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**Beautiful and Damned: The Role of New York
City in Scott Fitzgerald's Second Novel**

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“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.”

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, “The Crack-Up”

ABSTRACT

Scott Fitzgerald's fiction interweaves the expression of romantic desire with the representation of the urban space. This B. A. Thesis analyzes the novel *The Beautiful and Damned* through the lens of New York City, aiming to demonstrate the major role that is conferred to the metropolis in shaping the narrative. The analysis of the various evocations of the city that appear throughout the text reveals how the author, by means of the narrative voice, manages to depict the ravages of a modern urban world while reflecting his attitude towards the city, thus shedding light on matters of both his personal life and his work, and turning his second novel into an illuminating account of the deceptive condition that characterized the early twentieth-century American city.

Keywords: Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned*, New York City, Modern city, Biographical criticism.

RESUMEN

La ficción de Scott Fitzgerald entrelaza la expresión del deseo romántico con la representación del espacio urbano. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado analiza la novela *The Beautiful and Damned* a través de la ciudad de Nueva York, con el fin de manifestar el papel principal que se confiere a la metrópolis en la configuración de la narración. El análisis de las múltiples evocaciones de la ciudad que aparecen a lo largo del texto revela cómo el autor, haciendo uso de la voz narrativa, logra reflejar los estragos del mundo urbano moderno a la vez que plasmar su actitud respecto a la ciudad, arrojando así luz sobre cuestiones relativas tanto a su obra como a su vida personal, y convirtiendo a su segunda novela en un testimonio ilustrativo del carácter ilusorio que encarnaba la ciudad americana de principios del siglo veinte.

Palabras clave: Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned*, Nueva York, Ciudad moderna, Crítica biográfica.

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1

Introduction

Cities are frequently addressed by means of anthropomorphic metaphors. They are said to be alive, to be in motion, to grow, but also to oppress, imprison and consume. The twentieth-century American city was regarded as a place where people sought happiness, where they would obtain prosperity and success, or alternatively encounter the opposite, namely decay, misery, or failure (Hoffmann 1). Consequently, such differing conceptions of the urban world would open a space for the analysis of the modern metropolis as a place of paradox, where two opposed ideas could coexist at the same time, as something that was simultaneously both beautiful and damned.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city became the emblem of the modern world, the epitome of the rapid socio-economic transformations that were taking place at the time. Some contemporary authors believed that this accelerated process of urbanization led to a fragmented and dehumanized society, where traditional values were breaking down, and, therefore, opted to disengage from the city (Boelhower 169). However, others, like Francis Scott Fitzgerald, embraced the modern city in pursuit of Dionysian sensations, succumbing to the urban rhythms, drinking themselves silly, and dancing to the beat of jazz (170).

Once an ambitious and imaginative boy from St. Paul, Minnesota, Scott Fitzgerald believed in the existence of a place where his youthful dreams would come true. He became fascinated by the New York he had discovered in books, and headed East to embrace that land of seemingly limitless opportunities (Prigozy 29). By the nineteen twenties, the author conflated in his mind a youthful ideal of New York as a place of boundless romantic promises along with his experience of disillusionment as a grown man in the metropolis. Thus, in his work, often appreciated for its autobiographical tinges, those two cities —the ideal and the actual— blended together through the lens of fiction.

Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Beautiful and Damned*, published in 1922, might be summarized as the story about the social, economic and moral decline of Anthony and Gloria Patch. In the background, the turn-of-the-century New York City, hometown to a

hedonistic lifestyle apparently full of possibilities, but where money, love, and dreams proved to be too fleeting, becoming an illustrative testimony of the dual mode in which the city was perceived during the Roaring Twenties.

Yet in literature, place is often far from exclusively providing a background for the action. As Lutwack argues in *The Role of Place in Literature*, place is introduced into literary texts in two ways, not only as a form, but also as an idea, the latter representing the attitude towards a place that the author has acquired from his or her personal experience and social milieu (14). The aim of the present study is to analyze the role of New York City in Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*, demonstrating how the writer does not insert it as a mere referential setting for the work, but rather assigns it a leading role, essential in determining the fate of the main characters and in capturing his conception of the modern city both as a form and as an idea. The analysis will focus on the recurrent glimpses of the metropolis that are found throughout the novel. Through the use of the narrative voice, the author evokes a modern, mechanized and fragmented city, and reflects his attitude towards an urban space where the real merges with the imaginary, and whose powers, just as if he were a character of one of his own works, Fitzgerald himself was unable to endure.

2

The city of the early twentieth century

In the late eighteenth century, James Hamilton, a former colonial governor of Pennsylvania, proudly declared knowing by name “every person white and black, men, women, and children, in [Philadelphia]” (Henkin 23). Slightly more than half a century after this claim, Lydia Maria Child, a cultural critic and reformer, lamented about only having seen two familiar faces during “eight weary months [...] in the crowded streets of New York” (23). With dramatic speed, the United States was becoming an urban nation, and, to a certain extent, the transition towards a modern city might be quite adequately captured by those two statements.

According to Henkin, the primary cause of this shift was the appeal of economic prospects in the proliferating American cities during the nineteenth century, after the Industrial Revolution (25). Since migrants predominantly—but not exclusively—settled in the cities of the North and East, the United States became a more urban country, leading to a disproportionate expansion of huge modern metropolises.

While there were certainly numerous factors that contributed to this change, the most notable ones may be grouped under the metaphor of “vertigo” (Boelhower 167). “The rise of avant-garde movements in the arts, the critical formation of modernism as a radical break from earlier literary and artistic traditions, rapid urbanization, and the new technological and industrial regimes shaping metropolitan identity” all found their ideal manifestation in big metropolitan areas like New York and Chicago (167). Signs of the emergence of global capitalism and its biopolitical accommodations led American enthusiasts to proclaim the arrival of a “new stage of civilization” (168). The American historian Henry Adams noted how “the city had the air and movement of hysteria. [...] Prosperity never before imagined, power never before wielded by man, speed never reached by anything but a meteor, had made the world irritable, nervous, querulous, unreasonable and afraid” (169).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city became be the ultimate measuring stick of human power and intellect, but also of its foolishness (Levy 66). The attitude with regard to the city fluctuated between optimism and distress, and in the case of New York, the impact of its techno-industrial exuberance over its population (as both source and problem of the city's ongoing biopolitical anguish) coalesced into an anthropological crisis of vertigo (Boelhower 169). Consequently, the writers and artists of the city began to portray this crisis in a dramatic and frequently belligerent manner, as they both embraced but also detached themselves from the urban world.

The modern city came to represent mechanization and industrialization in the eyes of the Modernists. Urbanization resulted in the transformation of urban centers into huge, mechanized metropolises riddled with enormous glass and steel skyscrapers, that experienced continuous renovations and modifications in an effort to increase their habitable space and functionality (Teaford 4). Lehan argued that “the rise of the machine [...] transformed the landscape, helped create the modern city, and enlarged the scale on which people lived as life became less human” (214). Therefore, for some people these technological and mechanical developments gave rise to an issue of dehumanization.

