

Blythe Sinclair

24 April 2017

English 152

Professor Doane

Lightness and Darkness in Fitzgerald's *Winter Dreams*

There is an obvious importance of the seasons in F. Scott Fitzgerald's piece *Winter Dreams*, namely the season of winter, considering it is the name of the text. But along with that, there is also a certain significance placed on lightness and darkness which relates to the seasons. There is a noticeable difference between the events that take place in the dark or the winter, compared to the events that take place in the light or the summer. Overall, in Fitzgerald's piece *Winter Dreams*, the events that take place in the darkness and the wintertime are those which are the cardinal functions of the story, while the events which take place in the light and the summertime are those which come as a result of those decisions and actions from the winter. To be explicit, in using the term "dark," I mean it to include literal darkness, nighttime, the winter, and concealment. In contrast, I use the term "light" to involve literal lightness, summer and all other seasons, and illumination.

Dexter himself recognizes that there is a certain power that the seasons have over him, as detected by the narrator. Being on the snowed-over golf course in the winter gives Dexter a "feeling of profound melancholy," the first indicator of the effect the winter has on him (659). Using the example of quitting his job as a caddy at the young age of fourteen, the narrator

appoints that “Dexter was unconsciously dictated to by his winter dreams,” to describe the weakness Dexter has against the winter (662). It continues in specifics to describe the exact nature of what the winter- and his dreams- would lead Dexter to do in an academic situation; “[they] persuaded Dexter several years later to pass up a business course at the State University... for the precarious advantage of attending an older and more famous university...” (662). This decision is a major cardinal function for Dexter because this decision, which was made in the winter, was what ultimately led to his success in college and, proceeding that, in the laundry business.

Following this introduction to both Dexter’s character and the ways in which winter holds authority over him, there is an indicator of how major events take place not solely in the winter, but in the darkness as well, regardless of what season it is. The narrator begins to describe the summer night when Dexter and Judy Jones meet on the lake. I consider this to be a cardinal function because it is the way that Dexter and Judy meet officially as adults, which spurs all of the following interactions between them and leads to the relationship that buds between the two. Despite the fact that it happens during the season of summer, it takes place in the darkness of night, which is the other category I am grouping with winter as indicators of cardinal functions.

One of the interactions between Judy and Dexter that comes as a result of their meeting on the lake is the dinner they have the following night, which is equally as important as their meeting. This first dinner is extremely important to the text because during that dinner, they have a conversation “on the dark...porch” that ultimately leads to and serves as the foundation for the partnership that forms between Judy and Dexter (666). This is the first time that Dexter and Judy

have a substantial discussion where they get to know more about each other, where Judy expresses her disdain at a poor suitor and Dexter conceals his unflattering early life and limits his answer to her question of who he is to a “nobody,” whose “career is largely a matter of futures” (667). This lie becomes a subtle tension that foreshadows the entire nature and ultimate outcome of the relationship the two have to each other.

The indulgences of Judy and Dexter continue mainly in the dark or in concealment, and the details of their interactions cease. Instead, the narrator flits across the specifics of their time together, only mentioning the “kisses through the late afternoons in shadowy alcoves or behind the protecting trellises of the garden” (668). The narrator only lands in September briefly to signify the instance when Judy began to lose interest in Dexter’s companionship, not making a big deal out of it. This fits with the argument that the events which take place in the dark are expanded upon and are significant to the narrative’s progression, while those which take place in the light are not as important because the the narrator implies that nothing significant really happens from the fizzling out of the relationship that comes in September, and continues on with the story.

Another example of how the important scenes occur only in the darkness is during the time in Dexter’s life when his engagement to Irene is soon approaching and he has stopped by the College Club to watch the dancing. While standing in the doorway, he is confronted by Judy. This confrontation leads to a car ride together where Judy suggests that they marry, and Dexter agrees without very much hesitation. This obviously is significant for various reasons; first of all, it signifies the end of his engagement to Irene, and second, it sets up what comes out to be the remainder of his life. If Dexter had not agreed to marry Judy, he never would have lost Irene, and

he never would have ended up in New York alone, without Judy as his wife. Even though this takes place during the month of May, it takes place in the nighttime, another confirmation that the cardinal functions of the piece take place in the dark.

In comparison to the feelings and events he gets from the winter, the fall makes Dexter “clench his hands and tremble and repeat idiotic sentences to himself,” and more specifically, “October filled him with hope which November raised to a sort of ecstatic triumph” (659). The things that take place in the seasons other than winter are a result of those which do happen in the winter and, for the most part, are summarized into a few sentences or made to seem less significant compared to those from the winter. An example of this is the section which talks about Dexter’s life after moving on from Judy. The years that follow are glossed over and summarized as “summer, fall, winter, spring, another summer, another fall” (669). In addition, it condenses the timeline during which he meets his fiancée, Irene Scheerer, into two sentences: “In January Dexter and Irene became engaged. It was to be announced in June and they were to be married three months later” (670). Something like meeting one’s future wife is generally something that would be of significance, yet here it is minimized and the time in which it takes place is emphasized; in the spring.

Another example of this is following the termination of Dexter’s engagement with both Irene and Judy. It is summarized, again, into few sentences about where he ended up throughout the spring and the summer without going into detail once: “He went east in February with the intention of selling out his laundries and settling in New York- but the war came to America in March and changed his plans. He returned to the west...” (673).

There is a major difference between the events that take place in the dark and the events that take place in the light. There is hardly any detailed mention of those which take place in the light, as opposed to the very detailed descriptions of the major events that take place in the dark. If one was to go through and chart the most significant events that happen in the story, the events that push forward the narrative, they would all be things that happen in some sort of darkness. The rest of the things are simple completive details, the things that do not take place in darkness, and are simply glossed over.