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The concept of marriage in F. Scott Fitzgerald's works from the viewpoint of Catholic morality

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F. Scott Fitzgerald was of Irish descent and was raised within the Catholic tradition. He married Zelda Sayre, a non-Catholic, in a Catholic ceremony, and despite significant marital discord, he never abandoned her. This paper contends that Fitzgerald, in his literary work, remained symbolically aligned with the Catholic vision of marriage. The theme of marriage recurs prominently throughout his body of work and will be analysed in light of Catholic moral teaching, including canon law and social practice. The discussion will encompass both married couples – such as the Wilsons and the Buchanans in *The Great Gatsby*, the Patches in *The Beautiful and Damned*, and the Divers in *Tender Is the Night* – as well as the couple who are planning a marriage: Amory and Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*. The analysis will demonstrate that marriage is mostly depicted as a virtuous institution worthy of protection and reverence. This depiction aligns with Catholic doctrine, which regards marriage as a sacred and indissoluble covenant. Fitzgerald's characters frequently encounter moral dilemmas reflective of the human condition as articulated in biblical texts, and those who transgress the boundaries of marital fidelity typically endure adverse consequences. In these narratives, the extra-marital lover – often serving as a symbolic representation of evil – is usually removed, while the legitimate spouse is affirmed.

Contribution: This study shows that Fitzgerald's novels may be interpreted as literary explorations of marriage, with a discernible underpinning in Catholic theology. The study argues that the author's view of marriage as a sacred and inviolable institution is reflected in the fictional worlds he creates. These insights offer a new dimension to existing scholarship, which has tended to interpret the theme of marriage in Fitzgerald's work primarily as a reflection of his personal marital experience.

Keywords: F. Scott Fitzgerald; theme; novel; marriage; Catholicism.

Introduction

Raised within the Catholic faith, F. Scott Fitzgerald never formally ended his Catholic marriage, notwithstanding profound marital conflict. This study argues that his literary production reflects a sustained commitment to the Catholic conception of marriage. By examining the recurring motif of marriage in his works through the lens of Catholic moral theology, the analysis reveals that marriage is predominantly depicted as a virtuous institution deserving of respect and preservation. Such representations align with Catholic doctrine, which defines marriage as a sacred and indissoluble union. Fitzgerald's characters repeatedly confront moral challenges that mirror the biblical understanding of the human condition, and those who violate the obligations of marital fidelity are commonly subjected to negative repercussions. Within these narratives, the extra-marital partner – often functioning as a symbolic embodiment of moral corruption – is typically eliminated, while the lawful spouse is mostly ultimately validated. The findings suggest that Fitzgerald's novels can be read as literary examinations of marriage grounded in Catholic theological principles. This perspective contributes a fresh dimension to existing scholarship, which has largely interpreted Fitzgerald's treatment of marriage as an extension of his own marital struggles. Although echoes of his Catholic upbringing have been extensively examined in scholarship (e.g. Allen 1978; Hagemann 1985; Häusermann 1956; LaHurd 1976), Fitzgerald's literary representations of marriage have not generally constituted a part of this critical framework.

Themes of Fitzgerald's works

Fitzgerald is a key figure in American modernism, known for his portrayal of disillusionment, moral uncertainty, and the breakdown of traditional values in the early 20th century. His works

