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Mirror Images Reflecting Self:

Narcissism in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*

Saori Tanaka

F. Scott Fitzgerald's maiden novella, *This Side of Paradise* (1920) is his only romantic work which treats transience and narcissism, neither of which can be found in his later sentimental works where protagonists reminisce about the past.¹ In *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby essays to buy back fallen Daisy, and in *Tender is the Night*, Dick projects his lost youth upon Rosemary. Yet Amory Blaine, a Princeton undergraduate says, "No, I'm romantic – a sentimental person thinks things will last – a romantic person hopes against hope that they won't" (159). He only sees the present self without looking back over the past. The contemporary world is only to be found in the juvenilia. The novel has been often discussed in terms of its biographical and historical context, for Fitzgerald became a symbol of the Jazz Age and is considered as a study in a fragmented style. I, however, wish to estimate this work from psychoanalytic angle and discuss the novel as a successful work in its own right.

Amory, as Patrick O'Donnell points out in the title of bk. 1, ch. 4, "Narcissus off Duty," in which the name *amor-y* suggests narcissism, looks at his reflection in mirrors – that is to say, his mother Beatrice, and his loves, Isabelle Borgé, Clara Page, Rosalind Connage, Eleanor Savage, and his friends, Dick Humbird and Monsignor Darcy (Notes 264). This thesis will spotlight his narcissism, which has been attributed to his puerility and analyzed inadequately.

According to O'Donnell, "narcissism, a cornerstone of Freudian theory, is named after the Greek story of youth Narcissus" (Notes 264) and narcissism has been applied in psychiatry. Heinz Kohut (1913-1981) decided to be a psychiatrist when Freud on the train for Paris on his way into exile to London tipped his hat to him at Vienna Station in 1938. He studied narcissism and formulated theories of narcissistic transferences, which were not fully formulated by Freud. This thesis develops Kohut's ideas and his universal theory has been applied clinically in the US until now (Mizuno and Kasahara 298-299).

The outline of narcissistic transferences, mirror / idealizing transference is that: "the therapeutic activation of idealized parent imago [an admired you], for which the term *idealizing transference* will be employed, and the activation of the grandiose self [a grandiose and exhibitionistic image of the self], which will be called the *mirror transference*" (Kohut 479). In the mirror transference, the patient assumes the analyst is like him and overlaps the self-image with the analyst as the child narcissistically confirming his exhibitionistic display in the gleam in the mother's eye.

[I]t is the grandiose self that is reactivated in the transference-like condition referred to as the *mirror transference*. ... In order to actuate and maintain in motion the painful process that leads to the confrontation of the grandiose fantasies with a realistic conception of the self and to the realization that life offers only limited possibilities for the gratification of the narcissistic-exhibitionistic wishes, a mirror transference must be established. (Kohut 489-492)

Analogous to the grandiose self in the mirror transference, in the idealizing transference, the patient idealizes the client and

maintains a continuous union with the idealized parent imago as the child feels bliss and power in it.

The *idealizing transference* is the therapeutic revival of the early state in which the psyche saves a part of the lost experience of global narcissistic perfection by assisting it to an archaic (transitional) object, the idealized parent imago. ... Under optimal circumstances the child experiences gradual disappointment in the idealized object – or, expressed differently, the child's evaluation of the idealized object becomes increasingly realistic. ... And ... the idealized parent image, too, becomes integrated into the adult personality. (Kohut 478-481)

Psychiatrists accept, mirror and cure cases of narcissistic personality disorders with empathy and introspection to enable the patient to accept their self. Thus Kohut's theory that brings about the evolution of the importance of narcissism is different from Freudian narcissism whose end is to replace self-love by object love; Freud thought that the adult should discard narcissism and love another person (Mizuno and Kasahara 300). Kohut's treatment aims at the coexistence of narcissism and object love. Without narcissism, one has difficulty in accepting the self-conception and in having the dream.

