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F. Scott Fitzgerald and Rome

Davvero c'è ancora qualcuno che s'interessa a quell'infelice ragazzo? ha troppo successo... troppo successo e troppo presto... quel povero ragazzo... senza il tempo di diventare maturo [...] Io non sono certamente mai stato in questi night clubs, ne ci voglio andare... lui dicono che questi di Roma poi sono tremendi... Ma lui sempre... "per aver contatti con la gente!" ... Un'altra sua idea: "scriviamo solo cose viste" ... Ma aveva perduto la testa, in realtà... e l'Europa era un vino troppo forte, per lui ... Questi giovanotti del West non sanno modificarsi... e soccombono... Questo vizio del bere... ancora oggi...

Arbasino, *Fratelli d'Italia*

Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* ends with the departure of the two protagonists — Anthony Patch and his wife Gloria — for Europe, presumably for Rome. After countless misfortunes they hope to recover not only a bit of their health, but also some serenity. Why did Fitzgerald choose Italy as a final destination for this couple so thoroughly exhausted? If "we lose the case," Gloria argues, with the little money left, "we can live in Italy for three years, and then just die."¹ If instead, as they obviously wish, the outcome is favorable, their future still "meant Italy. The word had become a sort of talisman to him [Patch], a land where the intolerable anxieties of life would fall away like an old garment" (*BD*, 359).

But can Rome really fulfill the promise of physical and moral rehabilitation for these two, who like Antony and Cleopatra, are so beautiful and so damned? Indeed, Anthony thinks that: "Marvelously renewed, he would walk again in the Piazza di Spagna at twilight, moving in that drifting (never a reassuring verb in Fitzgerald) flotsam of dark women and ragged beggars" (*BD*, 359). Will it really be so? Or isn't Fitzgerald rather using here a type of ironic counterpoint,

reminiscent perhaps of the American literary tradition by which Rome is a city of ruins as well as the allegory of a city where one may easily ruin oneself?

That Fitzgerald was working toward an ironic ending is attested to by his correspondence with Maxwell Perkins concerning the first drafts of the novel.² Within that framework, one cannot help being startled by a paradox: Anthony's great attraction to Rome is particularly centered upon Italian women, "always beautiful and always young" (*BD*, 359), and yet, at the same time, he is also well aware of women as the principal cause of his ruin: "All the distress that he had ever known, the sorrow and the pain, had been because of women" (*BD*, 360).

The prospect of a Roman future, with a Rome more longed for than realistically present, has a very clear purpose in the novel, which is that of making Anthony's bitter experience turn full circle. It is against the background of Rome that the novel actually starts: from the first short paragraphs, dedicated to Anthony's past, one learns that he has just returned from a long stay in Rome where he became interested in architecture and painting and in the Renaissance. Rome prompted him to make a stab at composing, perhaps in the manner of his beloved Keats, "some ghastly Italian sonnets" (*BD*, 13). And now, back in New York, he would like to write a book on the history of the Popes. It was in Rome that he had been enchanted by "the peculiar charm of Latin women" (*BD*, 13), very much like Roderick Hudson who had been fascinated by Christina Light. Rome, in short, gave him "a delightful sense of being very young and free in a civilization that was very old and free" (*BD*, 13).

Thus, *The Beautiful and Damned* develops from one Rome to another Rome: a Roman idyll forms a sort of framework linking past and future, and within that absent topography there is New York, already a harbinger of devastating decadence.

In *This Side of Paradise* Amory Blaine also has his own Roman dream. His mother Beatrice had been educated in Rome, "at the Sacred Heart convent - an educational extravagance," Fitzgerald admits, "that in her youth was only for daughters of exceptional wealth" (*TSP*, 11). She lived her youth in Renaissance splendor, up-to-date with the most recent gossip about the old Roman families,

and known "by name as a fabulously wealthy American girl to Cardinal Vittori and Queen Margherita and more subtle celebrities that one must have had some culture even to have heard of" (*TSP*, 11). Beatrice O'Hara Blaine had absorbed "the sort of education that will be quite impossible ever again [...]; a culture rich in all arts and traditions, barren of all ideas, in the last of those days when the great gardener clipped the inferior roses to produce one perfect bud" (*TSP*, 11). What comes out clearest here is the mocking of a whole educational tradition, of a certain type of upbringing, of, as it were, a "sentimental journey."

One senses then, in Fitzgerald's allusions to Rome, an underlying irony, the cynical unmasking of a myth — if that of Rome is a myth —, which appears definitely a dubious or even an imperfect one. Rome seems to be the target of the early Fitzgerald's gentle sneer, of the style typical, for example, of *This Side of Paradise*, which consists of a vein at times ironic, full of gibes, epigrams and paradoxes, at times completely imbued by a "subtle and romantic despair."³ And yet the protagonists — the young and the not so young — of his early novels do not give up their Roman dream: suffice it to recall Monsignor Darcy when he announces with great pride that his post will be Rome (from where, according to Alberto Arbasino, he will return with the 'Spanish' flu that will cause his death⁴). Amory himself dreams of his trip to Italy with Rosalind (*TSP*, 169), a trip postponed for a very long time, that is since he was thirteen when, to the astonishment of the other passengers and after only four hours of sailing, the ship taking him to Rome gently changes its tack and returns to New York to deposit him on the pier with a sudden attack of appendicitis (*TSP*, 15). Irony at times spills into pathos.

