

BOOK REVIEWS

Jackson R. Bryer, ed.

THE SHORT STORIES OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD: NEW APPROACHES IN CRITICISM

Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Pp. 390. \$7.95.

Reviewed by: Raymond Nelson

This collection of essays brings into one volume an unusually large number of eminent critics, brought together perhaps by the fine reputation of the general editor, perhaps by the opportunity to memorialize C. Hugh Holman, perhaps by the emergence in the last several years of collections of Fitzgerald stories (*Bits of Paradise*, 1974; *The Price Was High*, 1979), as well as renewed general interest in the short fiction of Fitzgerald, but probably by some combination of all of these factors. In any case, this gathering of fine scholars seeks to redress some of "the imbalances which have heretofore characterized Fitzgerald studies." The result is a group of essays that does indeed establish fresh views and insights into Fitzgerald's achievement that will almost certainly influence future studies.

The book is divided into three sections, the first (called "Overviews") is devoted to general themes and motifs in the fiction like fantasy, alcoholism and mental illness, the economic depression of the 1930s, Fitzgerald's Hollywood years, publication in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Esquire*, Jungian psychology, the tension of North and South, and other similar categories of ideas. The second section (called "Individual Stories") is devoted to a discussion of twelve specific stories, some of which have till now had very little notice. The third section ("A Checklist of Criticism") will be invaluable to students of Fitzgerald's work, for it lists his short stories currently known. It categorizes the types of published materials by and about Fitzgerald into seven classes. There is, finally, a useful index to the volume.

In the first essay, Richard Lehan argues that Fitzgerald consistently developed romantic characters, though he located them in various "places." In his early fiction he set his stories in New York, later in Europe, and then in Hollywood, for places and people interacted in his delineations. The locales are essential to theme and character. Lawrence Buell argues effectively that fantasy is a consistent, important device in all of Fitzgerald's fiction—"a second manner"—from early to late. Kenneth Eble discusses Fitzgerald's experience of alcoholism and mental illness, and relates it to his use of these motifs in his stories. In the process he cites a particular psychiatrist who had studied Fitzgerald's alcoholism clinically, and in so doing adds valuable insights to both the man and his writing.

C. Hugh Holman, who died on October 31, 1981, is both a contributor and the person to whom the collection is dedicated. He wrote about Fitzgerald's use of the Southern Belle as a symbol of "tradition, graciousness, and beauty," suggesting that Fitzgerald means by it the loss of innocence, dreams, and youthfulness in the inexorable process of growing up and of the passage of time—whether in the experience of a person or of a nation. Alan Margolies discusses Fitzgerald's serious but ineffectual attempts to write screen scripts because he did not understand the movies as an art form. Scott Donaldson traces the shift in Fitzgerald's emphasis from the early stories, where love and money go together, to his mature awareness that money "rarely worked to the benefit of those who possessed it." Joseph Mancini, Jr., writes a superb essay in which he outlines Jung's psychological theory of the "emergent awareness of individuality" in developing persons, then demonstrates Fitzgerald's acquaintance with Jung. He makes his points clearly and forcibly, but does not straitjacket Fitzgerald into that system of thought.

Ruth Prigozy says that Fitzgerald dealt with issues of the Great Depression during the years 1929-1935 in forty-two different stories, but he did so tangentially. He did not find "a center for his work" to replace the young-love motif that had in the Jazz Age served him so well, and though he was a superb "social historian" in these stories, he did not find a new vehicle for

stories in the new day of economic depression. There is thus a sense of something vaguely missing in the stories of this period.

Robert A. Martin argues that Fitzgerald was always a commercial writer who made a great deal of money writing short stories for slick magazines and writing for movie projects, though he was a self-styled novelist. He demonstrates that three insistent elements governed the author's life: artistic failure, debt, and Hollywood. James West III traces Fitzgerald's association with *Esquire*. Fitzgerald published forty-five stories in *Esquire* between 1934 and 1941, much of it substantial, important material, most of it inadequately assessed to date. West surveys the history of the magazine itself and Fitzgerald's relationship with its editor, Arnold Gingrich, and then looks briefly at two representative stories. "Three Acts" and "The Lost Decade."

The second division of the book begins with a look at "The Ice Palace" by John Kuehl. He builds his essay on the psychic distance between the indolent but beautifully cultured South and the energetic but brassy North. Sally Carrol Happer, a Southern belle, becomes both lost and entombed (figuratively) in a St. Paul ice palace as the two geographic areas clash violently in symbolic terms. James Tuttleton argues that "May Day" successfully communicates the confusion of the American scene and mind in the aftermath of World War I, particularly as socialists clashed with mobs of stolid democrats. He also explores Fitzgerald's sentimental, if persistent, attachment to visionary ideals intended to redress the economic wrongs which he deplored all his life. Tuttleton provides valuable historical detail concerning the actual riots in New York on May 1, 1919, the fountainhead of events for the story.