Psychiatry shows that narcissism is not only Narcissus' self-love in the Greek myth, but also the basis for accepting the real self; without a mirror or a reflector, one cannot recognize oneself. As a result, looking at the self-image reflected in the eyes of others has a therapeutic effect for recovering the self or for painful initiation into adulthood. Based upon Kohut's psychoanalysis, this thesis will analyze Amory's projection of narcissism, which leads him to independence, while also analyzing other characters who create narcissistic space in the

work. His yearning and lost experiences are a process of finding his own mirror which is as calm as a water surface.

Criticizing his narcissism, however, O'Donnell argues that his independence is illusionary:

Each sexual episode mirrors Amory's own self-love or self-hatred ... Amory's problem is one of narcissism, and his "education" in the novel involves both the formation of a "personage" and an encounter with that which lies outside the self ... though it is possible to read the character's final cry as merely a return to the narcissistic self – the "I" of involuted self-knowledge – rather than a movement toward the world beyond Princeton. (Introduction xi)

This thesis will argue against his supposition. Amory's narcissism can be reevaluated as the basis of his independence, which has been criticized from the Freudian point of view that narcissism transitorily exists in infancy (Mizuno and Kasahara 300). His last cry, "I know myself" (249), is an echo not of self-love but of restraint on narcissism, of losing *This Side of Paradise* through the awakening to self.

Amory comes to know himself through Beatrice and his four loves, which are like five sheets of glasses. They are his reflectors, in the same way as Kohut's mirror transference. His lovers resemble him narcissistically, which shows that he unconsciously identifies himself with them and that he is at the stage of self-awareness. Les belles dames sans merci reflects his narcissism and the inner side.

1. Beatrice: The Archetype of Beauties

Beatrice, a beautiful, delicate and overprotective mother, appears as Amory's first mirror who "inherited from his mother

every trait, except the stray inexpressible few, that made him worth while" (9). She is the basis of both his nervousness and romanticism. She who lives dreamily and gracefully lacks the practical wisdom. She is proud of the delicateness of her and him as a pair. She indulges him and sweetly whispers to him, "You *are* tall – but you're still very handsome – you've skipped the awkward age..." (23). He is attracted to her exquisite delicacy despite "no illusions about her" (11) and has a sense of superiority. Consequently, he who is proud of his beautiful mother as her copy has a basis of self-love. His narcissism is not only toward himself but also toward the four muses whose beauty is equivalent to her. She is the matrix of his lovers as he finally muses over the resemblance between Beatrice and Eleanor.

He, her double and a boy "dreaming awake" (34), however, has to be just "awake" and to face the reality as he grows up; he cannot live like her. The disillusionment he feels at the close of the novel is far from feelings about the aesthetic epoch with her. His ideal breaks down the moment she dies before the war and this represents that she and he face each other as a positive and a negative of the photograph from opposite sides of the war. His narcissistic voyage is the locus of his awakening from her "wonderful visions" (24) to an insomniac reality. This overlaps the achievement of independence from his mother and of identity. First he meets Isabelle, an idealist and his dramatic reverberator.

2. Isabelle: Between the Acts

Isabelle, a beautiful girl in Minneapolis whom Amory remembers as a child, is a replica of his perfect self. They play not their real self but their idealized self and seek their own idealized image in the figure of the other. The naivete is

thrown into relief by the absence of a mirror that exposes their narcissistic vanity.

Isabelle is described as a "curious mixture of the social and the artistic temperaments found often in two classes, society women and actresses" (60). She is an actress rather for her coquetry than for her inner allure. As a result she feels nervous in front of the mirror: "Isabelle, started toward the dressing-room for a last peek in the mirror, but something decided her to stand there and gaze down the board stairs of the Minnehaha club" (58). She disguises her real self for lack of confidence, which expressed itself in her wavering eyes that cannot gaze at her mirror image. She imagines what he looks like using a photo and he does the same. Since Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag think a photograph is a representation of past, a melancholy object, their love is merely a past phantom from the beginning. The fact that the musical and photographs reunite them intimates that their affair consists of the dramatized fiction created by their childish illusion.