Fitzgerald eventually reached Rome not with Rosalind but with Zelda (Rosalind's model) in June 1921. The *Beautiful and Damned*, with its peculiar Roman frame, had been completed and, before his departure, he had set up its serialization in *Metropolitan* (from September 1921 to March 1922). The publication of the book by Scribner's was planned for March 1922; and in the middle of all that there was this trip to Rome, a procrastinated honeymoon, with Zelda expecting Scottie.

The main purpose was a visit to the Vatican, desired by his mother Molly McQuillan, who — incidentally — was the very opposite of the beautiful and refined Beatrice O'Hara Blaine. The couple stayed at great expense in the sumptuous and rather new Grand Hotel, regrettably infested by fleas. Years later in the famous "Show Mr. And Mrs. F. to Number—," included in *The Crack-Up*, Fitzgerald would remember especially the fleas of Rome: "But there were fleas on the gilded filigree of the Grand Hotel in Rome; men from the British Embassy scratched behind the palms; the clerks said it was the flea season" (*CU*, 42).

The immediate reactions were in fact much more complex and not just limited to an admittedly bothersome problem with insects. Apart from the emotions roused by the pilgrimage to Keats's house, his first Roman stay was far from pleasant. Actually, it was rather depressing, and made worse by his excessive drinking. Even many years later, in a long 1930 letter, concerning the bitter history of their marriage, Zelda could not refrain from reproaching him for "Rome and your friends from the British Embassy and your drinking, drinking" (*LL*, 191).

Drinking will be the determining factor in a future Roman debacle. But now, in 1921, Fitzgerald's reactions to the Italians are more absorbing. In a letter written to Edmund Wilson in June 1921 (not in May as indicated by Andrew Turnbull) he defines them as "philistine, anti-socialistic, provincial and racially snobbish" (*L*, 326). The Italians, in short, seem very different from the Northerners, they are little more than 'negroes': "The negroid streak creeps northward to defile the Nordic races," he writes using terms that he will later lend to Tom Buchanan⁵; and he goes on arguing: "Already the Italians have the souls of blackamoors. Raise the bars of immigration and permit only Scandinavians, Teutons, Anglo-Saxon and Celts to enter" (*L*, 326). Not sufficient to calm him down is Wilson's long appeasing answer (an essay in its own right), in which Fitzgerald's long-time friend entreats him to review such extreme opinions and to stay longer in Europe so as to discover its beauty and render "a service to American letters: your novels," Wilson concludes, "would never be the same afterward."⁶

More light-hearted, although still tremendously cutting ("acidu-

lous [and rather silly]", as Fitzgerald defines it in a letter to Maxwell Perkins [*DS/DM*, 44]), is the sketch entitled "Three Cities," published in *Brentano's Book Chat* in the fall of 1921:

We were in Rome two weeks. You can see the fascination of the place. We stayed two weeks even though we could have left in two days — that is we *could* have left if we had not run out of money. I met John Carter, the author of "These Wild Young People," in the street one day and he cashed me a check for a thousand lira. We spent this on ointment.

The ointment trust thrives in Rome. All the guests at the two best hotels are afflicted with what the proprietors call "mosquitos too small for screens." We do not call them that in America.

John Carter lent us "Alice Adams" and we read it aloud to each other under the shadow of Caesar's house. If it had not been for Alice we should have collapsed and died in Rome as so many less fortunate literary people have done.[...]

By bribing the ticket agent with one thousand lira to cheat some old general out of his compartment — the offer was the agent's, not ours — we managed to leave Italy.

"*Vous avez quelque chose pour déclarer*" Asked the border customs officials early next morning (only they asked it in better French).

I awoke with a horrible effort from a dream of Italian beggars.

"*Qui!*" I shrieked, "*Je veux déclare que je suis très, très heureux a partir d'Italie*" I could understand at last why the French loved France. They have seen Italy.⁷

This sketch was the only thing he managed to produce from his European and, in particular, Italian experiences. In spite of being urged by many, Fitzgerald didn't feel like writing anything; as he told Perkins in December 1921: "I think I may be able to use my European impression a little later but at present [...] I haven't many ideas on the subject" (*DS/DM*, 44). No, he had no desire to recount anything, partly because he had no fond memories (even the despised "carabinieri" make their first appearance in this sketch of 1921), and partly because, at this point, he was deeply involved with an elaborate revision (on the proofs as was his habit) of *The Beautiful and Damned* which was to come out in March 1922. Perhaps that depressing trip caused alterations in the Roman frame of his novel, particularly apropos of its 'ironic' ending. One may argue as well that the Roman setting which appears at first so desirable, albeit with a touch of irony, starts to look like an increasingly decadent and even

foreboding scene if one recalls that, among other fictional ill-fated characters, in the usually joyous Piazza di Spagna in Rome, exactly 100 years earlier died the great Keats.

