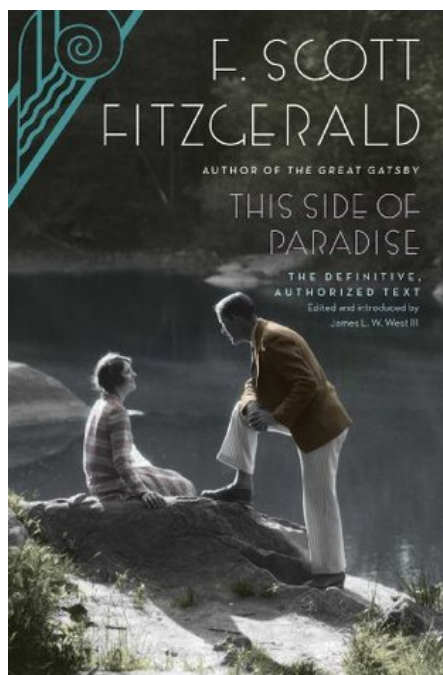




This Side of Paradise

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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This Side of Paradise, F. Scott Fitzgerald's romantic and witty first novel, was written when the author was only twenty-three years old. This semiautobiographical story of the handsome, indulged, and idealistic Princeton student Amory Blaine received critical raves and catapulted Fitzgerald to instant fame. Now, readers can enjoy the newly edited, authorized version of this early classic of the Jazz Age, based on Fitzgerald's original manuscript. In this definitive text, *This Side of Paradise* captures the rhythms and romance of Fitzgerald's youth and offers a poignant portrait of the "Lost Generation."

This Side of Paradise Details

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From Reader Review This Side of Paradise for online ebook

Matt says

I've always thought that English teachers need to take a lesson from drug dealers: hook kids while they're young with good product. In this analogy, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is pure, high-grade cocaine, given away at the nearest street corner. It is an acknowledged classic, always in the running for "the Great American Novel." It is accessible, with prose that is simple yet beautiful. The story is straightforward and relatable and as reductive as a boy trying to impress – and win over – a girl. And it runs deep with themes and symbols, so that any reader paying the least bit of attention will do fine on that school essay.

Also, it's worth noting, it is fun to read.

As a child, I had a great love for reading. My favorite place was the library. Then a succession of English teachers – mainly in high school – took that love of reading and drowned it in the tub. It's not really their fault, I suppose. They probably weren't the ones making the decision to cram *Great Expectations* down the throat of a fourteen or fifteen year-old who is too busy thinking about cheerleaders and a driver's license to give a sprawling Victorian novel the time of day.

It doesn't matter.

When you have to read something with a figurative gun to your head, when you have to read on deadline, when you have to read artificially, coming to conclusions that others have foreordained, the thing you love quickly becomes the thing you dread.

But *The Great Gatsby* I liked.

Only after law school, with no more reading assignments cluttering my life, have I returned to the classics. I reread what I bluffed my way through, or skimmed, or ignored completely.

Despite my earlier affinity for Fitzgerald, however, it has taken me years to get around to reading another one of his books.

But finally, I got around to *This Side of Paradise*, a weird, frustrating, funny minor masterpiece, and Fitzgerald's first novel.

This Side of Paradise tells the story of Amory Blaine, a young boy who comes from a family with money and a good name. The story begins with him in preparatory school, follows him to Princeton, and eventually ends with Amory adrift: he still has the family name, but the money is mostly gone. In the meantime, Amory falls in and out of love, stays out of World War I combat, and carries on a series of dialogues – both internal and external – that probably encapsulates the generation, at least for a narrow cohort of white, privileged, upper class ivy-leaguers.

Fitzgerald's novel is semiautobiographical, weaving events and locations – St. Paul, Minnesota; Princeton; a lousy, heart-breaking breakup – into his fictionalized world. If Amory is meant to be a stand-in for Fitzgerald, it is a relatively scathing self-portrait. Amory is a mostly-unlikeable protagonist: self-absorbed, overly-confident, thin-skinned, aimless and lazy.

The novel is divided into three parts.

