

Fitzgerald the Poet

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“Poetry is dying first. It’ll be absorbed into prose sooner or
later.”

— *The Beautiful and Damned*

Abstract

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom argues that poets are under the influence of their predecessors. In order to construct an authentic voice in poetry, the younger poet needs to undergo a process of “misunderstanding, misinterpreting, misalliance” that would require him to both acknowledge and, at the same time, diverge from the influential poet to situate his poems in the history of poetry. Although more famous for his novels, short stories and screenplays, F. Scott Fitzgerald also wrote poems and was vocal about the influence of especially Keats, as well as other English and American poets. His attempts at writing poetry date back to his Newman School and Princeton years; however, he has never been recognized as a prominent figure in poetry. Some critics even call him a “failed poet.” The reason for this failure seems to be that Fitzgerald’s anxiety was not of becoming a great poet influenced by traditional poets but to be just like them. The aim of this paper is to discuss how Keats and other figures in Fitzgerald’s life shaped his understanding of poetry and how his poetic composition influenced his novels.

Keywords

F. Scott Fitzgerald, Poetry, Influence, Biography, John Keats

Özet

Harold Bloom *The Anxiety of Influence* eserinde şairlerin önceki kuşaktan gelen şairlerden etkilendiklerini savunur. Şairin kendine özgü stilini oluşturabilmesi için şiirlerinde hem eski şairleri geleneğin bir parçası olarak tanıdığını, hem de onlardan farkını ortaya çıkararak kendinin de ana akım şiir geleneğinin içerisinde olduğunu gösterdiği bir “yanlış anlama, yanlış yorumlama ve denk düşmeme” sürecinden geçmesi gerekmektedir. Romanları, kısa öyküleri ve senaryolarıyla bilinen F. Scott Fitzgerald aynı zamanda şiirler yazmış, İngiliz ve Amerikalı şairlerden etkilendiğini her fırsatta vurgulamıştır. Şiir denemeleri yazarın Newman Okulu ve Princeton yıllarına kadar uzanır, ancak şiir alanında hiçbir zaman öne çıkmamıştır. Bazı eleştirmenler onu “başarısız bir şair” olarak bile tanımlamışlardır. Bu başarısızlığın ardında yatan Fitzgerald’ın önceki kuşak şairlerden etkilenen iyi bir şair olmak isteme endişesi değil, tıpkı onlar gibi olmak istemesi olarak değerlendirilebilir. Bu makalenin amacı, Keats ve Fitzgerald’ın hayatındaki diğer insanların onun şiir anlayışını nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve onun şiir tekniğinin romanlarına nasıl etki ettiğini tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

F. Scott Fitzgerald, Şiir, Etkilenme, Biyografi, John Keats

Anthony’s words from *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) illustrate how poetry is an indispensable part of Fitzgerald’s prose. Many of Fitzgerald’s novels have been named after the famous lines of Romantic poets; *This Side of Paradise* (1920) after a line in Rupert Brooke’s *Tiare Tahiti* (1916), and *Tender is the Night* (1934) after Keats’s poem, “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819). His influence by Keats’s poems has been traced in his novels by numerous Fitzgerald critics¹. More famous for his novels, short stories, and screenplays, Fitzgerald also wrote poems which influenced, and sometimes appeared directly in, his prose. His poems,

1 Keats’s influence on Fitzgerald’s prose has been traced by numerous critics. Although Maxwell Perkins has been noted to be responsible for the title choices for Fitzgerald (Inge 626), there are still contextual references to Keats which have been traced by other critics. To name some, for general interpretations one may read Richard Lehan, James Miller, Andrews Wanning, Dan McCall, Robert Sklar, and Malcolm Cowley whose works are provided in the Works Cited.

