

ANALYSIS

“Winter Dreams” (1922)



F. Scott Fitzgerald

(1896-1940)

“In ‘Winter Dreams’ (1922) Fitzgerald...experimented with the notion that success conferred such an inclusive privilege, and he had concluded that money bought only a limited number of things. That story, which Fitzgerald called an early attempt to work with the ideas of *The Great Gatsby*, has a few things in common with the novel: in each, the hero is slighted by a pretty girl and is determined to recapture her; both heroes know that to do so, one must have money and must display the marks of obvious success; both are defeated in the end, the one because he fails to understand the rather simple facts of physical decay, the other because he refuses to acknowledge moral corruption and decay.”

Frederick J. Hoffman
The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade
(Viking/Collier 1949-62) 135-36

“[The girl] is ownership embodied, as can be seen in one of the best of Fitzgerald’s early stories, ‘Winter Dreams.’ A rising young man named Dexter Green takes home the daughter of a millionaire for whom he used to be a caddy. She is Judy Jones, ‘a slender enameled doll in cloth of gold: gold in a band at her head, gold in two slipper points at her dress’s hem.’ The rising young man stops his coupe; in front of the great white bulk of the Mortimer Jones house, somnolent, gorgeous, drenched with the splendor of the damp moonlight. Its solidity startled him. The strong walls, the steel of the girders, the breadth and beam and pomp of it were there only to bring out the contrast with the young beauty beside him. It was sturdy to accentuate her slowness—as if to show what a breeze could be generated by a butterfly’s wing.’ In legends butterflies are symbols of the soul. The inference is clear that, holding Judy in his arms, Dexter Green is embracing the spirit of a great fortune....

Sometimes Fitzgerald’s heroines are candid, even brutal, about class relations. ‘Let’s start right,’ Judy Jones says to Dexter Green on the first evening they spend alone together.

‘Who are you?’

‘I’m nobody,’ Dexter tells her, without adding that he had been her father’s caddy. ‘My career is largely a matter of futures.’

‘Are you poor?’

‘No,’ he says frankly, ‘I’m probably making more money than any man my age in the Northwest. I know that’s an obnoxious remark, but you advised me to start right.’

‘There was a pause,’ Fitzgerald adds. ‘Then she smiled and the corners of her mouth drooped and an almost imperceptible sway brought her closer to him, looking up into his eyes.’ Money brings them together, but later they are separated by something undefined—a mere whim of Judy’s, it would seem, though one comes to suspect that the whim was based on her feeling that she should marry a man of her own caste. Dexter, as he goes East to earn a still larger income, is filled with regret for ‘the country of illusions, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.’

It seems likely that Judy Jones, like Josephine Perry in a series of later stories, was a character suggested by a Chicago debutante with whom Fitzgerald was desperately in love during his first years at Princeton; afterward she made a more sensible marriage. As for the general attitude toward the rich that began to be expressed in ‘Winter Dreams,’ it is perhaps connected with his experience in 1919, when he was not earning enough to support a wife and Zelda broke off their engagement.”

Malcolm Cowley
“Fitzgerald: The Romance of Money” (1953, revised 1973)
The Portable Malcolm Cowley, ed. Donald W. Faulkner
(Viking/Penguin 1990) 251-52

“‘Winter Dreams’...is based on the theme developed more fully in *The Great Gatsby*. Dexter Green, a boy whose father owns ‘the second-best grocery store’ in a Minnesota resort, serves as a golfing caddy for the spoiled young heiress Judy Jones and falls in love with her. He spends the rest of the story trying to climb the social scale to her level; he goes to a first-rate eastern university, makes a fortune in the laundry business, and arrives socially. Almost forgetting Judy, he becomes engaged to another girl; when he meets Judy again she momentarily surrenders to him physically, but now it is his turn to reject her; the magic moment has passed, and besides he realizes she is too selfish to be satisfied with any one man. ‘I’m more beautiful than anyone else,’ she complains. ‘Why can’t I be happy?’

