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A Beautiful and Damped Woman: Gloria Gilbert Patch as a Heroine

Sachiko Tachibana

Of his five novels including the unfinished *The Last Tycoon* (1941), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), Fitzgerald's second novel, is the most in length and the least in popularity. Critics point out the defects of the novel, such as shallow philosophism, blatant racism, unnecessary sideshows, and the unclearness of its theme. Almost all of them probably agree that the book is "a failure," "[m]uch more than *This Side of Paradise* [1920]" (Eble 73) which, as Edmund Wilson puts it, commits almost every sin a novel can possibly commit.

Although one critic makes a positive comment that "*The Beautiful and Damned* is unique ... in that it has a heroine as well as a hero" (Podis 144), in many cases the heroine herself is treated like a flaw: Gloria is condemned as a "babywife" (Stern 141) who is "egocentric, careless, and pleasure seeking" (Stavola 123) or as "the devil's agent" (Gindin 113) whose "demands upon Anthony are excessive and debilitating" (Lehan 80). Gilbert Seldes, the author's acquaintance, deplores in a review under a pen name that Fitzgerald depicted her "as a flapper not as a woman" (Shaw 80). My viewpoint is, however, that Gloria should be considered not a typical "Golden Girl" but one of women who "are recipients of mixed messages about their roles and rights in life" (Fryer 5). I shall begin this paper with explaining the time of the story and show that she is in a different social condition from flappers.

The Beautiful and Damned consists of three books, each of which is divided into three chapters. The story is a chronicle of Anthony and Gloria Gilbert Patch who wait to inherit his grandfather's vast fortune. It opens in 1913 when they first meet and ends in 1921 with their voyaging a few months after they get the money. The couple, drinking, dancing, and living hedonistically, may seem to be representative of the "Younger Generation" in the 1920s (Turnbull 131), but the point is that a good part of the story unfolds in the 1910s: the Jazz Age comes finally near the end of Chapter 2 of Book 3. As Robert Sklar observes, although the action of the book transpires mainly during the second decade of the twentieth century, its "mood and themes belong to a decade even earlier" (Sklar 93).[1] Moreover, I add, it is through the image of women that the novel conveys the mood of the previous era most. Gloria's bobbed hair surprises Anthony: it is "to be fashionable in five or six years. At that time it [is] considered extremely daring" (119). The interiors of some houses are furnished with the pictures of "Gibson girls" (168) that, created in 1896 by Charles Dana Gibson, an illustrator, embody the ideal woman in the Victorian era. Unlike flappers they are wholesome rather than sexual.

Naturally there is a double standard concerning sexual behavior in the novel and even the young accept it as reasonable. Dot, a nineteen-year-old girl of the working class, was tempted by her boyfriend into premarital sex and suffers from the severe aftermath of her affair after the rumor spread secretly:

> [S]ometimes she regretted vaguely that her reputation precluded what chance she had ever had for security. There had been no open discovery.... But some of the boys she had known in high school now looked the other

> way when they were walking with "nice girls," and these incidents hurt her feelings. (318)

Gloria, though she is one of "nice girls," also has an unsavory reputation, known as "Coast-to-Coast Gloria" meaning "traveller of nation-wide notoriety" since seventeen (58). She dismisses the nickname by saying "what some silly boys coined" and declares that her sexual experiments have "had no effect on" her (177). Unlike Dot, Gloria is a transgressor with conviction and she is ahead of her times: many women in the postwar period came to think that sexual freedom was "more readily accessible than economic or intellectual autonomy" (Fryer 13) and their release from sexual restraints, under which women had to be passively sitting and waiting for men, seemed to lead them to emancipation from patriarchy.[2] Making her tyrannical father "mad at" her (63), Gloria voluntarily "goes and goes and goes" about (38).