Disappointments, however, tend to wear off rather quickly. The Fitzgeralds, excited by alcohol and success, were just embarking at that time on their never-ending Long Island feast. And it is there that we find them during the first months of 1924. He was now involved with *The Great Gatsby*, having trouble completing it because of his constant need for money, the eternal problem which forced him to write short stories (eleven between November 1923 and April 1924, earning seventeen thousand dollars).

It is a well-known fact that the couple spent lavishly and was always debt-ridden. The sketch "How To Live On 36,000 Dollars a Year" dates back to these months, followed in September by its companion "How To Live On Practically Nothing a Year." The first describes the extravagant life on Long Island, the second that on the Riviera, where, in fact, the Fitzgeralds moved in April "to economize" (AA, 101). Since everything on the Riviera was reportedly very cheap, their stay there would allow him to complete *The Great Gatsby* in peace.

In the second sketch one notices the beginning of a new process. The enchantment of the Riviera — "the more liquid dark," the "heavy roses and the nightingales in the pines," "the beauty of this proud gay land" (AA, 116) — deeply remembered in *Tender Is the Night*, was suddenly broken. The Fitzgeralds became aware of the "High Cost of Economizing" (AA, 114), while their marriage was on the strain for the first time because of the French aviator Edouard Jozan with whom Zelda, left alone too long for Gatsby, fell madly in love. This incident had a direct influence on the famous scene at the plaza in *The Great Gatsby*. Zelda's sentimental adventure contributed to make the (by no means less expensive) air of the Riviera too hot to boot. Fitzgerald sent Perkins the manuscript on 27 October, 1924 and, despite his first dreadful experience, decided to spend "a warm quiet economical winter in Rome."⁸

After a long trip by car with stops in San Remo, Savona, Pisa, Florence, a trip sustained by "real Italian food"⁹ — mostly by "maccheroni" —, the young couple arrived around the middle of Novem-

ber in "a large city where everyone was driving on the wrong side of the street, except me. The man who tried to arrest me told me this was Rome and I had better do as the Romans do."¹⁰ The new Roman stay occurred in a particularly difficult time for the Fitzgeralds: Zelda was "trying to have a baby" (*LL*, 192), and the fascist rise to power was in full swing¹¹ together with the hysteria of the Holy Year. The immediate outcome of this sojourn was a third, little known sketch, an unfinished essay full of gaps, with the meaningful title "The High Cost of Macaroni," published posthumously in 1954. It was conceived as the final part of a triptych on the material (merely 'material'?) cost of living on Long Island, the Riviera and in Rome.

Why Rome again? Was it just because it was cheaper? Or wasn't Fitzgerald ideally following other pilgrimages: that of Monsignor Fay, for example, or of his dear Keats, who with his nightingale is immortalized once more in the title of *Tender Is the Night* and in its epigraph? Actually, it was the reading of *Roderick Hudson* in October 1924¹² that enticed Zelda deeply. Truly there could not have been a more intriguing and foreboding reading, a more appropriate representation of the unraveling of a curious destiny lurking for Fitzgerald in the Roman ruins, the same pathetic destiny of those Jamesian characters for whom Rome plays a fatal role: Daisy Miller, Roderick Hudson, Isabel Archer.

From the very start the Roman sojourn was not under a good star. The search for an apartment, for example, was complicated by those whom Fitzgerald calls "speculators":

This was Holy Year. Only one year in every twenty-five is Holy Year — and we had blundered right into it. To the Roman business man, Holy Year is that period when he counts on making enough profit out of foreign pilgrims to enable him to rest for twenty-five years more. A host of speculators — army officers, black-handers, waiters, mule drivers, morticians and princes of the blood — round up every edifice that can be disguised as an apartment house and wait for the Americans.¹³

In short, prices were high for makeshift accommodations in old Rome, hastily restored and 'modernized' with rather rinky-dink bath tubs. The Fitzgeralds liked better to lodge at the Hotel Quirinale on

Via Nazionale, and later at the Hotel des Princes in Piazza di Spagna (formerly Albergo di Londra, closed in 1931¹⁴), but neither place left them with very good memories. The somewhat gloomy atmosphere of the Quirinale was later summoned in "Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number — ": "Marion Crawford's mother died in the Quirinal Hotel at Rome. All the chamber-maids remember it and tell the visitors about how they spread the room with newspapers afterwards" (*CU*, 44).