which have not received ample attention, bear resemblance to Keats's poems; however, the poems that he wrote evolve and contain some of the most striking images he uses later to describe some of his novel heroines. In a way, Fitzgerald breaks free of the influence and establishes his ideas initially in his poems. In fact, among many other influences, Fitzgerald was not only inspired by these external influences, but also by the poems he wrote throughout his career which can be considered as sketches for his prose later in his career. As he maintains in a letter to Frances Scottie, the talent which matures at an early age is that of writing poems, whereas writing prose is influenced by other factors as well (Turnbull 85). Throughout his career, Fitzgerald was vocal about his interest in poetry and emphasized its strong influence on him through the appraisal of Romantic poets Keats, Swinburne and Brooke in his writing (Sklar 25). In numerous letters he states his admiration for these Romantic poets and further insists on Scottie reading Keats and incorporating his poems in her education (Turnbull 29, 86-87). For Fitzgerald, poetry is a medium in which talent matures the easiest, and in order to construct a distinct style in poetry, one must "absorb half a dozen top-flight authors every year," as he advises to Scottie Fitzgerald (Turnbull 86; Cowley 60). Thus, focusing on Fitzgerald's poems as autobiographical anecdotes, as imitations of Keats, and as sketches for his later novels would fill the gap between his juvenilia work and his later career.

During his life, seldom of his poems appeared mostly in *Nassau Literary Magazine*, and others he appropriated into his prose, and a good number of them were found in his notebooks and journals, and published posthumously. Thus, his poems received a limited amount of critical attention. By some of his later critics, he was regarded as a "failed poet,"² unsuccessful, and derivative of Keats (Brucoli; Dickey xii). Although his first attempts begin with a direct imitation of Keats, his later poems attain an authentic voice. James Dickey suggests in his Foreword to Fitzgerald's posthumously published work *Poems: 1911-1940* (1981) that if lyric success is associated with "penetration and memorability," then Fitzgerald had "sparks" of success in his poetry that reveal "the authentic Fitzgeraldian insight" (xiii-xiv). As the present study argues, what made Fitzgerald's prose so 'poetic' was not only that he was reading a good deal of romantic writers but also that he had shaped his style by rooting himself in *his* poetry. He was an aspiring poet, whose poems later fully bloomed in his novels.

2 The jacket of *Poems 1911-1940* (1981), has the editor Brucoli's comments on the book, in which he calls Fitzgerald a "failed poet."

Like many of his novels and stories, some of Fitzgerald's poems allude to autobiographical events. Fitzgerald admired football at an early age; as a young student in St. Paul's Academy, he joined the football team (Piper 4). With his "too light and fragile" figure, Henry Dan Piper remarks, Fitzgerald was not fit to play in a team; even in the practices his clumsiness led him to score for the other team and another time resulted in cracking his rib (4). The headmaster of St. Paul, C.N.B. Wheeler, was one of the earliest figures in Fitzgerald's life to advise him to write (Piper 14). According to Piper, out of these failures Fitzgerald wrote his first story "Reade, Substitute Right Half" (1910) in which the protagonist is a football player for whom everyone cheers at the end (4). After this story he wrote a poem about football, this time in Newman School:

Now they're ready, now they're waiting,
Now he's going to place the ball.
There, you hear the referee's whistle,
As of old the baton's fall. (Fitzgerald, *Poems 1911-1940* 3)

"Football" (c.1911), a poem that appeared in *Newman News*, describes a football game through the movement of the players. Unlike the St. Paul Academy short story "Reade, Substitute Right Half" (1910), in which he created a slim, light-haired protagonist just like himself, a year later in "Football," Fitzgerald praises football players by listing the quick-paced movements of the players (Piper 17). The poem, in contrast to the story, does not have the protagonist who makes Fitzgerald's dream of being a football player come true; rather, he seems to have accepted the fact that he was terrible at playing football. As the poem is written from the perspective of a commentator, the poem's focus becomes praising the team instead of being part of the team. From the distance he creates in the poem it can be inferred that Fitzgerald abandoned the idea of becoming a football player. Later in *This Side of Paradise* (1920) he would make peace with his short-lived experience as a football player:

He went all wrong at the start, was generally considered both conceited and arrogant, and universally

detested. He played football intensely, alternating a reckless brilliancy with a tendency to keep himself as safe from hazard as decency would permit. (*TSOP* 30)

Amory Blaine, like Fitzgerald, desires to become a football player in order to be popular; however, he ends up being disliked by his peers and soon adds to his unpopularity by getting involved in a fight. Fitzgerald's later portrayal of Amory aspiring to be a football player is much different from that of the earlier "Reade, Substitute Right Half," in which Reade, unlike the author, achieves his goal to become popular and a good player. The function of the poem in between these two football narratives is to create tranquility in his emotions; for Fitzgerald, poetry seems to be his medium of contemplation through which he makes peace with his frustrations in his youth. Charles Weir Jr. further illustrates that Fitzgerald wrote poetry "to recover from the rejection from the football team" (139). Fitzgerald's later poems not only rehabilitate him from his frustrations, as Weir highlights, but also inspire him to find his voice as an authentic writer.