critically examine the American Dream, revealing the tension between idealism and materialism through symbolic imagery and psychologically complex characters. These themes place him firmly within the modernist preoccupation with alienation and cultural instability. However, any rigid thematic classification of Fitzgerald's work risks oversimplification and fails to capture the richness of specific motifs for which his prose is renowned. These include the inevitability of loss, the pursuit of self-perfection, the myth of the self-made man, the corrupting influence of wealth, the emotional detachment of the elite, the reversal of fortune, alcoholism (Curnutt 2007:53–69), and the complex mythology surrounding the American Dream (Callahan 1996; Johnson 1986). Moreover, such categorical frameworks mostly take into consideration what may be considered Fitzgerald's central subject: himself – his life and literary career (Burroughs 2004:51). While some critics interpret this self-referentiality as a narrative flaw (Callahan 2006:102; Diemert 1998:135; Eagleton 1971:438), others (e.g. Stachura 2010:213) regard it as a distinctive asset that enhances his capacity to portray the historical and social realities of American life in his era. F. Scott Fitzgerald was of Irish immigrant descent and was raised within the framework of Catholic values. He married Zelda Sayre, a non-Catholic, in a Catholic ceremony at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on 04 April 1920 (Hook 2002:29), and, despite enduring significant marital difficulties – including Zelda's mental illness and the couple's subsequent separation – he never sought a divorce. In this respect, Fitzgerald upheld a central tenet of Catholic matrimonial doctrine. This study contends that Fitzgerald, as a writer, likewise remained faithful to a Catholic vision of marriage, even though he abandoned Catholicism at an early stage, as its moral principles stood in sharp contrast to the turbulent, indulgent, and extravagant lifestyle of the emerging generation of the Roaring Twenties – a lifestyle that he readily embraced as his own. As Fessenden (2005:21) argues, even the fashionable clothing that the author favoured personally and foregrounded in his characters functions as a marker of his consciously articulated distance from the Catholic provincialism of his upbringing. The presence of autobiographical elements – particularly those reflecting the complexities of Fitzgerald's own marriage – has been widely acknowledged in scholarship (e.g., ed. Curnutt 2004; Mangum 2013; Meyers 1994; Pelzer 2000; Prigozy 2002; Schwartz 2012; Shepard 2006). Such elements have also been catalogued in encyclopaedic sources, which trace the influence of historical figures and personal events on the fictional worlds Fitzgerald created (e.g. Gale 1998; Tate 1997[2007]).

Purpose and method

In the present study, the depiction of marriage in Fitzgerald's work will be examined independently of his personal marital experience. The objective is not to offer yet another biographical reading that traces the influence of the author's private life on his fiction, but rather to explore how the representation of marriage within his literary corpus may resonate with a Catholic readership.

As the following analyses will demonstrate, marriage emerges as a central thematic concern in the novels *The Beautiful and Damned*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Tender Is the Night*, while occupying a more peripheral – yet still significant – role in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Last Tycoon*. I maintain that Fitzgerald's complex representation of marriage closely aligns with the Catholic conception of matrimony and possesses a universal character: while firmly embedded in the socio-cultural context of 1920s America, his representation may also be extrapolated from this setting and applied to any context shaped by Catholic thought.

The research is based upon close reading and semantic analysis of the parts of the narrative in which the characters reveal their thoughts on and their attitudes to marriage. These are compared to the fundamentals of marriage prevailing in the Catholic church, including – to some limited extent – my own insider's knowledge as a Catholic person, born, raised, and living in a Catholic country.

Fundamentals of marriage in the Catholic church

Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which introduced significant reforms to various aspects of Catholic doctrine, the Catholic church regarded marriage as a contract, characterised by clearly defined rights and obligations of the parties, and oriented chiefly towards procreation and the upbringing of children as its primary end, while mutual support and love were regarded as its secondary aims. By virtue of the Council's decrees, marriage is now considered a covenant between two people, based on love and fidelity and blessed by God (Yockey 1990:36–40). The well-being of the spouses is recognised as the major purpose of marriage, although the bearing and upbringing of children remain an important goal. As Endres (1966:14) notes, the redefinition of the concept of marriage corresponded to the evolving marriage model in the USA, where the family increasingly came to be seen as a relationship of companionship rather than a formal institution, with growing emphasis on interpersonal bonds over externally imposed functional rules. This model underwent rapid transformations in European countries as well, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, which claimed the lives of numerous men and necessitated that women assume roles traditionally occupied by men. The Catholic church continues to affirm the indissolubility of marriage, holding that it constitutes a permanent union that endures until the death of one spouse. Marriage is further understood as a vocation, offering both sanctifying grace and the opportunity for spiritual growth and holiness. As Dudziak (2024) observes, referencing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 'The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator'. This view suggests that, in Catholicism, marriage is viewed as a natural and universal calling, presuming the absence of grave impediments. In this context, Góralski (2007:105) invokes the biblical verse from Genesis 2:18 (RSVCE 1966): 'It is not good that the

man should be alone', underscoring the anthropological and theological foundation of marital union. This understanding is further supported by other scriptural passages that articulate the spiritual and ontological unity of spouses:

> [*A*] man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. (Mt 19:5–6 [RSVCE 1966])

and 'Let marriage be honored among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous' (Heb 13:4 [RSVCE 1966]). According to canon law, marriage is a sacrament that is solemnised during the wedding ceremony officiated by a priest and must occur in the presence of witnesses (Majer 2015:158). Besides, beyond the formal celebration of the sacrament, several canonical conditions must be met for a marriage to be valid. Conversely, the absence of these conditions – or the presence of certain impediments – may constitute legitimate grounds for annulment. Gajda (2000:98–127) identifies 13 potential, albeit infrequently encountered, circumstances that may justify a declaration of nullity. These include, for example, a situation in which one spouse has murdered their previous partner, or cases in which one party is the godparent of the other. One particularly practical and frequently invoked – although frequently misused – basis for annulment is a defect in consent. The validity of a Catholic marriage is unequivocally dependent on the conscious, deliberate, and voluntary consent of both parties. Therefore, the following conditions, each of which indicates a flaw in consent, may render a marriage canonically null: lack of the use of reason; grave ignorance or misunderstanding of the essential rights and duties of marriage; error concerning a spouse's personal qualities as a result of deceit; intentional exclusion of essential properties or elements of marriage (namely unity, indissolubility, and openness to procreation and childbearing); consent obtained under coercion or grave fear arising from external pressure; and psychological incapacity to assume the essential obligations of marriage.

Significantly, neither adultery nor any other transgression committed by a spouse during the marriage constitutes grounds for its annulment. In such instances, the overarching principle of love and forgiveness is upheld, as encapsulated in the words from The Lord's Prayer: 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'.

Marriage in Fitzgerald's novels

The novel: *This side of Paradise*

In Fitzgerald's debut novel *This Side of Paradise*, the protagonist, Amory Blaine, undergoes a profound emotional collapse following the disintegration of his matrimonial aspirations. His fiancée, Rosalind 'ultimately chooses stability over love' (Morretta 2015) and,

> … breaks up with Amory, whom she does not believe will be able to provide her with the life of wealth and leisure she desires, and agrees to marry Dawson Ryder. (p. 58)

On the one hand, it is essential to acknowledge her right to seek security and make decisions based on her own rationale. On the other hand, the reasoning that underpins her final choice is not entirely her own, but rather significantly shaped by her mother's influence. Furthermore, the marriage of Rosalind appears to be driven not by the principles set forth in Catholic doctrine – namely, mutual self-giving, openness to procreation, and the pursuit of a spiritual and emotional union – but by personal comfort and superficial desires. She describes her own attitude to life in these words (Fitzgerald 1920):

> [*I*] like sunshine and pretty things and cheerfulness, and I dread responsibility. I don't want to think about pots and kitchens and brooms. I want to worry whether my legs will get slick and brown when I swim in the summer. (p. 193)

Her marriage, under Catholic canon law, could potentially be deemed invalid, as it may have been entered into under external pressure and with a fundamentally distorted understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage.

Deeply wounded in his pride, heart, and soul, Amory nonetheless clings to the hope that circumstances might still change in his favour, thereby revealing his enduring – if naïve – faith in the power of romantic love as he conceives it. At this stage, Amory has yet to grasp a crucial lesson that other male protagonists in Fitzgerald's short stories have already internalised: that love, when defined merely as passion and a strong emotional bond – distinct from Christian agape as taught by the Catholic church – is insufficient as a foundation for building a family. By contrast, the protagonists of stories such as *Winter Dreams* (1922), *The Sensible Thing* (1924), *Presumption* (1926), and *The Bridal Party* (1930) clearly understand that, within the constraints of prevailing social expectations, they must attain a certain level of economic security in order to fulfil the traditional role of the family patriarch and adequately provide for a wife and children. Dexter Green, George O'Kelly, Juan Chandler, and Michael Curly – each the respective central figure in these stories – temporarily abandon their pursuit of the wealthy women they love until they have acquired the financial standing, whether through hard work, fortuitous circumstances, or inheritance, that aligns with the expectations of their prospective partners. Only after securing this economic foundation do these men return to reclaim the object of their affection.

