Nervousness in the works of F Scott Fitzgerald

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NERVOUSNESS IN THE WORKS OF
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

by

Michael Emil Tischler

Bachelor of Arts
State University of New York at Potsdam
1991

Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

Nervousness in the Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald

by

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This study examines how nervousness and the ideas that came to be associated with it manifest themselves in the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, often influencing both the characters and themes in his fiction.

Chapter one traces the development of what is referred to as a “nervous discourse” from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, revealing how the pre-Enlightenment sense of nervous, which signified strength, gradually gave way to a meaning which indicates agitation or timidity and implies a sense of weakness. In addition, this chapter demonstrates that nervousness, even within medical literature, became linked to a number of other cultural ideas, particularly modernity, social status, gender, and sensibility.

Chapter two examines how the ideas connected with nervousness can be seen in Fitzgerald’s early work and This Side of Paradise, particularly in his treatment of nervous mothers, restless children, and enervation. Chapter three demonstrates that dissipation and hysteria became connected with nervous discourse, and that these ideas are contrasted with efficiency in The Beautiful and Damned and several of Fitzgerald’s other stories from this period. Chapter four discusses the nervous men who fall in love with
nervous women in *The Great Gatsby* and other fiction Fitzgerald published from 1922 to 1927, which reveals that nervousness had a different significance for characters of different genders. Chapter five demonstrates how the theme of vitality which runs through the Basil and Josephine stories. *Tender is the Night*, and *The Crack-Up* essays is associated with the nervous system, and that Fitzgerald conceived of his artistic and emotional crisis in the 1930s as a type of nervous bankruptcy, while it also examines how the theme of degeneration emerges during this period of Fitzgerald’s career. And chapter six concludes the study by revealing that some of Fitzgerald’s ideas regarding nervousness began to change in the final years of his life, as can be seen in *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, and that after Fitzgerald’s death, the “age of anxiety” came to displace Fitzgerald’s nervous era.
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ABBREVIATIONS FOR WORKS BY
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

AF  The Apprentice Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald
BD  The Beautiful and Damned
BS  The Basil and Josephine Stories
CU  The Crack-Up
FP  Flappers and Philosophers
GG  The Great Gatsby
LL  A Life in Letters
LT  The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western
PH  The Pat Hobby Stories
PW  The Price Was High: Fifty Uncollected Stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald
SS  The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald
ST  Six Tales of the Jazz Age and Other Stories
TN  Tender is the Night
TS  This Side of Paradise
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CHAPTER ONE

TRACING A NERVOUS DISCOURSE

In Studies in Words, C. S. Lewis points out that while one recognizes the words one does not understand in older books, in more recent texts, "one discovers, often after years after contented misreading, that one has been interpolating senses later than those the author intended. And all the while one seems to be learning not only about words" (1).

Contemporary readers of F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose work was written within the past century, often fail to recognize that a number of cultural ideas in the early twentieth century were different from our own, and this is particularly true of the ideas associated with nervousness. Yet by retrieving the significations of nervous and related words, and, more specifically, by establishing what significance they had for F. Scott Fitzgerald in the first decades of the twentieth century, we can gain a clearer understanding of his work.

The ideas associated with nervousness which Fitzgerald inherited have a long history, and by the beginning of the twentieth century they had come to reinforce and reflect ideas associated with seemingly unrelated subjects; I refer to this body of ideas associated with nervousness as a "nervous discourse"—a shared understanding and set of assumptions about nerves, the nervous system, nervous energy, and nervous exhaustion. Therefore, it is necessary to take a broad historical perspective, beginning with the eighteenth century, to determine what other cultural ideas nervousness partakes of and contributes to, in order to determine what nervousness came to signify for Fitzgerald. To facilitate this, for the
present I have subdivided my discussion into five themes, each reflective of a larger body of ideas which came to be associated with nervousness: first, medical literature, the ideas of the medical community which, at least initially, are the source of developing ideas about nervousness; second, modernity, since nervousness has consistently been linked to the progress or development of civilization (of course, people in a number of eras have considered themselves "modern"); third, class and social status, because until World War I nervousness was generally reserved for the elite, even becoming a mark of social distinction; fourth, gender, since nervousness came to reflect cultural ideas about gender roles; and fifth, sensibility, since a more refined nervous system was generally thought to indicate a greater degree of sensitivity, creativity, and moral sentiment, a consequence of which was that nervousness often became imbued with moral implications. Although this categorization of a developing nervous discourse is somewhat problematic since these various themes become intertwined and together form the linguistic significance of nervous and related words, I have found it to be an effective way to analyze what seems a heterogeneous body of ideas linked to nervousness.

In contemporary usage, if someone is described as "nervous," does that mean that he or she "has a lot of nerve"? In fact, quite the contrary is true: nervousness suggests anxiety, timidity, agitation, and even connotes a sense of weakness, while having "a lot of nerve" signifies fortitude or strength. However, nervous is certainly a derivative of the word nerve and should mean "having nerve," as zealous means "having zeal" or monstrous means "having the qualities of a monster." This inconsistency between nervous and nerve in contemporary usage is indicative of a substantial semantic shift in the meaning of nervous which began to take place during the eighteenth century, and it is here where we must begin to trace the development of a nervous discourse.
However, prior to the eighteenth century *nervous* did mean "having a lot of nerve."

The second definition provided by *The Oxford English Dictionary* for *nervous* corresponds to what I will call the pre-Enlightenment sense of the word as "Sinewy, muscular; vigorous, strong," a usage which is now rare, if not thoroughly obsolete. Clearly, this sense is derived from the earlier sense of *nerve*—a sense which can be traced to the linguistic and medical conceptions of the classical and Renaissance worlds. The Latin root, *nervus*, is a masculine noun which means "sinew," "tendon," or "muscle," and, in its plural form, "power," "vigor," or "strength." The *OED* cites an example of the pre-Enlightenment sense of *nervous* as early as 1413, and more recent examples extend well into the nineteenth century. Hoeniger has pointed out that ideas about medicine during the Elizabethan age were derived from ancient Greek civilization, particularly as they were systematized by Galen of Pergamon in the second century AD, and he maintains that these ideas "became part of common knowledge among the educated, and much of the idiom affected ordinary speech" (71). However, during the Elizabethan era, nerves were not only conceived of as tendons or sinews; there was a very basic understanding of their function to relay sensory information and motor skills. Although Aristotle believed the source of sensation was the heart, other Greek physicians and Galen demonstrated that the true source was the brain, from which the spine and a network of nerves extend. Hoeniger contends that "For centuries down to Shakespeare’s time, physicians writing on the functions of the human organs usually followed ... [a] makeshift compromise"; they "succeeded in reconciling Galen’s demonstration of the role of the brain with Aristotle’s claim for the supremacy of the heart by making the simple point that the brain cannot live without the heart performing its vital function" (134-35). Hence, in terms of usage, Shakespeare writes in Antony and Cleopatra of "A
brain that nourishes our nerves" (4.9.21), using the word nerves in its modern sense, while in Cymbeline, he writes, "he sweats, / Strains his young nerves, and puts himself in posture" (3.4.93-95); in this latter usage, nerves clearly refer to sinews or muscles. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that nowhere in the writings of Shakespeare does the word nervous occur, nor, for that matter, does it occur in the writings of Spenser, Marlowe, or Milton. However, we do find its use in Dryden's work. In his translation of The Fifth Book of the Aeneas, initially published in 1687, he writes, "His nervous Arms the weighty Gauntlet yield" (488), indicating sinewy or muscular arms. Also, Pope employs the term in his translation of Book XXIII of the Iliad, first published in 1720, in which he writes, "Amid the Ring each nervous Rival stands, / Embracing rigid with implicit Hands" (822-23). These rivals are not "nervous" in our contemporary sense, but are strong and powerful rivals.

There is also another point to bear in mind regarding pre-Enlightenment ideas about nervousness: mental illness was not conceived of as a primarily neurological problem; it was not directly related to the nerves. Rather, drawing once again on ideas from the classical world, mental illness was believed to stem from various bodily humors. Stanley Jackson points out that "Over a period of approximately two thousand years, from the Hippocratic writings to the late seventeenth century, the predominant scheme for explaining diseases in general, and mental disorders in particular, was the humoral theory" (386). Also, Hoeniger discusses the theories of classical writers which provided the basis for Renaissance discussions of mental illness, particularly those of Aretaeus, who lived in the second century AD and whose work was printed in Latin translation in 1552: "Mania, writes Aretaeus in On the Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Disease, is caused by excess choler, which, hot and dry in its qualities, turns black when burned."
Mania expresses itself in tumultuous behavior. . . . By distinction melancholia is caused by overheated black bile and occurs in those "whose form of constitution is inclined to dryness"" (191).

However, melancholia is of particular interest. The OED reveals that the word melancholy was derived from Greek and literally means the "condition of having black bile," and it has been in English usage since the fourteenth century, in later references becoming associated with "mental gloom and sadness." While, as I will discuss in chapter six, melancholy was replaced by the term depression in the twentieth century, in descriptions of melancholy we can see how the humoral conception of the body was replaced by one which recognized the nervous system and brain as the source of mental disorders. Jackson asserts that "the displacement of humoral explanations" of melancholy was completed by the 1690s (115), and he calls attention to the work of William Cullen (1710-1790), who became "the preeminent authority on the explanation of disease," pointing out that Cullen "shifted from the heart and the vascular system to the brain and the nervous system as the basic elements in his physiology" (124-25). In fact, we can see this quite clearly in Cullen's First Lines of the Practice of Physic, in which he asserts that "In a certain view, almost the whole of diseases of the human body might be called Nervous; but there would be no use for such a general appellation" (Part II 1). Also, regarding melancholy, Cullen's work demonstrates that by the late eighteenth century it was no longer associated with bodily humors, but with the nervous system and the brain:

It will therefore be proper to consider in what this melancholic temperament especially consists: and to this purpose, it may be observed, that in it there is a
degree of torpor in the motion of the nervous power, both with respect to sensation and volition.

It is this state of the mind and the state of the brain corresponding to it, that is the chief object of our present consideration. But what that state of the brain is will supposed to be difficult to explain; and it may perhaps seem rash in me to attempt it.

I will, however, venture to say, that it is probable the melancholic temperament of mind depends upon a drier and firmer texture in the medullary substance of the brain; and that this perhaps proceeds from a certain want of fluid in that substance, which appears from its being of a lesser specific gravity than usual.

(Part III 30-31)

Cullen’s statements above regarding melancholy demonstrate the gradual development of nervous discourse. Specifically, although Cullen discards the humoral explanation and recognizes the significance of “nervous power” and the brain, he still asserts, like Aretaeus 1,500 years before him, that melancholy results from a condition of dryness.

Nevertheless, advancements in medical science during the eighteenth century led to a dramatic shift in the meaning of nervous. In the OED, our current sense of nervous is perhaps best expressed by definition 7, “Of or belonging to the nerves. nervous system, the complex of nerves and nerve-centres,” or, more importantly, definition 9: “Of persons: suffering from disorder of the nerves: also, excitable, easily agitated, timid.” Three of the earliest usage examples for these latter definitions which correspond to our contemporary sense of the word nervous are from texts by Doctor George Cheyne from 1734 to 1740, and Janet Oppenheim maintains that Cheyne himself was in many ways responsible for this semantic shift:
It was thanks, in large part, to Cheyne that the meaning of nervous began to undergo a slow transformation from the denotation of sinewy, strong, and energetic, which the word had carried since the fifteenth century, to the implication of ready excitability and the likelihood of exhaustion, which it bore in the nineteenth, almost to the exclusion of the earlier signification. (100-01)

Furthermore, the developments in eighteenth-century medical literature which came to be reflected in the linguistic change of *nervous* have been discussed by a number of scholars. In addition to Jackson's comments above, Roy Porter describes discoveries made regarding the nervous system during the Enlightenment (*Greatest Benefit* 249), and G. S. Rousseau has pointed out the increasing study and emphasis of the nerves during the eighteenth century as well: "The nerves were academized at virtually every European medical school, regardless of its reigning beliefs, as students were assigned dissertations on this subject. . . . Indeed, I have found no school where dissertations on the nerves were not written" ("Semiotics" 221). Thus, he continues, "if the stomach was the magical human organ of the seventeenth century, the nerves were its equivalent in the eighteenth" (218). In fact, Rousseau goes so far as to say that "in some qualified senses it is historically valid to claim that the whole of this eighteenth-century Enlightenment was one magisterial footnote on nervous physiology, a remarkable attempt to secularize cognition and perception through the brain and its vassal nerves" (219), and he asserts that this "vast theoretical labyrinth had its counterpart in the socialization (and as we shall see in the lingualization) of the nerves; in the ordinary daily life of the time as well" (221).

Yet the socialization and lingualization of the nerves occurred as nervousness became tied to other important, larger discourses during this period, one of which was progress.
and modernity. Specifically, nervousness was attributed to the progress of modern
civilization. Oppenheim, noting this, points out that "the conviction that men succumbed
to nervous collapse because of the strenuous effort to achieve economic success was
implicit in many of the Georgian texts that traced the rise of neurotic illness to the advent
of modern life, lived at breakneck speed" (153). This can clearly be seen in Dr. George
Cheyne’s *The English Malady*, subtitled *A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds* and
first published in 1733. In his Introduction to the modern reprint of Cheyne’s text, Porter
calls attention to the immense popularity of this work which went through six editions in
six years and asserts that Cheyne was "perhaps the most popular English writer of
practical medical works targeted at the 'general reader.' It was a reputation which lasted
throughout the century" (ix). However, Cheyne’s work definitely connects the
prevalence of nervous diseases in England with the advancement of civilization:

Now since this present Age has made Efforts to go beyond former Times, in all
the Arts of Ingenuity, Invention, Study, Learning, and all the contemplative and
sedentary Professions, (I speak only here of our own Nation, our own Times, and
of the better Sort, whose chief Employments and Studies these are) the Organs of
these Faculties being thereby worn and spoil’d, must affect and deaden the whole
System, and lay a Foundation for the Diseases of Lowness and Weakness.

(Cheyne 54)

Furthermore, Cheyne’s remarks above also indicate the shifting meaning of nervous.
While the word had formerly implied strength, Cheyne refers to nervous diseases as
"Diseases of Lowness and Weakness." And lastly, Cheyne asserts that the number of
people affected by nervous diseases is considerable: nervous disorders were "scarce
known to our Ancestors, and never rising to such fatal Heights, nor affecting such
Numbers in any other known Nation. These nervous Disorders being computed to make almost one third of the Complaints of the People of Condition in England” (ii).

However, Cheyne’s comments above also indicate that nervous discourse during the eighteenth century was used to reinforce class and social stratification. He consistently links nervous disorders to the “better Sort” and to “People of Condition,” revealing that nervousness is reserved for the elite, as when he cites one of the causes of nervous disorders as “the Inactivity and sedentary Occupations of the better Sort (among whom this Evil mostly rages)” (Cheyne ii). Rousseau has also recognized that “nervous mythology segregated the social rank and file anew, and provided all the classes with an important new model of aristocratic life,” pointing out that the development of a nervous discourse “was tied as much to the social history of the upper classes, and to their need to reassert their difference from the other social strata, as to the scientific theories that had explained the significance of the nerves for human economy and material production” (“Semiotics” 225). Yet it must be remembered that this did not preclude the lower classes from adopting nervous discourse into their daily lives: “If the lower classes emulate the upper in all centuries and live vicariously through them, they certainly did so in the eighteenth century, as seamstresses and charwomen, pickpockets and prostitutes like Moll Flanders and Fanny Hill, fantasized that they too could be as ‘nervous’ as their ‘gentlewomen’ mistresses” (226). Therefore, “nervous malady (similar to the nervous breakdowns of the early twentieth century) was the precondition of high standing. . . . If it was fashionable to blush and weep and faint, it was more glamorous to present oneself with nervous symptoms” (227).

Furthermore, the developing nervous discourse during this period was used to reinforce existing gender roles, as the “essential differentiation—the ‘otherness’—of
women was now attributed to a defect—discursively represented as an inherent weakness, a lingering form of exhaustion, a fundamental lack of tonic vigor—in female nerves and fibres” (Rousseau, “Semiotics” 222). We can see evidence of the “weak nerves” associated with women in Samuel Johnson’s Irene, first published in 1749, in which he writes, “Will not that Pow’r that form’d the heart of woman, / And wove the feeble texture of her nerves, / Forgive those fears that shake the tender frame?” (2.1.23-25).

Elaine Showalter also underscores this gender distinction of nervousness when she points out that at the end of the eighteenth century “the dialectic of reason and unreason took on specifically sexual meanings, and that the symbolic gender of the insane person shifted from male to female” (Female Malady 8). In other words, nervousness was beginning to take on feminine connotations. This also has a corresponding etymological aspect, for if we recognize a much older and fundamental discourse of gender which emphasizes a male/female dichotomy, with the domination of the former (associated with virility and strength) and the marginalization of the latter (connected with weakness and frailty), the developing nervous discourse comes to reflect and reinforce this larger discourse of gender. The OED entry for the adverbial form of nervous succinctly establishes this bifurcation; there are two definitions for nervously: (1) “With strength or vigor; forcibly” and (2) “With weakness or agitation of the nerves; in a nervous or excited manner.” This opposition clearly reflects what I earlier called the pre-Enlightenment versus the contemporary sense of nervous. However, since most English speakers today would acknowledge the disappearance or obsolescence of the former sense, nervous has taken on “feminine” characteristics. Furthermore, this gender association can be traced to nervus, the Latin root mentioned previously, a masculine noun which in the plural form signifies “strength” or “power.” In fact, the OED shows that a vulgar Latin usage of
nervus gave rise to a seventeenth-century meaning of nerve as “penis,” as in Dryden’s 
Tenth Satyr of Juvenal, first published in 1693, in which he writes, “The limber Nerve, in 
vain provok’d to rise” (228).

Yet the final theme relating to the nervous discourse emerging in the eighteenth 
century is sensibility; that is, conceptions of sensibility and creativity became explicitly 
linked to nervousness: “nervousness became a badge of honor, to be displayed as a mark 
of superiority together with the delicate sensibility that usually accompanied it” 
(Oppenheim 13). Rousseau explains this phenomenon in the following manner: “The 
more exquisite and delicate one’s nerves—morphologically speaking—the greater the 
ensuing degree of sensibility and imagination. . . . Greater nervous sensibility makes for 
greater writing, greater art, greater genius” (“Semiotics” 241). Therefore, the “nerves 
were also internalized and ‘mentalized’ into the most imaginative processes of which 
language and art were then capable” (223). This even extended to literary criticism: 
“Joseph Warton and Samuel Johnson, among many others sought to define a gradually 
evolving ‘nervous style,’ which they construed as a particularly masculine type of 
muscular and sinewy English prose, best described as ‘nervous’” (224). Note here, once 
again, the gender association linked with nervous discourse.

While it appears from the evidence above that in Johnson’s eighteenth century, the 
older, pre-Enlightenment, “masculine” sense of nervous still endured, in reality a gradual 
change was taking place. Johnson’s Dictionary of 1755 provides three definitions for 
nervous: “(1) Well strung; strong; vigorous. . . . (2) Relating to the nerves; having the 
seat in the nerves. (3) (In medical cant.) Having weak or diseased nerves” (McAdam and 
Milne 263). Hence, while nervous retained its pre-Enlightenment sense, Johnson’s third 
definition also suggests the new meaning of nervous. And although Johnson does not
employ the word *nervous* in his poetry, in a letter to Mrs. Thrale from November 24, 1783, he writes of his daughter Sophy: "I do not much fear her pretty life, because scarcely any body dies of her disorder, but it is an unpromising entry upon a new period of life, and there is, I suspect, danger lest she shall have to struggle for some years with a tender, irritable and as it is not very properly called a nervous constitution" (Letters 105-06). Hence, while Johnson recognizes the new meaning of *nervous*, he seems to disapprove of it, maintaining that "it is not very properly called a nervous constitution."

It appears that Johnson, author of one of the first and most significant dictionaries of the English language, must have recognized that the new meaning of *nervous* was not etymologically sound.

However, regardless of Samuel Johnson's reservations, the new meaning of *nervous* remained and gradually replaced the older sense during the course of the nineteenth century. For instance, in Keats' "Ode to Apollo," written in 1815, he says, "There Homer with his nervous arms / Strikes the twanging harp of war" (2.1-2), and this usage retains the older sense of *nervous*: however, in a letter to Fanny Keats dated August 14, 1820, Keats writes, "An accident of an unpleasant nature occurred at Mr. Hunt's and prevented me from answering you, that is to say made me nervous. . . . I am excessively nervous: a person I am not quite used to entering the room half chokes me" (Letters 504-05). Thus, while Keats retained the older sense of *nervous* in his poetry, in his prose he used its later sense to imply agitation or timidity. However, in 1824 Byron would utilize the new meaning of *nervous* in his poetry. In Canto 16 of *Don Juan*, Byron writes:

'Twere difficult to say what was the object
Of Adelaine, in bringing this same lay
To bear on what appeared to her the subject
Of Juan's nervous feelings on that day.

Perhaps she merely had the simple project

To laugh him out of his supposed dismay; (51.449-54)

Juan's "nervous feelings," associated with his "supposed dismay," clearly reflect the new meaning of nervousness. In prose fiction, we can clearly see the new meaning of nervous in Jane Austen's Emma, published in 1816. In chapter six of the first volume, Emma says of her father, "'the idea of sitting for his picture made him so nervous, that I could only take him by stealth'" (27).

Furthermore, during the nineteenth century the significations of nervous were further enmeshed within the five larger themes or discourses I have mentioned. Oppenheim points out that "nerves and their disorders were inextricably interwoven with nineteenth-century British assumptions about more than health and illness, or normalcy and deviance: they were interlaced with attitudes toward success and failure, civilization and barbarism, order and chaos, masculinity and femininity" (3). However, this was certainly not limited to Great Britain. In the United States, nervousness also extended beyond the ken of medical discourse and became intertwined with conceptions of modernity, class, gender, and sensibility. As Barbara Will points out,

While medical discourse provides us with one instance of the interpretive challenge posed by the emergence of the phenomenon of "nervousness" within turn-of-the-century American culture, what is striking indeed—and as yet relatively unseen by contemporary historians—is the insistence with which scores of writers, cultural critics, capitalist entrepreneurs, politicians, as well as doctors, appropriate "nervousness" as a central trope within their individual discourses.

(88)
Nevertheless, an examination of nineteenth-century medical literature itself can reveal how nervousness became connected with larger discourses of the period.

First, on the linguistic level, a new term, neurasthenia, was introduced into the lexicon to describe a particularly American form of nervousness: “In 1869 a New York neurologist, George M. Beard, coined a term that gave legitimacy to a group of mystifying complaints tormenting the lives of an unknown number of Americans. Beard called this new disease ‘neurasthenia’ (from neuro for nerve and asthenia for weakness) or nervous exhaustion” (Gosling 9). Although Oppenheim points out that Beard was not the only medical professional to use the term and that his ideas on neurasthenia stemmed in large part from the work of a previous physician (92-95), he can be attributed with popularizing the term because he “tirelessly publicized its existence between 1869 and his death in 1883” (93). In practice, “neurasthenia was used to characterize practically every nonspecific emotional disorder short of outright insanity” (Gosling 9). Thus neurasthenia had an “immense capacity to be all things to all medical men” (Oppenheim 93).

Yet Beard’s own pronouncements on nervousness distinctly reveal how nervous discourse encompassed the five themes I have been expounding, for “physicians writing on the condition were continually drawn toward larger social issues with which neurasthenia was finally seen to be inextricable” (Will 87). For instance, Beard asserts that the primary cause of neurasthenia is “modern civilization” and maintains that modern civilization “is distinguished from the ancient by these five characteristics: steam-power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women” (Beard vi). Thus Beard explicitly links nervousness to modernity and also indicates the relationship to gender by linking nervousness to “the mental activity of women.”
Yet even the tropes Beard utilizes to describe the workings of the nervous system reflect his appropriation of modern advancements in science and technology:

Edison’s electric light is now sufficiently advanced in an experimental direction to give us the best possible illustration of the effects of modern civilization on the nervous system... The force in this nervous system can, therefore, be increased or diminished... but none the less it is limited; and when new functions are interposed in the circuit, as modern civilization is constantly requiring us to do, there comes a period... when the amount of force is insufficient to keep all the lamps actively burning... this is the philosophy of modern nervousness. (Beard 98-99)

Beard’s conception that there is a fixed amount of nervous energy which can be depleted therefore implies that neurasthenia (or “nervous weakness”) is the equivalent of “nervous bankruptcy”: When the nervous system is overtaxed by the pressures of modern civilization, a person may experience “nervous bankruptcy, from which he finds it as hard to rise as from financial bankruptcy” (Beard 10).

However, as mentioned previously, Beard’s 1881 description of modern nervousness was not particularly original; he was in fact re-articulating what had become a common set of assumptions about the workings of the nervous system. Oppenheim, for instance, has pointed out that the connection between nerve force and electricity as well as the notion that individuals only possess limited amounts of nerve force can be traced back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (80-83). Nevertheless, Beard’s text is significant in that it represents a particularly American manifestation of nervous discourse in the late nineteenth century. Lutz maintains that “Neurasthenia was, then, most succinctly, a sign of modern life” (4), one which “helped people negotiate the large-
scale changes in culture and structure which radically changed the face of social life in America between the Civil War and World War I" (27). Bellah et al. also recognize that the "period preoccupied with ‘American nervousness’ was also the period in which a national marketplace was depriving the small towns and regional cities of their effective independence and throwing increasing numbers of Americans into a national occupational world based on education, mobility, and the ability to compete" (118). And Will points out that this emerging national marketplace was itself often described in the terms of a nervous discourse:

In the late nineteenth century, the language of the modern American marketplace was increasingly incorporating a neurasthenic vocabulary into its conceptual framework, as though market culture were not only productive of neurasthenia, but were itself a "nervous system." Terms like "depression" or "panic," entering into the vocabulary of the market in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, echoed the symptomology of the neurasthenic body, just as the shift between excess and depletion of the capitalist business cycle was often read in terms of the typically unbalanced nervous constitution of modern individuals.

(94-95)

However, we must bear in mind that just as nervous discourse contributed to other ideas in the period, it also appropriated them, and Will’s statements above may represent an oversimplification of the matter. In reality, emerging capitalist economies were developing simultaneously with nervous discourse, and the language used by both became intertwined. For example, the OED demonstrates that the word bankrupt has had its current meaning since the sixteenth century, and this certainly predates the emergence
of nervous discourse; however, the term became linked to nervous discourse, as when Beard speaks of "nervous bankruptcy."