Amory also gazes into the mirror. He admires himself, and her beaux yeux tickles his vanity; he identifies himself with her because she is his twin in "good looks and an excitable temperament" (63):

Turning on all the lights, he looked at himself in the mirror, trying to find in his own face the qualities that made him see clearer than the great crowd of people. . . . Silently he admired himself. . . . It was Isabelle, and from the top of her shining hair to her little golden slippers she had never seemed so beautiful. . . . As in the story-books, she ran into them [his arms], and on that half-minute, as their lips first touched, rested the high point of vanity, the crest of his young egotism. (82)

His superiority contrasts with “the crowd.” Isabelle is merely Amory’s image reflected in the pool. Narcissus Amory kisses his watery image; he loves her rather for his narcissism than for tenderness.

Their narcissistic fiction does not last long. The couple cannot stand the breakdown of illusion caused by time and a little blue spot on her neck hurt by his shirt stud. Isabelle can be likened to Cinderella because his train leaves at midnight and he cannot find unscarred *glass* shoes mirroring narcissism for her. This fragmentary fairy tale reveals that the spells of princes and princesses in fantasies are broken in modernism. This is why the drama is cut off during intermission and he must feel for the sequel to a story in the crowd. The utopian subtitle of bk. 1, ch. 2, “Babes in the Woods” abstracts theatricality and his naïve immaturity, yet, the image of an actress is still dreamy. Later the theatrical image is transmogrified into all the more realistic pain after awakening from the dream. The fragility of their love implies that they are still “babes,” incomplete by one. Here the theater sugarcoats his shallow inner self. Therefore he blindly falls in love with the Madonna as if to varnish over his inexperience.

3. Clara: “A light-weight is an eternal nay”

Clara, Amory’s second cousin is the purest woman in the novel. She is ideal, clean, brilliant and casts light upon him as her name suggests. She is too saintly for him to draw near to. “Like two mad children,” they face each other as the asymmetrical negative and the positive that parallels he, the negative and his mother Beatrice, the positive. He believes in Clara, “a daughter of light” (130) and she believes in god. Stavola discusses her as follows: “[b]y merging with her Amory seeks salvation from many tortuous struggles; her holiness and

goodness will save him from his fear of temptation and evil, especially the kind associated with sex" (96). For him, she is a goddess – "if I lost faith in you, I'd lose faith in God" (129). Monsignor Darcy symbolically leads him to her, to innocent paradise, but she says, "A light-weight is an eternal nay" (130). The Madonna who is opposite of but also curiously like to Beatrice rejects him. The denial by idolized icon foreshadows his atheism, his paradise lost and his needs to be independent of two narcissistic mothers.

She is Narcissus who has "never been in love" except with herself and God. Before her with "cheeks moist from the soft water" (129) evoking Narcissus in the pool, he is impotent like invisible nymph Echo who wasted away for love of Narcissus. He is not yet conscious of the "black old inside self" (210). If her dazzling light incessantly casts the deep black shadow, he is just "a light weight," a pale shade. He cannot even be her negative.

From this point, the novel enters the postwar era after passing the "Interlude" when he participates in the war before his graduation and his family loses most of its money. "Interlude" as the negative contrasted with the romantic prewar positive returns to the postwar positive under neon light. Hendriksen considers "Interlude" to be a pivot in the novel:

The "Interlude" section in *Paradise* is the transition to the second stage of Amory's development, where he becomes a personage, discovering the meaning in his life to that point ... The first scene after the "Interlude," however, is written as a stage play, which suggests that because of the war, life has become more absurd, unreal – theatrical – than it had ever been. (112-113)

The intermission ends when he has lost Beatrice, Isabelle and Clara, and his financial foundation. He meets les belles dames sans merci who make him not dream but awake in postwar Act II.

4. Rosalind: The Débutante Diving into the Clear Water

Rosalind's room after "Clara's bright soul" (134) is colored pink all around. The curtain is raised with the description of her room and "a luxurious dressing-table with a glass top and a three-sided mirror" (151) that plurally reflects her narcissism. The dressing-table images her narcissism. She is intangible for him because she is misted with the abundance of pink, which is reminiscent of Clara's prismatic accumulation. The two narcissists, however, are different in nature: postwar Rosalind is a modern realist while prewar Clara is a pious Christian. He, a member of the lost generation, meets a femme fatale and comes to restrain his self-love in the face of her egotism. She is allured by her mirror image – "*ROSALIND goes to the glass where she gazes at herself with great satisfaction. She kisses her hand and touches her mirrored mouth with it*" (161). The realist gazes at herself differently from Isabelle's swaying eyes.

