "in the light, hard and American, of sober second thought" (AC, p. 436). Eric, in whose love he has placed his entire future, is an exile of the society. He, moreover, embodies the bewilderment and the incoherence, the horror and the shame, of the American nightmare into which Yves has now stepped. Yves' fate is now sealed: like Richard and Vivaldo, he must pay the price of painful disillusionment before he can attain the maturity necessary to survive.
I said, It is an extraordinary phenomenon that Americans have lost the sense, being made up as we are, that what we are has its origin in what the nation in the past has been; that there is a source in AMERICA for everything we think or do; that morals affect the food and food the bone ....

The American dream had indeed inspired and molded a pattern of thought which is unique—one which has given form and significance to the entire history of the American Republic: to its politics, its morals and to its literature. Given the appropriate time, one could perhaps illustrate the influence of this dream on all the major writers in America's literary history.

Scott Fitzgerald was very much a part of the world that formed his subject matter. One can safely agree with Paul Rosenfeld's observation that the values of this world obtained much too strongly over him. "Hence," writes Rosenfeld,

wanting in philosophy, and a little overeager like the rest of America to arrive without having really sweated, he falls victim to the favorite delusions of the society of which he is part, tends to indulge in its dreams of grandeur, ... 2

Fitzgerald's work reflects the environment of his age. He has received "flashes from the psyches of the golden young intimate." (CU, p. 318), even as he has fixed "the quality of brutishness, of dull indirection and degraded sensibility running through American life of the hour." (CU, p. 318).

Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald possessed a capacity for wonder; moreover, he too was haunted by the dream of future success. In a letter to John Peale Bishop,, Fitzgerald once wrote in 1925,

Also you are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at any time saw him clear myself--the amalgam was never complete in my mind. 3

Fitzgerald had once dreamed of being "an entire man in the Goethe-Byron-Shaw tradition, with an opulent American


touch, a sort of combination of J.P. Morgan, Topham Beauclerk and St. Francis of Assisi, ... " (CU, p. 85).

Like Carraway, too, the author of This Side of Paradise displayed a curious ambivalence. He knew that the glamour and entertainment of his country, "wrapped cool in its mystery and promise" (CU, p. 31), was a "splendid mirage" (CU, p. 33) behind which a "lot of rather lost and lonely people" (CU, p. 28) wandered about. Yet he loved it all. The "whispers of fantastic success and eternal youth" (CU, p. 69) that reached his ears sounded false and hollow; yet they completely hypnotised him.

This tension, created by this ambivalence, was actually the source of the intelligence that created Amory Blaine and Gatsby. Fitzgerald himself argued that

the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still remain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise. (CU, p. 69).

He believed that he was destined to hold "in balance a number of opposites:
the sense of the futility of effort and the sense of the necessity to struggle; the conviction of the inevitability of failure and still the determination to 'succeed'—and, more than these, the contradiction between the dead hand of the past and the high intentions of the future. (CU, p. 70)

He was, therefore, a self-confessed victim of the paradox into which the American dream had resolved itself in the early twentieth century.

One can observe in the history of Fitzgerald's "failure" a curious parallel to the failure of his country to realize its dream. He, too, failed to "fulfill the obligations life had set for him or that he had set for himself" (CU, p. 81). Like the early settlers of his country, the author once "woke up every morning with a world of ineffable top-loftiness and promise" before his eyes (CU, p. 86). This early realization of his dreams "carried with it a certain bonus and a certain burden" (CU, p. 86)—"an almost mystical conception of destiny as opposed to will power at its worse the Napoleonic delusion" (CU, p. 89). Moreover, the conviction that "life is a romantic matter" possessed him (CU, p. 89).

Fitzgerald was never to enjoy again the short moments when, as he believed, "the fulfilled future and the wistful past were mingled in a single gorgeous moment—
when life was literally a dream" (CU, p. 90). Soon came
the "real dark night of the soul," when the tendency is
to refuse to face things as long as possible
by retiring into an infantile dream--but one
is continually startled out of this by
various contacts with the world. One meets
these occasions as quickly and carelessly as
possible and retires once more into the dream,
hoping that things will adjust themselves by
some great material or spiritual bonanza. But
as withdrawal persists there is less and less
chance of the bonanza--one is not waiting for
the fade-out of a single sorrow, but rather being
an unwilling witness of an execution, the dis­
integration of one's own personality ...  
(CU, pp. 75-6).

In his own diagnosis of his experience of failure,
Fitzgerald seems to have revealed the truth of his
country's condition. A child of the American dream, he
too was a questor. He too believed in "the orgiastic
future" (GG, p. 182). So enthralled was he by the aura
of America that he could not achieve complete objectivity
in his portrayal of his age. Even though he was aware
of what "foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams,"
(GG, p. 2), he charged dauntlessly after his elusive
grail. He, like Jay Gatsby, had therefore to pay the
price of pursuing dreams with such perversity.