The first book, titled (with aching self-consciousness) “The Romantic Egotist” covers Amory’s matriculation. It is written in the third-person limited, from Amory’s point of view. Most of the time is spent at Princeton, where Amory is convinced that he has a bright future (and equally convinced that he shouldn’t have to work for it).

The first book was hard to get through. Amory is a striking exhibit of undeserved privilege. He is fickle and prickly and generally unpleasant to spend time with. The peripheral characters, including Monsignor Darcy, with whom he exchanges letters, and Thomas Park D’Invilliers, a student and would-be poet, are thinly drawn at best. (The fictional D’Invilliers gave *The Great Gatsby* its famous epigraph: “Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her...”). Certainly, none of Fitzgerald’s creations leave the impression of Tom Buchanan’s “cruel body,” clad in “effeminate” riding clothes.

Between Book I and II there is a section titled “Interlude.” This portion of the novel briskly covers Amory’s service in World War I, where Amory serves as an instructor. No further information is given regarding his military stint (and it’s worth noting that Fitzgerald himself never went overseas).

The second book, titled “The Education of a Personage,” begins with a chapter written as a play, with stage directions and dialogue. No reason is given for this temporary shift in narrative style, but it works. The chapter covers Amory’s courtship and love affair with a debutante named Rosalind (standing in for Zelda Sayre). The ebb and flow of this relationship, delineated by conversation, comes close to making Amory into a relatable, half-sympathetic human being.

For much of this book, the reader is held captive to Amory’s pompous proclamations. His long monologues can get a bit frustrating. Every once in awhile, though, Fitzgerald will slip in a little grace note. Near the end of the novel, for example, Amory is shuffling down the road when a man in a limo offers him a ride. Amory then subjects the man to a tiresome disquisition on his economic theories. As the ride ends, it turns out that Amory went to Princeton with the man’s son, who is now dead:

“I sent my son to Princeton...Perhaps you knew him. His name was Jesse Ferrenby. He was killed last year in France.”

“I knew him very well. In fact, he was one of my particular friends.”

“He was – a – quite a fine boy. We were very close.”

Amory began to perceive a resemblance between the father and the dead son and he told himself that there had been all along a sense of familiarity. Jesse Ferrenby, the man who in college had borne off the crown that he had aspired to. It was all so far away. What little boys they had been, working for blue ribbons...The big man held out his hand. Amory saw that the fact that he had known Jesse more than outweighed any disfavor he had created by his opinions. What ghosts were people with which to work!

Mostly, though, Amory is detestable. For instance:

“I detest poor people,” thought Amory suddenly. “I hate them for being poor. Poverty may have been beautiful once, but it’s rotten now. It’s the ugliest thing in the world. It’s essentially cleaner to be corrupt and rich than it is to be innocent and poor.”

It is clear that *This Side of Paradise* is a first book by an extremely talented author. At times, Fitzgerald seems to be toying with the form of a novel, evidenced by the transition from third-person narrative to a play, and his inclusion of letters, poetry and verse. (Of course, Fitzgerald might simply have been stitching things together, since *This Side of Paradise* began life as a different, unpublished work).

Despite being less than three-hundred pages long, it feels meandering and baggy and choppily episodic. There were portions where my eyes just glazed over. But just as often, I was transported by Fitzgerald's lyrical, beautiful prose. I am in awe at how well he can describe a place:

At first Amory noticed only the wealth of sunshine creeping across the long, green swards, dancing on the leaded windowpanes, and swimming around the topes of the spires and towers and battlemented walls...

This Side of Paradise has been deemed a classic and will remain a classic. Overall, I had a positive reaction, though due to its anecdotal nature, I enjoyed the parts more than the whole. Ultimately, my sense is that this is a minor work by a man who later authored major works.

The Roaring Twenties live on in American imagination, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's books fuel that flame. In retrospect, *This Side of Paradise* has been credited with establishing "the image of seemingly carefree, party-mad young men and women out to create a new morality for a new, postwar America."

That's a lot of baggage to heap on a novel with such thin shoulders.