In later years he hears about her from an acquaintance; she has married a Detroit businessman and become dull and commonplace. Dexter feels that he has lost something, but it is not Judy: it is the image of the fabulous Judy he fell in love with as a boy, a girl who never existed but who nevertheless dominated his life. It is interesting that the situation in this story is parallel to that in ‘The Rich Boy’ except that the position of the sexes is reversed; Judy here plays the role of Anson, and Dexter corresponds to the ‘conservative and rather proper’ Paula.”

Donald Heiney
Recent American Literature 4
(Barron’s Educational Series 1958) 146-47

“In ‘Winter Dreams,’ a story universally recognized as a precursor to *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald had also worked with this theme [“materiality at the core of transcendentalism”]. Dexter Green’s lavish dreams are also undermined by the mutability of their material terms (a mutability suggested by Dexter’s surname and underscored by the seasonal emphasis of the title). The quality in Judy Jones upon which Dexter’s dream of imaginative fulfillment depends is time-bound, transient; her particular beauty is characterized by ‘a sort of fluctuating and feverish warmth, so shaded that it seemed at any moment it would recede and disappear. This color and the mobility of her mouth gave a continual impression of flux, of intense life, of passionate vitality...’ When time destroys Judy’s fragile beauty, Dexter’s dreams dissolve too. The dreams were winter dreams after all—they were tied to time from the outset, as transient as any green bud, as fugitive as any daisy.”

Kermit W. Moyer
“*The Great Gatsby*: Fitzgerald’s Meditation on American History”
Fitzgerald / Hemingway Annual 1972
(Washington D.C.: NCR Microcard Editions 1973) 43-57

“In ‘Winter Dreams,’ the 1922 story that is a miniature of *The Great Gatsby*, poor boy Dexter Green becomes wealthy but loses the rich girl who catalyzed his ambitions... When Fitzgerald rewrote [a] passage in Chapter 8 of the novel for Gatsby’s response to Daisy Fay’s home—scrupulously cutting it from the collected text of the story—‘rich motor cars’ became ‘this year’s shining motor-cars.’ Not just expensive cars, but the cars that evoke the aura of a particular time. At the end of ‘Winter Dreams,’ Green is told that

the beauty of his dream has 'faded'.... Green grieves for his capacity to respond to 'the richness of life,' but he nonetheless yields to time and loss. Gatsby doesn't: "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"

Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed.
New Essays on The Great Gatsby
(Cambridge U 1985) 10-11

"It is not until 'Winter Dreams' in 1923 [1922] that Fitzgerald explicitly connects the themes of love and money. In this story, Dexter Green, a figure straight from the work ethic of Horatio Alger, loses Judy Jones, a child of wealth. Yet the relationship between love and money in 'Winter Dreams' is not as simple as in Alger. For one thing, Judy Jones, the heroine of the story, is a romantically attractive woman. In Horatio Alger's fiction, rich females are cold and cruel and loveless, but Judy Jones is exciting and desirable, capable of exciting love in others, but, once society has corrupted her, not herself capable of loving. Exciting others and promising love, however, matter more than the realizable dreams of wealth necessary to obtain Judy Jones; they give the story all its powerful emotion. The intangibility of the emotion, its transience and fragility, its evanescent illusory quality, and the fact that it is unrealizable account for its enchantment. What sustains the charm is the atmosphere that surrounds Judy Jones, an atmosphere engendered by wealth. This wealth destroys even as it creates; thus, the doubleness of Gatsby is prefigured here.

When Dexter Green is aware of how empty and bereft his life is because the dream of the old Judy Jones has gone, he has the impulse to 'get very drunk.' There are shades here of Amory Blaine, who similarly responds when Rosalind is not to be his. But not, seemingly, shades of Gatsby; although a bootlegger, Gatsby is abstemious and careful—a man aware of his own doubleness. Both dreamer and vulgarian at the same time, he is, like Dexter Green, a moneymaker and a romantic; unlike Dexter Green, he seems to balance between the two. He appears to be able to keep the halves in control."

Roger Lewis
"Money, Love, and Aspiration in *The Great Gatsby*"
New Essays (1985) 43-44

Michael Hollister (2014)