In relation to the developing, capitalist economy of the United States, another particularly "American" ideal also was affected by nervous discourse: aspiration. For Beard, the unique potential Americans have to "rise out of the position in which they were born, whatever that may be, and to aspire to the highest possibilities of fortune and glory" is another "factor in producing American nervousness" (Beard 122). Beard sees that "in all classes there is a constant friction and unrest—a painful striving to see who shall be highest" (123). Oppenheim also recognizes this aspect of American nervousness:

> Of all societies, furthermore, none was so prone to the illness as Beard's own United States, that land of unparalleled social mobility, uniquely dynamic entrepreneurs, and ambitious achievers, where the hurried tempo of life was very nearly a matter of national pride. If the eighteenth had been the century of the English malady. Beard seemed determined to stamp the nineteenth with an American affliction. (93)

Yet if American nervousness was attributed to modernity and American social mobility, it still, for the most part, reflected class and social status. Beard maintains that "nearly all the sufferers from nervous exhaustion are those in whom the nervous diathesis predominates," and this "nervous diathesis"

> is developed, fostered and perpetuated with the progress of civilization, with the advancement of culture and refinement, and the corresponding preponderance of labor of the brain over that of the muscles. As would logically be expected, it is oftener met with in cities than in the country, is more marked and more frequent
at the desk, the pulpit, and in the counting-room than in the shop or on the farm.

(Beard 25-26)

Thus nervousness for Beard becomes a mark of social status, something reserved primarily for those who are culturally refined, rather than for the working masses. The following passage from Beard further illustrates this:

All that is said here of American nervousness refers only to a fraction of American society; for in America, as in all lands, the majority of the people are muscle-workers rather than brain-workers; have little education, and are not striving for honor, or expecting eminence or wealth. All our civilization hangs by a thread; the activity and force of the very few make us what we are as a nation; and if, through degeneracy, the descendants of these few revert to the condition of their not very remote ancestors, all our haughty civilization would be wiped away.

(96-97)

Most scholars have recognized that nervousness became intertwined with the issue of class: Lutz views nervousness as “a mark of distinction, of class, of status, of refinement” (6), and Trachtenberg also believes that “Beard makes nervousness a badge of distinction [and] also discloses another source of severe anxiety prevalent among middle- and upper-class Americans, that of impending chaos, the rule of accident, exigency, and rampant city mobs” (48). Yet although Beard and others attempted to reserve nervousness for those in the upper classes of society, it must be remembered that working class people also suffered from legitimate psychological disorders. Beard himself attests to this fact when he discusses the effects of the division and specialization of labor which came with a developing, industrial economy: “Herein is one unanticipated cause of the increase of insanity and other diseases of the nervous system among the
laboring and poorer classes” (102). Yet the key distinction lies in the diagnosis: nervous exhaustion is reserved for the elite, while “insanity” and “other diseases of the nervous system” occur in working-class people. Oppenheim points out this same occurrence in Great Britain:

The influence of class also asserted itself at the critical moment when a psychiatric diagnosis needed to be made—when the patient’s mental state had to be categorized as sane or insane. Since the severest symptoms of nervous breakdown so closely resembled some milder forms of madness, social considerations often played a role in the medical choice. With patients from the middle and upper classes, for whom the diagnosis of insanity could gravely affect professional status and the control of property, alienists were generally slower to identify lunacy than in the working-class cases, where no such considerations were seen to apply. (107)

Nevertheless, although nervousness was viewed as a symptom of refinement by many, in nineteenth-century America, just as in eighteenth-century England, this did not preclude the lower classes from appropriating nervous discourse—or prevent others from taking advantage of this: Davis has pointed out that “Lydia Pinkham, hailed as the most important businesswoman of her era, marketed her patent medicines as a cure for nerves and female complaints among the less educated, rural, and working classes” (93).

Yet the nervous discourse of the nineteenth century also reflected attitudes toward gender as well: however, the increasing feminization of nervousness throughout the nineteenth century was a gradual process. In the early years of the nineteenth century, nervousness does not appear to have had significant feminine connotations. For instance, in Jane Austen’s Emma (1816), Emma’s father, Mr. Woodhouse, an obvious
hypochondriac, is repeatedly described as a nervous character. In chapter eleven of the first volume, he “could not be induced to get so far as London . . . and . . . consequently was now most nervously and apprehensively happy in forestalling this too short visit,” and when the Knightley family and their entourage arrive, “The bustle and joy of such an arrival . . . produced a noise and confusion which his nerves could not have born under any other cause, nor have endured much longer even for this” (60). In chapter fifteen of the first volume, when snowfall threatens to strand the Woodhouses at the Randalls and Mr. Woodhouse is informed that they will, after all, be able to depart, he “was immediately set as much at ease on the subject as his nervous constitution allowed” (83). While I will discuss hypochondria more extensively in chapter three, for the present it is significant to note that there does not appear to be anything particularly feminine about Mr. Woodhouse’s “nervous constitution.” In fact, as Oppenheim points out, in the early years of the nineteenth century, “Cheyne’s influence still echoed down the decades in that association of civilization and sensibility which encouraged so much fashionable indisposition in the Georgian years, when men of feeling, easily moved to tears, congratulated themselves on their cultural superiority over more stolid brethren” (145).

However, the gender associations of nervousness changed significantly as the nineteenth century progressed, as nervousness took on increasingly feminine connotations. While the passages from Beard’s 1881 text presented above seem to suggest that nervousness was the ultimate product of refinement and had no particular feminine connotations, this is not the case. Lutz has recognized the significance of gender in Beard’s work, pointing out that the “prevalence of neurasthenia in men was sometimes analyzed as an effect of the feminization of culture, and in the early 1880’s Beard celebrated this feminization as an indication of the high degree of civilization
America had achieved, manifested by the refinement and sensibility of its cultured men” (35). Likewise, Barbara Will points out that “If the ‘mental activity of women’ is for Beard one of the five great changes of modernity which produces neurasthenia, then there must be something inherent in the ‘feminine’ constitution which is more adapted to modern life or ‘civilization’” (96). She maintains that the “brain-workers” which Beard identifies as most prone to nervousness have feminine qualities:

George Beard’s point is that the social groups most involved with the modern—brain workers—are seen to have a decidedly feminine mental and physical constitution. In particular, the mental negotiation of modern life—the sensitivity to shocks, the response to the new, the ability to lapse into an energy-saving fatigue—was for Beard and other inextricable from the feminine. (Will 96)

Yet the connection between nervousness and the feminine is the latter years of the nineteenth century is nowhere more evident than in the work of one of Beard’s contemporary physicians, Silas Weir Mitchell, whose well-known “rest cure” for nervous women has received a great deal of recent attention and has been familiarized to the public through the scathing indictment it receives in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” first published in 1892. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator says that her husband, a physician, “assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency. . . . So I . . . am absolutely forbidden to ‘work’ until I am well again” (41-42). Yet what is striking is not the narrator’s “nervous condition,” but the treatment imposed upon her: in her room “the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls,” while she says that her husband “hates to have me write a word” (43-44). Also, the narrator’s husband threatens to send her to Weir Mitchell: “if I don’t pick
up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall” (47). By the end of the story, the
narrator, prohibited from writing and forced into submission by her husband, goes insane.

Gilman herself underwent Mitchell’s rest cure treatment, and she describes the
experience in the following passage from “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper,” first
published in 1913:

This wise man [Mitchell] put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still
good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much
the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice “to live as domestic a
life as possible,” to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,” and “never to
touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived.” This was in 1887.

I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so
near the border line of utter mental ruin that I could see over. (348-49)

While Gilman herself acknowledges that she made “embellishments and additions” (349)
to create “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the above comments that she ascribes to Mitchell
reveal that the rest cure treatment was used to reinforce cultural gender roles. Although I
do not believe Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” should be read as an accurate historical
description of the rest cure, there can be little doubt that the treatment did reinforce
gender roles in the late-nineteenth century, as Oppenheim’s assessment demonstrates:

If accounts in the medical press can be trusted, numerous women actually
benefited from the rest cure and were restored to what their culture considered
normal feminine roles, but independent-minded women who resented masculine
domination were rarely among them, for obvious reasons. . . . Reducing a woman
to the dependence of an infant, as befitted the Victorian identification of
femininity and childishness, did nothing to help her become emotionally strong
and self-reliant. Clearly that was never the goal of Weir Mitchell or his followers. They either thought of their patients as monstrous hysterics whose wills had to be crushed or as helpless neurasthenics who needed a doctor's invigorating will in order to recover. Whichever of these mutually inconsistent mutations they espoused, proponents of the rest cure were certain that the impetus to restored health came from outside the female patient, from the commanding personality of the medical man. (215)

In addition, some of Mitchell's own comments can demonstrate Oppenheim's assertions above. In Fat and Blood and How to Make Them (1882), Mitchell asserts that his treatment was an attempt to renew "the vitality of feeble people by a combination of entire rest and excessive feeding," and the cases he treated were "chiefly women of the class well-known to every physician.—nervous women, who as a rule are thin, and lack blood" (9). Thus, as Mitchell himself acknowledges, his rest cure treatment was usually applied to women. Regarding male nervousness, in "Nervousness and Its Influence on Character," first published in 1887, Mitchell asserts that "as to nervousness in the male, . . . he, too, in a minor degree, and less frequently, may become the victim of this disability" (142), revealing that nervousness was primarily associated with women. However, Mitchell's attitude toward some of these nervous women was certainly not positive: "There are many kinds of fool, from the mindless fool to the fiend-fool, but for the most entire capacity to make a household wretched there is no more complete human receipt than a silly woman who is to a high degree nervous and feeble, and who craves pity and likes power" ("Nervousness" 143). Nevertheless, note that "nervous" and "feeble" are connected in the above passage, confirming the "feminine" nature of nervousness.
However, it was the different treatments imposed on nervous men and women that definitively reveal how nervousness reinforced cultural gender roles: while nervous women were isolated in bedrooms and forced to rest according to the dictates of Mitchell's rest cure, "men feminized by the disease were sent out west to become men again" (Lutz 31). Thus Theodore Roosevelt was "sent to the Dakotas for rough-riding exercise cures... Henry James was sent to hike in the Alps, and William James continued to prescribe vigorous mountain hikes for himself until he was in his sixties" (Lutz 32).

In addition, a number of scholars call attention to the fact that a sense of nostalgia was often bound up with the gender implications of nervousness at this time:

While he held equally deep scorn for the effeminate, neurasthenic urban brain worker as for the tiring, weepy, nervous "lady," Mitchell also conceived of the disease of neurasthenia as a kind of bodily resistance to modernity and its inherent effeminacy, a wordless physical cry for the loss of individuality, personal liberty, and the entrepreneurial values of an older masculine America. (Will 91)

Jackson Lears, who maintains that neurasthenia was a symptom of modernity's "crisis of cultural authority" which helped spawn an antimodernist movement (56-57), also recognizes that nostalgia for an older, more "masculine" America was linked conceptions of nervousness at this time: "Tortured by indecision and doubt, the neurasthenic seemed a pathetic descendant of the iron-willed Americans who had cleared forests, drained swamps, and subdued a continent" (50). Hence, if Beard's work celebrated modernity and its inherent femininity, it was lamented by Mitchell.

Furthermore, Oppenheim also recognizes "a kind of rural nostalgia" in British attitudes toward modern nervousness:
the many medical authorities who worried that nervous debility was an inevitable consequence of urban civilization looked to the countryside to counteract its toxins . . . [and] interwove with their medical opinions the strand of romanticism that faulted industrialized society for violating the organic social patterns presumed to have prevailed in the past. (102)

One can detect a clear manifestation of this nostalgia in Matthew Arnold's "The Scholar Gypsy," first published in 1853, in which the poet describes "what wears out the life of mortal men" (142):

*Tis that from change to change their being rolls:

*Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,

Exhaust the energy of strongest souls,

And numb the elastic powers.

Till having used our nerves with bliss and teen,

And tir'd upon a thousand schemes our wit.

To the just pausing Genius we remit

Our worn-out life, and are--what we have been. (143-50)

The notion that people have exhausted their energy and used their "nerves" clearly relates to a depletion of nervous energy caused by modern life, and the poet expresses nostalgia for former times:

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,

And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;

Before this strange disease of modern life,

With its sick hurry, its divided aims,

Its heads o’ertax’d, its palsied hearts, was rife-- (201-05)
Ultimately, by the end of the nineteenth century, nervousness had taken on decidedly feminine connotations, connotations which remain with us to this day, and this was the case both in Great Britain as well as the United States. In England,

In the new model taking shape during the middle decades of Victoria’s reign, the equation of nervous sensibility with effeminacy carried with it the hint of disablement. Sensitive nerves no longer implied quickness of mind or acuteness of sympathy, as in the past, but a virtual assurance that the man so cursed would be unable to play his allotted part on the public stage. (Oppenheim 149)

In the United States, Lutz points out that a corresponding phenomenon was occurring simultaneously: “By the turn of the century . . . the feminized man had fallen out of fashion as a new entrepreneurial and militarist ethic arose, an ethos that was used to justify the elite pursuit of business success and the related political and economic changes involved in America’s new success as an industrial and imperial power” (35).

One final point should be elucidated regarding the relationship between nervous discourse and gender; that is, one may have detected a contradiction in the increasing feminization of nervousness. Specifically, that contradiction is this: if more a more refined nervous system and more modern civilization were equated with the feminine, how could this be reconciled to conventional nineteenth-century notions of gender and female “weakness”? Or, in other words, how could the association between nervousness and a higher level of development be harmonized with the connotations of “weakness” and “timidity” which are now associated with nervous? As Oppenheim points out, this contradiction was never resolved:

As sensibility and excitability, both hallmarks of refinement, were clearly functions of the nerves, it was necessary to assign woman a fully—even
excessively—developed nervous system. On the other hand, a host of old cultural biases and current threats combined in the second half of the nineteenth century to dictate support for an evolutionary explanation of female mental inferiority, plausible only on the grounds of arrested nervous development. There was no way to reconcile these two lines of thought. (193)

It is perhaps because of the limitations of language, the inability of a signifier to maintain two diametrically opposed significations, that is, because of the inability of nervous to maintain both its pre-Enlightenment and contemporary senses, one associated with strength, vigor, masculinity and thus prioritized, the other with weakness, timidity, the feminine and thus marginalized, perhaps it is because of this very irreconcilability that nervous has been firmly established in its current sense, virtually eliminating the signification of nervous as strong or vigorous.

Nevertheless, during the nineteenth century nervous discourse remained intertwined with the theme of sensibility. For instance, in Austen’s Mansfield Park (1813), Fanny’s sensitive and delicate nature is associated with her nerves: in chapter eight of volume three, after Fanny returns to her home, “The living in incessant noise was to a frame and temper, delicate and nervous like Fanny’s, an evil which no super-added elegance or harmony could have entirely atoned for” (266). In addition, sensibility became linked to nervous discourse as a connection was made between nervousness and theories of moral character: “there developed a theory of character, already evident in Jane Austen, but which also flowers in DeQuincey’s English Opium Eater, the Brontes, Melville’s Ambiguities, and Carlyle, and which showed moral fibre to be lodged in the nerves” (Rousseau, “Semiotics” 250).³ It is of significance that the character of Fanny in Austen’s Mansfield Park, who is particularly sensitive and “nervous,” is also one of
Austen's most virtuous heroines. In addition, as Rousseau points out, nervous discourse intersected with sensibility through a firmly established connection between the imagination and nervousness: "Proust, like Wilde and other decadents in their Franco-English milieu, linked his neurasthenia to creativity; not to be nervous and ill, he came to believe, was not to write" ("Semiotics" 250).  

Although some aspects of the relationship between nineteenth-century nervous discourse and the theme of sensibility have already been suggested by the previous discussion of the association of nervousness with modernity and refinement, this requires further analysis, specifically regarding the moral connotations connected with this theme. In the passage from Beard quoted earlier, he warns that "all our civilization hangs by a thread" and "through degeneracy" future generations may "revert to the condition of their not very remote ancestors." The degeneration Beard is referring to is clearly nervous degeneration, which results in a corresponding degeneration of sensibility, refinement, and, specifically, morality. Oppenheim has pointed out the implications of this in late-Victorian England: "the theory of nervous degeneration . . . rested primarily on [the] conviction that civilized humanity was the product of nervous development. Keen intelligence, esthetic sensibilities, and moral sentiments all attested to the vast distance that separated the human nervous system from that of mankind's closest neighbors on the evolutionary scale" (272).

Yet it is indeed true that "degeneration was, and remains, a concept saturated with moral connotations" (Oppenheim 276), and Oppenheim explains this theory of moral degeneration in the following manner:

According to degeneration theory, moral deficiency and nervous disintegration advanced together through the combined force of individual choice and
inexorable heredity. Except for the innocent victim of disease, environmental poison, or an accident that destroyed nerve tissue, the person who initiated degeneration within a family did so by choosing unhealthy and immoral habits that damaged the nerves. The acquired trait of damaged nerves was then passed off to offspring, for whom incomplete nervous development became an inherited characteristic. Since the moral sense represented one of the final stages of human evolution, it soon vanished as deterioration of the brain and nervous system proceeded apace. (288)

Tom Lutz has also perceived the link between morality and nervousness, particularly how it relates to the economic aspect of neurasthenia, the notion that individuals only have a limited supply of nerve force which should be spent wisely. He points out that productive work and procreation represented useful ways of spending nervous energy which effectively allowed a "reinvestment" of that nervous energy (Lutz 3). However, immoral behavior represented a waste of that energy and led to nervous exhaustion or neurasthenia:

Other ways of spending one's nerve force—the paradigmatic examples are masturbation, gambling, and other forms of illicit sexual or financial activity—constituted a waste, a drain on nerve force without any corresponding reinvestment. The idea of "dissipation" thus is based on a notion of dispersed rather than directed nerve force, spent without any possible return on the investment. Dissipation eventually led to "decadence," the death and decay of nerve centers in the individual, and the death and decay of civilization at the social level. The links between medical thinking and economics, the links to morality, were constantly apparent to both doctors and patients. (Lutz 3-4)
Yet another aspect of the link between morality and nervousness which developed during the nineteenth century involved the will. Since the will is the source of decision-making ability and determines our actions, any discussion of morality, which rests on our decisions to do right or wrong, must implicitly involve the will, and nervous discourse also became connected with the will, the source of our self-control. Jackson Lears has maintained that the various symptoms of neurasthenia “were unified . . . by a common effect: a paralysis of the will” (50), and this can be seen in Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” discussed previously, when the narrator who suffers from a “nervous condition” tells us. “He [her husband and doctor] says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control . . .” (49). However, the moral significance of the will in relation to nervous discourse is illustrated in the following passage by Mitchell, in which he discusses the effects of nervous exhaustion on women: “The moral degradation which such cases undergo is pitiable. . . . I have seen a few people who were ennobled by long sickness, but far more often the result is to cultivate self-love and selfishness and to take away by slow degrees the healthy mastery which every human being should retain over her own emotions and wants” (Fat and Blood 30-31). Mitchell here clearly calls attention to the moral dangers of nervous exhaustion, yet the source of this “moral degradation” is the inability to the nervous woman to harness her willpower in order to maintain “mastery” over herself. Thus one of the effects of nervousness is a weakening of the will, with significant moral ramifications.

Interestingly, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, the causal relationship between nervousness and its effect on the will became blurred. Oppenheim maintains that this relationship was actually reversed, that a weak will became the source of nervousness rather than its consequence: “Whereas in the past, medical authorities had
interpreted a paralyzed will as the result of nervous exhaustion, they now began to suspect that it belonged at the origins of the disaster” (151). This phenomenon accurately reflects the changing sense of the word nervous itself over the course of the nineteenth century: as the term came to fully adopt its contemporary sense, one connected with weakness and timidity, nervous people became weak people who were associated with a weak will.

In the first years of the twentieth century, nervous discourse retained its popular currency and the significations it had in the late nineteenth century. Jackson Lears points out that “a North American Review writer observed in 1908” that “‘On every street, at every corner, we meet neurasthenics’” (50). And although nervousness continued to be influenced by and reflected in medical discourse as well as associated with modernity, the advent of World War I had a substantial impact on the relationship of nervousness to the themes of class, gender, and the moral aspect of sensibility.

Perhaps the most significant effect World War I had on nervous discourse was caused by the high incidence of what were perceived of as nervous disorders among soldiers, and a new term, shell shock, entered the vocabulary. Showalter highlights this “epidemic” of nervousness among the British: “By the winter of 1914, there were indications of a high percentage of mental breakdown among hospitalized men and officers. By 1916 one observer reported that shell-shock cases accounted for as much as 40 percent of the casualties in the fighting zones. And by the end of the war, 80,000 cases had passed through army medical facilities” (Female Malady 168). Showalter also recognizes that the diagnosis of nervous disorders among soldiers reflected class distinctions, since regular soldiers were diagnosed as suffering from hysteria, a term I will discuss more extensively
in chapter three, while the more aristocratic disorder of neurasthenia was applied to officers:

This extraordinarily tidy distribution of symptoms and diagnoses is consistent with late Victorian moralistic and class-oriented attitudes to hysteria and neurasthenia in women. Military doctors may have been reluctant to attach the stigmatizing feminine label of hysteria to men of their own social class. But in fact, the rate of war neurosis was four times higher among officers than among the men. (174)

In reality, of course, all of these men were suffering from the same thing, what would later be referred to “combat fatigue.”

While Showalter’s assertions make it clear that the medical community during the war at least attempted to re-assert the particular class distinctions connected with nervous discourse, it is also clear that the high incidence of nervous disorders among all soldiers must have refuted these ideas of social status and nervousness. As a result, nervous discourse following World War I became less elitist and more proletarian, a conclusion which is further substantiated by the fact that “men’s war neurosis would be worse after the war,” when “the startling influx of neurasthenic ex-servicemen—about 114,600 in all . . . applied for pensions for shell-shock-related disorders between 1919 and 1929” (Showalter, Female Malady 190). As we shall see, medical discourse itself following the war would attest to this growing popularization of nervousness; it was no longer reserved for the elite, but became a condition which could affect people from all social ranks.

Nevertheless, the statements above indicate that the experiences of World War I also served to reinforce the connection between nervous discourse and gender. Showalter points out that “shell shock was related to social expectations of the masculine role in
war" (Female Malady 171). Specifically, the “efficacy of the term ‘shell shock’ lay in its power to provide a masculine-sounding substitute for the effeminate associations of ‘hysteria’ and to disguise the troubling parallels between male war neurosis and the female nervous disorders epidemic before the war” (172). Sandra Gilbert contends that “paradoxically, in fact, the war to which so may men had gone in hope of becoming heroes, ended up emasculating them . . .” (qtd. in Showalter, Female Malady 174). One can see the significance of gender in the World War I poem “A Renascence” by Robert Graves:

They’ve steeled a tender, girlish heart,
Tempered it with a man’s pride,
Learning to play the butcher’s part
Though the woman screams inside— (5-8)

Clearly, Graves indicates that soldiers have conquered any “feminine” qualities they possessed to assert their masculinity.5

Yet the “feminizing” quality of World War I also reflects the connection between nervous discourse and morality: soldiers suffering from nervous disorders were seen as having shirked their moral responsibility. As Oppenheim points out, “the vast majority of the public saw in shell-shocked servicemen cowards who had demonstrated their lack of moral fiber by avoiding duty and repudiating patriotism” (151-52). This conception is also once again inextricably linked with conceptions of the will, since soldiers who suffered from shell shock were thought to possess weak wills. Oppenheim notes that “C. S. Meyers, as late as 1918 . . . claimed that, in treating certain cases of shell shock, the doctor had to compel ‘the patient to pull himself together and to resume control over himself’” (317). Yet this notion of the “failure” of shell-shocked servicemen even
extended to the soldiers themselves. In *Sherston's Progress*, Siegfried Sassoon, describing the experience of being a patient at a shell-shock hospital during World War I, writes, “Sometimes I had an uncomfortable notion that none of them respected one another; it was as though there was a tacit understanding that we all were failures, and this made me want to reassure myself that I wasn’t the same as the others” (14).

However, the pronouncements of the medical community itself most distinctly reveal the manifestations of nervous discourse during the early twentieth century. First of all, the theories of Sigmund Freud which emerged at the beginning of the century had an impact on conceptions of nervousness. A number of scholars have recognized that the introduction of Freud’s terms displaced the use of the word *neurasthenia*. For instance, Gosling points out that *neurasthenia* was used only until “Freud’s psychological terms were accepted in the 1910’s and 1920’s” (9). And Oppenheim notes that “By the end of World War I, [neurasthenia] was no longer the preeminent diagnosis for victims of nervous breakdown. While the word continued to appear occasionally in the 1930s, it was already becoming a medical antique in the preceding decade” (109). Yet it must be remembered that the introduction of Freud’s theories could not quickly or completely eliminate the significations and connotations of nervous discourse in popular consciousness in the early twentieth century. In fact, not all members of the medical community were ready to embrace Freud’s theories: “World War I, in revealing the primacy of violence and brutality in human affairs, increased the readiness of younger British psychiatrists to accept some, or all, of Freud’s theories, but their professional predecessors could not follow suit” (Oppenheim 310). As late as 1931, Freud himself uses the term *neurasthenia* and feels obligated to refute the still-persistent link between nervousness and modernity: “we fail to observe such a regular connection between the
aspect of the nervous disease and the other pernicious influences of civilization which authors have described as factors of the disease” (Freud 12). Instead, “These neuroses, generally designated by the term neurasthenia, can be produced by certain pernicious influences of the sexual life” (11). Although this is not the place for a thorough analysis of Freud’s work, it could perhaps be argued that Freud himself inherited the legacy of nervous discourse and that this was reflected in his theories. When Freud states that “Our civilization is entirely based upon the suppression of instincts” (13)—a theme further elaborated upon in his Civilization and Its Discontents—he certainly is at least intimating that the development of civilization invariably leads to the various forms of sexual suppression which can, if not handled correctly, lead to neuroses. This hints that nervous illness is a product of human development, and thus links nervousness to the familiar theme of progress and modernity.

Nevertheless, there can be no question that F. Scott Fitzgerald, living from 1896 to 1940, became acquainted with the nervous discourse of the early twentieth century. As I will demonstrate throughout this study, Fitzgerald, who was seen as the spokesman for the Jazz Age of the 1920s, lived in a world inundated by references to nervousness. Although he does not discuss the significance of what “nervousness” meant in the 1920s, Nash points out a number of reasons why people in this era made up a “nervous generation”:

The decade after the war was a time of heightened anxiety when intellectual guideposts were sorely needed and diligently sought. Many clung tightly to the familiar moorings of traditional custom and value. Others actively sought new ways of understanding and ordering their existence. Americans from 1917 to
1930 constituted a nervous generation, groping for what certainty they could find.