From the Catholic perspective, this narrative pattern is particularly compelling: marriage to the beloved woman is portrayed not merely as a romantic goal but also as a responsible enterprise – a value that merits strenuous effort, self-denial, and patience, with the implication that it is ultimately subject to divine will, while existing scholarship often interprets such plotlines – wherein a poor man desires a wealthy woman – as allegories of the conflict between poverty and affluence or illustrations of the tension between old money and new money (e.g. Becnel 2008:148; Broughton Adams 2019:7; Shephard 2005:57).

In his analysis of Fitzgerald's short fiction, Donaldson (2009) observes:

> [*O*]ne group of stories depicts the success, or seeming success, of the poor young man in wooing the rich girl. In the other, more effective group, the young man is rejected in his quest or, if successful, is subsequently disappointed. (p. 110)

This reinforces the notion that romantic efforts are, in most cases, ultimately unfulfilled. I claim that these narratives may also be viewed as depictions of the 'small man's' recognition of marriage as an intrinsic moral and spiritual value – one that inspires him to marshal all his resources in its pursuit.

However, as Amory comes to realise by the conclusion of his personal journey, the failure of one's marital aspirations may be intrinsically linked to an individual's broader vocation. As Hook (2002:31) observes, "In the final major scene of the novel, in which Amory argues the case for socialism with a wealthy industrialist and his secretary, Fitzgerald has him develop in the course of his argument an image of the 'spiritually married' man". In this context, marriage is employed as a metaphor for entrapment: the married individual is perceived as having relinquished autonomy, whereas true freedom is associated with being 'unmarried'. This perspective implies that marriage, as a profound commitment requiring full devotion, may not be appropriate for those whose lives are already oriented towards another dominant pursuit – one to which they are, in effect, 'spiritually married'. Amory Blaine, at this stage, remains uncertain about the direction of his life. He has not completed his education, lacks financial independence, has no permanent residence, and possesses no clearly articulated goals. From the standpoint of Catholic teaching on marriage, he has not yet reached the requisite level of personal maturity and social stability necessary to undertake the obligations inherent in family life.

The novel: *The Beautiful and Damned*

Fitzgerald's second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) has been interpreted variously as a narrative centred in New York, where 'the metropolis appears to be a "protagonist"' (Antolin 2009:113), as a depiction of the failed artistic aspirations of a man who 'refuses to convert his native ability into creative action' (Astro 1968:402), as the reflection of American society 'in the shadow of war' (Monk 1995:67) or as a study of success and power, which concludes 'that success is not guaranteed by one's current economic background, but their commitment to self-development' (Sadeq 2017:186). However, the novel is also, and arguably foremost, a study of marriage. In Linda C. Pelzer's (2000:54) words, '*The Beautiful and Damned* charts the journey of a degenerating hero and a disintegrating marriage'. The plot recounts the evolution of the relationship between Gloria and Anthony Patch, beginning with their courtship, wedding and initial period of happiness, and progressing through a phase of deep crisis and temporary disintegration, ultimately concluding with a bitterly ironic resolution.

Anthony expresses a strong aversion to marriage, a sentiment he articulates during a conversation with his casual working-class girlfriend. This stance persists even though he has already encountered Gloria, whose beauty and unpretentious demeanour deeply captivate him (Fitzgerald 1922 [2011]):

'Geraldine', – he says at length,

> … in the first place I have no one I want to marry; in the second place, I haven't enough money to support two people; in the third place, I am entirely opposed to marriage for people of my type; in the fourth place, I have a strong distaste for even the abstract consideration of it. (p. 331)