The Modernists advocated for the idea that the modern metropolis impeded the individuality of the modern human being. They thought that those who lived in modern urban centers were so frustrated and estranged from society that they would eventually lose interest in life and forgot who they were. In this way, their distinct characteristics, ideas, and convictions had been progressively diminishing until they reached a state of uniformity, that of a “homogeneous mass” (Boelhower 172). As stated by Lehan, “what is lost in mass society is the individual: alienation is inevitable; the individual feels alone even in the crowd” (72).

A potential rationale for the attraction of urban settings in literature is the concept of control. Unlike nature, the city is a human creation, and therein humans must attain their salvation or damnation (Levy 66). In the early nineteenth-century novel, a realistic city served as either a background or as a sort of test that the protagonist would successfully pass or fail. These representations resorted to a highly symbolic language to denote success or failure. Yet gradually, the city turned into a more autonomous phenomenon. It started to be considered more of a human creator than a human creation. It exerted control over man's existence, building his reality and

stimulating his unconscious concerns and imagination (73). Ultimately, the city was not a symbolic representation anymore, rather, the modern metropolis started to represent itself.

Michel de Certeau¹ stated that “the rationalization of the city leads to its mythification” (95). Indeed, myths were frequently used by authors during the early twentieth century when depicting the modern metropolis in their works. Attending to Scherpe, “physical reality seems to recede in proportion man’s symbolic activity advances. [...] He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, [or] in mythical symbols [...] that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium” (146).

In this regard, Scott Fitzgerald is often referred to as the laureate of the Jazz Age, and his identification with this period is not a mere coincidence. As Tanner states, “in fact, he is less a product of the age than the age is a product of him” (60). It might be considered as an example of life imitating art. A significant part of the popular perception of life in the city during the Roaring Twenties is based on myth, much of that myth was created by Fitzgerald himself, and his work illustrates that process of creation.

¹ Despite being a philosopher who developed his work during a later period (*The Practice of Everyday Life* was published in 1980), it has been considered that Michel de Certeau’s insights regarding the urban space could be related to Scott Fitzgerald’s view of the modern city and its application in his fiction.

3

Fitzgerald's lost city

3.1. The story of a romantic promise and a diminished thing

Based on his own experience, Scott Fitzgerald once penned in an essay called “One Hundred False Starts” (1933) that authors must repeat themselves. He claimed that they “have two or three great and moving experiences in [their] lives” and that their work consisted in retelling those two or three stories in different disguises, “maybe ten times, maybe a hundred, as long as people will listen”. Indeed, he admitted that he functioned best as a writer when all his stories had “a certain family resemblance”, thus avoiding “false starts”.

According to Tanner, the symbols that work most effectively in literature are those that are naturally available to the artist, those that are real in his or her own life and experience, and, therefore, “generate symbolic reverberations unobtrusively” (57). Conversely, symbols that are artificially inserted, drawing excessive attention to themselves, are less pleasing. Readers will feel uncomfortable when they are overly aware of the author’s purposes upon them. In this sense, New York City was probably a natural and artistically suitable symbol for Fitzgerald to incorporate into his work. Being a young boy from the Mid-West, culturally and socially ambitious, and filled with romantic yearnings, he looked eastward, more particularly to New York, with the desire to fulfill all his aspirations (Prigozy, 29). And in this way, as if by some sort of literary instinct, he became aware that his youthful dreams regarding the city proved to be representative.

Fitzgerald’s essays, short stories, and novels, when analyzed in terms of their autobiographical component, may provide an account of the author’s changing feelings regarding New York City. The metropolis appears recurrently in his work presented as a “sad and glorious” city, (*Tender is the Night* 205), “the city of luxury and mystery, of preposterous hopes and exotic dreams” (*The Beautiful and Damned*² 282), or the city

² In all subsequent references made to excerpts extracted from *The Beautiful and Damned* in this B. A. Thesis, the novel will be referred to as “*Beautiful*”.

where “anything can happen [...] anything at all” (*The Great Gatsby* 60). Indeed, this fictional approach to New York might mirror his development and downfall as both an artist and a man.

A remarkable instance in which the author blends the evocation of New York City with autobiography, and with the creation of literary art is “My Lost City” (1945), an essay that captures his essential insights and preoccupations as an artist. Thus, “My Lost City” becomes not only, as Fitzgerald asserted, “an account of this writer’s feeling for the city” (“My Lost City” 27), but also offers us a fundamental framework for interpreting his fiction and for understanding better the representation of an “incalculable city” (26) in his work. However, before dealing with the essay itself, it may be worth outlining Fitzgerald’s major themes and attitudes—not only the literary ones—in order to perceive more clearly how these are captured in “My Lost City”, and, subsequently, in his second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*.

If one considers Fitzgerald’s work as a fictional manifestation of his own life experiences, then it might be possible to interpret that those two stories that he constantly retold “each time in a new disguise” are actually two parts of a single longer story, of Scott Fitzgerald’s own story. As Tanner suggests, the author’s works are generally formed by a two-fold structure, where sometimes one of the parts carries more emphasis than the other, but they are often blended (55).

The first of these parts, as stated by Tanner, is characterized by a “romantic promise” (56). This term is intended to denote the complex of dream, expectation, hope, or overall idealism concerning the future that accompanies so many of his characters. In the author’s fiction, it is usually characterized by an unavoidable instinct for forward-looking that is rooted in symbols such as youth, love, money, and the source of all the above, the city of New York. However, this romantic promise will often tend to exceed reality and necessarily lead to a “diminished thing” in the second part of the story (Tanner 57). A diminished thing makes reference to the disillusionment implied by the inevitable aftermath of the romantic promise: previous hopes and dreams are shattered, excitement becomes commonplace, and future lacks any further expectation. Considering Fitzgerald’s work, the most frequent manifestations of the diminished thing in his fiction involve the end of youth, the loss of the loved girl, emotional breakdown, physical

deterioration, and, as a general trait, losing the faculty to look forward to a future that used to be filled with promise (58).

Therefore, the essential Fitzgerald story would be shaped by a dual vision: first, “forward to the promise that might be”, and second, “backwards to the glory that used to be” (Tanner 56). Indeed, this duality could be considered a literary manifestation of a frequently quoted statement from his essay “The Crack Up”, in which he states 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 retain the ability to function” (69). Although this point is frequently alluded to when discussing both the author’s work and personality, in fact, a few paragraphs below in the same essay he himself specifies what those two opposed ideas are: “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” (70). These ideas would be coherent with the previously established distinction between a romantic promise and a diminished thing.

Moreover, in that same essay he goes on to confess that he “cracked” (“The Crack Up 72) at the very moment when he ceased to be able to function with such a dual vision and keep a balance between the two elements, which could be interpreted as clear evidence of the central role they played in his literary production. Up to this emotional and artistic crisis, Fitzgerald continued to romanticize New York despite being well aware of the threat posed by a diminished thing, meaning that the actual city could never meet his romantic aspirations (Tanner 57). Nevertheless, he seemed to reach a sort of acceptance of this unrequited illusion, he learned to cope with it, and it may be precisely from this attitude that the themes and plots of his fiction sprang.