In addition, Eble has asserted that "As to a serious regard for mental illness, one can say that 'being crazy,' like being drunk, was the thing to be in the world readers attributed to the Fitzgeralds" (41). Also, Bryson has called attention to early twentieth-century advertising, maintaining that the "great breakthrough . . . came with the identification and exploitation of the American consumer's Achilles' heel: anxiety. . . . By the 1920s, advertisers had so refined the art that a consumer could scarcely pick up a magazine without being bombarded with unsettling questions. . . . The 1920s truly were the Age of Anxiety" (239). And Tom Lutz has perceived a direct link between the economic conceptions of nervousness in the early years of the twentieth century and the Jazz Age of the "roaring twenties":

The fear of overproduction . . . fueled the nervousness of America's middle-class and at the same time helped legitimate advertising and consumption. . . . With the emerging acceptance of the principle of consumerism, nervousness was reinterpreted as pure energy, and desire was reinterpreted as energizing rather than depleting. The easy answer to oversupply is overspending, and therefore the up-tempo sequel to the Age of Nervousness was the Jazz Age of the twenties, the cultural work for which was already under way in 1903. (28)

Furthermore, although this study focuses on Fitzgerald's work, one can detect elements of nervousness in a number of works by Fitzgerald's contemporary American authors. In The Waste Land, T. S. Eliot describes a nervous woman that many believe is based on Eliot's first wife:

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me."
“Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.

“What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?

“I never know what you are thinking. Think.” (111-14)

And in “The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio,” Hemingway writes of Mr. Frazier: “His nerves had become tricky and he disliked seeing people while he was in this condition. His nerves went bad at the end of five weeks, and while he was pleased they lasted that long yet he resented being forced to make the same experiment when he already knew the answer” (363). However, a brief examination of two popular texts by American doctors of the 1920s should further clarify some of the underlying assumptions of nervous discourse during this period.

Abraham Myerson’s The Nervous Housewife was first published in 1920 and was reprinted again in 1926, 1927, and 1929, attesting to the work’s popularity, and it reflects how the five themes I have associated with nervousness manifested themselves in the early twentieth century. Interestingly, Myerson himself notes the disparate significations of nervous at this time: “Nervousness, like many another word of common speech, has no place whatever in medicine. Indeed, no term indicating an abnormal condition is so loosely used as this one” (Myerson 17). Nevertheless, this does not prevent Myerson from employing the term extensively. However, Myerson’s medical conceptualization of nervousness still employs the tropes of the previous century, since nervous weakness or neurasthenia remains for him the result of a depletion of nervous energy:

“Fundamentally neurasthenia is a deenergization” (26). Regarding modernity, although Myerson asserts that the nervous housewife in America “has always existed, perhaps in lesser numbers than at present” (5), his conclusions seem to echo those of Beard fifty years earlier; that is, he believes that nervousness has become more prevalent because of
changes in modern society. For example, Myerson attributes the increase of nervous housewives in his era to two major occurrences: first, modern industrial society has forced women to "[yield] a large part of [their] work to the factory," and second, "there has been a rise in the dignity and position of women in the past one hundred and fifty years" (16). Also, Myerson mentions and reaffirms Beard’s ideas when says of neurasthenia, "there exists no reasonable doubt that modern life, with its hurry, its tensions, its widespread and ever present excitement, has increased the proportion of people involved" (19). Yet, as I indicated earlier, the connection between social status and nervousness is no longer valid: "nor is she [the nervous housewife] alone the rich Housewife with too little to do, for though riches do not protect, poverty predisposes, and the poor Housewife is far more frequently the victim of this disease of occupation" (2). Of course, it is obvious from the title and focus of Myerson’s work, as well as from the fact that one of the causes of nervousness described by Myerson stems from the position of women, that nervousness remained associated with ideas about gender. Yet this is also reflected in some of Myerson’s assertions regarding the theme I have termed sensibility, which seems to be connected with the will in Myerson’s work. Myerson discusses what he calls the “Will to Power through Weakness”:

It has long been known to women that a man is usually helpless in the presence of woman’s tears, if it is apparent that something he has done has brought about the deluge. And in the case of some housewives, certain similarities between tears and the symptoms appear to show that in these cases, at least, the symptoms of nervousness appear as a substitute for tears in the marital conflict. (165)

Hence, for Myerson, nervousness is often exploited by women as a means to an end, that is, in order to get the upper hand over their husbands. Although Myerson does not dwell
on the moral ramifications of this, his comments on hysteria, seen as another form of nervousness, seem to have overt moral implications: “in the last analysis, all hysterics are deceivers, both of themselves and of others. Their symptoms, real enough at bottom, are theatrical and designed for effect. As I shall later show, they are weapons, used to gain an end, which is the whim or will of the patient” (38).

However, a work by Robert S. Carroll, The Mastery of Nervousness Based Upon Self Reeducation, also reveals how nervous discourse was associated with the themes I have been discussing. This text, which initially appeared in 1917, was published in two later editions and went through a total of six printings between 1917 and 1931, demonstrating the book’s popularity. Also, this work is particularly significant because Carroll would later be put in charge of Zelda Fitzgerald’s mental care and thus have direct contact and correspondence with Fitzgerald himself, which I will discuss in chapter five.

Carroll’s medical conceptions of nervousness also reflect the common set of assumptions of the previous century. He conceives of nervousness as the result of a waste of nervous energy, a waste brought about by a patient’s weak will: “Most persons of nervous temperament are constantly losing more or less energy through some of the many useless, wasteful habits of action,” and the “patient’s inability to control this waste of energy discloses the helplessness of his will” (Carroll 17). Although others lose nervous energy “not by action, but by feeling, to useless and wasteful sensations” (18), in either case nervousness seems to be the consequence of a wasteful expenditure of a limited amount of nervous energy. Carroll also employs the term neurasthenia, pointing out that “Probably no form of nervousness has become so popular as neurasthenia” which “is indeed quite an aristocratic disorder” (23). In addition, Carroll explicitly links nervousness to modernity. After celebrating the achievements of mankind, he points out
that these achievements are the result of a highly developed nervous system: "His superb
powers . . . are possible because of his intricate, sensitive, responsive nervous system" (1).
However, the developments of the human nervous system are still not advanced
enough to keep up with the hectic pace of modernity, for "Modern stimuli are increasing
much faster than our nervous training for adaptation. Great as is man's capacity for
complex adjustments, the multiplying demands of modern life are coming too fast" (6).
Yet regarding this modernity, Carroll refers to the Roman era and Julius Caesar to imply
that the development of civilization always has a feminizing quality: "We are to-day
living in an age of flux. Caesar long ago decried 'the effeminating influences of
civilization.' Never in mankind's splendid history has discovery chased discovery,
invention succeeded invention, as during the last generation" (2). However, as I have
maintained, nervousness had been popularized and lost its indication of social status by
this time: "Nervousness, once a disease of the elect, now invades the homes of all
classes" (2). Furthermore, Carroll's work distinctly reveals the theme of sensibility in
nervous discourse. In addition to the role of the will mentioned above, he explicitly
connects nervousness with morality: "In our final analysis, nervous illness presents a
problem which is fundamentally moral" (241).

This connection between nervousness, the will, and morality can be demonstrated in
Carroll's assessment of nervousness in the upper classes, in those who suffer from the
"aristocratic disorder" of neurasthenia: He points out that the "so-called comfortable and
well-to-do classes have few demands made upon them today for real self-denial" (Carroll
168). Since this ease allows for self-indulgence, which "looms larger and larger into
latter-day living as an enemy of the will" (169), these comfortable people are not required
to direct their wills toward productive and strenuous effort. And this has definite moral consequences:

It is a fundamental truth difficult for all to learn, one which the cleverness of the ages has attempted to negate, but one which wisdom through all time has accepted, that good of body and good of mind and good of soul come to man through conscious and consistent effort. And power and strength grow out of sacrifice, and sacrifice ever indicates a surrender of ease. (171)

Although the sermonizing quality of the above passage illustrates the obvious moral overtones of Carroll’s text, what is more significant is the program Carroll offers to “master” nervousness (indicated by the title of his book), which is essentially designed to encourage individuals to take control over their lives, their wills, and their nervousness through proper eating, work, and clear thinking.

By this point, it should be relatively clear that nervousness had a multiplicity of ideas or themes connected with it in the first part of this century, ones very different from today. Nervous has now lost the richness of the significations and connotations it had in the early portion of this century: it is no longer associated with conceptions of modernity, class, or sensibility and morality, and even the medical community has largely opted for other terms such as anxiety, depression, or neurosis (with the exception of its use to signify the anatomical complex of nerve cells, as in nervous system). However, vestiges of the nervous discourse which we have inherited can still be seen in our popular use of nervous, which retains traces of cultural attitudes toward gender. Specifically, if nervous has indeed taken on the sense described by the OED as “excitable, easily agitated, timid,” this also suggests an inherent sense of weakness, a weakness which runs counter to our
cultural construction of masculinity. The following passage from Oppenheim reinforces this:

The legacy of the changing attitudes toward manliness that developed during the nineteenth century, and crystallized in the first two decades of the twentieth, still profoundly informs current thinking about gender. Today, when depression is “estimated to be two or three times more common in women than in men,” medical opinion partly explains that statistical difference in terms of masculine reluctance to acknowledge feelings of inadequacy and despair—an unwillingness even to discuss emotions—for fear of appearing weak and effeminate. (152)

Today, still, nervousness is not considered a “manly” quality to possess.

Nevertheless, the nervous discourse of Fitzgerald’s era was indeed connected with other, larger discourses, specifically medical literature, modernity, class, gender, and sensibility or morality. Of course, this broad range of themes could be detected in a number of authors, and many readers and critics of Fitzgerald’s work have recognized some of these themes. However, this study will examine how and where a nervous discourse intersects with these broader themes in Fitzgerald, how nervousness partakes of and contributes to these themes.
Notes

1 Although the older sense of *nervous* has now been virtually eliminated, the fact that it did not disappear completely during the nineteenth century is not surprising; as Lewis points out, “We shall again and again find the earliest senses of a word flourishing for centuries despite a vast overgrowth of later senses which might have been expected to kill them” (8-9). This is also true of the word *nerve* today, when it is used in a phrase such as “that took a lot of nerve.”

2 Interestingly, while medical science has firmly established the seat of consciousness and sensation in the brain, our language still retains the older, Aristotelian sense of heart as the source of sensation, as when we speak of emotional pain as “heartbreaking,” or one refers to moving the “hearts and minds of people.”

3 For a discussion of aspects of nervousness in Melville’s *Pierre, or The Ambiguities*, see Rachman. Also, for a discussion of nervousness in a number of nineteenth-century British prose writers, see Logan.

4 For a contemporary text which discusses nervousness in Proust, see Finn. Also, Bruccoli points out that “Proust became [Fitzgerald’s] most admired French writer” (*Epic Grandeur* 238).

5 For an extensive discussion of attitudes toward sexuality and gender in several World War I poets, see Adrian Caesar.

6 Although Bryson’s point is valid, the phrase “Age of Anxiety” more accurately describes the latter half of the twentieth century, as I discuss in chapter six.
CHAPTER TWO

NERVOUS MOTHERS, RESTLESS CHILDREN,
AND ENERVATION: EARLY WORK
AND THIS SIDE OF PARADISE

On September 24, 1896, F. Scott Fitzgerald was born to Edward Fitzgerald and Mary McQuillan in St. Paul, Minnesota. His father, originally from Maryland, could trace his ancestry back to the colonial period, and his sympathies were definitely with the South:

"Mary Surratt, Edward's first cousin, was hanged for conspiracy in Lincoln's assassination, and as a boy Edward guided Confederate spies during the Civil War" (Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 11-12). His mother, on the other hand, was the daughter of an Irish immigrant who had settled in St. Paul and amassed a small fortune in business ventures. In a letter to John O'Hara from 1933, Fitzgerald himself described the tension created by his ancestry:

I am half black Irish and half old American stock with the usual exaggerated ancestral pretensions. The black Irish half of the family had the money and looked down upon the Maryland side of the family who had, and really had, that certain series of reticences and obligations that go under the poor shattered word "breeding" (modern form "inhibitions"). So being born in that atmosphere of crack, wise crack and countercrack I developed a two cylinder inferiority complex. So if I were elected King of Scotland tomorrow after graduating from
Eton, Magdelene the Guards with an embryonic history which tied me to the
Plantagonets, I would still be a parvenue. I spent my youth in alternately crawling
in front of kitchen maids and insulting the great. (LL 233)

In addition, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s early life was marked by frequent relocations. After
the failure of his furniture factory in St. Paul, Edward Fitzgerald took a job with Proctor
and Gamble which led the family to Buffalo, New York in 1898; to Syracuse, New York
in 1901; then back to Buffalo in 1903. In 1908 Edward Fitzgerald lost his job with
Procter and Gamble and the family returned to St. Paul, and the young Scott would spend
the remainder of his boyhood in the Middle West until his departure for the Newman
prep school in Hackensack, New Jersey in 1911, although he would return home during
breaks.

In the previous chapter I have attempted to trace in general terms the nervous
discourse Fitzgerald inherited in early twentieth-century America. It is precisely the time
in which Fitzgerald lived and wrote which places him in a unique position for us to
examine the development of nervous discourse in his text, and I cannot overstate the
prevalence of nervous discourse during this period of American history. In 1907, while
the young Fitzgerald was living in Buffalo, a New York Times article, referring to the
“course of heroic treatment which Secretary of State Root has been taking at a sanitarium
... for nervous exhaustion and the effects of overwork,” states, “Not without reason has
nervous prostration been called the ‘National disease.’” The article also maintains that
“Health Department figures for 1906, not yet published, show ... There were 76,203
deaths in Greater New York last year and 6,046—nearly 10 percent—were due to nervous
collapse” (“Problem of Finding”). In 1920, the year This Side of Paradise was published,
another New York Times article quotes a report by the State Conservation Commission which points out that "'Students of our social and industrial conditions are satisfied that the human organism has not yet adapted itself to the high nervous tension of modern life'" ("Unrest Laid to Nerves").

However, Fitzgerald’s social position also makes his work an ideal focus for this type of study. First, his father’s economic failures in the highly competitive and rapidly expanding industrial and commercial world of early twentieth-century America certainly introduced Fitzgerald at a very early age to the "high nervous tension of modern life" described in the Times article above. However, the business failures of his father also put the young Fitzgerald in a unique social position: Fitzgerald’s mother’s capital would come to provide the primary source of income for the family, and although this allowed Fitzgerald a comfortable life in the fashionable Summit Avenue neighborhood of St. Paul, the Fitzgeralds moved frequently in and out of rented houses and apartments, which became "a source of chagrin for Scott" (Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 24). Furthermore, as Matthew Bruccoli points out,

In a neighborhood of imposing houses known by their owners’ names, Scott was keenly aware of his father’s failure. He was Molly McQuillan’s boy, not Edward Fitzgerald’s son. He played with children of the well-to-do . . . but he felt that he was an outsider. Moreover, he was embarrassed by his mother, who dressed carelessly and sometimes seemed mildly confused. (Epic Grandeur 24)

Thus Fitzgerald would move in the circle of the upper class, yet never truly feel a part of that circle. Nevertheless, this position allowed the young Fitzgerald to critically observe that upper class. This is of significance because, as I have indicated previously,
nervousness and nervous exhaustion (neurasthenia) were generally associated with the elite members of society. While nervous discourse was increasingly appropriated by the lower classes throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, in the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, it still retained connotations which linked it to the upper class, and we shall clearly see this in Fitzgerald’s characterization of Beatrice O’Hara in *This Side of Paradise*.

Yet Fitzgerald’s social position is also important because it would play a significant part in his decision to enroll at Princeton University in the fall of 1913, and Fitzgerald’s formal education is another factor which makes his work relevant to this type of study. In *This Side of Paradise*, Amory Blaine says, “I think of Princeton as being lazy and good-looking and aristocratic—you know, like a spring day” (31), and the young Fitzgerald, like Amory, was drawn to these qualities. However, Fitzgerald’s freshman year at Princeton would expose him to an institutionalized form of nervous discourse, and he would encounter this in Hygiene 101 (Personal Hygiene).¹ *The Catalogue of Princeton University 1913-1914* provides the following description of this course:

A discussion of the fundamentals of health and physical efficiency: the influence of diet, exercise, bathing and sleep; the effects of personal habits; the use of alcohol and tobacco; and a study of the more common infectious diseases—their nature, causes, methods of transmission and prevention. . . . Reference books: Hough and Sedgwick, Woodhull, and Pyle. Freshman course, both terms, 1 hour a week. (182)

While I have been unable to determine which of these three texts Fitzgerald used in his section of Hygiene 101, I have identified them as Theodore Hough and William T.
Sedgwick’s *The Human Mechanism: Its Physiology and Hygiene and the Sanitation of Its Surroundings* (1906), Alfred A. Woodhull’s *Personal Hygiene Designed for Undergraduates* (1906), and an anthology edited by Walter L. Pyle: *A Manual for Personal Hygiene: Proper Living upon a Physiologic Basis* (1910). A brief examination of each of these texts will demonstrate not only that Fitzgerald encountered nervous discourse in an academic setting, but also to what extent nervous discourse pervaded ideas at this time.

First of all, each of these works devotes a substantial discussion to the human nervous system and its proper maintenance, and each text associates nervous problems with the hurry, unrest, and worry caused by modern living. Hough and Sedgwick point this out in the following passage:

> For no student of the practical problems of hygiene can shut his eyes to the marked prevalence of nervous prostration and even insanity, or fail to recognize the evident connection between these things and the intensity, the hurry, and the unrestful character of the lives we lead. Probably there is no more pressing problem of practical hygiene than that which is here presented. (335)

Woodhull, on the other hand, focuses his discussion more upon the physiological aspects of the nervous system, yet he also recognizes the impact that stress can have upon the nervous system, as well as the impact of substance abuse: “But after all worry is more responsible than work for nervous breakdown, and the abuse of tobacco and other nervous depressants is a close second in the causation of neurasthenia or nervous prostration, so called” (108). In Pyle’s anthology, J. W. Courtney, a physician for
diseases of the nervous system at Boston City Hospital, likewise connects nervous prostration with stressful living:

These two factors, heredity and education, are the most important elements among what we may term the predisposing agents in the genesis of the morbid state under consideration [neurasthenia]. As a strong third comes occupation. The prolific inventor, the broker on the stock exchange, and others whose business affairs entail perennial emotional unrest, are found in the majority in the now great army of neurasthenics. School-teaching also seems to be fraught with danger. (284)

However, another element in these Hygiene 101 texts is their emphasis on morality. First, there is a clear connection between morality and nervous health. For instance, J. W. Courtney in Pyle’s text clearly states the significance of morality in the proper functioning of the nervous system: “Every physician whose duties bring him much in contact with the victims of nervous and mental disease will unhesitatingly endorse the statement that the nervous and mental health of a nation is in direct relation to its moral health. The greatest scourges of the nervous system are syphilis and alcohol . . .” (291). In addition, the danger of ill health is associated with immoral behavior: Hough and Sedgwick maintain that “it is not too much to say that much of the ill health from which men and women suffer is to be traced primarily to the absence of sound moral sense or to its abnormal or perverted development” (345).

Nevertheless, I do not wish to overemphasize the significance one college course had upon the young Fitzgerald. One can certainly detect aspects of nervous discourse in Fitzgerald’s juvenilia, as in “The Room With the Green Blinds,” first published in June
1911 when the author was 14 years old. Here the narrator says, “Though I am not troubled with weak nerves, I confess I was somewhat startled by this . . .” (AF 40). However, as Fitzgerald developed as a young writer at Princeton, his work shows further evidence of nervous discourse in more interesting ways. For instance, one of his earliest college publications, “Shadow Laurels,” first published in April 1915 (after Fitzgerald had completed Hygiene 101), demonstrates that nervous has developed additional significations.

“Shadow Laurels” was created as a one-act play in which an American, Jacques Chandelle, travels to Paris to find out information about his deceased father whom he has not seen in over twenty years, and many critics have viewed this work as the first in which Fitzgerald examines his attitude toward his own father. In an unfinished essay written after the death of his father in 1931, Fitzgerald says, “He came from tired old stock with very little left of vitality and mental energy but he managed to raise a little for me” (AF 67). Clearly, the “vitality” and “mental energy” Fitzgerald speaks of can be associated with nervous energy; however, I will say more regarding this in chapter five. Yet “Shadow Laurels” has another significance for us here, as the young Chandelle meets his father’s three friends. One of these friends, Francois Meridien, is repeatedly described as nervous: Upon his entrance, we are told that “His face is pitifully weak, his eyes small, his chin sloping. He is very nervous” (AF 73). After Chandelle introduces himself, “Francois begins to laugh nervously” (73), and later, “Again Francois laughs nervously” (73).

Yet why is Francois so clearly defined as a nervous character? Consider the following aspects of the play: as Chandelle discusses his father with these men, Francois
eagerly quaffs down wine, "draining his glass and pouring out more" (AF 73). And as another bottle of wine is brought out, "Francois seize it and eagerly pours himself another glass" (74). At the end of the play, Francois is saying, "I want—just one glass more—one more—" (77). In addition, one of Francois' friends says of him, "Do you realize that back of Francois there, despite his fine phrases, there is a character as weak as water, a mind as shallow as—" (75). However, Francois' response to this provides some additional indication of why he is a nervous character: "But Monsieur, you must know—I leave the gift of—of—(helplessly) I can't name it—appreciation, artistic, aesthetic sense—call it what you will. Weak—yes, why not? Here I am, with no chance, the world against me. I lie—I steal perhaps—I am drunk—I—" (75). Francois' nervousness clearly indicates his innate weakness, yet this weakness has obvious moral connotations, as Francois admits to lying and stealing. Furthermore, we can also attribute Francois' nervousness to his abuse of alcohol, which, as we have seen in the Hygiene 101 texts above, was regarded as one of the "greatest scourges of the nervous system." And although the connection between nervousness and weakness is in keeping with the nervous discourse which I have outlined in the previous chapter (and which remains with us still), there is another element to Francois' nervousness: Francois is the character with "fine phrases" and "artistic, aesthetic sense." Hence Francois' nervousness also indicates that he possesses a delicate and refined nervous system, one which makes him capable of an artistic sense, and this aspect of nervous discourse is one which can be traced back to Georgian notions of sensibility. As I discussed in the previous chapter, from the eighteenth century onward, more delicate and exquisite nerves came to be associated with a greater degree of sensibility and imagination.
Therefore, while the nervous discourse Fitzgerald inherited and utilized in his work differs substantially from the vestiges of that discourse which remain with us today, that is, while nervous and its derivatives (nerve, nervously) had significations and connotations for Fitzgerald and his readers which we do not recognize today, we must bear in mind that the historical development of any word is a gradual process; the meaning of a word is never fixed and static. Thus it is impossible to expect a consistent significance for each instance of nervousness in Fitzgerald’s texts. Rather, Fitzgerald’s use of nervous discourse reveals its changing nature during this period, and hence the word nervous and its derivatives will be employed in a variety of ways. At times, the usage will be virtually identical with our own contemporary usage; however, at other times, although the usage will seem identical to ours, a closer examination will demonstrate that it in fact is not. In addition, the changing nature of nervous discourse during Fitzgerald’s era allowed him to utilize this to create an additional layer of ambiguity in his work, developing a richness which is often overlooked by contemporary readers today.

This Side of Paradise provides two prime examples of the type of ambiguity which could be achieved through nervous discourse in Fitzgerald’s era. These examples not only reflect the changing nature of that discourse, but actually demonstrate the word nervous in transition. In the first chapter of Book One, Amory attends a production of “The Little Millionaire” in New York, and “walked down the aisle of the theatre, greeted by the nervous twanging and discord of untuned violins” (TS 35). Here the word nervous can be interpreted in both its pre-Enlightenment sense as well as its modern one. First, the “nervous twanging and discord of untuned violins” reflects a usage which stems back
to the older sense of nerve as a sinew or tendon; the strings of the violins are indeed “nervous” in the sense that they are sinewy strings. However, the word nervous also has another meaning: the musicians tuning their instruments before the show impart their own nervousness before the performance to the instruments they are tuning; thus the “nervous twanging” accurately reflects the excitement and agitation that exists before the performance, an excitement felt by both the musicians and the young Amory. Another example of nervous discourse in transition can be seen in the third chapter of Book One, in a section entitled “The Devil.” In this rather bizarre passage which Bruccoli maintains “dramatizes the connection in Amory’s mind between sex and evil” (Epic Grandeur 125), Amory has a hallucination of the devil: “Amory noticed his hands; they weren’t fine at all, but they had versatility and a tenuous strength . . . they were nervous hands that sat lightly along the cushions and moved constantly with little jerky openings and closings” (TS 109). Here the usage again illustrates both the pre-Enlightenment and modern senses of nervous. First, the hands of the devil possess a “tenuous strength” and thus are “nervous” in the older sense of being sinewy and strong, yet they are likewise “nervous” in the sense that they are agitated; they “moved constantly with little jerky openings and closings.” Hence these hands seem to possess two contradictory qualities, nervous strength as well as nervous agitation, and the second quality intimates a sense of weakness. However, this combination heightens the surreal and supernatural quality of the experience Amory is having. (The phrase “tenuous strength” likewise connects two contradictory elements in this passage.)

Marianne Dekoven has asserted that “Most definitions and descriptions of modernism, and many of the modernists’ own statements on aesthetic practice, resort to
tropes that bespeak an aesthetic of *sous-rature*, tropes such as the famous irony, tension, ambiguity, and paradox of the New Criticism,” and she further maintains that

Empson’s “seventh type of ambiguity” is perhaps its ultimate formulation: “an example of the seventh type of ambiguity... occurs when the two meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind.” F. Scott Fitzgerald claimed that “the test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” (24-25)

I believe Dekoven’s quotation of Fitzgerald’s famous statement from *The Crack-Up* in relation to Empson’s description of his seventh type of ambiguity accurately reflects an aspect of Fitzgerald’s aesthetic practice, one which demonstrates his association with the modernist movement. Therefore, in both of the examples above from *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald appears to consciously manipulate nervous discourse to create ambiguity which enhances the work.