Anthony's 'type' is characterised by a completed Harvard education, a decent passive income that affords a comfortable bachelor lifestyle, close intellectual friendship with two male companions, literary aspirations unaccompanied by the inclination towards hard work, refined aesthetic sensibilities, and a respectable social standing derived from his grandfather's fortune that he is expected to inherit. Anthony's attitude may appear to contradict the Catholic doctrine, which upholds marriage as a central vocation for humanity, insofar as he consciously rejects its pursuit. However, his standpoint can also be interpreted as a confirmation and reinforcement of these teachings, for two reasons. Firstly, despite his stated intentions, he ultimately marries Gloria, thereby failing to escape what Catholic doctrine identifies as a fundamental human vocation. Secondly, his initial resistance to marriage appears to stem from his own conception of it – one that entails certain attributes or responsibilities he himself does not embody, which suggests that he took a marital bond with a degree of seriousness and gravity rather than dismissing it lightly. The further developments of the plot show that Anthony might have been right when he deemed himself unfit for marriage, and that his decision to marry Gloria was wrong. At the age of 22 years, Gloria appears neither as particularly eager to marry (as evidenced by her rejection of Joseph Bloeckman's proposal) nor opposed to it (as she readily accepts Anthony as her future husband, based on his properties matching her concept of marriage). In her diary, she lists three types of husbands she would never accept (Fitzgerald 1922 [2011]:70); they could be summed up as homebody, macho, and worshipper, respectively. Gloria wants a lover-husband – 'a temporarily passionate lover with wisdom enough to realise when it has flown and that it must fly' (Fitzgerald 1922 [2011]:70). What Gloria rejects is not marriage as an institution, but the obligations it entails: 'I don't want to have responsibility and a lot of children to take care of' (Fitzgerald 1922 [2011]:310). In fact, Gloria does not want to have any children at all: 'She knew that in her breast she never wanted children. The reality, the earthiness, the intolerable sentiment of childbearing, the menace to her beauty – had appalled her' (Fitzgerald 1922 [2011]:544). Primarily preoccupied with her physical appearance and the pursuits of life's pleasures, she demonstrates a reluctance to embrace the traditional model of marital life, which delineates conventional gender roles: the woman as housewife and mother, and the man as the family's provider

and authoritative figure. Anthony seems not concerned about having children and leaves the decision to Gloria when she thinks that she is pregnant: he is ready to accept either, showing that he cares about his wife's comfort and well-being rather than procreation. Thus, Gloria and Anthony reject or neglect the purpose of marriage, which was considered the most important in the Catholic world of her time and still remains crucial. From the perspective of canon law, her attitude would constitute a sufficient reason for the annulment of her marriage. Although Gloria and Anthony's marriage is fraught with severe crises, including Anthony's extra-marital affair and Gloria's flirtations, the novel concludes with the couple travelling together, Anthony now confined to a wheelchair. They have overcome substantial adversities, both those imposed by fate and those resulting from their own recklessness, such as poverty, alcoholism, infidelity, or loneliness. In research, the marriage of Gloria and Anthony is perceived as a failure: 'By the time the elusive inheritance comes, they and their marriage are empty shells, and the money can do nothing but gild their surfaces' (Pelzer 2000:54). Nonetheless, it cannot be left unmentioned that Gloria remains by Anthony's side when he succumbs to physical and emotional collapse, and he consistently returns to her whenever their relationship appears to be irrevocably over. Although both characters momentarily succumb to temptation, they appear to uphold the principle of the indissolubility of marriage and ultimately return to their marital commitments.