Although his juvenilia have examples of short prose affecting his poems as illustrated above, some of Fitzgerald's lasting images have sprouted from his poems. In his letters and interviews, he names poets from the nineteenth century to be his source of inspiration, particularly the Romantic poets (Dickey xii; Moore vii; Turnbull 88, 317). Like his prose, most of his early poems draw their sources from Romantic poets. At Princeton, Fitzgerald joined a group of young men aspiring to become writers. It was during his Princeton years that he met along with Edmund Wilson, John Peale Bishop and Shane Leslie. In a letter to her daughter Fitzgerald later reflects on the time he spent with them as the time when he found his "own private intellectual and emotional life" (Turnbull 74). In contrast, Goldhurst argues that Fitzgerald's joining of the group was simply because he noticed his "lack of sophistication" and joined the group to overcome his deficiency (44). At the time Fitzgerald joined the Triangle Club, Wilson was already a prominent editor in *Nassau Literary Magazine* and urged his friend to send manuscripts (Berman 29). These were to be his first publications; the first step for his becoming a professional writer. In the Triangle Club, Fitzgerald was introduced to the poems of Keats, Swinburne, Wilde, Brooke and Verlaine among others which stimulated him to write within this tra-

dition (Piper 25). The early encounter of Fitzgerald with the poems of Keats indicates that Fitzgerald initially tried to imitate Keats in order to understand his style. Exemplary of his earliest influence by Keats, Fitzgerald's "To My Unused Greek Book" (1916) is a parody of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" that imitates the ten-syllable lines in terms of rhyme, meter, and diction:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou joyless harbringer of future fear,
Garrulous alien, what thou mightst express
Will never fall, please God, upon my ear.
What rhyme or reason can invest thy shape
That is not found in the syllabi?
What trots and cribs there are, what ponies rich,
With all thou sing'st and in a clearer key.
Expose thee to a classroom's savage rape?
Nay! better far remain within thy niche. (*Poems* 43)

In this early attempt to be a great poet, Fitzgerald imitates the form of the poem he admires; this brings to mind Wilson's comments on Fitzgerald lacking "imagination," "aesthetic ideal," and "ideas to express" (Wilson 80). His poem not only demonstrates the young writer's struggle to be like his precursor but also shows how clueless he is when it comes to the poetry of Keats. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is a description of the urn that encapsulates the secrets of its time. Like a historian, the urn narrates history as the questions in the poem reveal the events. In the poem, Keats describes beauty to exist in the form of art and to have timeless quality (Lehan 9). For Keats, beauty is a timeless phenomenon that can exist only in the realm of art and the artist is the only person who can attain this ideal form of beauty (9). While old age wastes the younger generation, the urn remains an eternal entity. The beauty of the urn is described as all there is to the truth in life. Thus, the contrast between the transitory nature of human beings and the permanence of art becomes the central theme of the poem. As a young poet-in-the-making, Fitzgerald appears to have understood the poem through its surface meaning in his misinterpreted imitation. In the following

summer, his understanding of poetry was enhanced through his peers at Princeton.

In the summer of 1917, Fitzgerald spent a month with John Peale Bishop, a schoolmate and fellow poet from Princeton, who taught him “the difference between poetry and non-poetry,” and more about the English poets Keats, Swinburne, Brooke and Wordsworth (Turnbull 88; Dickey xii-xiii). After this moment Fitzgerald would argue that reading Keats, “all other poetry” would sound as “only whistling or humming” (Turnbull 88). With Bishop, Fitzgerald spent all his time and energy on writing poems “under the Masefield-Brooke influence” (317). He felt that his time was limited; if he wanted to be a great poet like Keats, he believed that he needed to write a book of great verse before he was twenty one (Brucoli and Bryer 269).