This Side of Paradise really tells the story of only a thin tranche of America's population. Those who were moneyed. Those who were white. Those who were living fast and high during Coolidge's laissez-faire administration, rushing towards their economic doom. Lost – or rather, ignored, completely – is any hint of a world beyond the elite. There are no minorities. There are no wage-earners. There is no indication that anyone from this time period got through life without an emotionally-jarring relationship with a flapper.

This is all a way of saying that I know exactly what this book has *come* to mean. And I do not doubt the effect it had at the time of its publication. Because of the confluence of author, setting, and historical moment, *This Side of Paradise* will live forever. But I'll be honest: I'm going to start forgetting this book real soon.

Britany says

Equal parts loathed and loved this book by America's most beloved author. I loved the dreamlike quality and the switching of verses from the standard novel, stories, poetry, play, and even a section drafted in Q&A format. Original and provocative, especially given that Fitzgerald was only 23 when he wrote this book. I could feel the greenness of his life, and how frightened he must have been of what the world had to offer.

I hated the arrogance and conceited attitude of the main character Amory Blaine- for I can't think of another protagonist that I hated as much I hated Amory. I also tend to hate novels filled with philosophizing and seemingly meaningless ramblings. For those things noted, I had to veer to three stars for this one.

Sarah says

I strongly disliked this book and I'm saying no more lest it turn into a rant.

Edit: Okay, some friends have requested the rant, so here goes. I never connected with the main character. The only time we really get insight into what he's thinking is when he's thinking about how much better he is than everybody else. (gag) We follow his romantic adventures as he falls in love repeatedly and we have no idea how he really feels or why he's doing this. The motivations of all of the characters make no sense to me. They're all paper dolls, doing weird things with no understandable motivations. "Oh, I killed my horse! Sometimes I just go mad and do things like that!" (context makes this make a tiny bit more sense)

And oh, the poetry! It's like Fitzgerald being a pretentious ass and trying to get lame (to me) poetry into a book way too many times. One or two would be fine, but I seriously wanted to close my eyes and bang my head against a wall every time it cropped up. However, that would have given me a hell of a headache because there was a lot of it.

Oh, yes, how could I possibly forget the political ranting in favor of socialism? It went on and on and on and on...

The interesting thing is how extreme my reaction was. Last year I read *The Beautiful and Damned* for a classics challenge, and not only did I give it some five star love, it was also one of my favorite books last year. A favorite of both the challenge *and* a 2015 top 10. So I was understandably extremely excited about this book. His first published book, and a book that took the world by storm. A book that was so popular that he makes a comment in *The Beautiful and Damned* about how all of society is talking about it and it's a must read for them. Arrogant and self-centered but it made me really want to read this. And then I do and I hate it as much as I loved the other. I've also read *The Great Gatsby* and had a sane, normal 3.5 star reaction to it. So why do these two books provoke such a powerful reaction?

Charity says

This Side of Paradise primarily suffers from not being *The Great Gatsby*. And while I know that *This Side of Paradise* is Fitzgerald's first foray into writing, *The Great Gatsby* is most people's first foray into Fitzgerald. People have expectations, you know? *This Side of Paradise* just doesn't measure up. One of *TSOP*'s main flaws is that it has virtually no plot. It does contain the rare snippets of brilliance, but you have to wade through a whole lot of tosh to find them. Still, I can't say that I hated it, however, I've definitely had naps that were more stimulating.

Adrianne Mathiowetz says

Someone needed to tell F. Scott Fitzgerald to stop writing poetry and including it in this book as the work of his characters. You have to read it, because it's freaking F. Scott Fitzgerald and you don't skim the man's work, but honestly this was insufferable.

There were passages in this book that I loved, and parts that I couldn't put down: but overall the work

seemed uneven. The plot structure wasn't really there. The whole focus of the book is simply one character's development as a person from childhood to mid-twenties, and that development isn't always believable.

That said, there was a lot of playfulness in this book that made it fun to read. Midway through, you suddenly have three chapters that are written entirely in play format. Towards the end you enter Amory Blaine's head with a series of questions and answers he's asking and answering for himself, followed by a page of stream of consciousness. These deviations, while abrupt, give effective, fascinating glimpses into the characters' lives that traditional prose could not deliver.

Recommended kinda!