That "The Débutante," bk. 2, ch. 1 is in the form of a drama sets her narcissism in the foreground and shows that she is a dream. The drama form is seemingly reminiscent of actress-like Isabelle, but compared with time-limited Cinderella without glass shoes, she sells her love to satisfy narcissism infinitely. She is a real actress who "might as well get paid for the amount of acting" (156). She is a typical flapper Fitzgerald created, but she cannot be the prototype of women in his masterpieces. Brian Way suggests that "[i]n *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night*, he learned to create women who were compellingly attractive and desirable, and at the same time

trivial and destructive, but in order to do so he had to discard the flapper altogether" (60). Textually and biographically, if he is Fitzgerald's projection, Amory should meet and give her up to be mature, which parallels the transition of Fitzgerald's muses.

She is Narcissus whose love for the other is "carpe diem," but for herself is essentially sentimental. He, a romantic cannot be a narcissistic mirror reflecting "Rosalind *Unlimited*" (157). Thus she dives into the water like Narcissus does into his watery image – "Rosalind, her arms spread in a beautiful swan dive, had sailed through the air into the clear water" (170). Unlike Narcissus metamorphosed into a narcissus, she is not drowned; she kills not herself but his love.

The curtain falls when she rejects "his lips against her wet cheek" (175) which is her relic of the dive. He has lost the illusion of eternal youth – "Amory wanted her youth, the fresh radiance of her mind and body, the stuff that she was selling now once and for all" (223-224). He as Narcissus loves her perfect image, cries for "unrealized dreams" and says, "It's all a poor substitute at best" (249). He cannot dive like Narcissus, though his love is all a substitute but for a vision of a beautiful diver. He escapes not into the pool but out of adolescence and enters the phase of adulthood.

After lost love, he comes across the mirror in the bar once more: "He tried to look at himself in the mirror but even by squinting up one eye could only see as far as the row of bottles behind the bar" (179). The narcissistic mirror appears as a reflector mirroring not his exterior but his dark interior. With Eleanor, Kohut's mirror transference enters the last phase.

5. Eleanor: One of the Twins Reflected in the Broken Glass

Eleanor, Psyche is the last "belle dame sans merci" who

leaves Amory the pain of knowing himself. She is the sole muse who projects his precise image. She sends back his hollow cry, "I know myself," like the nymph Echo who could only repeat Narcissus' words. As Kohut's echoing within mirror transference, it is possible to interpret "echoing" as the transformation of mirroring. The echoing is explained as follows: "the listening, perceiving, and echoing-mirroring presence of the analyst now reinforces the psychological forces that maintain the cohesiveness of the self-image, archaic and (by adult standards) unrealistic though it may be" (Kohut 492). Amory hears poetry when his image is not reflected in the mirror. In accordance with the darkness, the transfer from vision to the sense of hearing and his line, "I *have* to have a soul" (203) show that he is finding the worth of the psyche and grasping his self-concept.

Edgar Allan Poe's "Ulalume" links him with Eleanor. They become psychic twins when she says, "Instead you can recite 'Ulalume' and I'll be Psyche, your soul" (200) and when he says, "I *have* to have a soul." Psyche called "sweet sister" in the poem means the spirit being independent of body, the self as well as a beautiful girl with wings who is loved by Eros in Greek. Psyche as a beautiful girl personifies the soul, the invisible. Analogous to the verse, Eleanor as Psyche echoes Amory's "black old inside self" and exposes his soul. He not only loves her aesthetic mask but her invisible soul: thus he sights his inner black self when she says, "Look at you" (210).