Everything that happened in Rome in those months found its way into *Tender Is the Night*. It is in the rooms of the Quirinale that the love-story between Dick and Rosemary ends. Francis Marion Crawford, too, makes an appearance in the novel, not at the Quirinale, but at the Excelsior, where late at night: "Baby Warren lay in bed, reading one of Marion Crawford's curiously inanimate Roman stories" (*TN*, 247). Truly a very peculiar irony! For, during that reading, the most agitated and animated night of the novel takes place.

The situation at the Hotel des Princes was not any better. In "The High Cost of Macaroni" it is morbidly renamed "Hotel de la Morgue":

The building itself had been erected over the tomb of one of the early emperors and the elevator shaft was obviously in direct communication with the open mausoleum. There was an atmosphere for you. [...] There was something very foreign and "old-world" about it. It was awful. ...¹⁵

Equally "awful" sounds a long list of discomforts and complaints: the cold weather, the damp sheets, the "snores of the people next door" (*CU*, 44), the fake mineral water, the terrible driving of the Romans, the dishonesty and the violence of the Italians and, last but not least, the eternal problems with the food, basically — and somewhat ironically — "Bel Paese" cheese and the usual macaroni ("Macaroni with grated meat" or "Spaghetti with pulverized tomatoes" or even "Vermicelli with annihilated cheese").¹⁶ However, in spite of all this, things at the Hotel des Princes went a bit better simply because it offered the enchantment of Piazza di Spagna with a view of Keats's house.

A less disappointing image (possibly for commercial reasons) of Rome can be found in "Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number —":

We were too superior at that time to use the guide books and wanted to discover the ruins for ourselves, which we did when we had exhausted the night-life and the market places and the campagna. We liked Castello Sant'Angelo because of its rounded mysterious unity and the river and the debris about its base. It was exciting being lost between centuries in the Roman dusk and taking your sense of direction from the Colosseum. (*CU*, 44-45)

How apparently joyful and leisurely this family strolling through the city! And yet how odd, indeed, that they take their "sense of direction from the Colosseum," the site where so many American fictional characters lose it: just think of Daisy Miller, Rod-erick Hudson and Isabel Archer.

The truth is that the Fitzgeralds deeply disliked Rome; there was no way for them to come to terms with the city. In February 1925, exhausted, they eventually left for Capri. On April 19, while traveling back to France, Scott wrote to Roger Burlingame:

Italy depressed us both beyond measure — a dead land where everything that could be done or said was done long ago — for whoever was deceived by the pseudo-activity under Mussolini is deceived by the spasmodic last jerk of a corpse. In these days of criticism it takes a weak bunch of desperates to submit for 3 years to a tyrant, even a mildly beneficent one. (*L*, 479)

Except for the mention of Mussolini, these words echo those of the protagonist in "A Penny Spent" (1925), a little known short story set in Italy, on Capri and in the countryside south of Naples:

in the hot mysterious shin of the Italian boot where the Mafia sprang out of rank human weeds and the Black Hand rose to throw its ominous shadow across two continents. [...] "I'm glad I'm American," [the girl tells her companion]. "Here in Italy I feel that everybody's dead. So many people dead and all watching from up on those hills - Carthaginians and old Romans and Moorish pirates and medieval princes with poisoned rings." (*BP*, 125-126)

One can detect no sympathy at all in that gothic transfiguration of a piece of our Southern landscape. Fitzgerald seems to be very far indeed from the unique charm of the Riviera with its nightingales

and heavy roses in the "liquid dark." Nevertheless, the Roman winter, however depressing, was of remarkable importance in his career. The reasons are manifold; all in all, Rome brought about: a successful revision of *The Great Gatsby*, a renewed relationship with Henry James's work; the seed of *Tender Is the Night*, with the Roman-Jamesian motif of the gradual ruin of the protagonist; and last but not least, a direct contact with the American movie world: in those months, on the Appian Way, by the Porta San Sebastiano, against grandiose cardboard backdrops, Fred Niblo was filming *Ben Hur*, starring Carmel Myers and Ramon Novarro. The Fitzgeralds often joined the crew -actually, it became their favorite pastime in those unhappy months. *Ben Hur* (1925), the last colossal of Hollywood's adolescence, is a story of ancient Rome at the beginning of her decadence. In *Tender Is the Night* it will be ironically renamed, perhaps after Du Bellay, or Pound, or Poe, *The Grandeur That Was Rome*.

So it was in Rome that Fitzgerald set himself to work on a careful revision of *The Great Gatsby*, on the galley proofs which arrived from New York. He worked on them for over two months and sent them back in such a tormented shape he had to admit to Perkins on December 20 that they were "one of the most expensive affairs since *Madame Bovary*. Please charge it to my account" (*DS/DM*, 89). The correspondence with Perkins records the various phases of revision and rearrangement, of the structural balance of parts and chapters, of the orchestration of the symbolic details. Moreover, the famous scene of the Plaza was thoroughly rewritten; the meaning of Doctor Eckelburg's eyes was clarified; the evocation of the "old island" and of the "fresh, green breast of the new world" which closed the first chapter was moved to the end¹⁷. And while Scott worked, Zelda this time worked with him too, drawing repeatedly the face of Gatsby "until her fingers ached" (*DS/DM*, 89). At the end of such a trial he could assert with satisfaction: "I know Gatsby better than my own child" (*DS/DM*, 89). Of course, this is not to say that Rome had any part at all in the revision of the novel, Fitzgerald would have done it anyway: it was his habit to create his masterpieces from proofs. However, it was Rome where, by his own admission, he definitely had more time and fewer distractions.