Kirk says

A very flawed novel but one much adored in its day---in fact, *Paradise* was FSF's best known work during his lifetime (not *Gatsby*). Inevitably, biographers pun on it: *THE FAR SIDE OF PARADISE*, *EXILES FROM PARADISE*, *CHEESEBURGER IN PARADISE*---okay, maybe not that last one, but you get the point.

What's most interesting about *TSOP* (as we in the Fitz biz call it) is the new type of Bildungsroman it established. Unlike Victorian coming-of-age novels (think Dickens), Amory Blaine's story avoids easy resolution and creates one of the more realistic portraits of adolescent indirection found in 20th cen lit. I would argue that there'd be no Holden if not for Amory---which, given the lambasting *Catcher in the Rye* has taken lately, may not have been a bad thing.

There's much charm in here: my own favorite character is Eleanor Savage, the daredevil among the women character. Rosalind---often thought to be a transparent portrait of Zelda---isn't sympathetic on the surface, but if you understand her predicament as a teenage girl in the 1910s, you begin to feel some empathy for her. There are also marvelous bursts of rhetoric, including the closing oratory on Amory's generation, which has grown up to find "all wars fought" and "all gods dead."

On the downside, the main character himself can be cloying---something that wasn't necessarily FSF's fault. He was working with a character type known as the "mooncalf," a teenage boy pining for love, and between talk of petting and wearing other men's BVDs (you'll have to check out the "Supercilious" chapter on your own!), he can seem a bit of a woos.

Nevertheless, *TSOP* captured something as America entered the Jazz Age, and the book, for all its faults, is gossamer and sad in all the lovely ways we expect from Mr. Fitzgerald.

Lee says

Of all the writing by writers in their early 20s I've read (and written), this book is down the street and around the corner from most. I wish I'd read about the Romantic Egotist before I wrote a book called *Incidents of Egotourism in the Temporary World* that also takes place in the Princeton area. (I loved when Amory Blaine

biked at night with a friend from P'ton to my hometown.) Fitzgerald writes sharp, swervy, gorgeous, clever sentences, pretty much always with his eyes on the socio-existential prize. Also, really funny: 30 LOLs, at least. Self-consciously episodic in structure, with a conventional, linear, there-and-back again, rising arc (NOT lacking structure, as so many muffinheads on here say; the plot is propelled by Amory's thoughts about his emotional/intellectual progression more than old-fashioned conflict/resolution). Also, I think he's conscious of most of the things people on here level at him re: class -- he seems to me more often critical than complicit (eg, the end of his relationship with Rosalind, not to mention the final rant in the car). It's a lot like Tolstoy's Confession, but here the Egotist steps into the labyrinth of the rest of his life and realizes he knows himself and nothing else. Looking forward to the other F. Scott novels and then re-re-re-reading Gatsby.

Maxwell says

DNFing this one. Maybe it's because I'm not in the mood, or maybe it's just slow and not my jam in general. Either way, just thinking about picking this book up was not inspiring me to read so I'm done.

Jared Logan says

The Great Gatsby is colossal. It's one of those books from your high school reading list that you probably still like. I do. I love Gatsby. When I saw the Baz Luhrman movie was coming out I remembered that I once promised myself I would read all of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels. This Side of Paradise is his first novel, published in 1920.

It's not a good book, but it's a sincere book. It's an everything-and-the-kitchen-sink book. You can tell young F. Scott Fitzgerald put EVERYTHING HE HAD into this book. His life, his loves, his poetry, every idea, every experience--he crammed it all in here and called it a novel. A lot of it doesn't fit together. Not all of it is interesting. Some of it is truly puzzling. The saving grace is that behind it all there's this exuberance and passion that keeps you turning the pages.

There's not much plot to speak of. At first you're reading a bildungsroman, the story of a young american, Amory Blaine, coming of age at Princeton University. Then the story seems to focus on his love life and becomes very episodic, with touches that show you this is a very autobiographical book. The last third of the book gets...experimental. Part of it is written as a one-act play. One brief section is stream-of-consciousness (the introduction says Fitzgerald was inspired by Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man). Then there are the poems. Loads and loads of poems. Some of them are just sort of hanging there in the middle of the chapter, without a lot of context as to what they're doing there. Oh, and there are reading lists of the hip authors Amory and his friends are reading at Princeton. Huge swaths of the novel are just discussions between Amory and his classmates about literature.