In this respect, Cochoy argues that the approach that Fitzgerald generally adopts to conjure the alluring charms of New York City in his work, and particularly in *The Beautiful and Damned*, could be related to the motif of the fleeting encounter with a “passing stranger” that Walt Whitman captures in *Leaves of Grass*. As Cochoy explains, “the encounter with the elusive other is like a lightning-flash illuminating the dilemma of possession and loss, of literary presence and personal absence” (68). Thus, by aiming at desire while postponing its consummation indefinitely, writing emerges. Perhaps, just as

Whitman found inspiration in the moment when the unknown person of the crowd disappeared, Fitzgerald would find his own in the realization of what he and his lost city actually are, but also of what they could have been, and, in fact, were during fleeting moments.

3.2. The fading of three symbols of New York

The fusion of longing and disillusionment referred to in the duality between a romantic promise and a diminished thing might be read as a manifestation in Fitzgerald's fiction of, respectively, his own young aspirations and later experience of loss, which are often associated with New York City. For instance, in *The Great Gatsby*, it can be noted how the motif of romantic promise is closely related to the metropolis: "The city seen from Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of the mystery and the beauty of the world" (54).

Similarly, in his essay "My Lost City", New York emerges as a symbol of both romantic promise and diminished thing, serving as a focus of how one gradually transforms into the other. Or, in other words, to quote its creator, of the process by which "one by one [his] great symbols of New York became tainted" ("My Lost City" 26).

"My Lost City" opens with the statement: "There was first the ferry boat moving softly from the Jersey shore at dawn —the moment crystallized into my first symbol of New York" (23). At that time, Fitzgerald was ten years old, and, as illustrated by the above quotation from *The Great Gatsby*, this childhood memory regarding the city would grow into a significant symbol in the author's mature work. In the next sentence, Fitzgerald recounts how upon returning to New York some years later and seeing two well-known actresses on stage, his "second symbol of New York: the girl", was generated. As he points out, "the ferry boat stood for triumph, the girl for romance" ("My Lost City" 23).

Yet a third symbol would still arise some time later when he was visiting his friend Edmund Wilson, who had become a real New Yorker imbued with a "Metropolitan spirit" ("My Lost City" 24). This was something new and fascinating to a Fitzgerald who was a

mere Princeton undergraduate at the time. In Wilson's apartment "life was mellow and safe, a finer distillation of all that [he] had come to love at Princeton," and it was precisely there that he would discover his "third symbol of New York: the good life" (25).

However, even in the midst of this first outburst of enthusiasm for the metropolis, a hint of menacing disillusionment can be perceived, as Fitzgerald already suspected that he "took the style and glitter of New York even above its own valuation" ("My Lost City" 24). A foreshadowing of the diminished thing within an atmosphere of romantic promise that is recurrent in the author's writing, where a Keatsian sort of melancholy is latent in the convergence of hope and loss that characterizes the representation of the city (Cochoy, 68). Like John Keats' "Ode on Melancholy," in which, paradoxically, a feeling of impending death incites the intense celebration of beauty ("She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die"), in Fitzgerald's fiction, the anticipation of inevitable disillusionment contributes to stimulate the lovers' passion before its consummation, as well as to disclose the transient beauty of New York.

But this foreboding is displaced by the author's renewed enthusiasm upon his return to the city in 1919, when "New York had all the iridescence of the beginning of the world, this was the greatest nation and there was gala in the air" ("My Lost City" 25). Fitzgerald was happy in New York in the early 1920s. He enjoyed literary and financial triumph, he married the girl he loved, and he was experiencing "the high life of New York" (26) in more flamboyant ways than he could even have dreamed of, thus embracing the three symbols of the city that he had once sketched. But for all the effort and hope he had invested in making his dreams of success in Manhattan come true, once the author, on the cusp of his success became "at last one with New York" (28), once he became self-conscious of the fulfillment of his yearnings, his joyful days in the city would prove to be exceedingly fleeting.

In "My Lost City" he recalls how "riding in a taxi one afternoon between very tall buildings under a mauve and rosy sky; I began to bawl because I had everything I wanted and knew I would never be so happy again" (28-29). It is at this point, about halfway through the essay, that the transition from a romantic promise to a diminished thing in the author's own story begins. Fitzgerald, having condemned so many of his characters to a position similar to the one he now found himself in, was well aware that the fulfillment

of dreams is the death knell of a feeling of unlimited romantic aspirations. As he would write in *This Side of Paradise*, “it was always the becoming he dreamed of, never the being” (19), because the being, however gratifying it may seem, is not imbued with the maddening desire that made the becoming so inspiring.

Hence, New York was no longer an inaccessible place, it was no longer a product of Fitzgerald’s desires. It became a real city instead, and the author found no satisfaction but a profound anti-climax in the fulfillment of his earlier dreams. As his mind “unwillingly matured” (“My Lost City” 29), all his symbols of the city began to vanish: “My first symbol was now a memory, for I knew triumph is in oneself; my second one had grown commonplace, [...] and the third had grown dim” (29).

Nevertheless, at that moment when his conception of New York, previously shaped by romantic promises, was turning inexorably towards a diminished thing, the detachment from the city succeeded in captivating him once again. After spending three years in Europe, he returned in 1926, and as his boat approached the river, “the city burst thunderously” upon him. The author describes this memory as “a miracle of foamy light suspended by the stars”, confessing that “from that moment I knew that New York, however often I might leave it, was home” (“My Lost City” 30). What he depicts here is probably less a faithful image of the actual city than the one he held in his mind as a vestige of romantic promise. An image that acquires a renewed splendor in this new meeting of the author with his “passing stranger”, evidence in own his self of the necessity of detachment for the survival of desire that is so recurrent in his fiction (Cochoy 67).

Although Fitzgerald “once thought that there were no second acts in American lives, there was certainly to be a second act to New York’s boom days” (“My Lost City” 30). He notes how by 1929 “the city was bloated, gluttoned, stupid with cake and circuses, and a new expression ‘Oh Yeah?’ summed up all the enthusiasm evoked by the announcement of the last super skyscraper” (31). Here is where the condition of a diminished thing becomes clearly tangible, as the writer moves straight into the second act of the story of his life. Scott along with his wife Zelda were suffering from this very condition, “once again [they] had enough of New York” (31), and they headed abroad one more time, presumably in an attempt to regain the attraction to the city that detachment allowed.

When he returned two years later, the city felt like an “echoing tomb”. Overlooking from the top of the Empire State Building —once the major symbol of the boom, now resembling a sphinx rising from the ruins—, he realized “the crowning error of the city”: a failure to understand that New York actually “had limits” (“My Lost City” 32). The essay concludes with the author taking leave of the place that had already become his lost city. A city that, then, “seen from the ferry boat in the early morning, it no longer whispers of fantastic success and eternal youth” (33). In this sentence, by mentioning the ferry, he transports us to the beginning of the text, to his first symbol of the city, sharpening the contrast between the former romantic promise and the current diminished thing.

“Perhaps I am destined to return some day and find in the city new experiences that so far I have merely read about” (“My Lost City” 33). As an author capable of translating his life experiences and dead dreams into manuscripts, in “My Lost City” Fitzgerald renders the essence of his artistic vision: the imagery, the symbolic layering, the appeal to mythic patterns, and especially, the maintaining of an aesthetic distance in order to recreate through his prose the urban magic of a place “where life was as vivid and satisfactory as in books and dreams” (“Forging Ahead”).