The novel: *The great Gatsby*

In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), two prominent married couples are presented, whose backgrounds are revealed through the narration of Nick Carraway: the Buchanans and the Wilsons, whose lives become tragically intertwined because of Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson's extra-marital affair. Although the character's religious affiliations remain largely ambiguous, their attitudes towards marriage largely align with Catholic principles, despite their transgressions against the sixth commandment through acts of adultery. While marital infidelity is explicitly condemned in the Bible (cf. Mt 5:27–28), within Catholic doctrine, it is regarded as a sin that, although grave, may be pardoned through the sacrament of confession and a strong determination to improve. At pivotal moments in the narrative, when decisive action regarding the future of their marriages is required, both Tom Buchanan and George Wilson choose to forgive and to assertively reclaim their respective wives – each according to his own disposition – thus demonstrating an underlying belief in the intrinsic value of marriage as an institution worth preserving and defending. According to her sister Catherine's recollection, Myrtle Wilson married her husband out of love and remained faithful to him until she encountered Tom Buchanan, thereby adhering to the moral expectations associated with the Catholic marriage doctrine. Myrtle asserts that she married her husband under the mistaken belief that he was a gentleman – a perception that, in her view, rendered the marriage a fundamental error. She recalls, somewhat derisively, that he failed to disclose having borrowed a suit from a friend for their wedding ceremony, a detail that contributes to her disillusionment. While this remark might initially seem trivial or dismissible, it potentially reveals a deeper truth: that George Wilson deliberately sought to project an identity inconsistent with his actual social and economic standing. This may have been Wilson's attempt to attract Myrtle by presenting himself in a more favourable light than his true circumstances warranted – a strategy that mirrors Gatsby's performance of a fabricated identity in his pursuit of Daisy – and could therefore be interpreted as grounds for a potential annulment of their marriage. Myrtle experiences dissatisfaction within her marriage and finds little fulfilment in her role as Tom's mistress. As Saunders (2018:143) notes, 'like many women involved with men of higher mate value than their current long-term partners', Myrtle aspires to transform her extra-marital relationship into a legitimate marital union, suggesting that she attributes significant value to the institution of marriage. Nonetheless, she appears to equate the sustainability of marriage with the attainment of marital happiness – however ambiguously that concept may be defined. Tom Buchanan's views on marriage are embedded in his broader convictions regarding the unquestionable value of the family. His extramarital affairs do not necessarily reflect simple hypocrisy; rather, he appears capable of reconciling his commitment to preserving familial and marital stability with his desire to indulge in physical pleasures outside of marriage. This type of moral stance is not unprecedented: in the United States, it was commonly observed among slaveholders, and in feudal Europe, among the landowners who held serfs but occupied the front pews during Sunday Masses in Catholic churches. Tom's attitude is thus part of a broader historical pattern in which social elites upheld conventional family structures while engaging in behaviour that contradicted the ethical standards they publicly endorsed. It would be reductive to label Tom a mere hypocrite, particularly in the scene in which he expresses understanding for Daisy's emotional involvement with Gatsby, acknowledges his own failings – a form of confession – and pledges to be a more attentive husband in future. While Tom is widely regarded as an unsympathetic figure – self-centred (Northman [1966]1997:45), racist (Gottlieb 2022:28), sadistic (Kerr 1996:421) and rude (Saborido 2012:47), it would be unfair to deny his attachment to Daisy and the degree of respect he appears to maintain for her as his wife. From the Catholic perspective, Tom can be perceived as a sinner who does not hesitate to admit his guilt and seek forgiveness. Gatsby's understanding of marriage appears to diverge from conventional. Having committed himself wholly to Daisy, he perceives their bond as tantamount to marriage: 'He felt married to her' (Fitzgerald 1925 [1997]:98). Contrary to Cain's (2020:463) assertion that this sentiment is difficult to interpret, the meaning becomes more apparent from the Catholic perspective, when considered alongside Gatsby's confession that he 'took Daisy one still October night' (Fitzgerald 1925 [1994]:96). This act of physical consummation, traditionally reserved for marriage within

the Catholic doctrine, suggests that Gatsby views their union as ultimate and binding. He appears indifferent to the legal or ecclesiastical formalities of matrimony, instead grounding the legitimacy of their bond in mutual love, personal commitment, and implied consent – elements he deems sufficient to confer marital validity. The precise nature of the promises exchanged between Daisy and Gatsby prior to his departure for the military service in 1917 remains undisclosed. However, it is evident that she experienced considerable emotional distress in the period leading up to her marriage to Tom Buchanan. According to the testimony of her friend Jordan Baker, Daisy nearly called off her wedding, indicating a deep inner conflict. From the perspective of Catholic canon law, such circumstances could constitute grounds for the annulment of Daisy and Tom's marriage. An annulment could be granted on the basis of defective consent. Ultimately, Daisy and Tom reaffirm the legitimacy of their marriage in Gatsby's presence, confirming that their union was founded on mutual love and a sincere intention to enter into matrimony.