Thus she has plenty of progressiveness, but on the other hand, she cannot fully escape from the influence of "'female' education" (163) that has infiltrated into Gloria as a woman in the prewar period. She is in transition between Victorianism and modernism, between "a 'Future Wife and Mother'" and "a Farmover girl" (354), and so she makes a mixed rule on her sexual liberty. She kisses so many men, insisting "[a] woman should be able to kiss a man beautifully and romantically without any desire to be his wife or his mistress" (109), whereas she despises female "promiscuity" (227). Her premarital sex with Anthony is obliquely hinted, yet it does not occur until she makes up her mind, saying in her diary, "Maybe I'll marry him some time" (141). When one of her past boyfriends, Percy, attempted to do a little more than kissing, she pushed him off a sixteen-foot embankment. She rejected him because she did not think him a suitable match for her. Gloria does

have sexual intercourse only with her chosen future partner.

Later she tells to Anthony about Percy's view of marriage that reflects the gender role firmly established in the society of the times:

> It seems he had some naïve conception of a woman "fit to be his wife," a particular conception that I used to run into a lot and always drove me wild. He demanded a girl who'd been never kissed and who liked to sew and sit home and pay tributes to his self-esteem. (175)

For many women in this era, social or economic independence was impossible, so what they should do with themselves was to marry. They were supposed to have the qualities of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness and to "place others' needs first, to feel these needs as their own" (Olsen 17). Gloria rebels against such "colorless marriages" (142) as cost women self-effacing support for their husbands and children. She proclaims her refusal to dedicate her life to posterity, though "virtuous females" of her contemporaries push forward their fitness to bear children (30). Instead, her weapons to capture men are tremendous beauty and vitality keeping her "on the go" (74). Gloria is enough modern to seek after autonomy in her marriage which, she claims, will be "the performance, the live, lovely, glamourous performance" (142). It is a natural consequence that she chooses for her marital partner neither Percy nor Joseph Bloeckman, another suitor, who admires woman as "the miraculous mouthpiece of posterity" (95) but Anthony who seems to her to respect "all the originality" in her (141).

During the term of engagement Anthony insists that he as well as Gloria is not tied down by the traditional gender role: "We're twins" (127) and "You've got a mind like mine. Not

strongly gendered either way" (130), he says. He compares himself to "a scarcely tolerated guest at a party she [is] giving" (128) and for the first years of their married life he admits that what he believes bears invariably "the stamp of Gloria" (185). Seemingly he accepts her taking the initiative and differs from his married friends, "Mr. Gilberts [Gloria's fathers] in embryo" (53) in his words, who will certainly tame their wives. Gloria often remarks that she likes his neck because the Adam's apple symbolic of masculinity does not show.

Yet Anthony sometimes betrays his desire for masculinity. He repressed it and as is often the (psychoanalytic) case, it recurs.[3] His grandfather's advice that he should go over to the battlefield as a war correspondent deeply fascinates him.

> He had had one of those sudden flashes of illumination vouchsafed to all men who are dominated by a strong and beloved woman, which show them a world of harder men, more fiercely trained and grappling with the abstractions of thought and war. (200)

"These unfamiliar phantoms" possess him for a while. Although he outwardly welcomes Gloria's offer to go with him, inwardly he is "vaguely angry with her, vaguely dissatisfied" (203) by her impudence to intrude into men's sacred sphere.

Twice in the novel, his internal urge to dominate her comes out with a slight touch of violence. Driven by "a brutish sensibility," he attempts to have his own way at one point during the early days of their love.

> Anthony pulled her quickly to her feet and held her helpless, without breath, in a kiss that was neither a game nor a tribute.
>
> Her arms fell to her side. In an instant she was free.
>
> "Don't!" she said quietly. "I don't want that." (109)

Repeating "I don't want that" in a calm voice, she simply does not allow him to take liberties with her body in total disregard of her will. Her refusal and "utter unwavering indifference" (111) succeedingly displayed to him bewilder Anthony. He is not ready to tame her by greater force or to ask her pardon and so has no choice but to walk away, "defeated and powerless," from her door. Anthony does not fully comprehend her so that he concludes with "no great self-reproach" that her rejection comes from her "whims" and "unreason" (113).