The role of the city in *The Beautiful and Damned*

4.1. The city as a protagonist

According to Levy, when reflecting on which might be some examples of great “city novels”, one could mention Dickens’ *Bleak House*, Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*, Zola’s *L’Assommoir*, or Joyce’s *Ulysses* (66). What all these novels have in common is that they try to portray the realities of life in the city. Nevertheless, they are primarily works that focus on character development, with a storytelling based on the experience in the city rather than exploring the experience of the city. In contrast, urban literature could be defined as that “where the setting takes precedence over character, where, in fact, the setting rises to the level of protagonist” (66). In Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and Damned*, New York moves from being a symbolic backdrop for the action to an active force shaping the narrative, an example that illustrates how the modern metropolis ultimately imposes its presence on fiction.

First, the city serves as the novel’s referential background, providing it with a sense of reality and the necessary verisimilitude. In this regard, Fitzgerald inserts throughout the work names of authentic places, streets, and establishments such as restaurants, hotels, and cafés. As a result, readers can track the characters’ movements on a city map and get a precise understanding of the atmosphere in the metropolis during the early twentieth century. As suggested by Tanner, “[Fitzgerald’s] legacy to us is a vivid fictional re-creation of New York during the Jazz Age” (61). Therefore, the city would come to represent the referential and also the historical dimension of the work.

Even though *The Beautiful and Damned* can be interpreted as a story of moral and social decay and thus has been frequently regarded as one of the author’s novels most shaped by naturalism and determinism, the role of New York City in the work is neither to serve simply as a referential backdrop nor a standard naturalistic setting. In other words, it is not a story of New York like Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (“*A Story of New York*” being its subtitle), in which, according to a major naturalistic principle, the author shows how “environment is a tremendous thing in the world and

frequently shapes lives regardless” (Gelfant 4). Crane is concerned with portraying the harsh reality of living in the slums and the way it corrupts individuals, hence his New York looks bleak at all times, and his characters are doomed from the beginning. According to Gelfant, in naturalistic works “usually the city plays the role of antagonist, [...] as the obstacle to the fulfillment of the hero’s desire” (5), and this is exactly the role that New York plays in Crane’s *Maggie*.

Conversely, the city in *The Beautiful and Damned* seems to take the role of a protagonist, in the style of John Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), becoming, “a vital personality with an identity and life of its own, distinct from that of its people” (Gelfant 5). As such, the city turns into a major character in the story, having a significant impact on the author’s narrative strategy and the protagonists’ aspirations and eventual tragedy, and serving as a key actor for the construction of their dreams of romance, prosperity, and beauty. In addition, whereas naturalist writers are concerned with truth, “to honest reporting of the world as [they see] it” (Gelfant 85), Fitzgerald seems to be more interested in fantasy and imagination.

In particular, the novel shares more similarities with *Manhattan Transfer* when it comes to the representation of New York City as a setting for the action. More precisely, Fitzgerald’s approach is similar to Dos Passos’s modernist “impressionistic method”, as opposed to Dreiser’s naturalistic method of “accumulation and cataloguing” (Gelfant 142)³. In this way, Fitzgerald never offers a conventional account of the city or its citizens, but rather provides the reader with striking evocative details. He captures fleeting images, remarkable sounds and scents, rushing sensations, a sporadic splash of color, or a flash of light. Additionally, he selects or builds meaningful atmospheres that frequently allude to or mirror the characters’ emotional states. For instance, in the opening pages of the work, the author makes references to multiple sensory experiences in order to evoke the city; hearing first, then sight, and finally smell:

³ Gelfant makes a distinction between Dos Passos’ modernist approach and Dreiser’s naturalistic style: “Dos Passos’ realism consists in striking essential details abstracted from their total context. Whereas Dreiser accumulates details in order to reproduce the actuality as closely as possible, Dos Passos selects a few evocative details that are to suggest the essential quality of the whole. Thus his realism involves a considerable distortion of actuality, but it is a realism to which the imagination can give assent. [...] Dos Passos’ method, then, is to give an impression of reality, rather than to give, like Dreiser, a total cataloguing of actual details” (142).

The soft rush of taxis by him, and laughter, laughter hoarse as a crow's, incessant and loud, with the rumble of the subways underneath—and over all, the revolutions of light, the growings and recedings of light—light dividing like pearls—forming and reforming in glittering bars and circles and monstrous grotesque figures cut amazingly on the sky. [...] From the door came a smell that was hot, doughy, and pink. A drug-store next, exhaling medicines, spilt soda water and a pleasant undertone from the cosmetic counter; then a Chinese laundry, still open, steamy and stifling, smelling folded and vaguely yellow (*Beautiful* 26).

In fact, at the end of the previous fragment, Anthony Patch's perceptions get jumbled. Fitzgerald describes scents using chromatic terms, implying both the process of distortion that occurs anytime New York is evoked in the novel, and the predominant role of sight over the other senses. Indeed, Antolin claims that any evocation of the urban world in *The Beautiful and Damned*, with its highly dynamic and fragmentary nature, may potentially suggest a Cubist work (115). For instance, the influence of this artistic movement can be felt when considering the description of the women who crowd Fifth Avenue as “a great fluttering of furs” (*Beautiful* 31), or of the people inhabiting New York as “graceless and absurd phantasms, grotesquely curved and rounded in a rectangular world of their own building” (122).

In addition, a sense of speed, of moving forward almost at a jazzy tempo, is generated in the novel by means of the rapid transition from one place, impression, or season of the year to the following one, reflecting the relentless movement and fragmentation characteristic of the modern city. Gelfant's remarks on Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* might also be applied to *The Beautiful and the Damned*: “The novel beats with a jazz tempo that epitomizes the hectic, brassy quality of modern city life” (148). Thus, taking into account his ‘modernistic’ evocations of New York, Fitzgerald seems to highlight motion and fragmentation —the bright and dark sides of progress—, as the hallmarks of the modern urban world.

However, while Dos Passos provides a broad overview of the city by moving the narrative from a determined neighborhood or social class to another, Fitzgerald focuses primarily on wealthy areas and rich people, despite the fact that Anthony and Gloria's progressive changes of place of residence on the city map are representative of their social decline. The couple leave Anthony's apartment on 52nd Street to move into the suburban “gray house” (*Beautiful* 169) of Marietta, before moving back to Manhattan and rent an apartment on Claremont Avenue, located in the “dim hundreds” (405). In this regard, in

The Beautiful and Damned, the map of New York would become a sort of social “ladder” (10) that records the volatile fortune of the protagonists.

Furthermore, the torments of passion are, in a certain manner, also projected in space, or rather, in the weather and the cyclical time of seasons, revealing the desire that seems to govern the characters’ attitude towards their loved one. For this reason, the city would not only take on the role of a social ladder, but also that of a “pleasure thermometer” (Cochoy 71) that measures the intensity of the protagonists’ desire, in such a way that temperature variations serve as a reflection of their fluctuating amorous passion. Thus, Gloria’s coldness when she first meets Anthony (“I’m a solid block of ice” [*Beautiful* 57]) is gradually mitigated, and then intensified, in the “night [that] was alive with thaw” (101) that accompanies the couple’s first kiss, and in the “freezing cold” day that frames their first argument (107).