With the corrected proofs back in New York and some regret at

the discarded 'Roman' title ("My heart tells me I should have named it *Trimalchio*" [DSDM, 94]), in February the family moved to Capri: "I've brought Gatsby to life," he writes Perkins on February 18, at the end of his Roman stay: "We're moving to Capri. We hate Rome. I'm behind financially and have to write three short stories. Then I try another play, and by June, I hope, begin my new novel" (L, 177).

In fact, as the labored revision of *The Great Gatsby* was coming to an end, the seed of *Tender Is the Night* started germinating and, unlike *Gatsby*, it owes everything to the Roman sojourn and to the so far underestimated influence of Henry James that Fitzgerald absorbed also through Van Wyck Brooks's *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925)¹⁸.

If, as has been maintained, *Roderick Hudson* is a remaking of *The Marble Faun*¹⁹, then *Tender Is the Night* can be read in turn as a remaking of *Roderick Hudson*, since it seems to inherit not only the very subject but also some of its structural faults²⁰. A comparison between the two novels would take us astray. However, it is worth recalling that both of them focus on the dissipation of a young and promising American against the background of Rome. Roderick Hudson and Dick Diver - incidentally, both from Virginia- are ruined by a woman and perhaps by too much drinking. After their Roman "catastrophe" (the word "catastrophe" is used by James and by Fitzgerald as well²¹), both of them end up in Switzerland. As with Daisy Miller, the Switzerland-Rome axis proves fatal to them.

Let's now come to the Roman "catastrophe" of Fitzgerald/Dick Diver and to *Tender Is the Night*. Besides all the discomforts of a cold — albeit politically 'hot' — winter in a Holy-Year-dishonest-violent-petty-fascist-vulgar-Rome, something else occurred around 20 December 1924 which marked Fitzgerald deeply. He would never be able to open-heartedly recount the serious, debasing incident that happened to him in the 'eternal city.' On 23 January 1925, replying to Harold Ober who was urging him to write about Rome, he was forced to decline: "I hate Italy and the Italiens [sic], so violently that I can't bring myself to write about them for the *Post*" (LL, 94). And in a note apparently written in 1929 he states cryptically: "I've lain awake whole nights practicing murders. After I — after a thing that happened to me in Rome I used to imagine whole auditoriums filled

with the flower of Italy, and me with a machine gun concealed on the stage. All ready. Curtain up. Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap."²² Dick Diver's reactions are very much the same, although not as violent: "What had happened to him was so awful that nothing could make any difference unless he could choke it to death, and, as this was unlikely, he was hopeless. He would be a different person henceforward" (*TN*, 254).

The Roman incident described in the novel inexorably undermines Dick's moral superiority, and he thus loses his match against the "very rich" Warrens: "it had been a hard night but she [Baby Warren] had the satisfaction of feeling that, whatever Dick's previous record was, they now possessed a moral superiority over him for as long as he proved of any use" (*TN*, 256). As with Fitzgerald himself, his humiliation forces Dick to conceal it in shameful silence. He will give "Nicole an expurgated version of the catastrophe in Rome" (*TN*, 262).

In "The High Cost of Macaroni" the debacle staged in *Tender Is the Night* is conveyed less dramatically (definitely in a less dramatic tone), yet more biting and sarcastically, to the point that it becomes almost comical. After a long series of unpleasant incidents, Fitzgerald tells us he had been forced into using the arrogant and uncivilized "methods" of the Italians:

We jumped into a taxicab and drove up to the Hotel Mazuma Americana. The afternoon tea dance was beginning and our eyes lighted upon the Princess Dumbella and her two cavaliers of the month before leisurely approaching the last vacant table. I rushed up to the head waiter. "Look here," I said. "I *have* to have that table. I'm Claude Lightfoot, the great American money king and if I can't have that table I'll call the Italian loan."

"But Signor, the Princess Dumbella—"

"Enough! Get me Signor Mussolini on the telephone."