He first has sexual intercourse with her while seeing "life through her green eyes" and feeling that "[a] transcendent delight seemed to sparkle every pool of water" (204). He becomes one with a twin like Narcissus with his shadow. The union infers his paradise lost by intercourse and self-identity. The water suggests the water Narcissus dives into and the

passing of juvenile Amory as Narcissus. It is the first and the last time for him to see a real self-image within a muse – “as Amory had loved himself in Eleanor, so now what he hated was only a mirror. Their poses were strewn about the pale dawn like broken glass” (212).

The love affairs with “les belles dames sans merci” that end in self-knowledge are identical to Kohut’s mirror transference. With Beatrice and Isabelle, Amory activates the grandiose self, with Clara and Rosalind, he restricts narcissism, and with Eleanor, he gains a realistic conception of the self. Consequently the glass is broken. After mirror transference, he wakes up to the meaning of life.

In Fitzgerald’s apprentice fiction, “Sentiment – and the Use of Rouge,” Clay, Amory’s prototype, is dying in the war, while Amory survives without an injury in “Interlude.” The former is certain that his sister and his lover are innocent and that they are all in the same boat on the verge of his death. The latter is traumatized: “Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries . . . grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken. . . (249) In a certain sense postwar Amory realizes only spiritual vacancy because he is not given physical and traumatic deep scars unlike Clay. The rip tide is indispensable to know the inner naked self. To keep living after losing his twin, Clay is valuable for him. He, on the side of Life, is fated to perceive love and life in his life, but, in contrast, Clay, his other self, on the side of Death, realizes “love being a big word like Life and Death,” the words his lover says at a parting (“Sentiment” 154).

Experiencing narcissistic love with his lovers, he projects his ideal upon Dick, his friend at Princeton, and Monsignor Darcy

and undergoes the loss of his ideal. He sees not self-image but visions of life through the two. In terms of Kohut's idealizing transference, they are his idealized objects and models. Undergoing identification with them and the control of his ideal, Amory, an idealist, tries to restrain narcissism, to distinguish ideal from reality and to realize his ideal under realistic constraints.

6. Dick: Between Integrity and Filthiness

Amory first projects his ideal upon Dick, "a perfect type of aristocrat." Nevertheless, being a prologue to "broken glass" in Eleanor's scene, his nobleness fragilely shatters to pieces in a traffic accident. His death awakes Amory to the fact that youth and beauty are not permanent. His ugly corpse and ghost foreshadow Amory's poverty and in the end get him to enter the chaotic crowd of Broadway.

Like the big signboard of the eye doctor in *The Great Gatsby*, "tragedy's emerald eyes glared" (79), which is remindful of Eleanor's "eyes that glittered green as emeralds" (201). Green eyes are glasses that gaze on the cold-hearted fate of beauty and paradise lost. Dick plays a vital role in the novel. Dick gives him nihilistic disillusionment, however, as a phantom finally pilots him into the precise mirror, Eleanor and into the idealizing mirror, Darcy.

7. Monsignor Darcy as the Idealized Parent Imago

Supposing that Dick was the negative that casts a black shadow on Amory, Darcy would be the positive that shines a ray of light at him. They are placed as the light and the shadow of his idealistic imago. A Catholic priest gives him paternal love, ethics and a beam of hope that he needs.

Darcy is not Amory's perfect mirror image in a real sense.

He is a mirror reflecting Amory's ideal while Eleanor is a mirror reflecting his precise image. As a mentor, he advises Amory to be a man of character and to believe in the brightness of his future: "at fifteen you had the radiance of early morning, at twenty you will begin to have the melancholy brilliance of the moon, and when you are my age you will give out, as I do, the genial golden warmth of 4 P. M." (96) Comparing life to the light graphically changing, he implies that life is a nonreturnable voyage with a one-way ticket and simultaneously a journey to backtrack to the daybreak like transmigration. Amory feels "an immense desire to give people a sense of security" at Darcy's funeral (236). Narcissus learns to love and to live for others from experience — he shifts his eyes from narcissistic paradise to the world.