However, other elements of nervous discourse during this period of Fitzgerald’s career are not ambiguous in nature, and one of the most prominent examples of this is the character of Amory’s mother, Beatrice, in *This Side of Paradise*. Mizener points out that “Beatrice O’Hara was Fitzgerald’s sharp memory of an actual person, ‘the mother of a friend of mine, whose name I cannot mention’” (117), yet also recognizes the “fundamental quality of his [Fitzgerald’s] imagination [which] appears in the description of Beatrice O’Hara...” (116).² However, regardless of its origin, it is Fitzgerald’s description of Beatrice which is relevant here: first, Fitzgerald makes it clear that
Beatrice is a member of the upper class, as “Early pictures taken on her father’s estate at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, or in Rome at the Sacred Heart Convent” demonstrate “an educational extravaganza that in her youth was only for the daughters of the exceptionally wealthy” (TS 11). Furthermore, Fitzgerald emphasizes and distinguishes the time period during which Beatrice was raised:

All in all Beatrice O’Hara absorbed the sort of education that will be quite impossible ever again, a tutelage measured by the number of things and people one could be contemptuous of and charming about, 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. (TS 12)

Sklar has accurately pointed out that Fitzgerald “plac[es] her culturally in an already bygone era, the gilded age” (39), yet what is particularly noticeable about Beatrice is her preoccupation with her (as well as her son’s) nerves: “From his [Amory’s] fourth to his tenth year he did the country with his mother in her father’s private car, from Coronado, where his mother became so bored that she had a nervous breakdown in a fashionable hotel, down to Mexico City” (TS 12). Also, consider some of Beatrice’s statements to young Amory: “‘Dear, don’t think of getting out of bed yet. I’ve always suspected that early rising in early life makes one nervous’” (12). “‘I am feeling very old today, Amory, . . . My nerves are on edge—on edge. We must leave this terrifying place tomorrow and go searching for sunshine’” (12). “‘I want you to take a red-hot bath—as hot as you can bear it, and just relax your nerves’” (13). Later we are told that “there were certain stories, such as the history of her constitution and its many amendments . . . that it was necessary for her to repeat at certain intervals. Like Freudian dreams they must be
thrown off, else they would sweep in and lay siege to her nerves” (13). And finally, after Amory’s operation for a burst appendix, “Beatrice had a nervous breakdown that bore a suspicious resemblance to delirium tremens” (15).

It is obvious that Fitzgerald deliberately characterizes Beatrice as being preoccupied with nerves and nervous health, and this is a reflection of Beatrice’s gender, social status, and her generation. First, Beatrice is a woman, and, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, women were considered to be especially susceptible to nervous ailments, since their nervous systems were thought to be more fragile than a man’s. In fact, Andrew Turnbull reports that Fitzgerald said to his secretary in 1935 that “Women are so weak really—emotionally unstable—and their nerves, when strained, break. They can endure more physical pain than men, and also more boredom. The boredom that they endure is incredible, but they can’t take nerve or emotional strain” (261). In addition, Beatrice is a member of the upper class who was raised during the late nineteenth century, a period during which nervousness became a national health concern, particularly for the elite members of society.

Yet it also appears that Fitzgerald deliberately caricatures nervousness in his description of Beatrice, as her first nervous breakdown stems from boredom, while her second bears a resemblance to delirium tremens. Hence it is clear that Beatrice’s nervousness is an affectation, one which is even used to mask her alcoholism. Hebel has maintained that This Side of Paradise is “a surprisingly accurate index of the American cultural scene in the second decade of the twentieth century” and is “a well-directed assault on sentimental popular culture”; thus the novel “manifests an intertextual variation of modernism’s alleged anti-sentimental bias” (149). In light of this,
Fitzgerald's characterization of Beatrice's nervousness can also be seen as an attack upon sentimental popular culture, specifically, popular culture's obsession with nervousness, and this further serves to illustrate that *This Side of Paradise* stands out as a modernist text.

However, I do not wish to imply that Fitzgerald was capable of consistently and consciously manipulating nervous discourse to achieve his desired effects. The nervous discourse which Fitzgerald inherited also manifests itself in other ways in his work, and these serve to illustrate that Fitzgerald unconsciously appropriated nervous discourse as well. In "Benediction," first published in 1920, Fitzgerald presents another nervous mother, this time one who appears to genuinely suffer from nervous illness. We are told that Lois, the daughter, "was going to give her very best imitation of undiluted sunshine, the imitation she could give even when ... her mother had a nervous breakdown" (*FP* 137). Later, Lois tells her brother of their mother: "'Oh Keith—she's—she's getting worse all the time. every way.'" and her brother responds with. "'Nervous, well--you can tell me about that later'" (138). Yet it is Keith's description of their mother's nervous behavior which indicates what nervousness implied for Fitzgerald:

"It seems to me that when one weak person goes to another, it isn't help they want; it's a sort of companionship in guilt, Lois. After you were born, when mother began to get nervous she used to go and weep with a certain Mrs. Comstock. Lord, it used to make me shiver. She said it comforted her, poor old mother. No, I don't think that to show others you've got to show yourself at all. Real help comes from a stronger person whom you respect. And their sympathy is all the bigger because it's impersonal."
“But people want human sympathy,” objected Lois. “They want to feel the other person’s been tempted.”

“Lois, in their hearts they want to feel that the other person’s been weak. That’s what they mean by human. [sic]

“Here in this old monkery, Lois,” he continued with a smile, “they try to get all that self-pity and pride in our own wills out of us right at the first.” (142-43)

In this passage, while Keith does not deny the validity of his mother’s nervous condition, he does indicate that this nervousness is linked to weakness, as well as “self-pity and pride in our own wills.” The implication is subtle, yet significant: nervousness indicates weakness (as it still connotes today), yet Keith’s statements also suggest that “self-pity” and “guilt” are associated with this weakness. Furthermore, these concepts become connected with the will, as if nervousness can be linked to a failure of the will. These concepts are in keeping with the ideas outlined in the previous chapter: nervousness during Fitzgerald’s era was seen as a weakness which had moral connotations (hence the use of the word guilt), and this weakness was often associated with a failure of the will.

Yet another nervous mother appears in Fitzgerald’s fiction during the period under consideration as well. In “The Four Fists,” first published in June 1920, the young Samuel Meredith “had been brought up on a diet of caviar and bell-boys’ legs in half the capitals of Europe, and it was pure luck that his mother had nervous prostration and had to delegate his education to less tender, less biased hands” (FP 174). Here, once again, a mother associated with the upper social class is the victim of nervous prostration, yet what is particularly interesting is the impact this nervous mother has had on her son: after his mother suffers nervous prostration, young Samuel Meredith is sent to the
Phillips Andover Academy prep school, and here his roommate Gilly “endured in silence young Samuel’s comments on the clothes and habits of Gilly’s personal friends, endured French phrases in conversation, endured a hundred half-feminine meannesses that show what a nervous mother can do to a boy, if she keeps close enough to him” (170). The implication here is that the pampering of a nervous mother can emasculate her son, which can be seen when Samuel subjects his roommate to “half-feminine meannesses.”

Furthermore, Samuel’s behavior provokes Gilly to punch Samuel in the nose, and as a result of this, when Samuel “went home for the Christmas holidays he was so despondent that his father sent him to a nerve specialist” (171). Therefore, Samuel also appears to suffer from weak nerves, either from heredity or because of the influence his nervous mother has had on him.

However, what I wish to emphasize in “The Four Fists” is the connection between nervousness and cultural attitudes toward gender, since nervousness in this story is clearly connected with femininity. In addition to the example above, this is further reinforced through the basic plot of the story, which describes how four fists serve to “educate” Samuel Meredith: “The blow years before at Andover had landed on his personal unpleasantness; the workman of his college days had jarred the snobbishness out of his system, and Marjorie’s husband had given a severe jolt to his greedy selfishness” (FP 179). Samuel also receives a fourth and final fist as he attempts to close a business deal which involves manipulating ranchers in the Southwest in order to buy their oil-rich land for an East-coast entrepreneur. Thus Samuel’s education has been a particularly “manly” one, as the blows to his face have eradicated his personal flaws and weaknesses.
In the closing paragraph of the story, Fitzgerald sums up the impact the four fists have had upon Samuel Meredith:

If you could run your hand along Samuel Meredith’s jaw you’d feel a lump. He admits he’s never been sure which fist left it there, but he wouldn’t lose it for anything. He says there’s no cad like an old cad, and that sometimes just before making a decision, it’s a great help to stroke his chin. The reporters call it a nervous characteristic, but it’s not that. It’s so he can feel the gorgeous clarity, the lightning sanity of those four fists. (185)

Here the narrator makes a point of stating that Samuel’s habit of stroking his chin is not a nervous characteristic: in fact, it appears that Samuel has overcome the nervous weakness brought on by his mother through the beatings he has received in life. Samuel’s effeminacy, moral weakness, and nervous weakness have been eliminated by the four fists which have, in a sense, “made a man of him.” This point about gender is reinforced by an assessment made by Frances Kerr: “Over his lifetime, Fitzgerald made a number of statements to acquaintances that mirror the distinction often drawn by the modernist avant-garde between the intellectual and emotional vigor of true manhood and feminine debility. In these statements, Fitzgerald usually appears to identify with men in a contempt for feminine weakness” (406). As I have already discussed, nervous discourse in Fitzgerald’s era reflected cultural attitudes toward gender, and this can be seen in a good deal of Fitzgerald’s fiction. However, as Kerr herself recognizes in her assessment of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald’s fiction also appears to have an ambivalent attitude toward gender at times (411).
While we have examined the significance of nervous mothers, these characters stand in marked contrast to the majority of other characters in Fitzgerald's fiction during this period, since these other characters, such as Amory Blaine, represent a new generation. That is, while the nervous mothers represent the gilded age of the late nineteenth century, the younger generation is the "modern" generation of the twentieth century. In addition, while the mothers of the previous generation succumb to nervous prostration, suggesting a lack of nervous energy, the newer generation does not. Instead, the increased nervous tension of modern civilization—so often cited as the source of nervous illness—does not affect the younger characters in the same way in Fitzgerald's fiction during this period. Rather, these younger characters appear to embrace the hurried, restless tempo of modern life. In "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," first published in 1920, we are told that "youth in this jazz-nourished generation is temperamentally restless" (SS 28). In This Side of Paradise, Amory announces, "'I'm more than bored; I am restless'" (198), and later reiterates the same point: "'I'm restless. My whole generation is restless'" (256). These characters, instead of succumbing to nervous collapse, appear to have an abundance of nervous energy which accounts for their restlessness. And while the notion of restlessness was in keeping with contemporary ideas about the fast pace of modern civilization, Amory's attitude toward this hurried tempo of modern life is different from conventional attitudes: "'Modern life,' began Amory again, 'changes no longer century by century but year by year, ten times faster than it ever has before—populations doubling, civilizations unified more closely with other civilizations, economic interdependence, racial questions, and—we're dawdling along. My idea is that we've got to go very much faster'" (251-52). Therefore, while the previous generation lamented the fast pace of modern life and
looked with nostalgia upon the past, the new generation—Fitzgerald's generation—accepts this modern era and even wishes that it would move along faster. In fact, this can be considered another aspect of *This Side of Paradise* which distinguishes it as a text associated with modernity.

However, another story from this period, "Dalyrimple Goes Wrong," first published in 1920, presents a character who acts as a foil to Fitzgerald's restless generation. The basic plot of the story describes Bryan Dalyrimple, a World War I hero quickly forgotten by society, who is forced by financial need to take a job in the stock room of a wholesale grocery house. Passed over for raises and promotions while less competent relatives and friends of the boss receive these, Dalyrimple becomes a burglar to supplement his meager income. and the following passage describes how Dalyrimple justifies his actions:

"Other men who broke the laws of justice and charity lied to all the world. He at any rate would not lie to himself. He was more than Byronic now: not the spiritual rebel, Don Juan; not the philosophical rebel, Faust; but a new psychological rebel of his own century—defying the sentimental a priori forms of his own mind—" (FP 160). Thus it appears that Dalyrimple is another representation of Fitzgerald's modern, restless generation, this time a "psychological rebel" of the twentieth century, one who is able to put aside traditional notions of morality. Furthermore, Dalyrimple is never made to pay for his crimes: rather, a powerful political figure offers to get Dalyrimple elected for the State Senate. However, it is Dalyrimple's fellow worker in the stock room, Charley Moore, who functions as a foil to the restless generation:

Charley was twenty-six, with that faint musk of weakness hanging about him that is often mistaken for the scent of evil. It took no psychological examiner to
decide that he had drifted into indulgence and laziness as casually as he had drifted into life, and was to drift out. He was pale and his clothes stank of smoke; he enjoyed burlesque shows, billiards and Robert Service, and was always looking back upon his last intrigue or forward to his next one. In his youth his taste had run to loud ties, but now it seemed to have faded, like his vitality, and was expressed in pale-lilac four-in-hands and indeterminate gray collars. Charley was listlessly struggling against mental, moral, and physical anaemia that takes place on ceaselessly on the lower fringe of the middle classes. (154)

It is clear that Charley is not a member of the restless generation. Rather, his “weakness,” “laziness,” and self-indulgence, particularly noticeable in his enjoyment of the diversions associated with popular culture, mark him as the antithesis of many of Fitzgerald’s other young, modern characters. Likewise, the notion that Charley’s “vitality” has “faded” and that he is “listlessly struggling against mental, moral, and physical anaemia” further reinforces the fact that Charley is not restless or infused with nervous energy. Yet it is difficult not to notice Charley’s social status, since Fitzgerald makes a point of stating that the “anaemia” Charley suffers from “takes place ceaselessly on the lower fringes of the middle class.” This, of course, begs a question: is the restlessness of Fitzgerald’s modern generation reserved for those in the upper classes of society? At this early point in Fitzgerald’s career, I believe so, and this reflects a point made in the last chapter regarding social status and nervous discourse, specifically, that nervous discourse still had connotations which linked it to the upper class in the early twentieth century. While it was recognized that the lower classes suffered from mental illness (insanity), nervousness was associated with the elite, with the brain-workers of
society. In support of this, it is significant that Charley is not described as nervous in “Dalyrimple Goes Wrong.”

Nevertheless, as I have already shown, the majority of Fitzgerald’s restless generation did possess nervous energy, and this is further illustrated through other elements of nervous discourse in Fitzgerald’s fiction during the period under discussion. For instance, the word nervous is often employed in a sense which is quite different from our contemporary one. That is, rather than signifying agitation, timidity, or worry, nervous instead is regularly used in a positive sense, one which has no connotations of weakness, to indicate a sense of nervous energy. This can be clearly seen in a passage Fitzgerald first used in “The Spire and the Gargoyle” (first published in 1917) and later incorporated into This Side of Paradise: “The college dreamed on--awake. He felt a nervous excitement that might have been the very throb of its slow heart” (TS 58). While the pairing of the word nervous with excitement allows the contemporary reader to understand the intended meaning here, consider the following passage, also from This Side of Paradise: “Amory was in full stride, confident, nervous, and jubilant. Scurrying back to Minneapolis to see a girl he had known as a child seemed the interesting and romantic thing to do, so without compunction he wired his mother not to expect him . . . sat in the train, and thought about himself for thirty-six hours” (61). In this passage the word nervous appears incongruous between the words confident and jubilant. However, the passage does not indicate that Amory was feeling agitated or timid about his upcoming visit with Isabelle, but rather was excited and eager, infused with nervous energy. We can again see this type of usage in This Side of Paradise in the description of
Bume Holiday: "They were striding toward the woods, Bume's nervous, enthusiastic voice warming to his subject" (124).³

However, Fitzgerald's fiction during this period also employed the word *nervous* in the sense which we still use it today to indicate agitation or timidity. A good example of this occurs in *This Side of Paradise* in the description of young debutantes, particularly in a passage describing Isabelle (a portion of which Fitzgerald first used in "Babes in the Woods," first published in 1917): "The sensations attributed to divers on spring boards, leading ladies on opening nights and lumpy, husky young men on the day of the Big Game, crowded through her," and, accordingly, "She caught a slight lump of nervousness in her throat" (*TS* 63). However, on some occasions, even though the usage pattern is consistent with our own, there are connotations associated with nervousness which are worthy of attention. For example, the dialogue between Eleanor and Clay in "Sentiment -- and the Use of Rouge," first published in 1917, comments on the loss of sexual morals associated with modern life--and specifically how this has been affected by World War I:

"Next enter Mr. Mars. You see as long as there was moral pressure exerted, the rotten side of society was localized. I won't say it wasn't spreading, but it was spreading slowly, some people even thought, rather normally, but when men began to go away and not come back, when marriage became a hurried thing and widows filled London, and all traditions seemed broken, why then things were different."

"How did it start?"

"It started in cases where men were called hurriedly away and girls lost their nerve. Then the men didn't come back--and there were the girls—." (*AF* 153)
Although the usage pattern here is not problematic, since girls “lost their nerve” in the sense that they lost their fortitude or strength, what is significant is that the above passage demonstrates the connection between nervous discourse and morality: the girls “lost their nerve” in the sense that they lost their moral fortitude or strength; they surrendered their chastity before marriage, as can be seen when Eleanor says, “Young men going to get killed for us.—We would have been their wives—we can’t be—therefore we’ll be as much as we can” (154).

In his Introduction to the above story, Kuehl points out that “Although Fitzgerald favored an honest recognition of the sexual facts of life and the newly won freedom of women, he objected to the loosening of morals attendant upon the new honesty and new freedom” (142), while Bruccoli asserts that Fitzgerald “remained puritanical about sex” (Epic Grandeur 79). These assessments of Fitzgerald’s attitude toward sexuality must be kept in mind when analyzing the discussion of Freudian theories that occurs in This Side of Paradise. In the third chapter of Book Two, Eleanor says, “‘I’m hipped on Freud and all that, but it’s rotten that every bit of real love in the world is ninety-nine percent passion and one little soupcon of jealousy’” (220). Yet Amory’s response to this is quite interesting:

“You see everyone’s got to have some cloak to throw around it. The mediocre intellects, Plato’s second class, use the remnants of romantic chivalry, diluted with Victorian sentiment,—and we who consider ourselves the intellectuals cover it up by pretending that it’s another side of us, has nothing to do with our shining brains: we pretend that the fact that we realize it is really absolving us from being
a prey to it. But the truth is that sex is right in the middle of our purest abstractions, so close that it obscures vision.” (220)

From this passage, it seems clear that Fitzgerald was at least acquainted with Freud’s theories when composing This Side of Paradise. However, the larger context of the novel demonstrates that Amory, while familiar with Freud’s ideas, is certainly unwilling or incapable of embracing these ideas fully. In addition to the hallucination of the devil which I have discussed previously, the following passage from the final chapter of the novel presents Amory’s conception of sexuality:

The problem of evil had solidified for Amory into the problem of sex. He was beginning to identify evil with the strong phallic worship in Brooke and the early Wells. Inseparably linked with evil was beauty—beauty, still a constant rising tumult; soft in Eleanor’s voice, in an old song at night, rioting deliriously through life like superimposed waterfalls, half rhythm, half darkness. Amory knew that every time he had reached toward it longingly it had leered out at him with the grotesque face of evil. Beauty of great art, beauty of all joy, most of all the beauty of women.

After all, it had too many associations with license and indulgence. Weak things were often beautiful, weak things were never good. (TS 258)

Certainly, someone who associates sex with evil has not truly reconciled himself to Freudian notions of human sexuality. I point this out here because I do not believe that Fitzgerald, at this point in his career, was fully willing to accept the ideas of Freud. This also is in keeping with what I have said in the previous chapter regarding Freud’s theories: they were not readily accepted by the American medical community or popular
culture in the early portion of the twentieth century. However, as I will discuss in chapter five, Fitzgerald's attitude toward Freud and psychoanalysis would change.

One final aspect of nervous discourse which can be seen in the early years of Fitzgerald's career is the theme of enervation. The *OED* demonstrates that the word *enervate* stems from the Latin prefix *e-* combined with *nervus*, and it literally means "to extract the sinews of," and, hence, to "weaken." One can detect a derivative of the word enervate in "The Trail of the Duke," first published in 1915 when Fitzgerald was sixteen years old, in which he describes a hot July night in New York City: "From out the night into the houses came the sweltering late summer heat, over-powering and enervating, bursting against the walls and enveloping all mankind like a huge smothering blanket. In the drug stores, the clerks, tired and grumbling handed out ice cream to hundreds of thirsty but misled civilians. . . ." (AF 54). In this passage, the heat robs people of energy, resulting in "tired and grumbling" clerks. However, the notion of the enervating quality of heat is developed most prominently in "The Ice Palace," first published in 1920, which describes a Southern girl's visit to an unnamed Northern city, the home of the man she plans to marry. Yet what is particularly interesting is the how the concept of energy—or the lack thereof—figures in the story. As Kuehl has pointed out, "If the South and its embodiment, Sally Carrol, are associated with inertia, the North and its embodiment, Harry Bellamy, are associated with energy" ("Psychic" 173).

The enervating quality of the South, which is directly related to its hot climate, is apparent throughout the story. Even in the opening lines, the hot climate and Sally's lack of energy are impossible to overlook:
The sunlight dripped over the house like golden paint over an art jar, and freckling shadows here and there only intensified the rigor of the bath of light. . . . Sally Carrol gazed down sleepily. She started to yawn, but finding this quite impossible unless she raised her chin from the window-sill, changed her mind and continued to silently regard the car. . . . Sally Carrol sighed voluminously and raised herself with profound inertia from the floor. . . . She approached a mirror, regarded her expression with a pleased and pleasant languor. . . . Then she kicked over the painting water, said, “Oh, damn!”—but let it lay—and left the room. (SS 48-49)

Furthermore, even the physical description of the Southern landscape demonstrates the lack of energy associated with heat:

Farther out were lazy cotton-fields, where even the workers seemed intangible shadows lent by the sun to the earth, not for toil, but to while away some age-old tradition in the golden September fields. And round the drowsy picturesqueness, over the trees and shacks and muddy rivers, flowed the heat, never hostile, only comforting, like a great warm nourishing bosom for the infant earth. (52)

In the final section of the story, after Sally has returned to the South, the enervating quality of its climate is again emphasized:

The wealth of golden sunlight poured a quite enervating yet oddly comforting heat over the house where day long it faced the dusty stretch of road. . . . Sally Carrol Happer, resting her chin on her arm, and her arm on an old window-seat, gazed sleepily down over the spangled dust whence the heat waves were rising for the first time this spring. . . . “Hate to move,” sighed Sally Carrol lazily. . . . (69)
In contrast, the North and its inhabitants are clearly connected with energy: the initial description of Harry Bellamy states that he is “tall, broad, and brisk” (SS 52), while his father has “energetic dignity” (61). As Sally travels north on the train, “she experienced a surging rush of energy and wondered if she was feeling the bracing air of which Harry had spoken” (55). And after she has arrived in the North, Harry says to Sally, “I don’t guess this is a very kissable climate, is it? I mean, it makes you so you don’t want to sit round, doesn’t it?” (57), which illustrates that the cold climate is related to the energy of the North. In addition, the energy of the North breeds success, as Harry points out to Sally:

“There’s Spud Hubbard, tackle at Princeton last year, and Junie Morton—he and the red-haired fellow next to him were both Yale hockey captains; Junie was in my class. Why, the best athletes in the country come from these States round here. This is a man’s country, I tell you. Look at John J. Fishburn! . . . Greatest wheat man in the Northwest, and one of the greatest financiers in the country.” (57-58)

Yet the success associated with the North is also contrasted with the South, which is associated with failure. This can be seen in Sally’s conversation with one of her Southern friends, Clark, in the opening section of the story: when Clark asks Sally if she thinks all of her Southern friends will be failures, she says, “Yes. I don’t mean only money failures, but just sort of—of ineffectual and sad. . . . you . . . never want to change things or think or go ahead. . . . The things that’ll make you fail I’ll love always—the living in the past, the lazy days and nights you have, and all your carelessness and generosity” (51). However, this passage likewise indicates another source of difference between
North and South: while the South lives in the past, the North embraces the future and progress. This is apparent when Sally takes Harry to a graveyard in her beloved South; as they pass the graves of Confederate soldiers, Sally says, "they died for the most beautiful thing in the world—the dead South" (53-54). On the other hand, when Sally visits the North, Harry points out the difference to her:

"you Southerners put quite an emphasis on family, and all that... but you’ll find it a little different here. ... just remember that this is a three-generation town. Everybody has a father, and about half of us have grandfathers. Back of that we don’t go... Our grandfathers, you see, founded the place, and a lot of them had to take some pretty queer jobs while they were doing the founding." (56-57)

Therefore, the North, where people do not trace their ancestry beyond their grandfathers, is a land of social mobility and progress. It is a place where the past is not cherished and one’s ancestry is inconsequential, a modern world where energetic men forge a new, successful future for their progeny.

However, Kuehl has also recognized that "Geographical antithesis... poses masculine against feminine" ("Psychic" 174). This could be seen in the passage above in which Harry refers to the North as a "man’s country"; however, it is also more clearly expressed by Sally in her conversation with Roger Patton while in the North:

"You see I always think of people as feline or canine, irrespective of sex."

"Which are you?"

"I’m feline. So are you. So are most Southern men an’ most of these girls here."

"What’s Harry?"
"Harry’s canine distinctly. All the men I’ve met to-night seem to be canine."

"What does ‘canine’ imply? A certain conscious masculinity as opposed to subtlety?"

"Reckon so." (SS 59)

By directly introducing the issue of gender, Fitzgerald links energy, success, and modernity to masculinity, while associating enervation, failure, and the past with the feminine. This is in keeping with cultural attitudes regarding gender in Fitzgerald’s time, since the masculine is prioritized in this dichotomy. Also, this once again demonstrates the intersection of nervous discourse with the subject of gender. However, "The Ice Palace" will not fit quite so neatly into this dichotomy of gender.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the contrast between North and South in "The Ice Palace" emphasizes the energizing, cold climate of the former with the enervating heat of the latter. Furthermore, while the North represents modernity and success, the South is associated with the past and failure. And lastly, the North and all that it represents—energy, modernity, and success—is masculine, while the South and all that it represents—enervation, the past, and failure—is characterized as feminine. Thus nervous discourse through the concept of enervation becomes intertwined with ideas about modernity, success (which determines social status), and gender, and these are all linked to geography in "The Ice Palace."