So, yeah, all the freshman mistakes are here. I can tell F. Scott Fitzgerald is a first-time novelist here because he makes the mistake new comedians make. They do stand-up comedy ABOUT stand-up comedy. Here, Fitzgerald is writing about writing before he knows how to write.

He's still more brilliant than you or I will ever be. Each section, by itself, is obviously the work of a very precocious young genius in the offing. They don't make a novel when you glue them all together, but taken a piece at a time there's a lot of fascinating stuff here. I particularly liked the section where Amory Blaine meets the devil. And some of the Princeton bits reminded me so much of my own college experience, how

your mind develops and your ideas change during that time.

But what I take away is how ON FIRE Fitzgerald was to write, to get it all down, to get it all out there. That excitement is there in every line. That's the lesson of the book and it's a good one.

Oh, and I also take away that 'Amory Blaine' is a terrible name for a character.

Jason Koivu says

Entitlement courses through every word and hemorrhages forth with a youthful flair for dramatics. That a momentary blemish can nearly bring a girl to tears of despair, that looking into the very face of death wrangles only a moment's serious reflection before thoughts are turned back to the senior prom - these scenes seem too fantastical to believe. And yet, I am angered by them. I loath these characters' nonchalance about life and lives. If they were not authored into existence with such undeniable skill, I would not have wanted to charge into this book and wring their necks. *This Side of Paradise* is a triumph of decadence unveiled.

Jenna says

"It was always the becoming he dreamed of, never the being."

Thinking back in time, I believe that I must have had ADD as a kid because when I was presented with all of the classics in school, I just didn't appreciate them like I am now, with the exception of Poe. Since I finished reading *Of Human Bondage*, I have had a thirst for devouring the classics and lucky me: it's like an extended Christmas since there are so many!!

When deciding on which classics to read my mind went first to F. Scott Fitzgerald, but not because he is considered one of the greatest novelists of all time, but because he settled for a time in North Carolina (my home state), while his wife Zelda was in an institution for schizophrenia. He stayed in Asheville at the Omni Grove Park Inn in room 441, which has not been remodeled since his time there and people can rent this room out to this day and feel the presence of Fitzgerald himself. I have actually had dinner here where you can eat on a veranda that overlooks the mountains and at one time could view the hospital where Zelda once was before it burned down taking her life with it. Enough about that though and on to the book...

This is a story told from the POV of Amory Blaine. It starts out when he is an adolescent and ends when he is a young man. As with many of the classics that I have been reading lately, this is mainly character-driven and he seems to be on a quest to understand his place in the world and to understand life itself. Of course, as with the other classics, this leads to deep introspection once he fails first at love, career, and convention. Once he is stripped of these things it leads him to finally think:

"I know myself, but that is all."

That one sentence really packs a punch and narrows down the entire book. What I loved far more than the story or the characters within was Fitzgerald's poetic prose and I am not one for saying such things.

For a minute they stood there, hating each other with a bitter sadness. But as Avory had loved himself in Eleanor, so now what he hated was only a mirror. Their poses were strewn about the pale dawn like broken glass. The stars were long gone and there were left only the little sighing gusts of wind and the silences between...but naked souls are poor things ever, and soon he turned homeward and let new lights come in with the sun."

Also as with most of the great classics there is the philosophy that decorates the pages and this one wasn't short of them,

"Sentimentalists think they want to be in the pure, simple state they were in before they ate the candy. They don't. They just want the fun of eating it all over again. The matron doesn't want to repeat her girlhood-she wants to repeat her honeymoon. I don't want to repeat my innocence. I want the pleasure of losing it again."

"To hold a man a woman has to appeal to the worst in him." That was the thesis of most of his bad nights...

I love reading stories about the rich, or so Amory was in the beginning, that just wander the Earth looking for introspect. They tend to get heavy at times, but I love to read the rattlings of their minds.