The novel: *Tender Is the Night*

As Blazek and Rattray (2007:9) observe, *Tender Is the Night* (1934) (henceforth referred to as TN) 'has, in myriad readings, been viewed as a marriage novel'. Although numerous alternative interpretations exist, this perspective retains its validity when considered in relation to the novel's objective content. In simplified terms, the novel chronicles the trajectory of Dick and Nicole Diver's relationship, from their initial meeting through the course of their marriage, culminating in their eventual separation and divorce. Nicole, a member of a wealthy American family, is undergoing treatment at a Swiss psychiatric institution where she first encounters Dick in his professional capacity as a doctor, but she is also drawn to him on a personal and romantic level. Although Dick acknowledges that the attraction between him and Nicole is mutual, their marriage is ultimately orchestrated by Nicole's sister Baby Warren, who entrusts Dick with the responsibility of securing a psychiatrist willing to assume the dual role of Nicole's husband and doctor, offering substantial financial and social incentives in return. Dick's decision to accept the offer ultimately proves fatal as it leads to the abandonment of his professional aspirations and reinforces his sense of being a kept man. Dick's decision also has detrimental consequences for Nicole, who abandons emerging professional ambitions (she thinks of a translator's work or becoming a nurse), becoming emotionally dependent on her husband in a way that mirrors his financial dependence on her. Following their marriage, Dick and Nicole, now parents of two children, present the image of an ideal union, seemingly embodying the Catholic ideal of marital unity: 'Dick and Nicole had become one and equal, not opposite and complementary; she was Dick too, the drought in the marrow of his bones' (Fitzgerald 1934 [1961]:214). As a symbolic expression of their complete unity, Dick and Nicole would sign their messages to friends with 'Dicole' (Fitzgerald 1934 [1961]:118), a portmanteau combining both of their names. This linguistic fusion not only reflects their perceived fusion but also illustrates the extent to which their individual identities were subsumed within the idealised images of their marriage. Nicole's need for affirmation of their exceptional closeness is so profound that she becomes distressed when Dick fails to reinforce, through their shared language of meaningful gestures, the sense that 'they were one together' (Fitzgerald 1934 [1961]:100). The complete unity of the Divers is readily apparent to external observers. Rosemary Hoyt, who hardly knows them from casual meetings at the beach, cannot wait to see again 'the *person* whom she still referred to in her mind as *the Divers*' (Fitzgerald 1934 [1961]:61, emphasis mine).

Dick is portrayed as a caring and loyal husband; as long as his marriage is working, he resists the temptation to engage in a sexual relationship with the young and beautiful Rosemary Hoyt, despite her openly expressed desire for him to be her first sexual partner. He first thinks about his wife and her emotions: 'Have you thought how much it would hurt Nicole' (Fitzgerald 1934 [1961]:76), then about his own feelings: 'There is the fact that I love Nicole' (Fitzgerald 1934 [1961]:76). Despite being successful and fulfilling for both parties during a certain period, the marriage of the Divers could be deemed invalid under Catholic marriage law. In broader terms, as an individual suffering from mental illness, Nicole was not (or at least could claim not to have been) fully capable of exercising autonomy in making critical decisions regarding her life, which could suggest that her consent to marriage was, in fact, defective. In more specific terms, as a victim of a sexual assault by her father, Nicole might subconsciously have chosen Dick as a man who embodied both the roles of father and lover (Stevens 1961:101), being unable to distinguish these roles from the specific vocation of a husband, which led to a conflation of the paternal and marital functions within her perception of their relationship. As Blazek (2007:76) puts it, Nicole is 'trapped in marriage ... , a unique case study' for her husband. She must liberate herself from this destructive relationship, necessitating the termination of her marriage and the beginning of a new life (Stevens 1961:101). Taking this into consideration, one could argue that her decision to divorce Dick is fully justified from the standpoint of any moral framework. Similarly, Dick, who throughout the years of their marriage had subordinated his life to Nicole's, gradually transferring his vital energy to her, healing her at the expense of his own mental well-being, ultimately breaks down and sees no other option but separation. It would not be an overstatement to suggest that the Divers created a kind of 'exaggerated unity' that finally proved unsustainable. Unlike Tom Buchanan, who challenges his wife's lover and fights for his marriage, recalling the strength of his marital bonds with Daisy, rooted in genuine love and devotion, Dick Diver, who has already relinquished his marriage in the emotional sense, promptly cedes his position to his

rival, signalling a quiet but significant retreat from the relational battlefield.