In a moment the Dumbella party was intercepted. A barricade of waiters formed in front of them, on both sides of them, jostling, tripping, apologizing²³

Princess Dumbella becomes, more appropriately, Princess Orsini in *Tender Is the Night*. Here the setting is the bar of the Hotel Excelsior and later the cabaret called "Bombonieri" where the first big,

albeit confusedly described, fight over the reserved table takes place. At this point Dick is totally drunk. However, it is in the brawl with the taxi drivers that the uncivilized ways of the Italians take on a definite shape. "I decided to try my fascisti methods" —Fitzgerald writes in "The High Cost of Macaroni"—, "I had no castor oil handy but I approached the first chaffeur with a menacing eye."²⁴ There is no mention in the sketch of his broken nose, the night in prison with the hated "carabinieri" and the humiliation suffered as a result of knocking out "John Alexander Borgia, the chief of the secret police of the carbonieri [sic]."²⁵ Apparently unharmed, the protagonist of the sketch decides to leave for Capri, "where the Emperor Tiberius used to go when Rome got too hot for him. People have been going there for much the same reasons ever since..."²⁶

Although it would be worthwhile expanding upon the documentary significance of "The High Cost of Macaroni" — indeed, it is a colorful, angry indictment against fascist Rome—, it seems more appropriate to emphasize the importance that it holds in relation to Fitzgerald's new novel. This posthumous and unfinished sketch is, in fact, to be considered in every respect the ur-text (albeit an unpretentious one) of *Tender Is the Night*. Even by 20 December 1924, he announces to Perkins:

I'm a bit (not very - not dangerously) stewed tonight & I'll probably write you a long letter. We're living in a small, unfashionable but most comfortable hotel at \$525.00 a month including tips, meals etc. Rome does *not* particularly interest me but its (sic) a big year here, and early in the spring we're going to Paris. [...] I've got a new novel to write - title and all, that'll take about a year. Meanwhile, I don't want to start it until this is out & meanwhile I'll do short stories for money. (*DS/DM*, 88)

He had already in mind "title and all" of his new novel. In fact, the unfortunate and not at all "tender" Roman night, started giving life to the "Francis Melarky version" of *Tender Is the Night*, on which Fitzgerald worked from 1925 to 1930 when he shifted to the "Kelly-shipboard version" and then to the final "Dick Diver version." In the original version (with its four different titles: "Our Type", "The World's Fair", "The Melarky Case" and "The Boy Who Killed His Mother") it is Francis Melarky, in Rome with an American movie

crew, who suffers the humiliation of being beaten by the "carabinieri" after a drunken brawl. The episode constituted the "Prologue" — a real Roman flash-back of about thirty pages — of the first version which begins in June 1925 on the Riviera, where Melarky arrives with his mother from Italy. Both of them are the prototypes for Rosemary and Mrs. Hoyt.²⁷ By 1932 that account of the degeneration of a promising American expatriate becomes chapter VII of the "Dick Diver version," which will be later included in the second book of *Tender Is the Night*.²⁸ Notwithstanding the numberless alterations to the theme and the plot of the novel within the span of nine years, it is amazing that Fitzgerald never discarded the episode of the 'brutality' of the Roman night. Besides, his moving those original first thirty pages further ahead in the final structure of the novel is much more important than it might appear at first.

Dick Diver arrives in Rome in search of Rosemary, presumably, in 1929 (not in 1924-1925)²⁹, when his decline is already quite evident. This is so because Fitzgerald intended to stress the coincidence of the Roman catastrophe—his own and that of his character — with the advent of a particularly inauspicious year. The decadent (even politically) Roman landscape mirrors a collapse, a 'fall', which is not only Dick Diver's and Francis Scott Fitzgerald's but that of a whole era: the roaring Twenties. One seemingly insignificant detail will suffice to illustrate what Fitzgerald had in mind.

Upon his arrival, Dick goes to the Hotel Quirinale and, waiting for a suit that is being pressed, reads in the *Corriere della Sera* an article on "una novella di Sainclair [sic] Lewis 'Wall Street' nella quale l'autore analizza la vita sociale di una piccola citra Americana" (*TN*, 227). The change from "Main Street" to "Wall Street" is striking: it is quite unlikely that the Italian journalist could have contributed a lapse so cynically appropriate to the climate of the novel (there are other allusions to the "stock market" here), especially since the news should date back to Fitzgerald's stay in Italy—that is, either 1921 or 1924-1925.³⁰

There is hardly any need to expand on the descriptions of Rome in *Tender Is the Night*, or on the details of Dick's wild night and of Baby Warren's coming to his rescue. It would be useful to recall, however, that Rome is full of fatal omens: from the specter of

Marion Crawford and of her mother to that of Keats in Piazza di Spagna where Dick arrives coming from Via Nazionale after having passed through the "foul tunnel" (*TN*, 240) of the Tritone. Even the walk with Rosemary on the Pincian Hill doesn't foretell anything promising as the following detail, so pregnant with sterility, shows: Rosemary "plucked a twig and broke it, but she found no spring in it" (*TN*, 240). For Dick Rome will be "the end of his dream of Rosemary" (*TN*, 240). Like Daisy Miller before her, Rosemary (certainly a much more compromised version of Daisy) will bid him adieu to follow the not quite nice Nicotera, "one of the many hopeful Valentinos" (*TN*, 231), actually a new and perhaps even more compromised version of Giovanelli.