Alexw says

Brilliant dialogue that still rings true after many years of being published. One has to wonder what he would have accomplished if F Scott Fitzgerald had not died so young ?

Glenn Sumi says

An Apprentice Work, With Flashes Of Genius

This Side Of Paradise was Fitzgerald's first novel, the one that made him, at age 23, a literary star, the unofficial chronicler of the flapper era. It was such a success that his ex-girlfriend, Zelda Sayre, agreed to marry him. And we know how *that* turned out.

Autobiographical protagonist Amory Blaine is insufferably narcissistic and egotistical. Fitzgerald was clearly aware of this, and there's more than a bit of satire to his portrait of the vain golden boy; he titled an earlier

version *The Romantic Egotist*. Structurally, the book is all over the place, a collection of vignettes, impressions, poems... there's even something resembling a one-act play near the end. WWI is oddly glossed over in an interlude.

It's a coming of age novel with an experimental feel; at one point Fitzgerald refers to Joyce's *A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man*, and you can sense its influence, especially in the second half.

The book covers Amory's comfortable midwest childhood, his Princeton years and the restless post-war Jazz Age generation. Throughout there's the search for all those things you rhapsodize about when you're very young: love, beauty, spirituality, fulfillment. The narrator occasionally drones on, telling us stuff, like some pedantic teaching assistant outlining a course.

But while the book is clearly, at times painfully, an apprentice work, it shows a ton of potential; you can see why legendary editor Maxwell Perkins agreed to publish it, despite the protests of his less enthusiastic colleagues at Scribner's.

The book has an undeniable vitality, a spark of originality and the occasional flash of genius. You feel that Fitzgerald is attempting to capture his generation, one unshackling itself from pre-war mores. What it needs is a Nick Carraway figure, an outsider among the privileged to comment on the action. Amory is living in the eye of his own dramatic hurricane, and it's hard to get a balanced point of view.

What's eerie, though, is how many prescient passages there are. Like this one:

"Amory, you're young. I'm young. People excuse us now for our poses and vanities, for treating people like Sancho and yet getting away with it. They excuse us now. But you've got a lot of knocks coming to you."

Indeed he does.

Also included is one post-breakup bender that foreshadows the author's later alcoholism. An elegiac feeling suffuses the book, especially near the end. When Amory revisits Princeton after the war, full of early disillusion, Fitzgerald gives us this stunning passage.

Long after midnight the towers and spires of Princeton were visible, with here and there a late-burning light – and suddenly out of the clear darkness the sound of bells. As an endless dream it went on; the spirit of the past brooding over a new generation, the chosen youth from the muddled, unchastened world, still fed romantically on the mistakes and half-forgotten dreams of dead statesmen and poets. Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through a reverie of long days and nights, destined finally to go out into the dirty grey turmoil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all God's dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken...

Fitzgerald's obvious lyrical gift is on display, but there's also a knowledge of the currents and rhythms of life that, even at so young an age, he intuitively grasped.

In short: there's real artistry.

Edward says

Introduction

Note on the Text

Select Bibliography

A Chronology of F. Scott Fitzgerald

--This Side of Paradise

Explanatory Notes

Oriana says

after reading: Meh. Meh, meh, meh. See, this is the problem with re-reading books that shine so bright in your memory — sometimes they just don't live up. I mean, there's really no reason I shouldn't have loved this book. It's filled with philosophical musings and snappy, flirty dialogue; it's pleasantly disjointed, very slice-of-life-y; it's definitely full of verve and probably powerful ideas.... but I just couldn't get into it. I was in fact very impatient throughout. I found Amory Blaine to be a bit of a narcissistic bore, all the female characters thoroughly self-obsessed and false, and most of the other characters either inconsistent, un-memorable, or not believable.

I nearly always feel guilty about not liking a book. In this case my guilt is compounded by the fact that someone who once meant a great deal to me loved the shit out of Fitzgerald, and this book in particular; in fact, it's his copy, full of his underlinings and nearly destroyed due to the number of times it's been caught in in rainstorms, that I still have.

But Nick, I'm sorry. F. Scott, I'm sorry. I just don't love this like I used to.