The novel: *The Last Tycoon*

Although *The Last Tycoon* (1941 posthumous), is an unfinished novel and, as such, has often been marginalised in scholarly discourse, it contains several plot and narrative elements that are significant in the context of Fitzgerald's conception of marriage. The protagonist, Monroe Stahr, is a widower who continues to grieve the loss of his beloved wife. During air travel, he chooses to occupy 'the bridal suite' (Fitzgerald 1941:5), a gesture that symbolises the enduring spiritual presence of his deceased spouse. Stahr, a renowned film producer, holds considerable influence over the careers of aspiring actresses. His late wife Mina, a celebrated and widely admired actress, was the object of public desire. Their evidently successful marriage – sustained despite the moral challenges characteristic of the Hollywood milieu – challenges prevailing stereotypes of artistic promiscuity and instead aligns with Catholic ideals of love, fidelity, and spiritual union as foundational principles of marriage. Even as a widower, now at liberty to pursue a new romantic relationship, Monroe Stahr exhibits no apparent interest in other women. He politely disregards the advances of the 18-year-old Cecilia, the daughter of his business partner, who admits to the reader her desire to marry him. Stahr's eventual interest in Kathleen Moore is motivated not by genuine romantic inclination, but rather by her striking physical resemblance to his late wife. In seeking her acquaintance, Stahr appears to be pursuing the spirit of his deceased wife, suggesting that their marriage endures beyond death, a testament to its lasting emotional and spiritual significance. Marriage also plays a significant role in Kathleen's life experience. She confesses to having lived with and relied on various men outside the bounds of marriage (Fitzgerald 1941:129–130), a circumstance that would be considered sinful according to Catholic doctrine. Consequently, the mistreatment and humiliation she endured – which ultimately compelled her to flee – may be interpreted as a form of moral retribution for her transgressions. At the time she meets Stahr, Kathleen is awaiting the finalisation of another man's divorce, planning to marry him and attain the security that marriage promises – which supports the image of marriage as a haven of safety and peace. However, according to Catholic principles, civil marriage to a divorced person will not pass for a valid marital bond. Therefore, even though the concept of marriage as a value is reinforced, the relationships described in *The Last Tycoon* considerably deviate from the Catholic ideal.

Conclusion

It is no exaggeration to assert that the theme of marriage permeates the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Three of them, in particular, can be explicitly interpreted as explorations of marital relationships. Although the marriages depicted are far from ideal – marked by conflict, infidelity, and emotional turmoil – the characters mostly come to recognise the significance of their marital bonds and are generally unwilling to relinquish them. The eventual dissolution of Dick and Nicole's marriage in *Tender Is the Night* does not necessarily contradict this pattern, as their union, formed under exceptional circumstances, could be considered invalid under Catholic marriage doctrine. Nevertheless, Nicole acknowledges that Dick was always a good husband to her, and she offers him financial support even after their divorce – an indication of her continued care and enduring emotional connection. Overall, marriage is portrayed as a complex and challenging institution. The ideal of marriage, in accordance with Catholic teachings – centred on fidelity, love, and unity – persists as a memory in Monroe Stahr's consciousness, although it is never fully developed within the narrative of any novel. This ideal aligns with broader Catholic doctrine, in which the ideal functions as a guiding principle to be aspired to, even if it remains ultimately unattainable.

It is obvious that the theme of marriage persists throughout Fitzgerald's literary career. Although he occasionally experimented with narratives involving marital separation – perhaps as an attempt to distance himself from Catholic doctrines that define marriage as a sacred and indissoluble bond – these very principles remain central to his work. Across his oeuvre, they are repeatedly interrogated, simultaneously inviting and proposing possible answers.

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