Therefore, in *The Beautiful and Damned*, the city of New York plays a major role in influencing the development of both character and plot. The metropolis is transformed into a sort of mirror for the protagonists’ feelings so that cityscapes are transfigured into mindscapes. Throughout the first part of the work, New York functions a reflection of the protagonists’ hopes of success and happiness, but it also foreshadows their tragic fate, creating thus an effect of dramatic irony, since they are not able to—or not willing to—notice the signs that might ruin their future ambition. Consequently, later in the work, the city will mirror the economic and moral decay into which their former dreams have deteriorated.

Hence the contrast between the first part of the narrative, in which, expecting to inherit the fortune of Anthony’s grandfather, the newlyweds frequent wealthy circles and hint at signs of great prosperity, and the end of the novel, where their social and economic decline leads them to move around more remote places and to be surrounded by poorer people, as the following extract reflects:

As he stood in front of Delmonico’s lighting a cigarette one night he saw two hansoms drawn up close to the curb, waiting for a chance drunken fare. The outmoded cabs were worn and dirty—the cracked patent leather wrinkled like an old man’s face, the cushions faded to a brownish lavender; the very horses were ancient and weary, and so were the white-haired men who sat aloft, cracking their whips with a grotesque affectation of gallantry. A relic of vanished gaiety! (*Beautiful* 418).

At this point, Anthony no longer finds himself in the elegant neighborhood of the first part of the novel, located between Washington Square and Central Park, but, ironically, he is in the commercial district of Manhattan, alone, and turned into a drunk man with no money. New York does not only function as an element that highlights his limited—or non-existent—perception of reality, his growing poverty, and diminishing capacities, but it also reflects the failure and isolation in the protagonist's life. Similarly, it could be interpreted that his increasingly dysfunctional mind and fragmented personality epitomizes the fragmentation inherent in the modern city.

4.2. A city of words and images

Although Scott Fitzgerald appeared to be aware of and familiar with the dangers of modernity and progress, he also seemed to be enthralled by its allure and power, as evidenced by the prominent role often played by the modern city in his fiction. Just like many modernist works, *The Beautiful and Damned* could be interpreted as “a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it”, containing glimpses of the metropolis that may suggest both “possibility and fragmentation” (Antolin 114). One of the most striking traits of the author's fiction may be precisely his ability to transform the negative aspects of the modern urban world into an aesthetic device. In this sense, in *The Beautiful and Damned* he manages to construct a meaningful novelistic pattern out of the “patternless jam” (137) characteristic of New York City.

Attending to Scherpe, “the moment we are confronted with images of the city, we as a matter of course are dealing with aesthetic patterns” (141). These images are employed as narrative components that have a structuring function, where the determined “mode of perception”, the “rhetoric of symbolic expression”, and the “reading of signs” that appear in the city's text provide the “contours” (142). Thus, in *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald evokes the city in an idiosyncratic, innovative way that might be catalogued as modernist, and in which, by means of images and words, he tries to reconstruct a meaningful narrative structure out of the characteristic fragmentation of the modern city.

Throughout the novel, the author crafts a series of images, making up a transfiguration of a city that, at least at the beginning, seems to become a romantic and joyous dreamland reflecting the protagonists' dreams of "high life and reckless freedom" (Prigozy 29). Hence, in the eyes of Anthony and Gloria, New York originally represented a symbol of success, delight, wealth, and romance:

Then they returned toward the Plaza, talking about nothing, but glad for the spring singing in the air and for the warm balm that lay upon the suddenly golden city. To their right was the Park, while at the left a great bulk of granite and marble muttered dully a millionaire's chaotic message to whosoever would listen (*Beautiful* 124).

Through the use of metaphors and sound effects, Fitzgerald is suggesting that the city is not merely a necessary part of their dreams, but that the city itself creates those very dreams to some extent. For this reason, at the end of the novel, once these dreams are shattered into pieces, the couple decide to leave for Europe, probably in search of a new setting where they hope to fulfill their aspiration.

In a similar fashion, at the early stages of the work, Fitzgerald makes use of a series of images that, as if endowed with a programmatic function, suggest that something negative, some hidden threat, is lurking behind Anthony and Gloria's seemingly dream-world. An example of this may be spotted at the Marathon, the cheap cabaret that the couple visits in one of their first encounters, and where, as if it were a premonition, the reader may notice something disturbing about it. At one point during their time there, Anthony seemed to be daydreaming while gazing at Gloria: "the freshness of her cheeks was a gossamer projection from a land of delicate and undiscovered shades; her hand gleaming on the stained table-cloth was a shell from some far and wildly virginal sea..." (*Beautiful* 71-72). However, a sudden stroke of reality puts an end to the protagonist's world of fantasy: "then the illusion snapped like a nest of threads" and life "became real, became portentous" (72).

This approach, being used systematically from the beginning, enhances the unity of the story. Once again, what Gelfant states for Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* may also apply here: "the introductory imagery establishes an attitude toward [New York] and a prevailing mood that is to function as a unifying element in the novel" (150). In this regard, the first image evoking New York City in the work also seems to take on a

programmatic role: “Fifth and Sixth Avenues, it seemed to Anthony, were the uprights of a gigantic ladder stretching from Washington Square to Central Park” (*Beautiful* 10).

Contrary to what it might suggest at first glance, by the end of the work the reader is able to understand that, in fact, the streets of New York are depicted as a social and moral ladder that the protagonists would not climb up but down, regardless of the money they eventually inherit. A few lines later, the author extends the metaphor of the ladder, this time providing it with a different meaning; instead of suggesting possibility, the image evokes unavoidable danger:

Coming up-town on top of a bus toward Fifty-second Street invariably gave him the sensation of hoisting himself hand by hand on a series of treacherous rungs, and when the bus jolted to a stop at his own rung, he found something akin to relief as he descended the reckless metal steps to the side-walk (*Beautiful* 10).

Moreover, the above passages are illustrative of the significant role played in the work by the recurrent use of images that draw comparisons or metaphors, and even at some points constitute strings of images in order to evoke the city. Since these images are often associated with motion, they lend a dynamic—even cinematic—quality to the narrative, suggesting illusion, and recreating a sense of limitation and fragmentation. Thus, Fitzgerald’s systematic use of these sort of images highlights, on the one hand, the subjective perception of the city seen through the eyes of the Patches, and, on the other hand, the actual artificiality and unreliability of the modern metropolis. At times, even Anthony himself appears to be conscious of New York’s essential ambiguity, and at one point he says: “I think the city’s a mountebank. Always struggling to approach the tremendous and impressive urbanity ascribed to it. Trying to be romantically metropolitan” (*Beautiful* 136). However, the hero continues to cling to the rungs of illusion, and, in spite of the negative signs that the city places before his eyes, he persists in believing in the magnificence of New York City.

When considering the novel as a whole, Fitzgerald’s intention seems to be far from attempting to render a realistic and explicit portrait of New York. Paradoxically, although constantly present, at the same time the city manages to pass unnoticed, appearing mostly absent, as if it were a “descriptive ellipsis” (Scherpe 140). This might be one of the reasons behind the author’s recurrent use of discontinuous images instead

of comprehensive descriptions as a means to depict the city. While the strings of images offer numerous signifiers to the reader, the signified remains missing, out of our reach. Once again, Fitzgerald succeeds in creating an aesthetic device out of the negative quality of a modern metropolis that eludes ordinary description. As a result, the author develops an urban poetics out of a city that is difficult to approach, what Antolin calls a “dynamics of desire” that reflects “the characters’ desire for a dream life, the reader’s desire for a reliable meaning, and the writer’s desire for mastery over a hardly attainable modern reality” (120).