The unhealthy air of Rome will certainly not kill Rosemary, it will rather be waiting for Dick at the nightclub exit (his own Colosseum, indeed), with its "marshy vapor," so typical of 19th century Rome:

There was dirty water in the gutters and between the rough cobblestones; a marshy vapor from the Campagna, a sweat of exhausted cultures tainted the morning air. (*TN*, 244)

The lights and celestial breezes sung by the nightingale do not mellow Dick Diver's Roman night. His "rough cobblestones" are more reminiscent of Hawthorne's Rome, "of her narrow, crooked, intricate streets, so uncomfortably paved with little squares of lava that to tread over them is a penitential pilgrimage."³¹

Entirely cut off from the romantic idea of the 'eternal city' harbored by Keats and Shelley, Fitzgerald's experience may be considered a trial (further complicated by fascist vulgarity) most American writers usually undergo before (if at all) they manage to come to terms with the beauty and the many complexities of the city. Indeed, for Fitzgerald that night in December 1924 was neither pleasant nor in the least "tender."

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, p. 346. Unless otherwise stated, Fitzgerald's books and collections of letters will be cited in the text by abbreviations for titles and page numbers. The following editions are used: *This Side of Paradise*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965, *TSP*; *The*

Beautiful and Damned (op.cit.), *BD*; *The Great Gatsby*, with an introduction by Tony Tanner, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990, *GG*; *Tender Is the Night*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, *TN*; *The Crack-Up*, edited by Edmund Wilson, New York, New Directions, 1956, *CU*; *Afternoon of an Author: A Selection of Uncollected Stories and Essays*, edited by Arthur Mizener, New York, Scribners, 1957, *AA*; *Bits of Paradise*, selected by Scottie Fitzgerald Smith and Matthew J. Bruccoli, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, *BP*; *The Letters of F.S.Fitzgerald* edited by Andrew Turnbull, New York, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1965, *L*; *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald-Perkins Correspondence*, edited by John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer, New York, Scribners, 1971, *DS/DM*; *A Life in Letters*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli with the assistance of Judith S. Baugham, New York, Touchstone, Simon & Schuster Inc., 1995, *LL*.

2 On "the extraordinarily effective irony of the last few paragraphs" see, in particular, Perkins's letters of December 27 and 31, 1921 (*DS/DM*, p.49-50) and Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, New York, Carrol and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1991, p. 176-184.

3 Elio Chinol, "Due storici della crisi americana: F. Scott Fitzgerald and James T. Farrell" in *Comunità*, VII (18 aprile 1953), p. 53-54.

4 Alberto Arbasino, *Fratelli d'Italia*, Milano, Adelphi, 1993, p. 869.

5 See Tom's tribute to the Northern races, under the influence of Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Colour*. "The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be - will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved.' [...] 'It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things.' [...] 'This idea is that we are Nordics. I am, and you are, and you are, and [...]' (*GG*, 18).

6 Edmund Wilson, *Letters on Literature and Politics 1912-1972*, selected and edited by Elena Wilson, introduction by Daniel Aaron, foreword by Leon Edel, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977, p. 63.

7 Reprinted in *F. Scott Fitzgerald in His Own Time*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli and Jackson R. Bryer, New York, Popular Library, 1971, p. 124-126, 125.

8 F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The High Cost of Macaroni," with a note by H.D. Piper, *Interim*, IV, 1-2, 1954, p. 3-15, 6.

9 *Ibidem*, p. 7.

10 *Ibidem*, p. 8.

11 During the period the Fitzgeralds lived in Rome (from November 1924 to February 1925) the social and political atmosphere in the city was particularly strained and violent. These were the months following the assassination of the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti, sanctioned by Mussolini in order to intimidate all opposition. And, indeed, his fascist squads were ruthlessly imposing their own 'order' to ensure the Duce's total control of Italian affairs. During December 1924, when Fitzgerald suffered the worst experience of his life (he was beaten by the 'carabinieri' and ended up in jail, more or less around December 20), there was an escalation of fascist violence. By January 1925 Mussolini was able to declare himself Italian dictator. Undoubtedly, the unpleasant historical events which were taking

place in Rome influenced, as we shall see, Fitzgerald's dislike of the city.

12 See Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, *op. cit.*, p. 244. Fitzgerald strongly recommended *Roderick Hudson* and *Daisy Miller* to Scottie in 1939, advising her not to start reading James with *The Portrait of a lady* "which is in his 'late second manner' and full of mannerism" (*L*, 59).

13 F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The High Cost of Macaroni," *op. cit.*, p.8.

14 See Armando Ravaglioli, *Gli alberghi storici di Roma*, Roma, Tascabili Economici Newton, 1996, 32.

15 F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The High Cost of Macaroni," *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

16 *Ibidem*, p. 9.

17 Cfr. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile of the Manuscript*, ed. by Matthew J. Bruccoli, Washington, DC, Microcard Editions Books, 1973, p. 38.