Among Fitzgerald’s favorite poems of Keats, a common theme emerges; the poet and his inspiration. Specifically in Keats’s “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” “Lines on the Mermaid Tavern,” “Ode to Apollo” and “Hymn to Apollo” the difficulty of inspiration for a poet and his poetic composition are explored. These poems that have influenced Fitzgerald focus on the burdens of “influence” on a poet. In “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” the persona of the poem feels inadequate for the laborious task of creation, and the anxiety to fulfill the expectation of becoming a successful poet overwhelms him. Similarly in “Lines Written on the Mermaid Tavern,” the incomparability of the poets in history are described to lie in their power to create celestial, ideal beauty out of common material, represented by the sign-post of the tavern. Likewise Keats’s “Ode to Apollo” addresses Apollo, the god associated with poetry, and lists seven additional remarkable poets Apollo has influenced. The poet-persona seeks an approval from Apollo to see if he is eligible to speak of his music or if he is merely “a worm” in the earth, unworthy of carrying his inspiration to earthly realms (Keats 98-99). In the poem, the creation of ideal beauty is described by the poet-persona through the reference to the celestial sound of Apollo’s lyre, which creates heavenly music. This image is reiterated in “Hymn to Apollo” as the “dying tones” of the earth (44). Hence, the concept of ideal beauty created in heavenly “golden” spheres is associated with melancholic tunes, which in turn highlights the unattainability of beauty. Fitzgerald makes use of the repetition of the word “gold” in his poem “The Cameo Frame” (1917), this time to create his understanding of ideal beauty embodied by a golden-haired woman:

Golden, golden is the air,
Golden is the air,
Golden frets of golden mandolins,
Golden notes of golden violins,
Fair...Oh wearily fair;
Skeins from woven basket
Mortal may not hold,
Oh what young extravagant god,
Who would know it or ask it...
Who could give such gold... (*Poems* 69)

The repetition of the word “gold” echoes Keats’s poem; however, instead of praising Apollo, “The Cameo Frame” praises a blonde woman, who later becomes one of Fitzgerald’s signature characters, the Southern Belle. The lines below describe the blonde woman posing for her lover at sunset, with a combination of the colors gold and rose to highlight the sunset in the setting:

“Head to the left...so...Can you stand
A little more sun on hair and face?”
Then as he lightly touched her hand
She whispered to him a time, a place
Then he aloud “Here’s the very light,
My Lord, for the gold and rose effect...
Such a light over pool and sky
As cameo never was graven by.” (*Poems* 70; quotations in original)

This vivid impression of the blonde woman at sunset, with sunlight reflecting on her hair, appears to be equally inspiring for Fitzgerald as he relates the creation of this artistic moment to have a divine quality. Between 1914 and 1917, Fitzgerald was also under the spell of Ginevra King who became the image of unattainable beauty as his admirations were unrequited (Meyers 29). As a result, Fitzgerald made use of Keats’s poem to construct his understanding of unattainable ideal beauty in the form of a blonde woman. The image of the blonde woman posing

for her lover at sunset later dimly appears in Nicole's description in *Tender is the Night* (1934):

Her face, ivory gold against the blurred sunset that strove through the rain, had a promise Dick had never seen before: the high cheekbones, the faintly wan quality, cool rather than feverish, was reminiscent of the frame of a promising colt – a creature whose life did not promise to be only a projection of youth upon a greyer screen, but instead, a true growing; the face would be handsome in middle life; it would be handsome in old age: the essential structure and the economy were there. (*TITN* 36-37)

Nicole's depiction in the novel exemplifies how Fitzgerald had drawn from his earlier poem by way of the color combinations he repeatedly uses. In the same poem the color play is used in another description of Nicole once again. Like Nicole's dress that alternates between "blue or grey," the woman in the poem wears a "grey and velvet dress" with her "very blonde hair" dazzling Dick,