As stated by Calvino, “the city must never be confused with the words that describe it. And yet between the one and the other there is a connection” (61). In *The Beautiful and Damned*, regardless of the numerous real place names and temporal and cultural references that are sprinkled throughout the work, the New York that Fitzgerald presents is primarily a “city of words” (Antolin 120). By means of words, the metropolis is transfigured and converted into a main character of the novel, even into a work of art in itself, given the cubist quality of the strings of images that are drawn out of it, or the jazzy tempo recreated in the recurrent evocations of it. Thus, in the New York of the early twentieth century, the very New York of the Fitzgeralds and the Patches, the main characters are represented mostly on the move from one place to another, either walking or riding a taxicab, a train, or, as in the following extract, a bus:

One afternoon they found front seats on the sunny roof of a bus and rode for hours from the fading Square up along the sullied river, and then, as the stray beams fled the westward streets, sailed down the turgid Avenue, darkening with ominous bees from the department-stores. The traffic was clotted and gripped in a patternless jam; the busses were packed four deep like platforms above the crowd as they waited for the moan of the traffic whistle (*Beautiful* 136).

It might be argued then that Fitzgerald’s recurrent focus on motion in *The Beautiful and Damned* is used primarily as a device to create meaning spatially. The author takes control of the chaotic urban mobility, transforms it into aesthetic order, and, consequently, the city becomes more of a literary space than a mere referential background for the work. Although the novel could be interpreted as a condemnation of the modern metropolis and its damaging effects (in this case its ever-increasing motion and fragmentation, as well as its control over an alienated individual), Fitzgerald, being himself a victim of them,

manages to put these negative aspects under control and is able to create meaning out of them.

At the end of Book Two, as Anthony and Gloria plunge into an inexorable social, economic and moral decay, and their dreams of fulfillment in New York begin to fade, the reader encounters a description of the couple on a train, then riding through the poor suburbs of the city:

The train moved in through the deepening twilight, above and past a hundred cheerful sweating streets of the upper East Side, each one passing the car-window like the space between the spokes of a gigantic wheel (*Beautiful* 282).

At this point, the protagonists seem to be completely dependent on the motion of the modern city. They no longer take an active role in the narrative, but have rather become passive spectators of the city's vagaries. In the last part of the excerpt, it is no longer the train that crosses the city, but the city streets that pass through the windows of the vehicle, suggesting the prominent role that the city has acquired in the novel, a city that has now taken control and turned into the actual protagonist. Indeed, this might be representative of the machine-like character associated with the modern metropolis at the beginning of the twentieth century, when some Modernists argued that it was no longer the individual who lived in the city, but rather the very individuality of the human being was inhabited by the city (Lehan 72). In this way, Anthony and Gloria remain powerless, completely vulnerable, and at the mercy of the "preposterous hopes and exotic dreams" (*Beautiful* 282) that New York creates for them, but which never come true. Consequently, the modern city in the eyes of Anthony and Gloria is perceived in a distorted manner, they de-realize the external world, what foretells their tragic fall and the eventual collapse of their dreams: "Here on the outskirts absurd stucco palaces reared themselves in the cool sunset, poised for an instant in cool unreality, glided off far away, succeeded by the mazed confusion of the Harlem River" (282).

When reading Fitzgerald's evocations of New York, readers might come to feel like spectators in front of a cubist painting, as they encounter "fragmented sights, distorted views, geometric shapes, multiple perspectives, motion and juxtaposition" (Antolin 120). Altogether, these effects succeed in defamiliarizing the urban landscape, conveying to the reader the de-realization of the city that occurs through the eyes of the protagonists, and

fictionalizing New York at the author's whim. As Barthes stated in *S/Z*, "because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (4), in *The Beautiful and Damned* readers are left to interpret the images they are confronted with and assign a meaning to them. Thus, the novel would become an *Opera aperta*⁴ as Umberto Eco would express it, where author turns into a conductor, who manipulates signs, signifiers and signifieds, coming to be, so to speak, the architect of a fictionalized urban landscape. Ultimately, Fitzgerald embodies and implements one of the main tenets of Modernism in *The Beautiful and Damned*: "the power of art and the role of the artist" (Antolin 121).

4.3 New York as a "lost city" in *The Beautiful and Damned*

"Sometimes I don't know whether I'm real or whether I'm a character in one of my own novels," Scott Fitzgerald once confessed to a friend (*Letters* 469). As his readers, we are likely to experience a similar difficulty in trying to distinguish him and his wife Zelda from his characters, given the pervasive autobiographical element in his work. Fitzgerald's second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, was published in March 1922. In 1940, the author wrote to Zelda: "I wish *The Beautiful and Damned* had been a maturely written book because it was all true. We ruined ourselves" (*Letters* 137).

Analyzing the representation of New York City in Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* in the light of his later essay "My Lost City" (1945) from an autobiographical point of view, might seem at first an anachronistic exercise. This prospective approach, however, may be congruent with the narrative strategy employed by the author in order to portray the city in the novel. In fact, like the confluence of possession and loss, and of expectation and disappointment that the titles of both texts epitomize, New York is that place whose romantic splendor Fitzgerald always evokes from the anticipation of a disillusioning future. In "My Lost City" it is when the author realizes that the New York "had limits" and that it was "a city after all and not a universe", that "the whole shining

⁴ Umberto Eco in *The Open Work* explains that "the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work to be completed. He does not know the exact fashion in which his work will be concluded, but he is aware that once completed the work in question will still be his own. [...] The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organized, oriented, and endowed with specifications for proper development" (19).

edifice he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground”. Thus, anticipating the disillusioned vision that he would eventually adopt in 1932⁵, the author simultaneously retraces the desires and aspirations of his youth, and the magnificence of the city during the roaring twenties, telling his own story once again, this time under the disguise of Anthony Patch.

Published twenty-three years before “My Lost City”, *The Beautiful and Damned* interweaves the evocation of the modern metropolis with the expression of amorous desire. Just as Fitzgerald, ascending to the summit of his success, suspected “that no actuality could live up to [his] conception of New York’s splendor” (“My Lost City” 24), Anthony Patch is “wedded to a vague melancholy” (*Beautiful* 6) even before he marries Gloria. Like his creator, Anthony seems to be aware of the dangers of fulfilling his desires: in the only tale he has ever managed to write, the protagonist, Chevalier O’Keefe, falls from the “Tower of Chastity” when he tries to draw the attention of a lady he spots on the road.

Just as distance made New York regain its splendor in the eyes of Fitzgerald, Anthony only appreciates beauty and passion when he is separated from them by the barrier of a windowpane or a multitude of people, which at the same time stimulate his desire but forbid its realization. It is because of such distance that early in the work, a woman that he notices through the window of an adjacent building appears beautiful to him: “He felt persistently that the girl was beautiful—then all of a sudden he understood: it was her distance, not a rare and precious distance of soul but still distance, if only in terrestrial yards” (*Beautiful* 17).