18 Brooks argues that Europe had been a negative rather than a positive influence on James, a "gifted writer who escaped the environment by living abroad, to the partial detriment of his work". Cfr. Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction" to Van Wyck Brooks, *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, New York, Meridian Books, 1955, p. 7.

19 See Geoffrey Moore: "The plight of the American artist narrows into the plight of the American artist in Europe, where, ironically, he finds it difficult to come to terms either with the profusion of material (which was so lacking in his native country) or with the temptations which beset him daily. It is a theme which Hawthorne broached, and in a sense *Roderick* is the re-doing of *The Marble Faun*. The important question for James - and one which he exploits to the full in *Roderick* - is whether passion and art can exist together. Can one live one's life and still be a great writer?" ("Introduction" to Henry James, *Roderick Hudson*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p.7-32, 31). Fitzgerald deals with more or less the same question in *Tender Is the Night*; his reading of Van Wyck Brooks's book on James may have endorsed his view of Europe as an ill-fated setting for the American artist. However, as we have seen, Edmund Wilson's opinion in 1921 was utterly different.

20 In his "Preface" to the New York Edition James insists on the many 'flaws' of *Roderick Hudson* (most of them related to the "time question"), which seem to me very similar to those of *Tender Is the Night*. For example, James would argue that his "mistake on Roderick's behalf - and not in the least of conception, but of composition and expression - is that, at the rate at which he falls to pieces, he seems to place himself beyond our understanding and our sympathy" (*ibidem*, p. 43). This is also true of Dick Diver. What James has to say about Roderick's weakness applies to Diver as well: "where is the provision for so much weakness? One feels indeed, in the light of this challenge, on how much too scantily projected and suggested a field poor Roderick and his large capacity for ruin are made to turn round. It has all begun too soon, as I say, and too simply, and the determinant function attributed to Christina Light, the character of well-nigh sole agent of his catastrophe that this unfortunate young woman has forced upon her, fails to commend itself to our sense of truth and proportion" (*ibidem*, p. 43). All in all, however, the problem is that of a chronological correctness in *Roderick Hudson* as well as in *Tender Is the Night*. It is worthwhile quoting one more (famous) comment by James: "This eternal time-

question is accordingly, for the novelist, always there and always formidable; always insisting on the effect of the great lapse and passage, of the 'dark backward and abysm,' by the terms of truth, and on the effect of compression, of composition and form, by the terms of literary arrangement" (*ibidem*, p. 44). Thus, possibly, all the discussion on the shortcomings and structural flaws of *Tender Is the Night* may eventually find a new light and a new critical evaluation if matched against James's "Preface" to *Roderick Hudson*.

21 As already quoted in the previous footnote, in his "Preface" James maintains that Christina Light is the "sole agent" of Roderick's "catastrophe." In *Tender Is the Night* Dick's ruinous behavior in Rome is concordantly termed a "catastrophe" (*TN*, 262).

22 See Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1951, 165-166.

23 F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The High Cost of Macaroni," *op. cit.*, p. 14.

24 *Ibidem*.

25 *Ibidem*, p. 15.

26 *Ibidem*.

27 For the whole vexed question of the composition of *Tender Is the Night* and its many versions, cfr. Matthew J. Bruccoli, *The Composition of 'Tender Is the Night': A Study of the Manuscripts*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963.

28 *Ibidem*, p. 36.

29 Dates are often confused in *Tender Is the Night*. Dick meets Rosemary in Rome four years after their first encounter on the Riviera (*TN*, 227), when she is twenty-four, thus in the autumn (November) of 1929. However, a few hours later, in Rosemary's room at the Hotel Quirinale, he clearly states that the year is 1928: "Looking at you as a perfectly normal girl of twenty-two, living in the year nineteen twenty eight" (*TN*, 231). Fitzgerald is probably ambiguously playing with dates. If the Roman episode is placed in November 1929 ("Then in a taxi they rode along cheerless streets through a dank November night," *TN*, 241), then the Wall Street crack-up (October 1929) has already occurred.

30 As far as I was able to check, no review of *Main Street* appears on the pages of the *Corriere della Sera* for the years 1921 (May-June) and 1924-1925 (October-April). Carlo Linati, a distinguished Italian critic and an expert of English and American literature, who was at the time the official reviewer for the *Corriere*, would not have mistaken "Main" for "Wall." It is possible that the quotation from the *Corriere* is Fitzgerald's own invention. Always suffering from his colleagues' success, he may have also been deriding Sinclair Lewis (his feelings towards Lewis always fluctuated between admiration and envy). All in all, the quotation is grammatically correct, except for the misspelling of Lewis's first name (it was Fitzgerald's habit to misspell names) and the capital 'A' in the word "Americana," which would be right in the English but not in the Italian orthography. Moreover, 'novella' (meaning 'short story' in Italian) looks more like a literal translation of the word 'novel.' Incidentally, *Main Street* (1920) was translated into Italian only in 1935.

31 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, New York, Signet, 1961, p. 235.