Of course, the conception of "The Ice Palace" must certainly be connected to Fitzgerald’s experience with Zelda, since Fitzgerald, a native of Minnesota, was courting a Southern belle. In addition, Bruccoli points out that the story was written after Fitzgerald returned to St. Paul after paying a visit to Zelda in Montgomery (Epic
Nevertheless, I agree with Kuehl's assessment that "the author projected his divided nature through a young woman in 'The Ice Palace'" ("Psychic" 172). This can clearly be seen when Sally speaks to Clark about why she cannot marry a Southerner:

"You've a place in my heart no one else ever could have, but tied down here I'd get restless. I'd feel I was—wastin' myself. There's two sides to me, you see. There's the sleepy old side you love: an' there's a sort of energy—the feelin' that makes me do wild things. That's the part of me that may be useful somewhere, that'll last when I'm not beautiful anymore." (SS 51)

Sally's "two sides" thus reinforce the dichotomy in the story which we have already examined: one side is "restless" or infused with "energy," which represents the modern generation, while the other side is the "sleepy old side" associated with enervation and the past. Kuehl makes a point of discussing Fitzgerald's ancestry in his analysis of "The Ice Palace" ("Psychic" 170), and it is difficult not to connect the North-South dichotomy with Fitzgerald's father and mother: that is, one has to wonder to what extent Fitzgerald's "divided nature" was represented by his father and mother. As I mentioned earlier, Fitzgerald's father had Southern sympathies and could trace his lineage to the colonial period, and in the previously quoted letter written about his father, Fitzgerald describes him as having "very little left of vitality and mental energy." On the other hand, Fitzgerald's mother was from the North, and her father, an Irish immigrant who accomplished the American dream by becoming financially successful in his modern world, certainly demonstrated that he had no lack of energy. Yet what is particularly striking here is the reversal of gender implicit in this: the North, associated with energy, success, and the masculine, represents Fitzgerald's mother, while the enervation, failure,
and femininity of the South represent Fitzgerald's father. This gender reversal is reinforced by the fact that Fitzgerald's mother was the breadwinner in the family, since her capital would come to provide the primary source of income, while Fitzgerald's father was a financial failure. Of course, this was contrary to traditional gender roles in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, this gender reversal perhaps sheds an additional light upon a famous statement which Turnbull has attributed to Fitzgerald: "I don't know what it is in me or that comes to me when I start to write. I am half-feminine—at least my mind is" (259). While Fitzgerald here appears to link his artistic ability to a "feminine" part of his mind, reflecting a point made in the last chapter about artistic ability being connected to a highly refined and sensitive nervous system—a concept associated with femininity—it also reveals Fitzgerald's acceptance of a feminine aspect of himself. Therefore, "The Ice Palace" may ultimately say more about Fitzgerald's ambivalent attitude toward gender, rather than simply reaffirming conventional cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity in his era.

Yet there is one final reason that Fitzgerald is an ideal author to study in terms of nervous discourse: Zelda. Fitzgerald first met Zelda in the summer of 1918 and they began courting. Although their relationship became more serious, Zelda broke off their plans for marriage in June of 1919, unconvinced that Fitzgerald was capable of becoming successful and providing for her financially. This Side of Paradise describes a very similar situation between Amory and Rosalind: Rosalind refuses to marry Amory because of his limited income, saying, "Marrying you would be a failure and I never fail" (TS 181). She says of herself, "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" (183). Yet at the beginning of their meeting, before Rosalind tells Amory that she can’t marry him, she responds to Amory’s request to “Tell [him] everything” with, “There’s nothing to tell, I say. I’m just nervous” (180). However, I will discuss the significance of this nervousness at length in chapter four, since Fitzgerald would make extensive use of this in his fiction written during that period. Of course, after This Side of Paradise was accepted for publication in September of 1919, Fitzgerald’s engagement to Zelda was resumed, and they were married on April 3, 1920, just 8 days after the publication of his first novel.

Yet there is a more obvious and significant reason why Fitzgerald’s relationship with Zelda has relevance to a study of nervous discourse in his work: Zelda’s mental illness forced Fitzgerald to directly deal with and consider the health and function of the nervous system. In her biography of Zelda, Milford maintains that even early in Scott and Zelda’s relationship, before their marriage, “[Zelda] had a nervous habit of biting the skin on her lips, which irritated Scott and which she tried hard to break. But it began again, she said, as she ‘relapsed into a nervous stupor. It feels like going crazy knowing everything you do and being utterly powerless not to do it—’” (50). Although this may not be an omen of Zelda’s future mental illness, it does reveal that what Zelda described as a “nervous stupor” is clearly connected to a failure of her will, a point discussed in chapter one. In other words, Zelda associated her nervousness with a weak will; she was unable to harness the willpower to stop this behavior, even though she was fully aware of everything she was doing. However, Bruccoli reports that by 1925 “Zelda experienced at least one episode of ‘nervous hysteria’ that required a morphine injection” (Epic
And in 1930, Zelda’s deteriorating mental condition would force her to enter the Malmaison clinic near Paris. From this point forward, Zelda was in and out of various mental health facilities for the rest of her life. However, I will discuss Zelda’s condition and its impact on Fitzgerald more thoroughly in chapter five, since this chapter deals with the time period during which Zelda suffered her first breakdown.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Fitzgerald’s time period, his social position and education, as well as his relationship with Zelda all connected him with nervous discourse, and his early work and *This Side of Paradise* reveal elements of that discourse, particularly through nervous mothers, restless children, and enervation. Although by 1921 *This Side of Paradise* had established Fitzgerald as a prominent, young American author of the new generation, as Fitzgerald grew older and matured as a writer, his work continued to utilize and manifest elements of nervous discourse, often in ways which not only reflect that nervousness became intertwined with other cultural discourses, but which also reinforce the very themes of his work.
Notes

1 Fitzgerald appears to make a reference to this course in Tender is the Night, when Dick alludes to "freshman year at New Haven when he had come upon a popular essay about 'mental hygiene'" (199). Also, I have been unable to uncover any significant information regarding the psychology course Fitzgerald took during his sophomore year at Princeton; however, the following passage from This Side of Paradise may reveal something about the content of the course and Fitzgerald's attitude toward it: "even psychology, which he has eagerly awaited, proved to be a dull subject full of muscular reactions and biological phrases rather than the study of personality and influence. That was a noon class, and it always sent him dozing" (80).

2 One is tempted to quote a letter Fitzgerald sent to Maxwell Perkins on February 20, 1926, in which he refers to his mother as "a neurotic, half insane with nervous pathological worry" (LL 138). However, a longer selection from the letter suggests that Fitzgerald was probably not speaking seriously here, and I do not think this statement can be regarded as a sober and accurate indication of Fitzgerald's attitude toward his mother. And although Bruccoli maintains that she "seems to have been considered a bit eccentric" (Epic Grandeur 13), and that Fitzgerald, as I pointed out earlier, "was embarrassed by his mother, who dressed carelessly and sometimes seemed mildly confused." I have found no concrete evidence to demonstrate Fitzgerald's mother suffered from nervousness.

3 Also of significance is Burne Holiday’s conception of the will, stated shortly after this: "On the return he launched into a discussion of will. ‘It’s the whole thing,’ he asserted. ‘It’s the dividing line between good and evil. I’ve never met a man who led a rotten life and didn’t have a weak will’" (TS 124-25). Burne's statement reveals the
moral significance attributed to a weak will, and, as I discussed in chapter one, one of the consequences or causes of nervousness was believed to be a weak will.
CHAPTER THREE

DISSIPATION AND HYSTERIA VERSUS
EFFICIENCY: THE BEAUTIFUL AND
DAMNED AND RELATED STORIES

In 1920, after the publication of This Side of Paradise and his marriage to Zelda, Fitzgerald found himself propelled into fame. At the beginning of an era known as the “roaring twenties.”

The twenty-three-year-old author and the nineteen-year-old Alabama girl were celebrities—young, handsome, rich (so it seemed), with no one to exercise authority over them. They were interviewed; they rode on the roofs of taxis; they jumped into fountains; there was always a party to go to. Regarding the days of his conquest of New York form the perspective of 1932, Fitzgerald wrote: “... I remember riding in a taxi one afternoon between very tall buildings under a mauve and rosy sky; I began to bawl because I had everything I wanted and knew I would never be so happy again.” (Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 134-35)

However, an essential element of this riotous lifestyle was alcohol, regardless of the fact that Prohibition was in effect. Matthew Bruccoli reports that at this time, “Fitzgerald was an incipient alcoholic whose drinking behavior became increasingly unpredictable,” and that he began to demonstrate a “growing dependence on alcohol” (Epic Grandeur 135). Consequently, the use—and abuse—of alcohol becomes a significant theme within
Fitzgerald’s fiction during this period, and is specifically associated with the idea of “dissipation.”

In chapter one, when discussing the connection between nervous discourse and conceptions of morality in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, I quoted Lutz’s assertion that the “idea of ‘dissipation’ thus is based on a notion of dispersed rather than directed nerve force, spent without any possible return on the investment.” While Lutz’s statement is certainly correct, the idea of dissipation can actually be traced further back to the eighteenth century. In fact, the changing meaning of the word dissipation itself demonstrates that it developed into another element of the nervous discourse which emerged during the Enlightenment.

Dissipation stems from the Latin dissipare, meaning “to scatter, disperse,” and while the word still retains this meaning, it also has developed another signification, demonstrated by the OED:

Distraction of the mental faculties or energies from concentration on serious subjects: at first often with colourless sense, as the scattering or distraction of attention, or with laudatory sense, as the dispelling of melancholy or sadness; diversion, amusement: but later implying the frittering away of energies or attention upon frivolities, and thus gradually passing into sense 6 . . . . Waste of the moral and physical powers by undue or vicious indulgence in pleasure; intemperate, dissolute, or vicious mode of living.

However, the 1788 usage example from Rev. John Wesley (1703-1791) demonstrates when this shift in meaning occurred. Wesley’s sermon “On Dissipation” states the following:
Almost in every part of our nation, more especially in the large and populous towns, we hear a general complaint, among sensible persons, of the still increasing *dissipation*. . . . From the continual mention which is made of this, and the continual declamations against it, one would naturally imagine that a word so commonly used was perfectly understood. Yet it may be doubted whether it be or no. Nay, we may very safely affirm, that few of those that frequently use the term, understand what it means. One reason of this, that although the thing has been long among us, especially since the time of king Charles the second, (one of the most dissipated mortals that ever breathed,) yet the word is not of long standing. It was hardly heard of fifty years ago; and not much before the present reign. So lately has it been imported: and yet it is so in every one's mouth, that it is already worn threadbare; being one of the cant words of the day. (191)

Wesley continues on to point out that "The original word properly signifies to *disperse*, or *scatter*." yet for his purposes maintains that "whenever the mind is unhinged from God, it is so far dissipated or distracted. Dissipation then, in general, may be defined, the uncentering the soul from God" (193). However, Wesley's following statement clearly indicates what *dissipation* had come to mean in common usage by the end of the eighteenth century: "The vulgar, it is true, commonly confine this [dissipated] character to those who are violently attached to women, gaming, drinking; to dancing, balls, races, or the poor childish diversion of 'running foxes and hares out of breath'" (193).

Therefore, Wesley's comments clearly reveal that a new signification developed for *dissipation* during the course of the eighteenth century, and this change in meaning developed concurrently with the rise of nervous discourse I traced in chapter one. The idea of dissipation reflected the scattering or waste of energy, an energy which was
rooted in the nervous system, and the "dissipation" of this nervous energy clearly became linked with conceptions of morality.

In Fitzgerald's fiction during the period under discussion, the theme of dissipation is developed extensively and always connected with drinking, and characters who lead lives of dissipation ultimately end up in ruin, having wasted their nervous energy. The first work which begins to develop this theme is "May Day," first published in 1920. While the idea of dissipation in this story is made evident through the drunken escapades of a number of characters, I wish to focus on the protagonist, Gordon Sterrett. A number of critics have pointed out that "Gordon is a rendering of Fitzgerald himself—or, more accurately, an imaginative projection of what could have happened to him the previous spring" (Petry 66), when Fitzgerald was living in New York and working for an advertising agency, unsuccessful as an author and unable to win the hand of Zelda. However, while Fitzgerald would ultimately achieve his desires, this is not the case for Gordon, whose dissipation will ultimately lead to his destruction. As Gordon relates his plight to his friend at the beginning of the story, we have a clear indication of the life Gordon has been living: after returning from France after World War I, he moved to New York and obtained a job with an exporting company (from which he has just been fired), yet Gordon explains, "everybody began to come back from France in droves—and all I did was to welcome the newly arrived and go on parties with them. That's the way it started . . . just from being glad to see everyone and having them glad to see me" (SS 101). James W. Tuttleton asserts that Gordon is "too self-indulgent" ("Slightly Red" 183), which is certainly true, and Gordon has been too preoccupied with going on parties, or living a life of dissipation. Now broke, unemployed, and pressured for money by a woman of the lower class who can "make trouble . . . if she doesn't get it" (SS 101),
Gordon has reached his breaking point, prompting Gordon's friend to say, "'You seem to be bankrupt—morally as well as financially'" (102). While I will say more regarding nervous bankruptcy in chapter five, it becomes clear in the story that Gordon indeed has little nervous energy left. As Gordon walks through the streets of New York, he is "reminded of how often he had been one of the crowd, tired, casually fed, overworked, dissipated." and immediately following this, as he and his fellow Yale graduates lunch together, they are "warmed with liquor as the afternoon began" (104). Eventually Gordon meets his old girlfriend, Edith, who realizes that "Something was wrong... He was pitiful and wretched, a little drunk, and miserably tired" (117). Yet it is Gordon's statements to Edith and her reaction which best illustrate his condition:

"I'm a little crazy. Something's wrong with me, Edith. There's something left me... Things have been snapping inside me for four months like little hooks on a dress, and it's about to come off when a few more hooks go. I'm very gradually going loony...."

As he talked she saw he had changed utterly. He wasn't at all light and gay and careless—a great lethargy and discouragement had come over him. (118)

Thus something has indeed "left" Gordon: nervous energy. Furthermore, the notion of something "snapping" suggests another image: that of an overwrought nervous system which has broken down. Therefore, Gordon Sterrett, through dissipation, has depleted his nervous energy, and "May Day" culminates with Gordon awaking in a hotel room with a hangover, smelling "stale cigarette smoke and stale liquor" (141), and realizing he has gotten married; he purchases a revolver and commits suicide.

Yet another short story from this period which presents a "dissipated" character is "The Popular Girl," first published in 1922. In this story a minor character, the
protagonist's father, is presented as a habitual drinker: we are told that his daughter "tried in a placid unruffled tempo to regulate his constant tippling to the sober side of inebriety" (FP 264). Interestingly, while the daughter is embarrassed by her father's drunken behavior in the story, the dissipation in and of itself is not the source of her discomfort: "Had her father been carried to bed by two butlers each evening she might even have been proud of the fact that he could afford such dissipation..." (274).

Nevertheless, the father's drinking or dissipation is apparent in the story. At one point the daughter is amazed at her father's ability to recover so quickly from his inebriation, yet "his eyes, crisscrossed with tiny red lines, were evidence of his late dissipation" (280). And the ultimate effect of the father's dissipation is dramatic: having dissipated his nervous energy, he conveniently dies early in the story (which also allows Fitzgerald to develop the plot, which focuses on the daughter's attempts to survive after her father's death).

However, the work which best traces the effects of dissipation on characters is Fitzgerald's 1922 novel, The Beautiful and Damned. In a 1920 letter to Charles Scribner II, Fitzgerald described the novel he was working on:

My new novel, called "The Fight of the Rocket" [The Beautiful and Damned], concerns the life of one Anthony Patch between his 25th and 33d years (1913-1921). He is one of those many with the tastes and weaknesses of an artist but with no actual creative inspiration. How he and his beautiful young wife are wrecked on the shoals of dissipation is told in the story. (LL 41)

Yet while the narrator in The Beautiful and Damned does speak of Anthony and Gloria Patch's "increasingly irregular, increasingly dissipated life" (BD 277), the gradual dissipation of these characters can be traced not through the use of the word dissipation,
but rather through their increasingly "nervous" behavior. In the previous chapter I pointed out that alcohol was considered one of the "greatest scourges of the nervous system," and I have demonstrated that the idea of dissipation is actually associated with the development of nervous discourse. As Dr. Robert S. Carroll points out in The Mastery of Nervousness Based Upon Self Reeducation, "to all who surrender and allow perverted nervous action to become habit, the penalty of wasted and misused vital energy will assert itself as 'nervousness'" (14). Therefore, the dissipation resulting from the abuse of alcohol can be seen in increasingly "nervous" behavior, and this is most clearly demonstrated in Anthony and Gloria Patch.

At the beginning of the novel Anthony is described as "nervous as a will-o'-the-wisp, restless" (BD 20), and Gloria is called "'a nervous kind—said she always ate gumdrops at teas because she had to stand around so long in one place'" (48), which reconfirms the positive signification of nervousness with restlessness which I discussed in the previous chapter. However, this nervousness is distinctly different from the nervous behavior which plagues Anthony and Gloria as their "increasingly dissipated" lives develop, since the text clearly demonstrates that alcohol is having a detrimental effect on their nervous systems. After a night of heavy drinking, Gloria awakes to find

she could smell whiskey and cigarette-smoke. She noticed that she lacked complete muscular control; when she moved it was not a sinuous motion with the resultant strain distributed easily over her body—it was a tremendous effort of her nervous system as though each time she were hypnotizing herself into performing an impossible action. . . . (219)

And after another evening of drunkenness, we find Anthony and Gloria's "overwrought nerves responding as acutely and jangingly to mirth as to depression" (225). Hence it is
clear that heavy drinking is weakening Anthony and Gloria’s nervous systems, dissipating their vital nervous energy. Furthermore, the text indicates that “both of them seemed vaguely weaker in fibre, not so much in what they did as in their subtle reactions to the civilization around them” (278). This notion of being “weaker in fibre” also can be viewed as an element of nervous discourse, since the link between nerves and fibres is relatively obvious and can be seen at least as far back as Cheyne’s *The English Malady*, in which Cheyne often uses the terms almost interchangeably and points out that nerves are one of the fibres of the body: “the Nerves being only some of these Fibres the most susceptible, by their Structure of communicating Action and Motion, made use of to convey such Impressions, as they receive from outward Objects, or the other Fibres . . .” (65).

However, Anthony’s dissipation and its effect on him is certainly more severe than Gloria’s, and one of the ways this is initially manifested is through a weakening of his will, reflecting the connection between nervousness and a weak will which I discussed in chapter one: the narrator tells us, “if his will had deteriorated in these past three years, so had his power to resist urging” (BD 280). In addition, the impact of alcohol on Anthony’s nervous system demonstrates another element of nervous discourse, that of sensibility, as when the narrator points out that “Except when Anthony was drinking, his range of sensation had become less than that of a healthy old man,” and, accordingly, “In the mornings Anthony awoke tired, nervous, and worried” (388). However, toward the end of the novel, “Anthony . . . was drunk each day,” though “very rarely, with Gloria” (416), and the effect on him is dramatic. We are told that “He was nervous and craving for a drink” (420), and that “With a few glasses the tension of his nerves relaxed and he found that he could think again” (421). He is described as “abominably drunk” and
"seemed to decay and coarsen under [Gloria's] eyes" (423). Moreover, the dissipation of his nervous energy is apparent: "He awoke in the morning so nervous that Gloria could feel him trembling in the bed before he could muster enough vitality to stumble into the pantry for a drink" (423), and Anthony develops a "stooped and flabby figure whose very sag was a document in lethargy" (444). In addition, we find "Anthony pacing the floor in a state of aggravated nervousness" (424), and saying, "'I've got to have a drink. I'm so darn nervous that I'm shivering''' (429). Finally, at the end of the novel, Anthony's nervous system has broken down; he is sitting on the floor playing with his stamp collection, evidently having reverted back to his childhood, saying to Gloria and Dick Caramel, "'you two get out--now, both of you. Or else I'll tell my grandfather'" (447). In the final scene a fellow passenger on the ship Anthony and Gloria are sailing off on says, "'He's been a little crazy, they say . . .''' (448). Thus Anthony's dissipation of his nervous energy has resulted in mental collapse, and Anthony's final thoughts are an ironic attempt to justify the life of dissipation he has led.

Gloria, on the other hand, does not decline so dramatically, although it is clear that the life she has led has had an effect on her. Early in the novel, before their marriage, the text demonstrates that Gloria does not drink as heavily as Anthony: when Gloria asks Anthony if he drinks all the time, he says, "'Why, I suppose so'" (BD 87). Yet Gloria says of her drinking, "'I go on parties sometimes--you know, about once a week, but I only take two or three drinks. You and your friends keep on drinking all the time. I should think you'd ruin your health'" (87). However, while Gloria drinks more heavily after her marriage to Anthony, she never is described as being drunk each day. Although she is "nervous and bored" (305), the most pronounced element of Gloria's nervousness can be seen in her "nervous" habit of chewing on things, as when she would "gnaw on
her finger like a nervous child” (279), or when, “in a highly nervous condition,” she is
described as having “bitten the insides of her mouth until they were raw and smarting”
(402), and this does not appear to be related to her dissipation, but rather seems to reflect
some of Zelda's behavior which I mentioned in the previous chapter. Nevertheless,
Gloria does deteriorate during the course of the novel, though this is specifically
associated with the loss of her youth and beauty. For instance, after taking a screen test
for a part in a movie, she is told that they “needed a younger woman” (403), which
prompts Gloria to sob and say, “'Oh, my pretty face! Oh, I don't want to live without my
pretty face! Oh, what's happened?''" (404). And in another passage, “Each night when
she prepared for bed she smeared her face with some new unguent which she hoped
illogically would give back the glow and freshness to her vanishing beauty” (416).
However, there also appears to be a moral element in Gloria's decline, prompting one of
her fellow passengers on the ship in the final scene of the novel to say, “'She seems sort
of--sort of dyed and unclean, if you know what I mean'” (448), and I will clarify the
moral implications of being “unclean” at a later point.

Nevertheless, while Gloria does indeed decline over the course of the novel, another
reason Gloria's dissipation of her nervous energy is less severe than Anthony's stems
from the fact that she is clearly the stronger of the two characters. This seems to reflect
an aspect of Fitzgerald's own relationship with Zelda at this time; Matthew Bruccoli
maintains that “When he began the novel after six months of marriage, Fitzgerald
perceived that his wife was . . . the stronger--or less flexible--character” (Epic Grandeur
155). In The Beautiful and Damned, after Anthony and Gloria's marriage, “Anthony
found that he was living with a girl of tremendous nervous tension and of the most high-
headed selfishness” (BD 157). Gloria's “tremendous nervous tension,” connected with
her "high-handed selfishness," clearly marks her as one of Fitzgerald's nervous female characters, which I will discuss at length in chapter four. However, a number of passages also suggest that Gloria has an ample supply of energy which will not be so quickly dissipated. For example, Gloria is often described as possessing or suffusing vitality, as when "Gloria appeared . . . bringing atmosphere and an increase of vitality" (213), or when Anthony realizes that with Gloria, "he [fell] before a personality more vital, more compelling than his own" (324). In addition, it appears that Anthony often drains Gloria's ample supply of energy, particularly her "moral" energy: after Anthony has left to join the army, we are told that "Recently, without his continual drain upon her moral strength she found herself wonderfully revived" (371), and after Anthony's return, "It required an astonishing amount of moral energy on Gloria's part to intimidate him into returning [to his latest attempt at work]" (381).

However, in contrast to Gloria's strength and ample supply of energy, Anthony is repeatedly described as a weak character. Even early in the novel, Anthony himself seems to acknowledge his innate weakness: "--If I am essentially weak, he thought, I need work to do, work to do. I worried him to think that he was, after all, a facile mediocrity . . ." (BD 55). Of course, throughout the novel Anthony never really succeeds in working; his attempts instead end up as "a triumph of lethargy" (215). Furthermore, another aspect of Anthony's weakness is his cowardice, which Gloria discovers after their marriage: "Gloria knew within a month that her husband was an utter coward toward any one of a million phantasms created by his imagination," and this "trait first showed itself in a dozen incidents of little more than nervousness—hisl warning to a taxi-driver against driving fast, in Chicago; his refusal to take her to a certain tough cafe she had always wished to visit" (157). However, this cowardice becomes obvious to Gloria
when Anthony imagines that someone is attempting to break into their hotel window and he telephones for help. A hotel employee, after investigating, points out in a "tone half of the servant, half of the teacher reproving a schoolboy" that the hotel window is fifty feet above the street and that Anthony simply heard the wind tugging at the blind (159). Yet Anthony attempts to justify his behavior by saying, "'I've been nervous as the devil all evening'" and "'I'm awfully darn nervous to-night'" (160). Later, the narrator refers to Anthony's "imaginative 'nervousness'" (179), indicating that Anthony attempts to use "nervousness" as an excuse for his fear and cowardice, which reinforces the implication that Anthony is weak and also links nervousness with its contemporary signification of weakness and timidity, which I discussed in chapter one. By the end of the novel, Anthony is described as "irritable, weak, and poor" (359), as "Anthony the poor in spirit, the weak and broken man with bloodshot eyes" (393), and even Gloria says to him, "'You're just a pitiful weakling and you always have been!'" (375). One wonders to what extent Anthony's weakness and lack of nervous energy can be attributed to his social status, since he is the grandson of the millionaire Adam Patch and is described as "a member of the leisure class" (330). However, the narrative inconsistency which a number of critics have detected in the novel makes it difficult to come to any conclusion regarding this. As Bruccoli points out, "At times the author seems to credit Anthony and Gloria with a certain integrity of irresponsibility, casting them as victims of philistia; but Fitzgerald's moralizing compulsion takes over as the novel becomes a warning prophecy for the Fitzgeralnds' own marriage" (Epic Grandeur 155). Therefore, I will say more regarding Fitzgerald's changing description of the connection between nervous energy and social class when discussing "The Rich Boy" in the next chapter.
Another element of nervous discourse in *The Beautiful and Damned* which must be addressed is hysteria. The word *hysteria,* derived from the Greek word for the womb or uterus, has obvious gender implications, and hysteria has received a great deal of attention from scholars in recent years.\(^1\) However, while I do not wish to reiterate the various interpretations of hysteria and its historical development, there are two elements of hysteria that relate to this study. First, it can safely be asserted that hysteria, which predates the development of nervous discourse, became integrated as another element of that discourse during the eighteenth century. As Logan has pointed out, “Hysteria became known as a disorder of the nervous system rather than the uterus during the Enlightenment and remained so throughout the nineteenth century. . . . However, at the end of the nineteenth century Breuer and Freud redefined hysteria as originating in mental, rather than physical, causes . . .” (8). Second, hysteria remained associated with ideas about gender. While hysteria was traditionally viewed as a female disorder, Rousseau discusses the fact that “Shakespeare conceived of a male hysteric [in Lear] in an era when the doctors had observed few” (“Pathology” 129), and Showalter has recognized that “male hysteria has been documented since the seventeenth century” (“Hysteria” 288). Likewise, Micale devotes a portion of his study to “Hysteria—The Male Malady” (161-68). However, as Showalter has pointed out, “hysteria in men has always been regarded as a shameful, ‘effeminate’ disorder,” and she provides a number of examples which extend well into the twentieth century to demonstrate this (“Hysteria” 289). Thus hysteria has retained gender implications and has been consistently linked to femininity, even when diagnosed in males.