With light and languor and little sighs
Just so subtly he scarcely knows
Laughing lightning, color of rose. (*Poems* 70)

The description of the woman laughing in the poem deviates into a smiling Nicole whose face lights up like that of an angel (*TITN* 28-29). "The Cameo Frame," being one of the rare poems chosen for publication is praised to the extent that reviewer John Bakeless from *Williams Literary Magazine* asks in 1917 why Fitzgerald would "attack the short story" when he is already so talented in writing verse (304). His remarks indicate that Fitzgerald was in fact creating vivid images in his poems, like that of the Southern belle. Fitzgerald's image of the Southern belle in his verse and prose was to be shaped also by women who entered his life after Ginerva King. Henry Dan Piper argues that the work Fitzgerald wrote in his undergraduate years were mainly

about her, his father, and his “unfulfilled dreams” (Piper 35-36). After the disappointment Fitzgerald had with Ginevra King, he met Zelda Sayer in the summer of 1918 (Roulston xv). Right after their meeting, Fitzgerald’s idealized sense of beauty seems to have found another embodiment as seen in “My First Love” (1919). The attempt to define his understanding of ideal beauty develops in the poem. Fitzgerald’s “My First Love” can be read as a construction of his notion of ideal, eternal beauty that symbolically refers to his understanding of artistic creation. In the poem the lover is associated with the light while the persona, in contrast, remains as a darker figure:

All my ways she wove of light
Wove them half alive,
Made them warm and beauty-bright...
So the shining, ambient air
Clothes the golden waters where
The pearl fishers dive. (*Poems* 75)

The woman described in the poem brings warmth and brightness to the persona’s life as she illuminates his path in his journey as an artist. The woman represents eternal beauty as she is “half an aeon older.” The blinding light of the woman fades after she abandons the persona, leaving him once again in darkness when he sees “the changing shades” and is no longer “color-blind.” The final lines of the poem suggest that the blinding, ideal beauty as portrayed in the woman who is half an eternity older, limits the speaker. However, as soon as she leaves the persona, he sees things clearly in his dark existence, suggesting that artistic creation depends upon seeing the shades in things. For Fitzgerald it seems that melancholy, pain, sadness, represented by the abandoning of the young lover, provokes artistic creation and is preferred over ideal beauty in blinding light. Zelda seems to appear in Fitzgerald’s poetry for the first time as the embodiment of true beauty that frees him from his earlier color-blindness, referring to the earlier poems that he had written about women.

About the style of the poem, Henry Dan Piper comments that the poem makes use of “tired Edwardian meters and conventional clichés, so that the poem lacks that freshness and immediacy of dialogue and

imagery;” however, in terms of the subject of artistic creation through loss and the construction of unattainable ideal beauty, Fitzgerald’s poem resembles Keats’s “Isabella; or the Pot of Basil” (Piper 34-35). In Keats’s poem, Isabella is depicted as the symbol of ideal beauty and her lover Lorenzo, cannot come within reach of her and can only expect to listen to “her morning-step upon the stair.” Beauty that is not seen but only heard in the poem establishes the idea that Lorenzo is a poet who desires to attain the power of divine poesy. Since Isabella represents ideal beauty, Lorenzo is at the door holding the latch, but never able to meet her. Thus the laborious task of artistic creation here is represented by waiting all night, just to hear her footsteps but never actually seeing or encountering the ideal. Thus ideal beauty is always out there, but never met. The poem that focuses on the auditory representation of beauty reminds the reader of Daisy’s depiction in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Daisy’s voice was the kind that

[...] the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: [...] a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour. (GG 8)

The voice of Daisy which resembles a musical tune that cannot be repeated illustrates how, for Fitzgerald, ideal beauty can never be fully grasped by the poet. Even when it is achieved, the possibility of losing it or its decay is ever-present. In an earlier poem, “One Southern Girl” (1921), Fitzgerald delves into this idea. In “One Southern Girl” (1921), the search to describe ideal beauty is finally achieved through the creation of a recurring depiction in Fitzgerald’s works; the Southern belle. Written after marrying Zelda, Mizener describes the newlywed Fitzgerald as a “jealous, charmed, ecstatic” man whose wife loved him back (Mizener, *Far Side of Paradise* 82). The discrepancy between possession and loss haunts the poem as if it sheds light on their future years together. The girl in the poem is described as belonging to the past, to suggest

that ideal beauty, if ever achieved, will decay. The image of the girl is used in the poem to represent a nostalgic view of the passing of time.