Therefore, if Anthony falls in love with Gloria, it is because “she created the infinite distances she spread about herself” (*Beautiful* 134). Because “she goes and goes and goes” (39), but she is never present: she missed their first dates, and her elusive features are always concealed by the elements of the city, either by the reflection of a shop window, a mass of furs or the crowds of the streets. Consequently, Anthony’s desire for Gloria is paradoxically heightened by her elusive nature: “Always the most poignant moments were when some artificial barrier kept them apart” (116). Indeed, these

⁵ Fitzgerald finished his essay “My Lost City” and delivered it to his agent in 1932, but was not published for the first time until 1945, when it was included in *The Crack Up*.

melancholic yearnings of the protagonist, now transferred to the space of New York, reveal the representation of Fitzgerald's attitude toward the city in the novel.

In a similar fashion to John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," where the lovers' passion was eternally frozen on a surface, Fitzgerald's New York guards the most intimate desires of his protagonists. Thus, in *The Beautiful and Damned*, the evocation of the Patches' passion is associated with the depiction of the modern urban space. In "My Lost City," when the turmoil of progress had turned overwhelming and "sections of the city had grown rather poisonous," Fitzgerald "found a moment of utter peace in riding south through Central Park at dark", and, as a consequence of this detachment, "there again was [his] lost city, wrapped cool in its mystery and promise" (28). Anthony and Gloria significantly fall in love in New York but spend their marital life in Marietta. Like in Keats' Ode, where the gap that separates their lips enabled the lovers' desire to endure, in Fitzgerald's novel the spatial detachment that the Patches keep from the city preserves the romantic potential of the urban space.

Moreover, the writer seems to draw an analogy between Anthony's desire for Gloria and his perception of New York. Anthony cannot "comprehend her beauty in a glance" (*Beautiful* 57) and the author, unable to embrace the modern city in a single, stable image, endows the protagonist's vision with a series of imaginary projections that allow him to convey the bewitching powers of New York while resisting its alienating turmoil. Anthony dreads Gloria's charms, which he could only contemplate from a safe distance, as much as he fears the allure of the city, resorting to mechanisms of protection at the level of discourse in order to depict yet avoid its negative effects. As a result, Anthony's mind emanates metaphors that transform crowded streets into seas, and metonymies that turn multitudes of people into fur coats, glittering jewels or hats that buildings spawn or suck in.

In the same way that the Fitzgeralds seemed to acknowledge the ephemeral quality of happiness in an "ever-quickening city" and "tried to save some of it for the selves [they] would inevitably become" ("My Lost City" 26), Anthony seeks to perpetuate his dreams in the city by delaying their realization indefinitely. Thus, in the expression of the protagonist's desire, a looming sense of loss is noticeable: "he wanted something, something. [...] Some path of hope to lead him toward what he thought was an imminent

and ominous old age” (*Beautiful* 55). But this self-imposed distancing from his loved one and New York ahead of a possible future disillusionment is precisely what brings him closer to them. Just like Gloria appears to be “very young and very old” at the same time (60), the metropolis is threatened by the destructive effects of progress, but, simultaneously, its allure is being constantly renewed.

In a scene where the couple is contemplating chaotic activity of the modern city from the safe distance of being in a bus, they display their disagreement regarding the aesthetic judgment of New York:

“I’m mighty happy just this minute, in this city.”

Anthony shook his head in disagreement.

“I think the city is a mountebank. [...] Trying to be romantically metropolitan.”

“I don’t. I think it is impressive.”

“Momentarily. But it’s really a transparent, artificial sort of spectacle” (*Beautiful* 136).

Anthony, aware that the city’s impressiveness when seen from the distance is only momentary, shuns pretense in order to preserve his dreams. Conversely, Gloria embraces the artificiality of the city as if it were real. Thus, as paradoxically drawn together by the distance that separates them, the couple embodies the fusion of the real with the romantic that characterized Fitzgerald’s New York during the 1920s.

In fact, it did not take long for a young Scott Fitzgerald to realize that the line between reality and fiction in the city could be very blurred. The narrator of “My Lost City” tells how “New York was more full of reflections than of itself” (28). As Cochoy explains, the author often suggests in his work that both the ornamental effects of romanticism and the veracity of realism fail to capture the “general inarticulateness” (“My Lost City” 26) of the city. However, it is in the blending of the real with the metaphorical that the author manages to evoke the difficult-to-describe radiance of New York (73). For example, in the following excerpt from “My Lost City,” the transfiguration of the cityscape first into a glacial landscape and then into a sort of miraculous illumination, illustrates the transformation of the ordinary into the magnificent that characterizes the city:

As the ship glided up the river, the city burst thunderously upon us in the early dusk—the white glacier of lower New York swooping down like a strand of a bridge to rise into uptown New York, a miracle of foamy light suspended by the stars (30).

In *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald exposes the tension between romance and realism existing in discourse for the representation of both desire and the urban space. Ironically, from the beginning of the work the narrator makes a distinction between two modes of representation: the “obscene thinness glistening on the surface of the world” and the “thoroughly sophisticated adjust[ment] to [the] environment” (*Beautiful* 3). It is precisely by endowing the narrative with a writing style where the real meets the imaginary that the author succeeds in recreating the city’s appeal. In the novel, this phenomenon becomes particularly noticeable during the scene of the first kiss between Anthony and Gloria. Accentuated by its location in the story, this moment plays a key role in revealing the blend of realist engagement with imaginary detachment that allows the evocation of both the lovers’ desire and the urban appeal.

In the description of the kiss, the transformation of the cityscape is a reflection of the changing condition of desire, which swings constantly between enchantment and disenchantment. At first, the taxicab where they traveled “moved off like a boat on a labyrinthine ocean and lost itself among the inchoate night masses of the great buildings, among the now stilled, now strident, cries and clangings”. But once the vehicle turns around, these romantic images acquire disquieting overtones: “the buildings fell away in melted shadows” and the Metropolitan Museum moved past as if it were “a great white ghost” (101-102).

The essay “My Lost City” closes with the cry “I have lost my splendid mirage. Come back, come back, O glittering white!” (33), illustrating that the magnificence of both desire and the city best appears through the melancholic distance of retrospection. In *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald transforms the sensual intensity of the Patches’ first kiss into a timeless aesthetic experience: “Such a kiss—it was a flower held against the face, never to be described, scarcely to be remembered” (86). It is the embellishing distance of memory that reveals the splendor of the scene to Anthony, and thus, it is only a few years later, in the South, when the protagonist kisses another woman, that he comes to understand the value of his first kiss with Gloria in New York:

[...] the moon came slanting suddenly through the vines and turned the girl's face to the color of white roses.

Anthony had a start of memory, so vivid that before his closed eyes there formed a picture, distinct as a flash-back on a screen—a spring night of thaw set out of time in a half-forgotten winter five years before —another face, radiant, flower-like, upturned to lights as transforming as the stars—

Ah, *la belle dame sans merci* who lived in his heart, made known to him in transitory fading splendor by dark eyes in the Ritz-Carlton, by a shadowy glance from a passing carriage in the Bois de Boulogne! But those nights were only part of a song, a remembered glory- here again were the faint winds. the illusions, the eternal present with its promise of romance (329).