However, some examples of usage from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can better illustrate both of these points. In the early eighteenth century, Bernard Mandeville,
in *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases*, published in 1730, states that “the Cause of the Hysterick Passion in Women . . . is the same with that of the hypochondriack Passion in Men,” and that “the Labour of the Brain has so great a Part in exhausting the Spirits in Men, as to be always one of the Procatartick [procatalectic] Causes of the hypochondriack Passion . . .” (238). Mandeville’s assertion that the “Labor of the Brain” exhausts the “Spirits” is an early formulation of the notion of nerve force, and hysteria and hypochondria are the seen as the result of a depletion of nervous energy. Furthermore, the significance of gender is apparent in the above passage: while both hysteria and hypochondria apparently have the same cause, hysteria is reserved for women, and hypochondria for men. Clearly, the etymology of *hysteria* makes it virtually impossible for Mandeville to diagnose men as hysterical. Hence Mandeville’s statements confirm Elaine Showalter’s assertion that “Doctors made a firm gender distinction between forms of nervous disorder, assigning hysteria to women and hypochondria to men” (“Hysteria” 293).

In the nineteenth century, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” first published in 1839, also demonstrates the connection between hysteria and the nervous system as well as the gender implications associated with it. At the beginning of the story, Roderick Usher’s letter to the narrator “gave evidence of nervous agitation” (Poe 3: 274), and upon meeting Usher, the narrator again notes “an excessive nervous agitation” (3: 279). Usher himself describes “the nature of his malady” as “a constitutional and a family evil . . . a mere nervous affection” (3: 280), and the nervous illness of Roderick Usher can be associated with a number of the elements of nervous discourse discussed in this study, particularly the ideas of degeneration and sensibility. As the above passage indicates, Usher’s “nervous affection” has clearly been inherited: both Roderick and his
sister suffer from the disorder which is "a constitutional and a family evil," and the narrator comments on "the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all-time honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent . . ." (3: 275). Furthermore, the narrator refers to this as a "deficiency" on two occasions (3: 275), implying that the Usher family suffers from nervous degeneration, a theme which I will discuss in chapter five, particularly as it relates to incest, a predominant element of Poe’s story. In addition, we are told that the "very ancient [Usher] family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself through long ages, in many works of exalted art. . . . and easily recognizable beauties, of musical science" (3: 275). While Carter has referred to "The Fall of the House of Usher" as an example of "decadent sensibility" (51), what the tale certainly demonstrates for our purposes is the connection between a highly refined nervous system and the heightened sensibility necessary for the artist. However, this highly refined nervous system is also much more liable to break down, particularly if it has degenerated through successive generations, as in the case of Roderick Usher, who "suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses" (Poe 3: 280). Nevertheless, to return to the hysterical element of the story, both Roderick and his sister appear to lack nervous energy: Roderick has "a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy" (3: 278), while his sister suffers from "A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptic character . . ." (3: 282). Yet, interestingly, Roderick Usher is referred to as a "hypochondriac" on three occasions in the tale (3: 283, 287, 292), and only once is the word hysteria used: "there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes— an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanor" [original italics] (3:
Thus, while Poe's story verifies the connection between hysteria and nervous discourse, it also reinforces the gender implications of hysteria: the male character is a hypochondriac, and on the one occasion when Poe does refer to his "restrained hysteria," the word is italicized, since hysteria retained a signification which was associated with women, revealing the etymological origins of the word.

Since I wish to scrutinize not only what the disorder known as hysteria meant for Fitzgerald, but also what the words _hysteria_ and _hysterical_ had come to mean in his early twentieth-century texts, we must also bear in mind that by Poe's era _hysterical_ was also being used in a figurative sense to indicate what the _OED_ describes as "morbidly emotional or excited." Therefore, in Poe's "Shadow. A Parable," the narrator says, "Yet we laughed and were merry in our proper way—which was hysterical" (Poe 2: 148-49), and this usage does not appear to have any gender connotations. Likewise, in _The Beautiful and Damned_, Fitzgerald uses the terms in the same sense, as when, in commenting on American attitudes toward World War I, "only the German Government . . . aroused them to hysteria" (BD 307), or when Anthony and Gloria go on a "prolonged hysterical party" (390).

Nevertheless, there are other uses of _hysteria_ and _hysterical_ in Fitzgerald's text which require further analysis, since, at times, the usage patterns seem to reinforce cultural attitudes toward gender. At one point, Anthony chastises Gloria for turning to religion, saying, "And if you must have a faith to soften things, take up one that appeals to the reason of some one beside a lot of hysterical women" (BD 303-04), and in another passage, the narrator describes the train station from which Anthony departs for the Army, calling it "a hysterical area, foul with yellow sobbing and the smells of poor women" (309). In both of these passages, the usage patterns reflect the gender
implications of hysteria, and hysterical behavior is connected with unreasonable or overemotional women.

However, there are two more intriguing uses in *The Beautiful and Damned*. One particularly perplexing passage occurs on the night before Anthony’s wedding, when he overhears a couple engaged in some sexual activity:

It was then that a new note separating itself jarringly from the soft crying of the night. It was a noise from an areaway within a hundred feet from his rear window, the noise of a woman’s laughter. It began low, incessant and whining—some servant maid with her fellow, he thought—and then it grew in volume and become hysterical, until it reminded him of a girl he had seen overcome with nervous laughter at a vaudeville performance. Then it sank, receded, only to rise again and include words—a coarse joke, some bit of obscure horseplay he could not distinguish. It would break off for a moment and he would just catch the low rumble of a man’s voice, then begin again—interminably; at first annoying, then strangely terrible. He shivered, and getting up out of bed went to the window. It had reached a high point, tensed and stifled, almost the quality of a scream—then it ceased and left behind it a silence empty and menacing as the greater silence overhead. Anthony stood by the window a moment longer before he returned to his bed. He found himself upset and shaken. Try as he might to strangle his reaction, some animal quality in that unrestrained laughter had grasped at his imagination, and for the first time in four months aroused his old aversion and horror toward all the business of life. The room had grown smothery. He wanted to be out in some cool and bitter breeze, miles above the cities, and to live serene
and detached back in the corners of his mind. Life was that sound out there, that
ghastly reiterated female sound.

"Oh my God!" he cried, drawing in his breath sharply. (BD 149-50)

While the above passage seems to reveal some of Fitzgerald's own issues regarding
sexuality which I mentioned in the previous chapter, the "hysterical" laughter of the
woman which reminds Anthony of a girl "overcome with nervous laughter" marks an
intersection between hysteria and nervous discourse in the work. Yet this woman's
"hysterical" laughter which possesses an "animal quality" and is referred to as a "ghastly
reiterated female sound" begs interpretation. However, we must first examine the
passage in which the notion of female "hysterical animality" recurs in the novel:

The distinction between "good" and "bad," ordered early and summarily out of
both their lives, had been reinstated in another form. Gloria insisted that any one
invited to the gray house must be "good," which, in the case of a girl, meant that
she must be either simple and reproachless or, if otherwise, must possess a certain
solidity and strength. Always intensely sceptical of her sex, her judgments were
now concerned with the question of whether women were or were not clean. By
uncleanliness she meant a variety of things, a lack of pride, a slackness in fibre
and, most of all, the unmistakable aura of promiscuity.

"Women soil easily," she said, "far more easily than men. Unless a girl's very
young and brave it's almost impossible for her to go down-hill without a certain
hysterical animality, the cunning, dirty sort of animality. A man's different--and I
suppose that's why one of the commonest characters of romance is a man going
gallantly to the devil." (234-35)
Gloria here restates the familiar sexual double standard: promiscuity in men is gallant, while in women it leads to being “unclean” and “dirty.” Also, the “slackness in fibre” Gloria perceives in these “unclean” women reflects an element of nervous discourse mentioned previously, one which here has obvious moral implications. Yet it is clear that the use of the word *hysterical* in both of the passages above is linked exclusively to the feminine gender, and pairing the word with an “animal quality” or “animality” certainly evokes connotations of licentiousness and makes a definitive moral indictment: the “hysterical animality” of women and “the ghastly reiterated female sound” Anthony hears signify that sexuality in women must be restrained. In a word, *hysteria* serves to reinforce cultural attitudes toward sexuality and gender. Furthermore, in light of this, the passage discussed earlier in which Gloria is described as “unclean” by one of her fellow passengers aboard the ship in the final scene of the novel unquestionably represents a strong moral condemnation of her character and marks the final element of her decline. In addition, since Gloria—unlike her husband—never is involved in any marital infidelity, the source of this condemnation is not her promiscuity, but rather her “slackness in fibre,” caused by her life of dissipation.

Yet there is one final element of hysteria in *The Beautiful and Damned* which must be analyzed, and this is the fact that Anthony Patch appears to suffer from a bout of hysteria. On one occasion, after visiting his mistress during his stint in the Army, Anthony returns to camp late and impersonates an officer to avoid trouble. For this, Anthony is reduced in rank and confined to the limits of his company street, yet “within a week he was again caught down-town, wandering around in a drunken daze, with a pint of boot-leg whiskey in his hip pocket” (*BD* 350). Now sentenced to the guardhouse, Anthony here appears to suffer from hysteria:
Early in his confinement the conviction took root in him that he was going mad. It was as though there were a quantity of dark yet vivid personalities in his mind, some of them familiar, some of them strange and terrible, held in check by a little monitor, who sat aloft somewhere and looked on. The thing that worried him was that the monitor was sick, and holding out with difficulty. Should he give up, should he falter for a moment, out would rush these intolerable things—only Anthony could know what a state of blackness there would be if the worst of him could roam his consciousness unchecked. (350)

After his release from confinement, Anthony comes down with influenza, and we are told that “He was aware that this sickness was providential. It saved him from a hysterical relapse” (352). It seems reasonable to conclude that Anthony’s hysteria is connected with his life of dissipation, in which his immoral ways and waste of nervous energy have resulted in a loss of self-control. Yet what is particularly interesting about Anthony’s hysteria is that it seems to reflect some Freudian ideas: the “little monitor” corresponds to the ego, which is holding in check the “intolerable things” trying to emerge from Anthony’s subconscious or id. While this appears to demonstrate that Fitzgerald was acquainted with some elements of Freud’s theories and that he was attempting to utilize them in his fiction, it also reveals that Fitzgerald was not thoroughly familiar with Freud’s work. In the first chapter of Breuer and Freud’s *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), the authors make it clear that hysteria results from repressed memories:

*individual hysterical symptoms immediately disappeared without returning if we succeeded in thoroughly awakening the memories of the causal process with its accompanying affect, and if the patient circumstantially discussed the process in*
the most detailed manner and gave verbal expression to the affect. . . . In other words: The hysteric suffers mostly from reminiscences. (3-4)

Thus Fitzgerald's description of Anthony Patch's episode of hysteria, while utilizing some Freudian ideas, does not accurately correspond with Freud's description of hysteria and its treatment.

However, what are we to make of the fact that Fitzgerald assigns hysteria to a male character? In other words, does the text work against early twentieth-century cultural attitudes about gender by presenting Anthony Patch as a weak, hysterical man, or does it feminize Anthony to further emphasize his dissipation and deterioration? Catherine Burroughs has stated that "For much of the story, the Patches are presented as a team dedicated to freeing themselves from cultural expectations for the 'correct' performance of masculinity and femininity" (54). In fact, at one point in the novel Gloria says, "'I've got a man's mind,'" and Anthony responds with, "'You've got a mind like mine. Not strongly gendered either way'" (BD 134). This seems to echo the statement Turnbull attributes to Fitzgerald, quoted in the previous chapter: "I am half-feminine--at least my mind is." And although the juxtaposition of a weak, hysterical man with a stronger woman in The Beautiful and Damned does appear, on the surface, to work against early twentieth-century cultural attitudes which viewed women as the "weaker sex," I believe the underlying gender implications of the novel are more complex than this.

Ultimately, The Beautiful and Damned actually reveals Fitzgerald's ambivalence toward the issue of gender. While the above examples do indeed represent a reversal of traditional gender roles by presenting a male character as weak and hysterical, we must also bear in mind that The Beautiful and Damned is a novel of deterioration. Hence Anthony's weakness and hysteria are also a means of demonstrating his decline from
conventional notions of masculinity. Thus Fitzgerald, while attempting to work against contemporary ideas about gender, simultaneously reinforces these ideas, and yet another example from the novel can demonstrate this. Early in the novel, the narrator describes Gloria's vanity in dating numerous men while never permanently engaging herself to anyone as "masculine": she "loved it with a vanity that was almost masculine—it had been in the nature of a triumphant and dazzling career..." (BD 81). Here, the use of the word *masculine* seems contradictory to conventional ideas about gender; after all, a woman's pride in her career of courting would rarely be viewed as a "masculine" quality. Nevertheless, the passage also reinforces traditional notions of gender, since a "triumphant and dazzling career" is associated with masculinity, not femininity. In other words, a successful career remains in the domain of men, not women.

Yet we must also bear in mind a point made in chapter one regarding the contradiction created by the intersection of nervous discourse and cultural attitudes toward gender. Specifically, if the heightened sensibility and emotional responses associated with women were attributed to a more highly refined nervous system, and a more highly refined nervous system signified superiority, how could this be reconciled to the traditional view of women as the "weaker sex"? As I have previously pointed out, it could not be. Thus, to some extent, Fitzgerald was enmeshed within an implicit paradox created by nervous discourse and ideas about gender: a highly refined nervous system, necessary for the heightened sensibility of the artist, would have to be connected with the feminine, yet, since connected with femininity, this would also imply weakness. Therefore, in the previously quoted letter to Charles Scribner II in which Fitzgerald described *The Beautiful and Damned*, Anthony Patch is "one of those many with the tastes and weaknesses of the artist." In addition, while Anthony's "weaknesses of the
artist” reveal his highly refined nervous system, this nervous system is much more liable to break down. In fact, his life of dissipation and waste of nervous energy insure that this will happen, just as Gordon Sterrett in “May Day,” another struggling artist who maintains “I’ve got talent . . . I can draw” (SS 101), also demonstrates his weakness by succumbing to a life of dissipation which ends in his self-destruction.

However, the idea which most effectively contrasts dissipation and hysteria is “efficiency.” Dissipation signifies the waste of nervous energy and has definite moral connotations, and hysteria, which can result from dissipation, reflects a loss of self-control and has gender implications. Yet efficiency directly opposes the idea of dissipation and, as I will demonstrate, is associated with masculinity. Hence, rather than wasting one’s nervous energy, the efficient expenditure of nervous energy allows one to live a healthy, moral, and productive life, an “efficient” life. As Robert S. Carroll points out in *The Mastery of Nervousness Based Upon Self Reeducation*, “nervous efficiency is human efficiency” (73).

In addition, we must recognize that the words *efficient* and *efficiency* had a great deal of cultural currency in the early twentieth century. Oppenheim has pointed out that “During the Edwardian decade, the ambiguous phrase ‘national efficiency’ expressed diverse, but profound, concerns about the British ability to compete in the modern world” (265). And in the United States, the opening lines of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s highly influential *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) call attention to the significance of *efficiency*:

President Roosevelt, in his address to the Governors at the White House, prophetically remarked that “The conservation of our national resources is only preliminary to the larger question of our national efficiency.”
... As yet, however, we have but vaguely appreciated the importance of "the larger question of increasing our national efficiency." (5)

In 1914, the "first National Efficiency Exposition" opened in New York to display and discuss better business methods, and the "present efficiency movement" held that its object was "to save time in production which may be used for broadening opportunities and making life more enjoyable" ("Efficiency Exhibit"). Also, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, as a freshman at Princeton University in 1913 Fitzgerald was required to take Hygiene 101, and the "aim of the work in this department [was] to promote the general health and physical efficiency of the students," which included "an opportunity for a discussion ... on the various practices and habits that affect his physical and mental efficiency" (Catalogue 181).

While some have called into question what has been deemed the "cult of efficiency," the term has generally retained positive connotations for us today. However, what is particularly interesting about efficiency in the early twentieth century is that it had definite gender implications, which can be seen in the following passage from an article written by Dr. Clement A. Penrose and published in the New York Times in 1914:

By degrees our civilization, which shows so clearly a lessening of human efficiency, is allowing women with highly developed masculinity to complete with the poorer types of men in many fields of labor. How very glad are these men to have the women work, vote, and support them. An inefficient type of man is generally married by the masculine woman, for the reason that she can afford to marry and will probably have better chances than a more womanly type with such men. History undoubtedly proves that masculine women almost always are attracted to the weaker and effeminate types of men, for instance, Sappho, Rosa
Bonheur, and George Sand, &c., who are usually not attractive themselves to
manly men.

As the efficiency of the men decreases the masculine type of woman will gain
the ascendancy. She will earnestly put through a number of ill-advised and
poorly thought out movements along philanthropic lines, on a par with Christian
Science, Dowieism, the anti-vivisection league, &c., supported chiefly by
women's influence. She will marry the man of her choice and give to posterity an
inferior order of human being, i.e., women too masculine to bear children safely,
nourish or fear [sic] them properly, and men without the masculine qualities
necessary for regeneration, which is only possible when the race is sprung from a
normal parentage on both sides.

While Penrose's statements also apply to the idea of degeneration, it is clear from his
above comments that "efficiency" is a masculine concept, and the "inefficient" man is
effeminate and weak.

In Fitzgerald's fiction from the period under discussion, there is one usage of efficient
which demonstrates the connection between efficiency and gender. "The Curious Case
of Benjamin Button," first published in 1922, presents the life of Benjamin Button, who
is born as an old man and gradually "ages" into youth. In the following passage, the
narrator describes how Roscoe Button, Benjamin's son, reacts to his father growing into a
little boy:

In 1920, Roscoe Button's first child was born. During the attendant festivities,
however, no one thought it "the thing" to mention that the little grubby boy,
apparently about ten years of age who played around the house with lead soldiers
and a miniature circus, was the new baby's own grandfather.
No one disliked the little boy whose fresh, cheerful face was crossed with just a hint of sadness, but to Roscoe Button his presence was a source of torment. In the idiom of his generation Roscoe did not consider the matter "efficient." It seemed to him that his father, in refusing to look sixty, had not behaved like a "red-blooded he-man"—this was Roscoe's favorite expression—but in a curious and perverse manner. . . . Roscoe believed that "live wires" should keep young, but carrying it out on such a scale was—was—was inefficient. (SS 179)

In the above passage, Fitzgerald clearly recognizes and calls attention to the connection between efficiency and ideas about gender, and there is even a element of ridicule in the "red-blooded he-man" idea of efficiency. Hence Fitzgerald seems to be deliberately parodying the masculine aspect of efficiency, and thus undermines some of the conventional conceptions of gender in the early twentieth century.

Therefore, during the early years of the 1920s and Fitzgerald's marriage to Zelda, the nervous discourse which Fitzgerald had inherited manifested itself in new ways in his work, specifically through the ideas of dissipation and hysteria, which both reflect the inefficient expenditure of nervous energy. However, once again, nervous discourse became linked with other cultural discourses, particularly ideas about sensibility and morality as well as gender. It is also interesting to note that The Beautiful and Damned reveals what a "nervous age" the early twenties were; even the song lyrics presented in the text demonstrate this: ""The—panic—has—come—over us. / So ha-a-as—the moral decline!"" (BD 238).

"Out in--the shimmee sanitarium

The jazz-mad nuts reside.

Out in--the shimmee sanitarium"
I left my blushing bride.

She went mad and shook herself insane.

So let her shiver back again—“ (BD 435)

Also, it seems reasonable to connect the dissipation which occurs in Fitzgerald’s work during this period to aspects of his own life with Zelda, although the exact relationship between the fiction and biographical information is hard to determine. Regarding The Beautiful and Damned,

[Fitzgerald] wrote to Zelda in 1930: “I wish the Beautiful and Damned had been a maturely written book because it was all true. We ruined ourselves—I have never honestly thought that we ruined each other.” But in 1940 he told his daughter: “Gloria was a much more trivial and vulgar person than your mother. I can’t really say there was any resemblance except in the beauty and certain terms of expression she used, and also I naturally used many circumstantial events of our early married life. However the emphases were entirely different. We had a much better time than Anthony and Gloria had.” (Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 155)

Whatever the case may have been, alcoholic parties and his relationship with Zelda would continue to provide material for Fitzgerald’s fiction, particularly during the period in which The Great Gatsby was written, since some of Fitzgerald’s female characters appear to have been at least partially based on his experiences with Zelda, and Gatsby’s famous parties were fueled by alcohol.
Notes

1 For a book-length discussion on the historiography of hysteria, see Micale. Also, for a comprehensive discussion of the history of hysteria, see Gilman et al.

2 For a discussion of the sources of Poe’s knowledge about nervous ailments, see Sloane.

3 For a discussion of some of the negative consequences of the “cult of efficiency” in the educational system, see Callahan. Also, for a broader discussion of some of the negative aspects of the “cult of efficiency,” see Mishan 178-83.

4 The connection between efficiency and degeneration is discussed more explicitly by Penrose in the following passage:

In his book, “The problems of Race Regeneration,” he [Dr. Havelock Ellis] demonstrates that wild philanthropies, often by making people too dependent and by preventing their elimination, which a struggle for existence would necessitate, are actually decreasing the average of human efficiency and lowering the quality of human life. He shows that our increasing population of feeble-minded is today the great menace of race regeneration.
CHAPTER FOUR

NERVOUS MEN IN LOVE WITH NERVOUS WOMEN: THE GREAT GATSBY ERA

In 1925 F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby was published, a novel which many consider his finest literary achievement and one that seems assured of a permanent place in the canon of American literature. In his analysis of The Great Gatsby, Ronald Berman points out the importance of recognizing the time period during which the novel was written:

The more The Great Gatsby recedes into the historical distance, the easier it becomes to lose sight of the differences between then and now. . . . Many ideas and many texts with time-bound meanings are refracted in Fitzgerald's text. We ought to be aware of the language that he elects to repeat, of the issues he introduces (often from both sides of the argument), and of the ways in which the ideas he presents differ from their current forms. (3)

Berman's assertion is certainly correct, and the manifestations of nervous discourse in this period of Fitzgerald's career reflect these "time-bound meanings." However, a closer examination of the text of The Great Gatsby as well as some of Fitzgerald's other work from 1922 through 1927 will further illustrate how ideas about nervousness impacted Fitzgerald's fiction during this period.
The words *nerve* or *nervous* only appear a total of nine times in the text of *The Great Gatsby*, yet their placement and significance is worthy of attention. The first occurrence is in chapter one, when Nick Carraway first goes over to the Buchanans' house for dinner. Here Nick tells us.

Sometimes she [Daisy] and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire. They were here—and they accepted Tom and me, making only a polite pleasant effort to entertain or to be entertained. They knew that presently dinner would be over and a little later the evening too would be over and casually put away. It was sharply different from the West where an evening was hurried from phase to phase toward its close in a continually disappointed anticipation or else in sheer nervous dread of the moment itself. (GG 13)

The distinction made between the elegant nonchalance of this dinner in the East and the "nervous dread" of the West invites speculation. In fact, a number of critics have attempted to assess the significance of the East versus West theme in *Gatsby* and have reached a variety of conclusions.

However, an examination of Western "nervousness" in Fitzgerald's short story "Absolution" may help shed light on this issue. This story, first published in 1924, has been viewed by many as a description of the young Gatsby, and this is supported by Fitzgerald's statement to a critic in 1934: "It might interest you to know that a story of mine, called 'Absolution' . . . was intended to be a picture of his [Gatsby's] early life, but that I cut it because I preferred to preserve the sense of mystery" (qtd. in Brucoli, *Epic Grandeur* 192). Nevertheless, whether or not Rudolph Miller, the young boy of
“Absolution,” should be seen as Jimmy Gatz, the young Gatsby, remains somewhat ambiguous; as Matthew Bruccoli points out, “The safest way to regard Rudolph Miller is as a preliminary treatment of the figure who developed into Jay Gatsby” (Epic Grandeur 192).

Yet the relevance of “Absolution” for this study lies in its depiction of Western life, a life associated with nervousness, and this nervousness implies a sense of ineffectuality and enervation. Although most readers of the story have focused on Rudolph Miller or Father Schwartz, it is the description of Rudolph Miller’s father in “Absolution” which best reveals how Fitzgerald associated nervous discourse with the West:

Rudolph’s father, the local freight-agent, had floated with the second wave of German and Irish stock to the Minnesota-Dakota country. Theoretically, great opportunities lay ahead of a young man of energy in that day and place, but Carl Miller had been incapable of establishing either with his superiors or his subordinates the reputation for approximate immutability which is essential to success in a hierarchic industry. Somewhat gross, he was, nevertheless, insufficiently hard-headed and unable to take fundamental relationships for granted, and this inability made him suspicious, unrestful, and continually dismayed.

His two bonds with the colorful life were his faith in the Roman Catholic Church and his mystical worship of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill. Hill was the apotheosis of that quality in which Miller himself was deficient—the sense of things, the feel of things, the hint of rain in the wind on the cheek. Miller’s mind worked late on the decisions of other men, and he had never in his life felt the balance of any single thing in his hands. His weary, sprightly, undersized body
was growing old in Hill's gigantic shadow. For twenty years he had lived alone with Hill's name and God. (SS 264)

This description of Carl Miller, emphasizing his incapability and deficiency, clearly marks him as ineffectual. In fact, when Rudolph is about to be beaten by his father, we are told that "it was not so much the beating he dreaded as the savage ferocity, outlet of the ineffectual man, which would lie behind it" (266). Furthermore, in the above passage Carl Miller is described as "suspicious, unrestful, and continuously dismayed," and both this and the intimation that he is unbalanced and possesses a "weary, sprightly, undersized body" provide all the ingredients for a nervous character. Yet although Carl Miller appears nervous, he is not described as such in the text; however, this is not the case for his wife: she is so nervous that she "lay nervously asleep" (265), and later we are told that young Rudolph Miller "Despis[ed] her nervous ineffectuality" (267).