The "crack-up" which Fitzgerald experiences in the
closing years of his life is the nightmare which must
inevitably follow such dreaming. Though he finally submitted himself to "the moving about of great secret trunks" (CU, p. 76), that is, to the ordeal of self-examination, he lacked the vitality to pursue the self he had lost. So complete was his disillusion that he could find nothing that he really wanted to do. It is indeed quite possible that the all-but-embarrassing self-revelation on the author's part in his last writings was intended to help his contemporaries from becoming "identified with the objects of their horror and compassion" (CU, p. 81), as he had become with his.

Whereas Fitzgerald can be considered a victim of the American dream, James Baldwin is its fine analyst. Unlike Fitzgerald, he is not hypnotised by the tempo, the spiritual glamour, or the material prosperity of his country. Consequently, he seems to be capable of taking a much more objective look at the conditions of modern America. Baldwin probes "deeper than anyone has dared, the psychic history of this nation." Moreover, he attempts to ameliorate the deplorable state of affairs in America by relinking the dream with the reality of life.

Like the Bunyan of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Baldwin considers life to be "a journey towards something one does not understand, which in going forward, makes one better" (*NKMN*, p. 136). He, too, is a child of the American dream; he is indeed very much aware of the possibilities of his country. America, in his opinion, is capable of creating "a country in which there are no minorities--for the first time in the history of the world," a country in which it is no longer important to be white or black (*NKMN*, p. 137).

"The hope and the effect of this fusion," he argues, "in the breast of the American Negro is one of the few hopes we have of surviving the wilderness which lies before us" (*NKMN*, p. 215). Baldwin's dream, therefore, involves an America in which the struggle for 'status' and identity would cease, in which the concept of the colour of skin will be obsolete, and in which the ideals of love, equality, and freedom would be as real as death itself.

Baldwin, however, does not allow the possibilities of the future to take precedent over the realities of the present. "There is never time in the future," he warns, "in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment, the time is always now" (*NKMN*, p. 126). Baldwin believes that the "unexamined
life is not worth living" (NKMN, p. xii), and that if he is to survive as an artist, he must strive "to tell the whole story, to vomit the anguish up. All of it, the literal and the fanciful" (NKMN, p. 179). Dedicated to the task of discovering his country for the first time, he has "stepped right into ... the bottomless confusion which is both public and private, of the American republic" (NKMN, p. 149). Once there, he has striven to "vomit" up the horror he has found there, in the hope of discovering the meaning of life for himself and for his country, of putting an end to the present "disrespect for human life and human achievement" (NKMN, p. 61), and of promoting the love which alone can achieve the spiritual revitalization of his fellow Americans.

Baldwin himself admits that what he is asking of his people is an "impossibility." "But," he counters, "in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand--..." (The Fire, p. 118).

This hope of being able to achieve the impossible which Baldwin fosters reveals the dilemma of contemporary American life. Baldwin, like Fitzgerald and most American writers, seems incapable of setting himself free of his "prohibitive American past."  

Baldwin's career itself is a manifestation of the effect of his prohibitive past. Driven by the horror of his early life in America, the author, as a young man, had fled to France, hoping to find himself there. After suffering a nervous breakdown, he travelled to Switzerland where he recovered. Recovery led to "a great creative outburst" and several publications. Baldwin's early books reveal his desperate search for an identity and his eventual reconciliation with his past as a Negro in America. In Europe, listening to the songs of Bessie Smith, he had been freed of the "illusion" that he hated his country. Hence, we find in these early works "a moving record of a man's struggle to define the forces that have shaped him, in order that he may accept himself."

Yet Baldwin's later works, especially *Blues for Mister Charlie*, do strongly suggest a drift on his part towards the role of "protest," which he so strongly condemned himself: he had criticised Richard Wright for not controlling his rage and not channeling it into the stream of art. Baldwin's conception of the author's purpose was "that he should try to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art" (NNS, P. 7). Consequently, he argued, the "protest" novels emerged "for what they are: a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty, panic, trapped

6 Bone, p. 4. 7 Ibid.
and immobilized in the sunlit prison of the American dream" (NNS, p. 19).

This apparent shift in roles from that of artist to that of protestor and seer does seem to suggest a loss of objectivity and a distortion of artistic perspective. This is indeed ominous. The society which forms the subject matter of Baldwin's recent works seems to be so incoherent, so bewildered, that the author, like Vivaldo of Another Country, fails to make his characters live as individuals. Ironically, however, it is this very lack of individuality and the confusion which they all share that seems to make them American.

One wonders if this author, who has indeed tried to live according to his own prescriptions, and who has honestly tried to come to terms with himself and to accept the truth he has discovered as a necessary part of life, is doomed to become "identified with the objects of his horror and compassion" (CU, p. 81). For, if this is so, the "impossibility" after which he strives and which he urges his country to pursue is unattainable; the elusive grail will never be grasped. That such a fate seems to be ineluctible is indeed tragic. But life itself is tragic—even for Americans. This they must acknowledge before they can completely free themselves from the nightmare that was once a dream.
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