Giss Golabetoon says

This would be my last Fitzgerald book ever.

His writing style is extraordinary and magnificent but as he might have put it: he doesn't write about anything of importance.

Jim Fonseca says

This was Fitzgerald's first novel, published when he was 23. So it's a coming of age novel and semi-autobiographical. Our main character, Amory, is presented to us as a not-very-likeable egotistical young god. "...he wondered how people could fail to notice he was a boy marked for glory..." He's so "remarkable looking" that a middle aged woman turns around in the theater to tell him so. He's the football quarterback

but hey, who cares, he gives that up. We are told older boys usually detested him.

He's a big hit with the girls but he's disgusted by his first kiss. There's a lot of chasing of girls, drinking, partying, driving fast cars and a tragedy. The blurbs tell us that some young women used the book as a manual for how to be a jazz-age flapper – this in 1920. We even get a bit of goth when we are told that with one girl “evil crept close to him.”

The book is dense with themes, the main one being wealthy young men in an ivy-league environment –Princeton, where Fitzgerald went. So there's a lot about college life and the competition among young men, endless hours over coffee BS-ing about philosophy and their “rushing” to get into the “right” clubs. There are a lot of excerpts of poetry he was reading and writing and one-sentence judgements about the classics (in those days) they had to read. And a bit about writing: “...I get distracted when I start to write stories – get afraid I'm doing it instead of living...”

Hanging over all these young men is not just the usual “what am I going to do with my life” but first, waiting to survive being drafted into World War I. Our main character is conscious of the changing of the generations and their different values: The Victorians are dying out and the WWI generation is in. They are playing with socialism. He's prescient when he tells us “Modern life changes no longer century by century, but year by year, ten times faster than it ever has before...” It sounds as if he's talking about the age of the internet.

By the end of the book he is world-weary, rejected by a woman, fighting a bout of alcoholism. Disillusioned, he turns against books, women and faith. At one point Amory tells us “I detest poor people” because he saw “only coarseness, physical filth, and stupidity.” Was he a Democrat or a Republican? LOL. He has no family left. He is amazing blasé in how he shrugs off the deaths of first his father, then his mother, and finally a monsignor who was a mentor and confidant. Almost noir but a good book. You can see Fitzgerald's emerging genius.

Coincidentally I happened to be reading *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, while reading *Paradise*. I'm amazed at the similarities. Rich young men coming of age (a prep school instead of university) while a war goes on (WW II instead of WW I) and the draft hanging over them.

Kim says

When published in March 1920, this - Fitzgerald's first novel - was an immediate critical and popular success. It led to success for Fitzgerald in another way too, because when it was accepted for publication Zelda Sayre, who had ended her relationship with Fitzgerald the previous year, agreed to marry him. After the first print run sold out within three days of publication, Fitzgerald wired for Zelda to come to New York City to marry him that weekend. She agreed and they married a week after the novel was published. The pair then fell headlong into the life of celebrity which contributed so much to their ultimate downfall.

In some ways it's difficult to understand why this work was so well received. It has "first novel" stamped all over it. The writing is uneven in quality and patchy in tone, clearly cobbled together from pieces which don't always fit together harmoniously. Fitzgerald combines standard prose narrative, narrative in the form of a play, free verse and rather pedestrian poetry to tell the story of Amory Blaine, a young mid-Westerner who believes he will achieve extraordinary success in life. He goes to boarding school and then to university, falls in and out of love, drinks too much, tries to write, goes to war, works briefly in an advertising agency and

endlessly philosophises alone and with his friends.