A missing piece is hidden not in the mirror images that Amory sees through people, but in him. Therefore, he faces only himself when Darcy dies, when Dick is disfigured, when a glass he sees in Eleanor's eyes is broken. He always learns only when he loses something that can be neither regained nor reproduced. In the last scene, he comes to a graveyard where many dead souls *sleep*, before arriving at "*dreaming awake*" Princeton. In the graveyard, he confirms the crashing of mirror images. His revisit of lost places shows that he has the capacity to accept loss. On the way to the long journey into the night, he is awake after midnight waiting for the distant light of dawn at 4P. M.

— "The silence of the theatre behind him ended with a curious snapping sound, followed by the heavy roaring of a rising crowd and the interlaced clatter of many voices. The *matinée* was over" (226) — Amory is out of the pseudo reality of the theater: "Out of the Fire, Out of the Little Room," the subtitle

of bk. 2, ch. 5 provides the image that he is out of the flaming adolescence, out of the theater named paradise. He gains the wisdom of which Rupert Brooke sings in "Tiare Tahiti" – "Well this side of Paradise! ... / There's little comfort in the wise" (lines 75-76). Crumpled among the crowd, he struggles to have "the melancholy brilliance of the moon" from the far side of paradise.

The eyes of characters functioning as mirrors where he gazes at himself, dissolve, metamorphose into "late-blooming, weepy watery-blue flowers that might have grown from dead eyes" (248) in a graveyard. He is at the point of being a mirror, a model of somebody else.

Conclusion: Out of Narcissus' Water

The vanishing point in *This Side of Paradise* is etched when Amory ceases to have all the mirror images and is conscious of "payment for the loss of his youth – bitter calomel under the thin sugar of love's exaltation" (217). He knows self through his mother and four loves and life through Dick and Darcy. This framework of narcissism is equivalent to Kohut's analysis that vulnerability of narcissism is reinforced through mirror transference, idealizing transference and disappointment at unavailability and imperfection of idealized objects. "In short, if the ego learns first to accept the presence of the mobilized narcissistic structures, it will gradually integrate them into its own realm, and the analyst will witness the establishment of ego dominance and ego autonomy in the narcissistic sector of the personality" (Kohut 499). Amory's acceptance of self is acquired when he restricts spurious narcissistic fantasies, controls it with ego and achieves narcissism without illusion. His last cry, "I know myself ... but that is all" is not O'Donnell's "merely a return to return to narcissistic self" but

recognition that narcissistic fantasies are unrealistic and the acquirement of healthy narcissism as a basis for accepting naked self.

This Side of Paradise is studded with mirrors, with negatives and positives just like a mirror room. A chain of four beauties – Isabelle / Clara / Interlude / Rosalind / Eleanor – transfers from the prewar brightness to realistic postwar shade. Not solely as Amory's mirror images, Isabelle / Eleanor in point of his twin sister, Clara / Rosalind in point of narcissism create mirror symmetry bordering Interlude. In addition, Clay killed in the war and Amory living, Dick killed uglily and Darcy sleeping romantically, dreaming Beatrice and Amory awake are integrated into negatives and positives. Specifically, Amory is the one who should step into the night. As a negative, he dives not into Narcissus' water but into the fixative in the darkroom for perceiving clear self-image. The narcissistic space where he knows self is analogous to the condensed but finite space shared between a psychiatrist and a patient under narcissistic transferences.

He who cries, "I know myself," however, says sadly, "It's all a poor substitute at best." The mirror transforms into "a poor substitute" reflecting only his duplicate for the youth. The unique self exists only within oneself although one cannot identify the self without the facsimile reflection of others.

Kahn suggests that "[i]n Amory Blaine, hero of *This Side of Paradise*, we can see the child who is father to the later man" (52) and Aldridge argues that "[i]t is Fitzgerald's vision of Paradise as well, going down in the dissolution of an age" (35). Fitzgerald's later protagonists might share the regret for Amory's lost youth. His narcissism is tarnished by the difficulty of accepting the present self afterward.

He at the exit of the paradisiacal mirror room steps into the

phantasmagoria of the city where a number of images of people become entangled.

NOTES

1 All references to his text are cited parenthetically in my essay.

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