The incident shows her demand for autonomy. She wants him to treat her as his equal. When he calls her "my darling wife" on their honeymoon, she replies, "Don't say 'wife.' I'm your mistress. Wife's such an ugly word. Your 'permanent mistress' is so much more tangible and desirable" (153). In the same way she expects him not to be a "husband" but to keep himself a "passionate lover" (142). She is indeed "careless" enough to miss "the boundary that defined their 'love' as 'illegitimate'" (Nowlin 116). In the patriarchal system, once their relation is legally sanctioned, she belongs to him as the property that her father transferred to him. Some years after their marriage she comes to a discouraging realization that she, in body, is forced to submit to his will. One afternoon Anthony, who has been stimulated by alcohol, suddenly gets furious at her deciding what they should do. He feels the need to assert himself as "her master" (192) and grips her arms tightly in public to hamper her from getting on a train alone. Gloria being his lawful wife cannot repel him this time. He keeps his hands firm upon her body until he makes sure of his "victory" (194).

> Gloria tugged and strained to free herself, and words older than the Book of Genesis came to her lips.
>
> "Oh, you brute!" she sobbed. "Oh, you brute! Oh, I hate

> you! Oh, you brute! Oh—!"
>
> ... Gloria's efforts redoubled, then ceased altogether, and she stood there trembling and hot-eyed at this helpless humiliation, as the engine roared and thundered into the station. (193)

Having a hold over her physically, Anthony, "the heir of many years and many men" (53) as he fancies himself, reveals his mentality that men ought to hold hegemony in the gender hierarchy after all. He says to himself: "It seemed that he had always given in and that in her heart she had despised him for it. Ah, she might hate him now, but afterward she would admire him for his dominance" (193).

The event deprives her of "all the pride and fire" (196). She loses confidence in her right to take control of her own body. Immediately after that, the possibility of her pregnancy arises. She leaves the decision about getting an abortion in his hands and sobs her fears out: "I value my body because you think it's beautiful. And this body of mine—and yours—to have it grow ugly and shapeless? It's simply intolerable. Oh, Anthony, I'm not afraid of the pain" (197). By this time she comes to admit his possession of her body and what makes her avoid childbearing has changed from her "self-love" (142) to her respect for his love of her body.

Anthony is unfaithful to her, whereas Gloria maintains her own code of morals. While he is away to serve in the army, she finds herself revived "to her normal state of mind" (362) and goes out with a few different men for diversion. On the invitation of Rachel, her old friend, Gloria visits her apartment at one time. They double-date with two officers and she enjoys herself. However, as soon as she realizes that one man is on intimate terms with Rachel and that the other intends to start a

love affair with her, she leaves there, spitting out her repulsion: "How *utterly* common!" (359). Then she begins to date with Tudor Baird, an aviator at drill, whom she was seriously thinking of marrying in former days. He is killed in an airplane crash the day after her kissing him. That makes her "glad" (360) probably because she feared Tudor, infatuated with her, might ask more intimacies. Gloria does not fully give herself to any man but her husband.

There are distinct differences between Gloria and two principal female characters in Fitzgerald's later novels, Daisy Buchanan and Nicole Warren, who both get married in 1919 and appear in the respective novels mainly as wives in the 1920s. The latter feel no remorse over having sexual relations with men other than their husbands. Each of them has an extramarital affair that she expects to open the way for her liberation from her husband's dominance. They can do so, in a way securely, owing to their financial welfare. Gatsby says that Daisy's voice is "full of money" (*The Great Gatsby* 112). Nicole, who has a huge fortune, fights her husband partly "with her money" and after achieving her victory, she turns toward "the household that [is] hers at last" (*Tender Is the Night* 300). According to Anthony, Gloria has a slender income of her own "[e]nough to buy clothes" (134). Upon marriage, her money becomes theirs under his management. After they have spent most of their money, Anthony, though still squandering their money on alcohol, does not permit her to buy the clothes she wants, "a gray squirrel coat" (379). He has had no regular employment. His income derived from his mother's inheritance, about five times as large as hers at the start of their marriage, is getting lower and lower. Yet, there remains a possibility of his getting his grandfather's fortune. She is bound by her individual morality and by her economic dependence on her