Neil Isaacs attempts to account for the perennial popularity of "Winter Dreams" among young readers, especially in classroom settings. He mocks the major literary systems usually brought to bear in the story, all of which argue for the technical excellence of the story, then suggests that its unflagging appeal rests on a sports-mindedness common to the author and the public. Irving Malin, discussing "Absolution," declares that Fitzgerald is "a religious writer." Maybe. But if so, the label must be loose enough to encompass any serious writer grappling with the ethical and moral issues that perennially plague all of us, and it says nothing very precise about Fitzgerald.

Victor Doyno uses four different critical stances to approach "Rags Martin-Jones and the Prince of Wales," and he concludes that Fitzgerald through his central character ("devoted suitor, writer, and manipulator of illusion") discerns in America a power of imagination as strong as many artists have held to be true of Europe. The "Adjuster," examined by Christiane Johnson, deals essentially with moral issues in the context of passing time, she says, and decides that the story, though fairly good, lacks the complexity of the better pieces and that it lacks focus. Peter Wolfe discusses "The Rich Boy," a story in which Anson Hunter is a perennial adolescent, unable to relate to other people, doomed instead to a sterile existence. Conditioned by great wealth since infancy, he cannot commit himself to anyone else. He therefore devastates other lives and lives out an aching void. Melvin Friedman says that "The Swimmers" despite its faults is a significant contribution to the Franco-American dialogue begun by Poe and carried on by Green, Berger, and Styron. The story details the revitalization of its hero as he symbolically cleanses himself in water, turning in fact from mere money grubbing to a liberating awareness of his Virginian-American heritage—almost the reverse of the Jamesian view.

James Martine demonstrates in "The Bridal Party" that rich boys sometimes grow up to be rich men if they learn that they can free themselves from romantic dependence on women. Carlos Baker identifies two motifs for the story "Babylon Revisited" which form the tension of the piece: the "ancient center of luxury and wickedness" and a "quiet and decent homelife that Wales wishes to establish for his child." Sheldon Grebstein limits himself to the aesthetic structure of "Crazy Sunday" because several excellent studies of the biographical origins of the story exist. He assesses structure, setting, style, and character, and concludes that although the story is an artistic whole, it lacks the "complex symbolism and intricate structure" of his better stories. George Monteiro argues that "Financing Finnegans" is Fitzgerald's assessment of Hemingway and of himself as artists, a balance sheet that perceptively judges each writer and offers genuine insight into both. Hemingway's "Snows of Kilimanjaro" and Fitzgerald's "The Crackup" are two public gestures which led to this story, each documenting the "hard malice" which each writer held for the other.

The achievement of the twenty-two contributors to this volume is considerable, the quality of performance generally high. Most of their essays are superb, and many will become sources where other scholars will find responsible judgments and significant interpretive material. The bibliographical resources will surely be useful to researchers, particularly the section devoted to individual stories. Professor Bryer and his colleagues have made a worthwhile contribution to Fitzgerald studies.

John S. Brushwood

GENTEEL BARBARISM: EXPERIMENTS IN ANALYSIS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY SPANISH-AMERICAN NOVELS

Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1981. Pp. xi + 241

Reviewed by: John M. Kirk

John Brushwood's new study continues the trajectory of his other landmark works, *Mexico and Its Novel* (1966) and *The Spanish-American Novel* (1975), both standard reference books in all libraries. The latest work takes on a double challenge, being both a survey of representative works from the nineteenth century, and too constituting a series of varied experiments in literary analysis. In both ventures (albeit with a few literary omissions) Brushwood is successful. The actual work is a series of independent essays written on eight major (and some minor) novels, preceded by an excellent introductory overview of literary movements in the nineteenth century, with a detailed concluding essay that assesses his approach to the work in question. A thorough, well-researched bibliography completes the study, making it an invaluable tool for all interested in this generally neglected backwater of Spanish-American literature.

Brushwood's perceptive comments, chatty insights, and unobtrusive suggestions all contribute to the success of this study. A mine of information on even the most esoteric aspects of this period, Professor Brushwood provides a superb analysis of these novels.

Two fundamental criticisms that could perhaps be leveled at the study are Brushwood's fascination with his variety of analytical methods, and his selection of material to be studied. To take an example of the former criticism, while his chapter on *Marta*, complete with his skillful usage of Barthesian codes, yields a superb interpretation of the Colombian work, his earlier chapter on *Martin Rivas* seems overly dependent on implementing Floyd Merrell's analytical techniques, and as a result appears to have been examined in a mechanical, somewhat distorted fashion. Concerning the choice of material studied by Brushwood, he explains in his Preface that they were chosen largely because they lent themselves most easily to the analytical procedures themselves. Unfortunately, this results in short shrift being given Lizardi's *El periquillo sarniento* or Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*, while more obscure works receive a more profound treatment.

Having noted that, one must add that the (many) advantages of this work clearly outweigh the disadvantages. Brushwood's virtuoso performance—consisting of a variety of techniques of literary analysis—and his profound knowledge of Spanish-American letters, combine to make this a major stepping-stone in nineteenth-century research. While perhaps lacking in the breadth of his earlier works—and in particular his landmark 1975 survey—this study is destined to join the other companion volumes on library shelves, for Latin-American literary specialists ignore it at their peril.