Lolling down on the edge of time
Where the flower months fade as the days move over,
Days that are long like lazy rhyme,
Nights that are pale with the moon and the clover,
Summer, there is a dream of summer [...] (*Poems* 113)

The poem describes the ending of summer when the long days like “lazy rhyme” are over to illustrate the idea of decaying beauty: “Who is the harlequin, who is the mummer, / You or time or the multitude? (*P* 113),” juxtaposing an idealized understanding of beauty, summer, with its worthlessness and corruptibility that create a sense of nostalgia, a frequent theme in Fitzgerald’s writings. James Dickey describes this as the “‘heartbreak’ quality” that blends irony with an apologetic sense of describing the world the poet Fitzgerald has faced (xiii). Time, for Keats and for Fitzgerald, works against humanity, and the beauty of life slips away quickly. The persona in “One Southern Girl” asks the woman if she has resisted time with her golden hair lighting the ground and dazzling blinds, suggesting that Fitzgerald might be alluding to his earlier poem “My First Love” through the description of the beautiful woman that blinds the persona.

Still does you hair’s gold light the ground
And dazzle the blind ‘till their old ghosts rise;
Then, all you cared to find being found,
Are you yet kind to their hungry eyes? (*Poems* 75)

In the poem, the fear of the loss of the hard-won ideal beauty is personified by the southern girl. The jealousy of Fitzgerald, as pointed out by Mizener, reveals the his fear that he will lose the love of his life to “the hungry eyes” that surround her. Both poems are significant in the sense that they shed light on Fitzgerald’s vision of Zelda in the sense that she represents beauty found and lost at the same time. What

remains of the relationship between the southern girl and the persona in “One Southern Girl” are fragments of moments, “Kisses, a lazy street – and night,” that are imprisoned in the fragmented memories of the speaker (*Poems* 113). These fragments further underline the concepts of the passing of time and decaying beauty, which are the two themes influenced by Keats readdressed in the later works of Fitzgerald.

In Fitzgerald’s poems, it seems that the Keatsian concept of unattainable beauty transforms into the Southern belle that can eventually be won; however, for Fitzgerald winning the girl’s heart is not the end as it contains also the threat of losing the girl. Even though Fitzgerald’s heroes face this potential loss, they embrace the momentary happiness. In the poems of Keats the persona is “half in love with easeful death,” whereas Fitzgerald’s poems delve in the potential of happiness even if it may result in destruction (Keats 347). “Rain Before Dawn” (1917) focuses on the loss the persona faces after the lover has abandoned him:

The dull, faint patter in the drooping hours
Drifts in upon my sleep and fills my hair
With damp; the burden of the heavy air
Is strewn upon me where my tired soul cowers,
Shrinking like some lone queen in empty towers
Dying. [...] (*Poems* 65)

Fitzgerald’s poem likens the loss of beauty to death; as the title indicates “The Rain Before Dawn” describes the rainfall before sunrise that echoes the uneasy sentiment of the speaker who has been left by his lover. This parallelism between the “damp,” “heavy” air and the “tired soul” of the persona constructs a dismal atmosphere for the poem. The desolation described in the poem reminds the reader of Fitzgerald’s definition of the “dark night of the soul” where “it is three o’clock in the morning” (Trilling 201). His depiction of the night essentially describes Fitzgerald’s fear of abandonment that, read together with “One Southern Girl,” presents the conflicting nature of Fitzgerald’s relationship with Zelda and other women.

Except for “One Southern Girl” (1921) the rest of Fitzgerald’s poems discussed above were written before the publication of *This Side of*

Paradise. These poems, some of which appeared later in *TSOP*, were designed to be published as a poetry collection in 1917. Fitzgerald's plans to get these poems published were hindered for a few reasons.