husband. There is no other way for her but to live with Anthony under the comforting cope of "an illusion of happiness and security" (363).

As the story progresses, "his continual drain upon her moral strength" (362) dwindles her vitality. While nagging at Anthony who indulges in drinking, she gradually accustoms herself to conforming to his standards. For breakfast she eats "the sempiternal bacon and eggs and toast" (353), a conventional dish to his taste, instead of "a lemonade and a tomato sandwich" (157) for which she showed a monomaniacal fondness with "a strong conviction that she could not possibly eat anything else." She has lost her autonomy. "All the qualities that they don't use in their daily lives," as she aptly says, "get cobwebbed up" (398). Finally her environment reduces Gloria to an ordinary woman in the times, to "a grotesque similitude of a housewife" (412).

Near the end of the story, Gloria reaches a full understanding that her aim was too much for a woman in the times: once getting married, women are, whether originally autonomous or not, "by no means the mistresses of their destinies" (354); a man who is completely free from gender ideology does not have a real existence in the world of those days, as she thinks "the only lover she had ever wanted was a lover in a dream" (384). In November of 1919, just before a new decade, she reflects upon the path of her life. She feels regret that she did, in fact she just had to, let her interests be narrowed to one thing, to making a love match:

> Years before, when she was twenty-one, she had written in her diary: "Beauty is only to be admired, only to be loved — to be harvested carefully and then flung at a chosen lover like a gift of roses. . . ."
>
> And now . . . Gloria had been thinking that perhaps she

> had been wrong. To preserve the integrity of her first gift she had looked no more for love. When the first flame and ecstasy had grown dim, sunk down, departed, she had begun preserving – what? (382)

She aspires to use her beauty in a new way and immediately after the opening of the 1920s, she challenges a screen test. Gloria cannot pass it. For the director wants a woman fit for "a 'flapper' part" (386). Although her beauty remains, her modernity has faded away in her married life. Then suddenly she feels herself to be aging. The part should be performed by "a younger woman" (393) of the new generation like Rosemary Hoyt, a professional film actress, who has been "brought up to work — not especially to marry" (*Tender Is the Night* 52).

The Beautiful and Damned was originally serialized in the *Metropolitan* (September 1921-March 1922). Before publication Fitzgerald drastically revised his manuscript, as usual. Here we should take notice of two chief alterations. The one is that, although Anthony was not greatly changed, Fitzgerald completely expunged a few places that had shown Gloria culpable for Anthony's deterioration. The other is the deletion of the last scene where Gloria, the embodiment of "Beauty," reunited with "the voice" meaning God.[4] From these changes it may be deduced that he intended to depict Gloria, to some extent, sympathetically and realistically. Taking the time of the story into consideration, we understand that the novel contains the aspect of Gloria's tragedy. Gloria can be seen as a heroine in the meaning not only of "the principal female character in a novel," but also of "a woman remarkable for courage and daring action" in her times.

NOTES

1. Sklar relates this to the impact of Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris upon Fitzgerald.
2. In the end, as Smith-Rosenberg explains, they failed "because they lacked the real economic and institutional power with which to wrest hegemony from men and so enforce their vision of a gender-free world" (Smith-Rosenberg 296).
3. Here I allude to Sigmund Freud's "The 'Uncanny'" in *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 193-233.
4. See, for more details, Bruccoli 152-5.

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