This information is relevant to The Great Gatsby because we can clearly see a connection between Carl Miller and Jay Gatsby's father, Henry C. Gatz. First, both hail from the same region: to attend his son's funeral, "Henry C. Gatz arrived from a town in Minnesota" (GG 130). Also, Mr. Gatz's physical description resembles that of Carl Miller, with the reiteration of the word dismayed: Mr. Gatz is "a solemn old man very helpless and dismayed" (130). And lastly, both revere James J. Hill: Henry Gatz says of his son, "'If he'd of lived he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country'" (131).

Yet the text of Gatsby in and of itself provides further descriptions of the West which serve to distinguish it from the East, and these illustrate why nervousness is associated with the former. In the beginning of the first chapter, Nick tells us that "Instead of being the warm center of the world the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the
universe” (GG 6), and toward the close of the final chapter, Nick speaks of being “most keenly aware of its [the East’s] superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old” (137). All of this evidence lends support to Robert Omstein’s assessment of the East/West theme in *Gatsby*:

And by the close of *Gatsby* it is unmistakably clear that the East does not symbolize contemporary decadence and the West the pristine virtues of an earlier America. Fitzgerald does not contrast Gatsby’s criminality with his father’s unspoiled rustic strength and dignity. He contrasts rather Henry Gatz’s dull, grey, almost insentient existence . . . with Gatsby’s pilgrimage Eastward, which, though hopeless and corrupting, was at least a journey of life and hope—an escape from the vast obscurity of the West that once spawned and then swallowed the American dream. (59)

However, although the analysis above allows us to account for the “continually disappointed anticipation or . . . sheer nervous dread of the moment itself” which is associated with the West in *Gatsby*, we must also keep in mind a detail which Omstein mentions but does not elaborate upon: the West spawned the American dream. As Bigsby points out, “The American Dream flourished in the West and the prime representative of this code, appropriately enough, is Dan Cody [Jay Gatsby’s mentor], ‘the pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon’” (133). In other words, while the West in *Gatsby* is associated with ineffectuality and enervation, it is simultaneously the source of the energy and desire which give impetus to the American Dream. Thus we shall encounter other manifestations of nervous discourse in *The Great*
Gatsby, ones which have a contradictory significance and suggest vitality, ambition, potential, or an abundance of nervous energy. In addition, when Nick says, "I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (GG 137), it reveals that any of these characters has the potential to be "nervous."

Yet before discussing which of these major characters are indeed nervous, a brief discussion of the second occurrence of nervous discourse in Gatsby is necessary. In chapter two, Nick provides us with the first physical description of Tom's mistress, Myrtle:

She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her surplus flesh sensuously as some women can. Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crepe-de-chine, contained no facet or gleam of beauty but there was an immediate perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering. (GG 23)

Although the usage pattern in the above passage provides little problem for the contemporary reader, Fitzgerald's sentence construction is significant: Myrtle's "vitality" is specifically connected with "the nerves of her body," and the image of these nerves "smouldering" enhances the effect of her sensuality, evoking images of fire and passion. Ronald Berman points out that the physical description of Myrtle is not in keeping with the conceptions of female beauty associated with the Jazz Age, but is rather "an exaggerated reminder of ideal female form around 1910 when Tom, one supposes, formed his own sexual ideals," and he further maintains that Myrtle's "'vitality' matters, especially in its implicit contrast to Daisy's languor" (49). However, this contrast will
become more relevant as we discuss the other examples of nervousness within the text of The Great Gatsby.

The third instance of nervous discourse within The Great Gatsby occurs in chapter four: here Nick uses the term while describing Gatsby:

He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand. (GG 51)

The significance of nervous in this passage is twofold: first, in a form of usage similar to that described in chapter two of this study, in which Fitzgerald appeared to deliberately create ambiguity with the use of nervous, in the above passage Fitzgerald appears to use the term in its pre-Enlightenment sense: that is, the reference to our “nervous, sporadic games” suggests that nervous means “vigorous.” Yet, at the same time, nervous here also indicates an abundance of nervous energy—and this surplus of nervous energy manifests itself in Gatsby in “the shape of restlessness,” a theme also discussed in chapter two. Furthermore, Fitzgerald points out that Gatsby’s “resourcefulness of movement” is “peculiarly American.” Of course, all of these ideas are in keeping with the nervous discourse Fitzgerald had inherited from the nineteenth century. As I have mentioned previously, Fitzgerald’s life must have been inundated by a particularly American form of nervous discourse which can be traced at least as far back as George Miller Beard’s American Nervousness of 1881, and a reiteration of some of the ideas associated with
this discourse aligns perfectly with Fitzgerald’s passage above: nervousness is an especially American phenomenon which can be traced to our unique national traits, including social mobility, ambition, and entrepreneurship. And what character in The Great Gatsby better illustrates these qualities than Gatsby himself?

It is for this reason that Jay Gatsby is indeed one of the nervous characters in the novel. Both the fourth and fifth instances of nervous in The Great Gatsby occur in chapter five, and both refer to Gatsby. First, just prior to Gatsby’s first meeting with Daisy at Nick’s house, we are told that “the front door opened nervously and Gatsby in a white flannel suit, silver shirt and gold colored tie hurried in” (GG 66). And several pages later, when Nick leaves his house so that Gatsby and Daisy can be alone, he says, “I walked out the back way—just as Gatsby had when he had made his nervous circuit of the house half an hour before” (69). Although both passages present little problem for the modern reader—Gatsby’s “nervousness” at seeing Daisy, the women he loves and has not seen in almost five years, is apparent throughout these pages—there is further significance in the application of the words nervously and nervous to Gatsby’s behavior. However, an examination of some of Fitzgerald’s other short stories associated with The Great Gatsby is necessary to explicate this.

Perhaps the most significant of these stories is “The Sensible Thing,” first published in 1924, and referred to by Matthew Bruccoli as “one of the strongest Gatsby cluster stories. Drawing on his courtship of Zelda, Fitzgerald wrote about a young man who loses a Southern girl because he is too poor to marry her” (Epic Grandeur 191). The connection between this story and Fitzgerald’s own life is confirmed in a 1925 letter Fitzgerald wrote to Maxwell Perkins: Fitzgerald says of it, “Story about Zelda + me. All true” (LL 121). However, what is of particular interest in this story is its extensive
evidence of nervous discourse. As Ronald Berman points out, "'The Sensible Thing' . . .
goes into voluminous detail on the guilt attached to being 'nervous'" (173). In the second
section of the story, when the young protagonist, George O'Kelly, is still unsuccessful
and poor, his girlfriend, Jonquil Cary, indicates that George is not ready to marry her
because of his financial position. In response, "All at once his [George's] nerves gave
way, and he sprang to his feet" (SS 293). Jonquil then proceeds to call George "'all tired
and nervous'" (294). Yet George's reaction to this is striking: he says, "'And anyways
I'm not nervous—it's you that's nervous. I'm not nervous at all'": furthermore, "To prove
that he wasn't nervous he left the couch and plumped himself into a rocking-chair across
the room" (294). Ronald Berman's assessment that "the reiterative use of 'nervous' to
describe himself means weak, self-pitying, and untrustworthy" (173) is confirmed in the
ensuing scene in which George and Jonquil's engagement is broken off: George breaks
"into a long monologue of self-pity, and ceased only when he saw that he was making
himself despicable in her sight," and then "he felt very ridiculous and weak in his
knowledge that the scene had been ridiculous and weak at the end" (SS 295). However,
one year later George O'Kelly is a new man: "he had risen from poverty into a position
of unlimited opportunity" and notes the "hardiness of his frame . . . with a sort of
fascination" in the mirror (297). Although before meeting Jonquil again he "wet his lips
nervously" (298), this is only a slight relapse of sorts—one similar to Gatsby's nervous
behavior upon meeting Daisy again. It is clear that George has now harnessed his
nervous energy so that he does not repeat the ridiculous and weak scene of his previous
encounter with Jonquil; instead, "he must be strong and watchful and he would see"
(299). This time George does win Jonquil, for "He would never be so weak or so tired
and miserable and poor. . . . He had traded his first youth for strength and carved success
out of despair" (300). Hence in "The Sensible Thing" we witness the transformation of a poor, "nervous," and "weak" young man into a wealthy and strong man who has achieved social status and succeeded in the modern world—and thus can marry the woman he loves. In keeping with the conceptions of nervousness in the early twentieth century, George O’Kelly has effectively "mastered" his nervousness.

A similar situation occurs in another story written after the publication of *The Great Gatsby*. "Presumption," first published in 1926, also tells the story of a young man who "lacked . . . confidence" (*PW* 178) and money and must overcome these obstacles to win the woman he loves. Although the evidence of nervous discourse in this story is not as obvious as it is in "The Sensible Thing," it still pervades the text. The protagonist, San Juan Chandler, is repeatedly described as "nervous" in the first half of the story, and perhaps for good reason: he is a "shy, handsome, spoiled, brilliant, penniless boy from a small Ohio city" who feels out of place at the "fashionable New England resort . . . where there are enough rich families to form a self-sufficient and exclusive group" (179) and where he is visiting his Cousin Cora. Thus the voice of the woman he loves, Noel, "made his own voice quiver with nervous happiness" (180), and at the golf course, where the "caddie master looked at him disapprovingly as he displayed his guest card . . . Juan nervously bought a half dozen balls at a dollar each in an effort to neutralize the imagined hostility" (188). Of course, Juan does not initially succeed in winning Noel’s love, but we are told that Juan "knew in his heart that it was his unfortunate egotism that had repelled Noel, his embarrassment, his absurd attempt to make her jealous with Holly. Only indirectly was his poverty concerned; under different circumstances it might have given a touch of romance" (189). Hence we are once again presented with a "nervous" young man who presents himself as weak and ridiculous, and this is noticed by Noel’s
father, Mr. Garneau, who “guessed that there was something solid in the boy, but . . .
suspected his readiness to confide in strangers and his helplessness about getting a job.
Something was lacking—not confidence, exactly . . . but something stronger, fiercer, more
external” (190). And appropriately, after playing a round of golf with Mr. Garneau,
“Juan was walking nervously and hurriedly from the grounds” (191). Yet Juan does
succeed in mastering his nervousness and eventually winning the hand of Noel by the end
of the story; he achieves financially success and “was a nobody no longer. There was
something solid behind him that would prevent him ever again from behaving like a self-
centered child” (193): “In his voice, as in his mind, there was no pretense now, no self-
consciousness, but only a sincere and overmastering emotion” (195).

Therefore, a certain pattern of “nervous” behavior can be seen in Jay Gatsby, George
O’Kelly, and San Juan Chandler. That is, nervousness in Fitzgerald’s male characters
indicates weakness and timidity, a lack of confidence, and these male characters must
master their nervousness to succeed in both attaining the women they love and proving
their economic viability in the capitalistic world of the 1920s—two things which went
hand in hand for Fitzgerald, for a man had to be capable of supporting the woman he
loved, as Fitzgerald’s own courtship of Zelda had proven to him. Of course, such
conceptions are inextricably linked to ideas about gender and masculinity; as I discussed
in chapter one. linking nervousness to weakness and timidity that must be mastered
creates connotations which connect nervousness with femininity, connotations which
remain with us to this day. And Fitzgerald’s fiction, which often presents male characters
conquering their nervousness and becoming strong and solid men who are now worthy of
the women they desire, serves to reinforce these notions.
Nevertheless, the nervousness of these male characters also has another significance, one which can be traced back to Georgian conceptions of sensibility and through the nineteenth century—and which does not correspond to our contemporary ideas of nervousness. That is, these nervous characters in Fitzgerald's fiction are those who have potential, those who possess the refined nervous systems and the nervous energy to eventually succeed. Thus Jay Gatsby, George O'Kelly, and San Juan Chandler are "nervous" men, that is, men who possess the nervous capacity for achievement, and we see the vestiges of nervousness in Gatsby and George O'Kelly even after they have harnessed their nervous energy and become successful. This fact is further evidenced during this period of Fitzgerald's career in the story "The Adolescent Marriage," first published in 1926. The story describes how a young architect, Llewellyn Clark, is reunited with his young wife through the help of Llewellyn’s employer, Mr. Garnett; however, of particular interest is the description of Llewellyn: “He was of a somewhat nervous type, talented and impatient, but Garnett could find little of the egotist in his reserved, attentive face" (PW 208). And Llewellyn is indeed talented: he wins an architectural competition for a house design and Garnett “recognized that Llewellyn’s unquestionable talent had matured overnight” (214). Here, once again, we see that a nervous man is one who is capable of achievement and success.

However, nervousness in Fitzgerald’s female characters during this period has a different significance, one which also corresponds to the nervous discourse of the early twentieth century. In chapter two I quoted the statement which Turnbull attributes to Fitzgerald: “Woman are so weak really—emotionally unstable—and their nerves, when strained, break...they can’t take nerve or emotional strain.” This demonstrates the common assumption of the period that the female nervous system is more fragile than a
man's, and that women are therefore more susceptible to nervous breakdown. And during the period under discussion, such ideas must have been reinforced in Fitzgerald by his experiences with Zelda: as I also pointed out in chapter two, Bruccoli reports that in 1925 "Zelda experienced at least one episode of 'nervous hysteria' that required a morphine injection."

Yet these ideas about female nervousness are reflected in the text of *The Great Gatsby* as well as some of Fitzgerald's other work from the period. The sixth instance of *nervous* in *Gatsby* occurs in chapter seven, when Nick tells us that "We had luncheon in the dining room, darkened, too, against the heat, and drank down nervous gayety with the cold ale" (*GG* 92). Fitzgerald seems to have adapted the phrase "nervous gayety" from his 1924 short story entitled "Diamond Dick and the First Law of Women." In this story, we are told that "It was an uncomfortable meal at which Mr. Dickey did the talking and Diana covered up the gaps with nervous gaiety" (*PW* 76). The usage in both instances is not problematic for the contemporary reader: the "uncomfortable" situation in "Diamond Dick" accounts for the nervousness, as the situation in *Gatsby* is quite uncomfortable as well. After all, Daisy is serving a luncheon at her house to both her lover, Gatsby, and her husband, Tom, who has just gotten off the phone with his mistress's husband, and everyone present seems to be aware of the situation.

However, the connection between "Diamond Dick" and *Gatsby* stops there; there is no similarity between Diana of "Diamond Dick" (who is one of Fitzgerald's stronger, more assertive female characters) and Daisy. Yet it is the placement of the sentence containing the phrase "nervous gayety" in *Gatsby* which is worthy of attention. Immediately following it, the reader is presented with, "'What shall we do with ourselves this afternoon,' cried Daisy, 'and the day after that, and the next thirty years?'" (*GG* 92).
Parr has recognized the connection between this and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, asserting that Daisy “has become like one of the hollow voices in Eliot’s *The Waste Land* . . . echoing the voice of the woman in *The Waste Land* who complains, ‘What shall we do tomorrow? / What shall we ever do?’” (“Responsibility” 669). Of course, this is the same woman in *The Waste Land* who proclaims “My nerves are bad tonight,” as I discussed in chapter one. Nevertheless, while the passage in *Gatsby* certainly reveals what Parr calls “Daisy’s lack of purpose” and “boredom” (“Order” 67), it also indicates that Daisy is the other nervous character in *Gatsby*.

Yet it is the seventh occurrence of *nervous* in *The Great Gatsby* which clearly identifies Daisy as a nervous character: also in chapter seven, Gatsby tells Nick, “‘You see, when we left New York she [Daisy] was very nervous and she thought it would steady her to drive—and this woman rushed out at us just as we were passing a car coming the other way’” (GG 112), and Gatsby is here describing the accident in which Myrtle has been killed. Although the usage pattern does not create confusion for contemporary readers, since the confrontation which took place at the Plaza Hotel between Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy can account for Daisy’s nervousness, it has another important significance: the fact that Daisy is “*very* nervous” (emphasis added) calls attention to what most readers recognize and what Parr refers to as “Daisy’s failure to assume responsibility for herself or for her actions” (“Responsibility” 671)—although Parr does not connect this with Daisy’s nervousness. However, Ronald Berman points out that Daisy “surrender[s] to fate in the guise of nervous incapacity” (144). In other words, “The Jamesian idea of ‘effort’ has been given up, and the mind lapses into ‘spontaneous drift.’ Daisy is ‘*very* nervous’ and without command of herself” (172). Thus Daisy has “abandon[ed] what William James called the ‘will,’ or volition that makes action
possible” and “retreat[s] into [herself]” (171). This is clearly illustrated in the text of *Gatsby* even while Daisy is at the Plaza: Nick tells us that “with every word she [Daisy] was drawing further and further into herself” (*GG* 105). And, of course, Daisy’s failure to take responsibility for the accident is the most obvious example of the failure of her will—a failure which has significant moral ramifications, especially because this also leads to Gatsby’s murder by Myrtle’s husband. Therefore, the usage reinforces the assumptions of nervous discourse in the early twentieth century, which linked nervousness to a failure of the will that often had moral overtones. Also, in a letter from 1925, Fitzgerald himself suggests that Daisy’s weak will, seen in her failure to take responsibility, stems from the fact that she is a woman: “Thank you for writing me about Gatsby—I especially appreciate your letter because women, and even intelligent women, haven’t generally cared much for it. They do not like women to be presented as emotionally passive—as a matter of fact I think most women are . . .” (*LL*, 129).

In addition, the eighth instance of *nervous* in *The Great Gatsby* reiterates Daisy’s nervousness: in chapter eight, Nick relates the history of Gatsby’s first relationship with Daisy, and he tells us that after Gatsby had gone off to Europe for World War I and could not get back, “He [Gatsby] was worried now—there was a quality of nervous despair in Daisy’s letters. She didn’t see why he couldn’t come. She was feeling the pressure of the outside world and she wanted to see him and feel his presence beside her and be reassured that she was doing the right thing after all” (*GG* 118). Clearly, Daisy’s resolution is failing: she is, in the words of Fitzgerald’s letter, “emotionally passive” and incapable of waiting for Gatsby. So instead,

Daisy began to move again with the season; suddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men and drowsing asleep at dawn with the
beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed. And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately—and the decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—that was close at hand.

That force took shape in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan.

This passage illustrates Daisy's nervousness effectively; she lacks the will to shape her own life and instead allows the decision to be made by an external force in the form of Tom Buchanan.

Furthermore, there is an obvious connection between this and "The Sensible Thing," discussed previously. In "The Sensible Thing," the poverty-stricken George O'Kelly is also in love with a wealthy girl, Jonquil, whom he hopes to marry, but she is getting cold feet and has written him a "nervous" letter. George responds in a telegram to her, "Letter depressed me have you lost your nerve . . ." (SS 290). Also, we are told that Jonquil's "letter showed that she was 'nervous' and this left him no choice [but to visit her]. He knew what 'nervous' meant—that she was emotionally depressed, that the prospect of marrying into a life of poverty and struggle was putting too much strain upon her love" (290-91), and this provides a crucial definition of female nervousness. In addition, as I mentioned in the previous discussion of the story, when Jonquil calls George "nervous," he responds to her that "it's you that's nervous" (294). Yet the text reveals that Jonquil is indeed nervous; this is a story about a nervous woman as well as a nervous man: the narrator says, "Jonquil came into the room again, her sorrow and her nervousness alike tucked under powder and rouge and hat" (295). While Alice Hall Petry
maintains that Jonquil “even uses Zelda’s pet word, ‘nervous,’ to describe her restlessness over having no prospect of imminent marriage to O’Kelly” (138), it is clear that the significance of nervous extends well beyond Zelda’s predisposition for it; Fitzgerald is using a term that carried a great deal of meaning in the early twentieth century. As Ronald Berman points out, “The Sensible Thing” provides “a useful definition of female nervous indulgence” (173). In other words, the “nervous” female is a weak and passive character, one who lacks the strength of will to function independently or risk a life of poverty. When George O’Kelly tells Jonquil, “If you’ll marry me and come with me and take a chance with me, I can make good at anything” (SS 294), her response is, “I can’t because it doesn’t seem to be the sensible thing” (295).

However, we must also keep in mind that Fitzgerald’s world of the 1920s had different cultural expectations for women, and this can be seen in Fitzgerald’s own experience with Zelda. As Matthew Bruccoli points out,

Zelda was cautious about marriage to an unpublished writer with no money. . . . She was [only] ready to marry Fitzgerald when he was a success in New York. . . . Fitzgerald was hurt by her lack of faith in his destiny; yet at the same time he recognized that her stand was consistent with her refusal to compromise on what she required from life. (Epic Grandeur 94)

Connecting widely held cultural assumptions about both nervousness and gender, the nervous discourse of the early twentieth century, which maintained that women are more prone to nervousness, reflected and reinforced cultural ideas about gender that presented women as the “weaker sex” in need of male support, a support which not only took the form of money, but also decision-making and moral support for passive, weak-willed, “nervous” women.
These notions are also illustrated in other short stories written by Fitzgerald during this period. In “Hot and Cold Blood,” first published in 1923, a young wife, Jaqueline [sic], chides her husband for his generosity to others:

“You spend half your time doing things for people who don’t give a damn about you or what becomes of you. You give up your seat on the street-car to hogs, and come home too dead tired to even move... You’re--eternally--being used! I won’t stand it! I thought I married a man--not a professional Samaritan who’s going to fetch and carry for the world!” (ST 166)

However, of particular relevance for this study is the description of Jaqueline which follows this: “As she finished her invective Jaqueline reeled suddenly and sank into a chair --nervously exhausted” (166). Yet the reasons for Jaqueline’s “nervous exhaustion” can be demonstrated by the following aspects of the story: first, it becomes clear that Jaqueline’s motives are merely selfish as she tells her husband, “I need your strength and your health and your arms around me. And if you—if you just give it to everyone, it’s spread so thin when it reaches me—”’ (166). And although her husband, Mather, initially believes his wife, the surprise ending in which Mather refuses to give up his seat on an extremely hot streetcar to a woman who sways toward him, but whom he does not look up to see, confirms this interpretation: the woman swaying against Mather faints, and this woman turns out to be his own pregnant wife, Jaqueline. The final scene of the story presents “Jaqueline resting placidly on the long settee with her head in his [Mather’s] arms,” and Mather calling an old friend of his father who had requested a loan which Mather had previously refused: Mather now says to him, “‘why, in regard to that matter we talked about this afternoon, I think I’ll be able to fix that up after all’” (174).

Hence Alice Hall Petry’s assessment of this story is correct: ““Hot and Cold Blood”
readily becomes a parable depicting the struggle between kindly husbandly impulses and selfish wifely ones. The male of course prevails” (122). However, the story also presents a “nervous” woman who is in need of her husband’s moral guidance to overcome her selfishness.

Another of Fitzgerald’s short stories, “One of my Oldest Friends,” first published in 1925, presents a similar situation. A young married couple, Michael and Marion, plan a dinner party for one of their oldest friends, Charley Hart, who has become successful and whom they hardly see any more. When Charley claims that he can’t attend the party because he’s too ill, Michael and Marion decide to pay him a visit, only to discover that he’s having a party of his own to which they were not invited. To make matters worse, Marion informs Michael that the reason Charley had stopped visiting them was because he had fallen in love with her, and she tells Michael, “‘If it hadn’t been for what happened to-night [the party incident] I’d probably never have told you . . .’” (PW 117). Marion also confesses, “‘I encouraged him, I suppose—I thought it was fine. It was a new angle on Charley, and he was amusing at it just as he was at everything he did. . . . When he saw that I was trying to let him down easily so that he’d be simply one of our oldest friends again, he broke away’” (117-18). However, later in the story Charley pays Michael a visit and asks him for a loan of two thousand dollars which Charley desperately needs to keep himself out of prison. Michael refuses, saying “‘If I gave it to you it would just be because I was slushy and soft. I’d be doing something that I don’t want to do’” (120). Yet immediately after Charley’s departure, “Michael sank into his chair, burying his face in his hands” (121). When Marion comes out and tells Michael that she’s “‘glad [he] didn’t lend him anything’” and then attempts to sit in his lap, an “almost physical repulsion” comes over Michael and he quickly gets up from his chair.
Marion says, "'I was afraid he'd work on your sentiment and make a fool of you. . . . He hated you, you know. He used to wish you'd die. I told him that if he ever said so to me again I'd never see him any more'" (121). Yet Michael chides her: "'You let him say things like that to you—and then when he comes here, down and out, without a friend in the world to turn to, you say you're glad I sent him away'" (121), and then asks Marion to leave him alone. In the ensuing scene Michael runs to the train station in search of Charley, realizing that "For one minute, one spot in time, all the mercy in the world had been vested in him," and "'he now understood the reason why he should have helped Charley Hart. It was because it would be intolerable to exist in a world where there was no help—where any human being could be as alone as Charley had been alone this afternoon'" (124).

At the end of the story, Michael saves Charley from a suicide attempt by throwing "'himself bodily on a man [Charley] who stood there close to the tracks, carrying him heavily to the ground'" (PW 124), and Michael agrees to lend Charley the money. There is also an obvious symbol of a cross in the final scene, and Matthew Bruccoli, in his Preface to the story, notes that the "'use of a crucifix at the end represents one of his [Fitzgerald's] rare excursions of forced religious symbolism.'" However, of particular interest is the evidence of nervous discourse in the work. In a short story of only fourteen pages, Marion is referred to as acting "'nervously'" on three occasions: "'What'll we talk about, Michael?' she demanded nervously on the eve of the party" (PW 114); "'You go on in,' urged Marion nervously, 'I'd rather wait out here'" (115); and "'Well—' Marion stood up and began biting nervously at her lip, 'that's all'" (118). The relatively extensive use of the adverb nervously to describe Marion’s behavior indicates that she is definitely one of Fitzgerald’s “nervous” female characters, and, considering the theme of
the story outlined above, she is presented as another woman in need of moral guidance: her encouragement of Charley's love for her, her decision not to tell her husband about it until the party incident, and, most importantly, her callous disregard of Charley Hart's plight indicate that she has failed in her moral obligations to both her husband and humanity and is indeed a "nervous" woman.