The first reason was that Fitzgerald was unable to find a publisher for his poems. In 1917 Fitzgerald wrote to Edmund Wilson about his final attempt in becoming a professional poet: "I sent twelve poems to magazines yesterday. If I get them all back, I'm going to give up poetry and turn to prose," and attached one of the poems, "Cecilia," that later appeared in *TSOP* as an untitled poem (Turnbull 318; *TSOP* 253). In a follow-up letter to Wilson the same year in fall, Fitzgerald inserted another poem, "The Way of Purgation," that appeared later in *TSOP* that had been accepted by *Poet Lore* to be published (Turnbull 320; *TSOP* 273). As discussed earlier, Edmund Wilson had been a mentor to Fitzgerald starting from his Princeton years. He not only edited his work but also advised Fitzgerald on what to read, and what he should be critical of, some of which he avoided (Berman 33). The brief commentary on his verse by Bakeless indicates that for some he was a promising poet; yet, the criticism by Edmund Wilson in particular seems to have led him to abandon poetry. His harsh criticism during Fitzgerald's career shaped his style at times. His friends John Peale Bishop and Edmund Wilson mocked his academic failure in a poem entitled "Lampoon," which later continued in Fitzgerald's writing career as well (Goldhurst 48-50). Particularly after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, Wilson commented some of the poems were good, but that he should focus more on the form of the novel (Goldhurst 54). This later created between them a friction that would continue later in his career. Edmund Wilson was one of the harshest critics of Fitzgerald; early in his career he stated that Fitzgerald's prose suffered "badly from lack of discipline and poverty of aesthetic ideas" (qtd. in Goldhurst 84). According to Meyers, Wilson scorned Fitzgerald throughout his life, only to revive his reputation after his death (336). It may be inferred that his critique of Fitzgerald which had begun in his Princeton years extended also to Fitzgerald's poems. The publishers might have shared the same opinion; in 1919 he faced rejection 122 times which made him realize that he needed to be better than an undergraduate writing for *Nassau Literary Magazine* (Roulston 12). Except for *Poet Lore*, no other publishing company agreed to publish his poems. Even then, as Mizener explains in *Far Side of Paradise*, *Poet Lore* had to cancel the publication when war broke out. (Mizener 69-70; Sklar 25)

A second reason for Fitzgerald quitting poetry and turning to prose is revealed in a letter to his friend Shane Leslie who was one of the greatest supporters of Fitzgerald's verse; so much so that he remained skeptical of his prose almost until his second novel (Sklar 25; Roulston 25). In a letter to Leslie in 1917 Fitzgerald reveals two of the reasons why he had given up writing poetry: "The reason I've abandoned my idea of a book of poems is that I've only about twenty poems and can't write any more in this atmosphere – while I can write prose, so I am sandwiching the poems between realms of autobiography and fiction" (Turnbull 371). As Fitzgerald emphasizes in this letter, he was having a difficult time focusing on writing poetry and he failed to write as productively as he did when he was a civilian, therefore he made use of the rejected poems he had written to be used in his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. Therefore as a result of multiple rejections by publishers and the army environment, Fitzgerald was forced to give up poetry.

Another reason given by critics is founded on economic reasons; he decided that poetry would not be as profitable as a novel. Sklar argues that Fitzgerald was more interested in publishing a book as soon as possible which resulted in his disinterest in poetry at the time (25). Fitzgerald admits that he discarded poetry from his life during his time in the infantry office in pursuit of "writing an immortal novel" (qtd. in Sklar 26). Fitzgerald's intention, Cowley argues, was not to become a poet (60). Interestingly, for a writer who *never* wanted to become a poet, the impact of poetry in his life can be found in the works he published throughout his career. Furthermore, as a mentor to his daughter, he wanted Scottie to admire Romantic poets to develop herself as a writer, just like himself, who would lay the foundations of her career in poetry just like himself (Cowley 60; Turnbull 86-87). Moreover, the topic of poetry emerges repeatedly not only in his letters but also in his poem "City Dusk" (1918) and in his later novels.