As if reunited with a passing stranger, the experimentation of melancholic recollection enhances the lost glory of the first kiss. Moreover, as the above fragment suggests, not only does temporal distancing help the protagonist to recover the beauty of passion, but also the detachment of exile brings back the “transitory fading splendor” of Manhattan’s urban scene —his lost city.

Therefore, in the same way that Gloria affirmed that she did not intend her marriage “to be a background but to need one” (*Beautiful* 147), it might be argued that in *The Beautiful and Damned* Fitzgerald does not conceive of New York City as a background for the passion of his protagonists, but rather as their object of desire. In this sense, the stamps of New York City that Anthony collects, admires, and which, at the end of the work, once it has turned into a lost city for him, he contemplates with a childlike melancholy, could be regarded as a symbol of Fitzgerald’s representation of the metropolis.

Just as the stamps preserve their sparkling romantic promises of New York even when the protagonist’s dreams have turned into disillusionment, the author draws on a narrative voice where dream and reality converge in order to evoke the glittering splendor of the city —“the old illusion that truth and beauty were in some way entwined” (*Beautiful* 417). In this way, these colorful but empty signifiers would mirror Fitzgerald’s carefully crafted sentences that meaningfully reflect the performative magnificence of the urban space. Through the use of repetition, punctuation, and sound effects, the author succeeds in evoking the promises of joy that, as the excerpt below illustrates, coalesce in the city’s night before the outbreak of disillusionment:

All the city was playing with this sound out there in the blue summer dark, throwing it up and calling it back, promising that, in a little while, life would be beautiful as a story, promising happiness—and by that promise giving it (*Beautiful* 149).

In this way, filled with aspirations, Anthony initially remains a spectator to the theatricality of the city. However, once he loses his youthful illusions, the cityscape progressively becomes a stark reflection of his own inner chaos:

New York, he supposed, was home the city of luxury and mystery, of preposterous hopes and exotic dreams. [...] The train moved in through the deepening twilight, above and past half a hundred cheerful sweating streets of the upper East Side [...], each one with its vigorous colorful revelation of poor children swarming in feverish activity like vivid ants in alleys of red sand. From the tenement windows leaned rotund, moon-shaped mothers, as constellations of this sordid heaven; women like dark imperfect jewels, women like vegetables, women like great bags of abominably dirty laundry (*Beautiful* 282-283).

While Anthony's "preposterous hopes and exotic dreams" in Manhattan move relentlessly towards a diminished thing, he himself seems to advance towards the gloomy place that is his destiny. The author, by means of a combination of devices such as the simile "like vivid ants", the oxymoron "sordid heaven" or the metonymy "sweating streets", appears to suggest that the human and the animal, the superb and the banal, and the organic and the architectural, are brought together in a modern city that gradually acquires a grotesque and dehumanizing quality. In this respect, the juxtaposition of comparisons in the last sentence could be representative of a dehumanizing nature of the metropolis that in fact Fitzgerald glimpses in "My Lost City": "within a few months after our embarkation on the Metropolitan venture we scarcely knew any more who we were and we hadn't a notion what we were" (24).

Nevertheless, it is at the very moment when hope gives way to disappointment and dreams are shattered into pieces that New York returns with its regenerative magic. Thus, under the influence of alcohol, which "served to close the gap between reality and possibility" ("My Lost City" 27), Anthony once again witnesses the splendor of a city that was seemingly lost:

“It was a reproachless twilight on the summer side of spring. Anthony lay upon the lounge looking up One hundred and Twenty-seventh Street toward the river, near which he could just see a single patch of vivid green trees that guaranteed the brummagem umbrageousness of Riverside Drive. Across the water were the Palisades, crowned by the ugly framework of the amusement park—yet soon it would be dusk and those same iron cobwebs would be a glory against the heavens, an enchanted palace set over the smooth radiance of a tropical canal” (*Beautiful* 405).

Despite being aware that New York City is nothing more than an “artificial sort of spectacle,” Anthony falls prey one more time to the promises of a place that has grown even more beautiful with the realization that it is actually damned. Two adjectives that may accurately encapsulate the contrasts that made up the mysterious allure of the modern city in the early twentieth century. Two adjectives that provide a title for Fitzgerald’s poetic transcription of a lost city that apparently remained etched as a ‘passing stranger’ in his memory.

5

Conclusion

The main purpose of this dissertation was to analyze the representation of New York City in Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Beautiful and Damned* both as a form and as an idea, aiming to discuss the prominent role that is conferred to the modern city throughout the work.

As far as the formal representation of the metropolis is concerned, even though some naturalistic traits might be ascribed to the novel, Fitzgerald seems to have been primarily influenced by the experimental art movements of the period, not only within the literary field, but also in other areas such as painting or music. Thus, the modernist approach to the city, along with the incorporation of cubist-like urban images and the jazzy tempo that at times appears to drive the action, would bring the depiction of New York in the work closer to the trends of describing the modern city as a fragmented, restless milieu that were prevalent during the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, it could be claimed that the city in *The Beautiful and Damned* does not only function as a mere backdrop for the vicissitudes of the main characters, but is also transformed into the most relevant of the protagonists, playing a key role in the unity of the work and Fitzgerald's narrative strategy. Although apparently absent at times, New York remains omnipresent, an object of desire that is transfigured to the author's will. Hence, in addition to emphasizing the motion and fragmentation characteristic of the modern city and their damaging influence on both the individual and the community, ironically, the writer succeeds in turning these negative aspects into an aesthetic device. At one point, Anthony says: "I like these streets [...] I always feel as though it's a performance being staged for me" (*Beautiful* 283). As if it were a theatrical performance, Fitzgerald fictionalizes the metropolis and takes control of it in such manner that, at the same time, it is both a prop and a main character on the stage of the work.

Furthermore, an examination of Fitzgerald's attitude towards the city in his work suggests how New York, once a symbol of romantic promise, eventually became the monument to the death of that very promise. This ambivalent conception of the

metropolis, as well as the author's apparent need to believe in its wonders even when his own personal experience had revealed them as lies, are latent in the way his lost city is conceptualized in *The Beautiful and Damned*. Fitzgerald builds a network of experiences around New York, intertwining amorous desire and the evocation of the modern city's allure. Thus, an analogy is established between the distancing that allows the survival of the characters' passion and the detachment from the city that allows the awakening of its lost splendor. Significantly, the blend of lucidity and fantasy that governs the description of the protagonists' passion becomes revelatory of the coalescence of verisimilitude and imagination that characterizes Fitzgerald's literary transcription of the urban space.

Ultimately, this analysis has revealed how, just as Fitzgerald managed to create an artistic device out of the negative features of the modern city, New York is presented as a place where the ravages of modernity can still be transformed into romantic promises. Fitzgerald's vision of New York was dreamlike and little grounded in reality, and his subsequent personal experience caused the symbols of the city he had constructed in his mind to vanish as he came into contact with the actual metropolis. Perhaps in trying to turn the imaginary real, in an attempt to evoke on paper the splendor of the place he had erected in his imagination, Fitzgerald crafted the magnificent New York found in *The Beautiful and Damned*. Now, more than a century after its publication, we as readers remain enthralled witnesses to the beauty and damnation of the author's lost city. After all, "things are sweeter when they are lost," and New York City seems to become all the more glorious as it has "turned to dust" in Fitzgerald's hands (*Beautiful* 341).

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