Amory is squarely based on Fitzgerald and much of the action is autobiographical. While what appealed to critics about the novel in 1920 was the exploration of young American manhood in the aftermath of World War I, it is the autobiographical flavour of the novel which is probably of most interest to modern readers. Fitzgerald's ego and his insecurities, his relationship with Zelda, his desire for success, the cynicism of the age are all there in the text. Amory Blaine's self-obsession is Fitzgerald's self-obsession, not the less real for being insightful. In a moment of introspection, Blaine reflects:

He knew tht he could sophisticate himself finally into saying that his own weakness was just the result of circumstance and environment; that often when he raged at himself as an egotist something would whisper ingratiatingly "No, Genius!". That was one manifestation of fear, that voice which whispered that he could be both great and good, that genius was the exact combination of those inexplicable grooves and twists in his mind, that any discipline would curb it to mediocrity. Probably more than any concrete vice or failing Amory despised his own personality - he loathed knowing that tomorrow and the thousand days after he would swell pompously at a compliment and sulk at an ill word like a third-rate musician or a first class actor. He was ashamed of the fact that simple and honest people usually distrusted him; that he had been cruel, often, to those who had sunk their personalities in him - several girls, and a man here and there through college, that he had been an evil influence on people who had followed him here and there into mental adventures from which he alone rebounded unscathed.

Knowing that Fitzgerald did not continue to rebound unscathed from those mental adventures adds a certain poignancy to reading this novel. However, notwithstanding the beautiful prose, the evocation of the age with which Fitzgerald has become synonymous, and the autobiographical insights, this is not a work I have any particular interest in reading again. Most of the problem with the novel is, I think, that clever young men are never quite as interesting as they think they are. Two stars for Amory's story and another one because of the insight it provides into the workings of the young Fitzgerald's mind.

David Fleming says

So how is it that this novel, despite it's shortcomings, was still able to be successful? Ask any New York agent to represent your literary novel with a male protagonist and he'll tell you: "Literary novel's with a male protagonist are hard sells." And they are. Think about it: How many literary novels with male protagonists have you enjoyed in the last, say, five years? Probably zero. The key to the success of *This Side of Paradise* is in Fitzgerald's mastery of the Male Protagonist in a Literary Novel Problem. But why should this even be a problem at all? It's my belief that males generally don't relate to one and other. They dominate each other. The question of 'do you respect a full grown man?' really comes down to: 'is he dominate in some way?'

In a literary novel, a male protagonist is essentially going after the status quo. He's saying that the society in which you live needs to change. We're not apt to give credence to a full grown male who thinks things should change and yet is not in a powerful situation. We'll assume it's sour grapes. So, in a literary novel, a male lead must be powerful enough to have an unbiased view of the problem he sees with society. The difficulty is that powerful, dominant men generally don't tend to be sensitive and open-minded enough to appreciate a societal problem. What's needed in a literary male protagonist is a delicate balance of sensitivity and strength that we don't normally see in the real world.

Many a would-be author will pen a male protagonist who just isn't strong enough for us to feel sympathy for him. And striking this balance, or countermining this principle, has been the secret struggle of many a literary author. Shakespeare's Hamlet was a whinny, emotional punk... but he was the king of Denmark;

T.S. Garp was a famous author; most all of Hemingway's male leads were war veterans or soldiers or, in the case of *The Old Man and the Sea*, handicapped with age. Other ways to get around the unsympathetic male protagonist is with youth, ie, *Lord of the Flies*, *Catcher in the Rye* and *Huckleberry Finn*, or insanity, (see: *Hamlet*, yet again), *Lolita*, *Moby Dick* (Captain Ahab) and *Slaughter House Five*.

The average, weak and sensitive male is to be avoided at all costs by the would-be author of literary fiction. History shows us that it is only kind to those that follow this principle and *This Side of Paradise* is no exception. Where Fitzgerald succeeds is with his execution of what I'll call the Snob Narrator (something that he wasted no time in establishing in *The Great Gatsby*). Amory Blaine is sensitive and weak in many ways—for example his vanity—but since he is a Princeton student and literary scholar, we know he also has dominance. It's this balance of sensitivity and strength (much like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) that convince us through the 268 pages of this novel until the very end that Amory Blaine might have the solution to what is wrong with society. SPOILER ALERT: He didn't. Fun read though. And very inventive.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

This side of paradise, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896 - 1940)

This Side of Paradise is the debut novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald. It was published in 1920. Taking its title from a line of Rupert Brooke's poem *Tiare Tahiti*, the book examines the lives and morality of post-World War I youth. Its protagonist, Amory Blaine, is an attractive Princeton University student who dabbles in literature. The novel explores the theme of love warped by greed and status seeking.

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