In his poem "City Dusk" (1918) there are traces of an explanation to why Fitzgerald abandoned poetry in his professional career. On the surface, the poem appears to be yet another imitation of Keats in terms of tone and imagery, however, the poem reveals another interesting detail about how he gives up becoming a professional poet. In "City Dusk," Fitzgerald makes use of the image of the city at night as the setting and contrasts the grim nighttime with the pleasant city lights to highlight the melancholic tone of the poem through this contrast.

Come out....out
To this inevitable night of mine
Oh you drinker of new wine,
Here's pageantry....Here's carnival,
Rich dusk, dim streets and all
The whisperings of city night. (*Poems 73*)

The persona invites the “new drinker,” a younger person than the speaker, to the “inevitable night,” which can be inferred as his inescapable death. The dark, grim invitation of the persona once again invokes Keats’s melancholic tone in “Ode to a Nightingale” as he underlines the sonorous nightingale symbolizing death. What further echoes Keats’s poem is the use of “wine” as an escape from this misery. In contrast to the dark night, the streets are illuminated by the city lights and entertainment, described as pageantry and carnival accompany wine as an escape from the grim invitation to the darkness of the night. The speaker longs for darkness, however, the light of the city and the singing in the streets interrupt with the desired darkness. Soon the speaker gives into the intoxication and blends into the joys of the night, described as a place with

Faint violins where lovely ladies dine,
The brushing of skirts, the voices of the night
And all the lure of friendly eyes...Ah there
We'll drift like summer sounds upon the summer
air... (74)

The same lines may alternately read as a memory of Fitzgerald with Edmund Wilson. The “friendly eyes” he refers to might be those of Edmund Wilson, who at the time had moved to New York and invited his friend for a visit. After this visit one can infer that Fitzgerald had departed his ways with Wilson as his advisor. In his poem, he confesses his giving up of publishing poetry:

I have closed my book of fading harmonies,
(The shadows fell across me in the park)

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And my soul was sad with violins and trees,
And I was sick for dark,
When suddenly it hastened by me, bringing
Thousands of lights, a haunting breeze,
And a night of streets and singing... (*Poems* 73)

In the poem, the contrast between the city and nature refers to the contrast between prose and poetry. As Fitzgerald closes his chapter of “fading harmonies,” he no longer is overshadowed in the park but turns instead to the illuminated streets that make him sing. The shadows referred to above might also refer to the pressure Fitzgerald felt from his romantic predecessors. Later in his prose, Fitzgerald would address his giving up of poetry through Amory Blaine’s life. Amory in *TSOP* wants to become a poet early in the novel, but later resolves that he lacks the vision to be a poet who notices “silver-snarling trumpets;” instead, his understanding of beauty is that of “women, spring evenings, music at night, [and] the sea,” like Amory, Fitzgerald concluded that he would write only “mediocre poetry” and that he did not have a future aspiring to become a great poet (*TSOP* 93).

In conclusion, the attention to Fitzgerald’s poems reveals his exploration in style, tone and images to have appeared earlier than his prose. Some of the images he constructs in his poems later evolve into some of the famous elements and themes of Fitzgerald such as the golden-haired Southern belle, the loss of ideal beauty and the tragic passing of time. Although his earliest contact with poetry had been under the influence of Romantic poets, particularly Keats, he diverges from the influence to devise his own understanding of beauty; particularly as the Southern belle. His inspiration in constructing the Southern belle, a character who repeatedly appears in his works, was mainly Zelda, among other women who have entered his life. By later critics, Fitzgerald’s poems are described as highly “derivative” by James Dickey, and Fitzgerald a “failed poet” by Brucoli because of his inability to create original poetry (Dickey xii; Fitzgerald *Poems*). Even though he came to be remembered as an inauthentic poet and was not acknowledged as one by his friends, his poems articulate how the mind of an author works in blending influence and authentic creation by becoming the first bloom of how Fitzgerald has become an influential writer. Lionel Trilling argues that in poetry the poet is the embodiment of the success

of a poem rather than its form or its use of metaphors because it is the poet who conveys the essence of the idea being presented (204). His experiments in poetry blend into Fitzgerald's prose where he transformed into a writer who wrote poetic prose (Piper 31). Anthony's words from *The Beautiful and Damned* explain what becomes of his poetry: it is *absorbed* by his prose.

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