Nevertheless, there are several other Fitzgerald short stories written during the period under discussion which must also be analyzed, since they clearly provide manifestations of nervous discourse. "The Rich Boy," first published in 1926, is one of these. Matthew Bruccoli asserts that "One of Fitzgerald's major stories—perhaps his best story—'The Rich Boy' is an extension of The Great Gatsby, enlarging the examination of the effects of wealth on character" (Epic Grandeur 231-32). Yet for our purposes, it is significant that Anson Hunter, the wealthy, young protagonist of the story, is not described as nervous in the first six parts of an eight-part story—with the notable exception of one occasion when Anson, after getting thoroughly drunk, "awoke in a fog of nervous agony" (SS 323), reiterating a connection between alcohol abuse and nervousness which I have discussed previously. Yet Anson's early life has no hint of nervousness aside from this; there is no hint of weakness or timidity in him, for Anson has had no obstacles to overcome. Instead, "Anson was the eldest of six children who would someday divide a fortune of fifteen million dollars" (318), and his "first sense of superiority came to him when he realized the half-grudging American deference that was paid to him in the Connecticut village" (319). Furthermore, Anson's aspirations "differed from the aspirations of the majority of young men in that there was no mist over them, none of that quality which is variously known as 'idealism' or 'illusion'" (319). Thus upon Anson's entry into the professional world of Wall Street, "the combination of his influential
family connection, his sharp intelligence, and his abundance of sheer physical energy brought him almost immediately forward" (325). And Anson’s lack of nervousness, manifested in his strength of will, is nowhere more evident than in his confrontation with his Uncle Robert’s wife, Aunt Edna, “who was carrying on an open intrigue with a dissolute, hard-drinking young man named Cary Sloan” (336). In the scene between Anson, Edna, and Cary, it is Edna who is conspicuously nervous: “‘Don’t lose your temper, Cary,’ said Edna nervously” (338); and toward the end of the evening, “Edna’s nerves suddenly collapsed, and she cried to go home” (339). Edna’s nervousness is in keeping with the nervous discourse I have already outlined: she is a weak-willed woman who has failed in her moral obligations to her husband by her infidelity. Yet Edna’s nervousness is presented in marked contrast to Anson’s behavior, for when Edna and Cary attempt to explain the story of their affair to Anson, “its enfeebled body beat helplessly against the armor of Anson’s will” (339). And at the end of the evening we are told that Anson’s “Resourcefulness and a powerful will—for his threats in weaker hands would have been less than nothing—had beaten the gathering dust from his uncle’s name, from the name of his family, from even the shivering figure [Edna] that sat beside him in the car” (340).

However, the final two parts of the story present a different image of Anson Hunter. First, “the quiet, expensive superiority of the Hunters came to an end. For one thing, the estate, considerably diminished by two inheritance taxes and soon to be divided among six children, was not a notable fortune any more” (SS 340). Also, we are told that “At twenty-nine Anson’s chief concern was his growing loneliness” (341). At this point, Anson’s life is marked by “dissipation” (342): “In the morning you were never violently sorry—you made no resolutions, but if you had overdone it and your heart was slightly out
of order, you went on the wagon for a few days without saying anything about it, and waited until an accumulation of nervous boredom projected you into another party” (342). However, Anson’s “nervous boredom” is the first indication of his growing nervousness. A little later, when Anson runs into his first love again who is now married and with child, “a strong nervous thrill of familiarity went over him, but not until he was within five feet of her did he realize that it was Paula” (344-45). In addition, his co-workers notice that a change has come over the now thirty-year-old Anson:

They liked Anson—everyone liked Anson—and the change that had been coming over him cast a sort of pall over the office. The enthusiasm that had invariably signalled up business, the consideration toward his equals and his inferiors, the lift of his vital presence—within the past four months his intense nervousness had melted down these qualities into the fussy pessimism of a man of forty. On every transaction in which he was involved he acted as a drag and a strain. (348)

As Peter Wolfe points out, “The last part of the story shows a nerve-frayed Hunter sailing to Europe aboard a passenger ship” (247). Hence “The Rich Boy” presents a different manifestation of a nervous male character than we have seen in Gatsby and other stories in this period of Fitzgerald’s career: instead of being associated with weak and timid young men who must harness and master their nervous energy to fulfill their potential and aspirations, nervousness in Anson Hunter marks his depletion of nervous energy; his growing nervousness reveals his deterioration. Yet what further distinguishes Anson Hunter from the other nervous male characters is his inherited wealth. Anson is “the rich boy” born into a life of luxury and ease who immediately recognizes his “superiority,” and Fitzgerald comments on this aspect of Hunter in the following well-known passage from the story:
Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you were born rich, it is very difficult to understand. They think, deep in their hearts, that they are better than we are because we had to discover the compensations and refuges of life for ourselves. Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are. They are different. (SS 318)

The rich are indeed different, for their "softness" and the fact that they do not "discover the compensations and refuges of life" for themselves reveal that they lack or have depleted the "nervous" resources which a poor man requires to succeed. Hence, instead, nervousness in the rich indicates the depletion of their limited supply of nervous energy, resulting in a character who has clearly deteriorated from his former self.

Fitzgerald’s conception of the rich is further substantiated in “Winter Dreams,” first published in 1922. This story bears a clear resemblance to Gatsby; in fact, Fitzgerald himself called it “A sort of 1st draft of the Gatsby idea” (LL 121). In this work we witness the transformation of Dexter Green from a young boy who caddies for the wealthy elite at a Minnesota country club into a successful entrepreneur living in New York, “where he [Dexter] had done well—so well that there were no barriers too high for him” (SS 234). Yet in this story the narrator also comments on the wealthy and how Dexter is distinguished from them:

He [Dexter] knew the sort of men they were—the men who when he first went to college had entered from the great prep schools with graceful clothes and the deep tan of healthy summers. He had seen that, in one sense, he was better than these
men. He was newer and stronger. Yet in acknowledging to himself that he wished his children to be like them he was admitting to himself that he was but the rough, strong stuff from which they eternally spring. (224-25)

Here we see again that those who are not wealthy are "better," "newer," and "stronger" than the rich; they possess the quality which the rich lack: the nervous energy which, if mastered, will allow them to succeed. However, it is significant to note that at no point in the story is Dexter Green referred to as "nervous," and this distinguishes him from Jay Gatsby, George O'Kelly, and San Juan Chandler. Unlike these characters, Dexter exhibits no signs of nervousness, no signs of weak or ridiculous behavior. Instead, "Dexter was at bottom hard-minded" and strong. "So he tasted the deep pain that is reserved only for the strong, just as he had tasted for a little while the deep happiness" (233). And although, as I have previously indicated, "Winter Dreams" functioned as a sort of first draft of Gatsby, it is clear that Dexter Green only serves as a preliminary sketch of a character that would turn into Jay Gatsby, since there are some significant differences between these two characters. The first of these, as I have shown above, is the absence of nervousness in Dexter, and the second can be seen in the difference between Gatsby and Dexter's attitudes toward the past. While Jay Gatsby exclaims, "Can't repeat the past? . . . Why of course you can!" and says, "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," thus "want[ing] to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy" (GG 86), Dexter Green recognizes that the past is irrecoverable:

The dream was gone. Something had been taken from him. In a sort of panic he pushed the palms of his hands into his eyes and tried to bring up a picture of the waters lapping on Sherry Island and the moonlit veranda, and gingham on the
golf-links and the dry sun and the gold color of her neck’s soft down. And her mouth damp to his kisses and her eyes plaintive with melancholy and her freshness like new fine linen in the morning. Why, these things were no longer in the world! They had existed and they existed no longer.

For the first time in years the tears were streaming down his face. But they were for himself now. He did not care about mouth and eyes and moving hands. He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more. The gates were closed, the sun was gone down, and there was no beauty by the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time. Even the grief he could have borne was left behind in the country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.

“Long ago,” he said, “long ago, there was something in me. but now that thing is gone. Now that thing is gone, that thing is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more.” (SS 235-36)

If, in the words of Nick Carraway, Gatsby possesses “an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness,” and “there was something gorgeous about him” (GG 6), it is clear that Dexter Green stands in marked contrast to Jay Gatsby, for Dexter has lost his ability to hope and dream.

In addition, there is a particularly intriguing element of nervous discourse in “Winter Dreams.” The story opens with the sentence, “Some of the caddies were poor as sin and lived in one-room houses with a neurasthenic cow in the front yard, but Dexter Green’s father owned the second best grocery-store in Black Bear ...” (SS 217). This is the first instance of the word neurasthenic in Fitzgerald’s fiction, and the word only occurs in one other story during the period of Fitzgerald’s career currently under discussion: in “Rags...
Martin-Jones and the Pr-nce of W-les," first published in 1924, we are presented with "the second officer pulling along three neurasthenic wolfhounds, much to their reluctance and his own" (SS 274). While Fitzgerald probably assumed that his commercial reading audience would be familiar with the term neurasthenic ("Winter Dreams" first appeared in Metropolitan Magazine and "Rags Martin-Jones and the Pr-nc of W-les" in McCall's), the fact that Fitzgerald only applied the adjective neurasthenic to animals is somewhat problematic. On one hand, it may indicate that by this time the word was losing its validity as a legitimate diagnostic term in the medical profession, though it still retained popular currency. However, the handwritten manuscript of "Rags Martin-Jones and the Pr-nc of W-les" reveals that Fitzgerald used the term somewhat arbitrarily. The line in the story initially was written, "the second officer pulling along three reluctant wolfhounds much to their reluctance and his own," yet the first use of reluctant is crossed out and replaced by neurasthenic, probably to avoid the needless repetition (Manuscripts 79). I believe that the use of neurasthenic in both of these stories suggests two things: first, it reveals that Fitzgerald was not thoroughly familiar with the ideas of the medical community regarding the nervous system at this time (although, as I will discuss in the next chapter, this would change), and second, in popular usage the word neurasthenic may have indicated thinness or emaciation. Wolfhounds are a particularly sleek and thin breed of dogs, and if the "neurasthenic cow" in the opening lines of "Winter Dreams" quoted above was thin or emaciated, this would reinforce the poverty of the other caddies who were "poor as sin" and "lived in one-room houses." Therefore, perhaps a contemporary synonym for us would be anorexic. While, as I will discuss in chapter six, anorexic is not a new term, it is similar to neurasthenic in that it is a medical term which has an impressive etymology and, in popular usage, has come to mean thin or emaciated.
also. As I have described it, this meaning of neurasthenic in Fitzgerald’s texts above is supported by Janet Oppenheim’s statement that Silas Weir Mitchell’s rest cure treatment, often applied to neurasthenics, “rapidly became associated with the cure of highly nervous, undernourished women whose maladies had resisted all other means of treatment,” and hence “its principal efficacy was asserted to lie in the treatment of depressed or hysterical women who were starving themselves”; furthermore, she maintains that “It was no accident that the development of the rest cure and the recognition of anorexia nervosa as a grave medical problem coincided chronologically” (211). In fact, the very title of Weir Mitchell’s 1882 text also reveals that many of the neurasthenic patients subjected to the rest cure treatment were thin or emaciated; the title of his book is Fat and Blood and How to Make Them.

Yet three other Fitzgerald stories from this period are relevant to this study: “Gretchen’s Forty Winks,” “The Adjuster,” and “Your Way and Mine” present male characters who are either in danger of nervous breakdown or actually suffer nervous collapse. The first of these, “Gretchen’s Forty Winks,” first published in 1924, describes Roger Halsey’s attempt to fulfill his aspirations for a successful career. Roger had left his former employer and gone into the advertising business for himself, telling his young wife, Gretchen, “beginning to-night, I start on what’ll probably be the most important six weeks of my life—the six weeks that’ll decide wheher [sic] we’re going on forever in this rotten little house in this rotten little suburban town” (ST 176). However, Gretchen is not particularly interested in the details of Roger’s career: “Boredom replaced alarm in Gretchen’s black eyes. She was a Southern girl, and any question that had to do with getting ahead in the world always tended to give her a headache” (176). Yet Gretchen does appear to be concerned about Roger’s health, as she says to him,
"'You do enough work as it is. If you try to do any more you’ll end up with a nervous breakdown'" (177). In addition, Gretchen’s concern about Roger’s nerves is reinforced by an acquaintance of the Halseys, George Tomkins. Tomkins outlines his personal routine for physical and mental health, which includes "‘morning . . . exercises’" (178), "‘a cold bath,’” and nine holes of golf on summer afternoons, telling Roger that "‘play[ing] nine holes of golf every day’" will allow Roger to "‘do his work better, never get that tired, nervous feeling’" (179). Tomkins further warns that overwork can have serious repercussions: "‘At the end of six weeks,’ he remarked, ‘he’ll be starting for the sanitarium. Let me tell you, every private hospital in New York is full of cases like yours. You just strain the human nervous system a little too far, and bang!—you’ve broken something’" (179-80). Of course, Tomkins is reiterating the common assumption of the period that the human nervous system only possesses a fixed and limited amount of nervous energy, and that putting too much strain upon it can cause a nervous breakdown. Also, Tomkins’ statements bear a striking resemblance to the ideas described in Fitzgerald’s Hygiene 101 texts described in chapter two, and his regiment for maintaining mental health and efficiency through proper exercise is similar to that described by Robert S. Carroll in The Mastery of Nervousness Based Upon Self Reeducation, in which Carroll, pointing out the importance of play to maintain mental health, says, “Our out-of-door games are limited. Golf is helping much” (116). Furthermore, throughout the story, Roger Halsey is repeatedly warned about the danger of nervous breakdown. At a later meeting, Tomkins says to Roger, "‘You’re so tired from overwork you don’t know what you’re saying. You’re on the verge of a nervous break—’" (ST 184). But Roger cuts him off and orders Tomkins out of the house. And even at work, Mr. Golden, the superintendent of Roger’s office building, says, "‘And don’t work too hard, Mr. Halsey."
You don’t want to have a nervous break—” (189). Once again, Roger cuts off the speaker, saying, ”’No . . . I don’t. But I will if you don’t leave me alone’” (189).

However, there is evidence that Roger Halsey is indeed nervous. While working upstairs in his home, Roger wonders what Tomkins and Gretchen are discussing downstairs and “several times he [Roger] arose and paced nervously up and down the room” (ST 183). Later, after a long night of work,

Suddenly he [Roger] began to be afraid. A hundred warnings he had heard swept into his mind. People did wreck themselves with overwork, and his body and brain were of the same vulnerable and perishable stuff. For the first time he found himself envying George Tomkin’s [sic] calm nerves and healthy routine. He arose and began pacing the room in a panic.

“I’ve got to sleep,” he whispered to himself tensely. “Otherwise I’m going crazy.”

He rubbed his hand over his eyes, and returned to the table to put up his work, but his fingers were shaking so that he could scarcely grasp the board. The sway of a bare branch against the window made him start and cry out. He sat down on the sofa and tried to think.

“Stop! Stop! Stop!” the clock said. “Stop! Stop! Stop!”

“I can’t stop,” he answered aloud. “I can’t afford to stop.”

Listen! Why, there was the wolf at the door now! He could hear its sharp claws scrape along the varnished woodwork. He jumped up, and running to the front door flung it open; then started back with a ghastly cry. An enormous wolf was standing on the porch, glaring at him with red, malignant eyes. As he watched it the hair bristled on its neck; it gave a low growl and disappeared in the darkness.
Then Roger realized with a silent, mirthless laugh that it was the police dog from over the way. (186-87)

Clearly, exhaustion and sleep deprivation are taking their toll on a "nervous" Roger Halsey. And on the day after Roger has completed his six weeks of labor, he awakes in his office "with a nervous start," and a few hours later "his whole body seemed to be on fire. When his artists arrived he was stretched on the couch in almost physical pain. The phone rang imperatively at 9.30 [sic], and he picked up the receiver with trembling hands" (189). After he receives the news that his work has been accepted, "Roger, stretched full length on the couch, was sobbing as if his heart would break" (190). Hence Roger Halsey was "nervous" in the sense that he had the reserves of nervous energy necessary to succeed in his work and career, and he did not sufficiently deplete that supply of energy to suffer a nervous breakdown.

In addition, the title of the story stems from the fact that the day before Roger receives the good news that his work has been accepted, he drugged his wife and took all of her shoes to prevent her from going riding with George Tomkins, since Roger still had "work ahead of him, twenty-four hours of work; and Gretchen, whether she wanted to or not, must sleep for one more day" (ST 187). Gretchen is therefore presented as a rather selfish young wife more concerned with having a good time than supportive of her husband's career. This appears to be related to Fitzgerald's own experience with Zelda; Gretchen is a "Southern girl" like Zelda, and Zelda "was bored when he [Fitzgerald] was writing and would go off by herself to seek amusement" (Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 141). As Alice Hall Petry has pointed out, "Like Roger Halsey, Fitzgerald must have longed occasionally to incapacitate his wife, who seemed to make a deliberate effort to prevent him from working in peace" (112). And although Gretchen is not described as "nervous"
in the story, her behavior indicates that the application of the term would have been appropriate. Nevertheless, we are told that Gretchen, upon awaking from her slumber, says, "I think my nerves are giving away. I can't find any of my shoes" (ST 191). She then tells the doctor who comes to visit, "I think I'm on the verge of a collapse" (192). The doctor prescribes "a good rest" for Gretchen, says to Robert Halsey, "I never saw you looking better in your life" (192), and provides the information necessary for one of the characteristic surprise endings in Fitzgerald's commercial fiction: George Tomkins, the character who constantly gave advice on how to keep one's nervous system in good health, has "had a nervous breakdown" (192). And fittingly, the doctor reports that George is "going West" (192)—the appropriate location, as we have seen from Gatsby, for nervous people.

However, "The Adjuster," first published in 1925, presents both male and female characters who are explicitly described as "nervous," yet this time the male character does suffer a nervous collapse. At the beginning of the story, Luella Hemple, a young wife and mother, tells her friend, "Even my baby bores me. That sounds unnatural, Ede, but it's true. He doesn't begin to fill my life. I love him with all my heart, but when I have him to take care of for an afternoon, I get so nervous that I want to scream. After two hours I begin praying for the moment the nurse'll walk in the door" (ST 141). Luella's statement above reiterates what Fitzgerald had written in a 1924 article for New York American: "Women with one child are somehow more restless, more miserable, more "nervous" and more determined to pay any price for the attention of men than women with several children or no children at all" ("Why Blame It" 184). Once again, it seems reasonable to assume that Fitzgerald was drawing upon his observations of Zelda, a mother of one child, for this description, and there is further evidence in "The Adjuster"
to support the connection between Luella and Zelda: Luella says of herself, "I'm a vile housekeeper, and I have no intention of turning into a good one" (ST 141), and Matthew Bruccoli reports that "Zelda was not interested in housekeeping" (Epic Grandeur 141). Bruccoli also asserts that "The Adjuster" is "one of the stories in which Fitzgerald seems to be lecturing at his wife" (Epic Grandeur 212).

Yet the two characteristics which define Luella Hemple are her boredom, as seen above in her statement about her child, and her selfishness. The narrator indicates that the boredom is partially the result of Luella's position in society:

> If she had been a pioneer wife, she would probably have fought the fight side by side with her husband. But here in New York there wasn't any fight. They weren't struggling together to obtain a far-off peace and leisure--she had more of either than she could use. Luella, like several thousand other young wives in New York, honestly wanted something to do. (ST 142)

In addition, Luella's selfishness is also apparent: she says to her friend, "And to tell you another true thing, I'd rather that he'd [her husband] be unhappy than me" (142). Yet Charles Hemple, Luella's husband, is fully aware of his wife's selfishness: "he was aware of her intense selfishness, but it is one of the many flaws in the scheme of human relationships that selfishness in women has an irresistible appeal to many men" (148).

Hence when Luella says, "Charles and I are on each other's nerves" (ST 142), she has identified that this story reveals the nervous impact of this marriage. Increasingly, the effects of nervous strain can be seen in Charles Hemple: Charles "had raised his hand to his face and was rubbing it nervously over his chin and mouth" (144), and later he again "had begun rubbing his face nervously" (146). Finally, the maid reports that
Charles "came into the kitchen a while ago and began throwing all the food out of the ice-box, and now he's in his room, crying and singing—" (148). Thus here we see that Charles Hemple had had a nervous collapse. There were twenty years of almost uninterrupted toil upon his shoulders, and the recent pressure at home had been too much for him to bear. His attitude toward his wife was the weak point in what had otherwise been a strong-minded and well-organized career. . . . Charles Hemple had begun to take the blame upon himself for situations which she had obviously brought about. It was an unhealthy attitude, and his mind had sickened, at length, with his attempts to put himself in the wrong. (148)

Charles Hemple's "nervous collapse" is connected with his "weak point," which lies in his "attitude toward his wife," and this weakness creates "pressure" which is too much for his nervous system to bear. Hence it appears that this pressure has depleted Charles' supply of nervous energy and resulted in a nervous collapse.

However. Luella's nervous behavior can be associated with her selfishness, which indicates that she is too weak-willed to fulfill her moral obligations to her husband. This is most clearly demonstrated through the enigmatic Dr. Moon, whom Charles Hemple has called in to speak with Luella. When Dr. Moon says to Luella, "Tell me about your trouble," Luella's weak will becomes apparent: "The words that were in Luella's mind, her will, on her lips, were: 'I'll do no such thing.' What she actually said amazed her. It came out of her spontaneously, with apparently no co-operation of her own" (ST 147). Thus Dr. Moon exerts a positive force over Luella's failure of will, and we find her gradually responding to his "treatment".

The nature of the curious influence that Dr. Moon exerted upon her, Luella could not guess. But as the days passed, she found herself doing many things that
had been repugnant to her before. She stayed at home with Charles; and when he grew better, she went out with him sometimes to dinner, or the theatre, but only when he expressed a wish. She visited the kitchen every day, and kept an unwilling eye on the house, at first with a horror that it would go wrong again, then from habit. (157)

As a result, “Charles was less nervous” (157). Yet the primary lesson Dr. Moon gives to Luella is revealed in his following words to her:

“We make an agreement with children that they can sit in the audience without helping to make the play,” he said, “but if they still sit in the audience after they’re grown, somebody’s got to work double time for them, so that they can enjoy the light and glitter of the world...”

“It’s your turn to be the center, to give others what was given to you for so long. You’ve got to give security to young people and peace to your husband, and a sort of charity to the old. You’ve got to let the people who work for you depend on you. You’ve got to cover up a few more troubles than you show, and be a little more patient than the average person, and do a little more instead of a little less than your share. The light and glitter of the world is in your hands.” (158)

Therefore, Dr. Moon teaches the “nervous” Luella Hemple how she must overcome her selfishness by fulfilling her obligations to her husband and humanity.

In addition, “Your Way and Mine,” first published in 1927, also displays a nervous husband and wife at odds with each other. In the first years of her marriage, Stella McComas “was so impressed with her husband’s rise and so absorbed in her babies that she accepted Henry as something infallible and protective” (PW 222-23). However, soon she feels that his “leisurely ways, his corpulence, his sometimes maddening
deliberateness, ceased to be the privileged idiosyncrasies of success,” and she begins to make “little suggestions as to his diet,” display “occasional crankiness as to his hours,” and make “invidious comparisons between his habits and the fancied habits of other men” (223). Finally, her husband’s business partner suggests that Stella might be able to change her husband’s ways if she “‘give[s] him a few more bills to pay. Sometimes . . . an extravagant wife’s the best inspiration a man can have’” (226). Accordingly, Stella “went to a real estate agent and handed over her entire bank account of nine thousand dollars as the first payment on a house they had fearfully coveted on Long Island” (226). This increased financial strain forces her husband Henry to change his ways and a “new routine was inaugurated in Henry McComas’ life”: instead of getting to the office by eleven o’clock as he used to, “Each morning Stella woke him at eight . . . He reached the office at nine-thirty as promptly as he had once reached it at eleven” (227).

Yet Stella appears to be another of Fitzgerald’s “nervous” women, which is somewhat evidenced by the fact that “Stella’s eyes blinked nervously” (PW 225). She has failed in her duty to her husband by not allowing him to live according to his own routine and then by creating unnecessary financial strain in order to force him to change his ways. However, the effect of this on Henry McComas is profound: he “found himself growing irritable and nervous” (228) and then suffers a nervous collapse which takes the form of an inability to execute his will:

In a moment he would reach up his hand to the bell beside his bed. In a minute--he wondered at his indecision--then he cried out sharply as he realized the cause of it. His will had already given his brain the order and his brain had signaled it to his hand. It was his hand that would not obey. . . .
Then he tried to reach his other hand across his body to message away the numbness but the other hand remained with a sort of crazy indifference on its own side of the bed. He tried to lift his foot, his knees.

After a few seconds he gave a snort of nervous laughter. There was something ridiculous about not being able to move your own foot. (229)

Later, the narrator provides the specific cause of Henry’s illness:

a famous specialist explained that certain nervous systems were so constituted that only the individual could judge what was, or wasn’t, a strain. The specialist realized that a host of hypochondriacs imposed upon this fact to nurse and pamper themselves through life when in reality they were as hardy and phlegmatic as the policeman on the corner, but it was nevertheless a fact. Henry McComas’ large, lazy body had been the protection and insulation of a nervous intensity as fine and taut as a hair wire. With proper rest it functioned brilliantly for three or four hours a day—fatigued ever so slightly over the danger line it snapped like a straw. (230-31)

Thus the failure of Henry’s nervous system is linked to placing too much “strain” upon it, causing it to snap “like a straw.” The implication is that Henry has a “fine and taut” nervous system (which accounts for his success), but that he only has a limited supply of nervous energy. If he works for more than “three or four hours a day” the system breaks down. Yet the symptom of Henry McComas’ nervous collapse is also quite interesting: it takes shape in Henry’s inability to execute his will, once again demonstrating the connection between nervous discourse and the will. Yet the failure of Henry’s will is different from the failure of will in Fitzgerald’s female characters: nervous women who
lack the will to fulfill their moral obligations are in need of male guidance, but Henry’s will is intact; his body is simply unable to execute the commands of his will.

As the famous specialist above suggests (and corresponding to a theme discussed in chapter two), nervousness was also often perceived as an excuse which people used to indulge themselves or to justify inappropriate behavior. In the opening page of “Diamond Dick and the First Law of Woman,” mentioned earlier, the ten-year-old Diana Dickey—who is not one of Fitzgerald’s nervous female characters—threatens to have a fit if she can’t keep her nickname. Diamond Dick: “I got to be named that because if I don’t I’ll have a fit and upset the family, see?” She ended up having the fit—a fine frenzy that brought a disgusted nerve specialist out from New York—and the nickname too” (PW 69). And “Not in the Guidebook,” first published in 1925, introduces the character of Jim Cooley, a man who takes his wife to Europe, takes all of her money, and then abandons her. We are told that “There was a thing called ‘shell shock’ which justified anything unpleasant in a war hero’s behavior—Jim Cooley had explained that to her [his wife] on the second day of their honeymoon when he had gotten abominably drunk and knocked her down with his open hand” (PW 163). Jim’s wife, Milly, believes this and consistently attempts to justify Jim’s behavior by alluding to his nervous condition: “it was in France that Jim’s nerves had gone to pieces, it was natural that he should be cross and uneasy for a few hours” (165); and when Jim abandons her, “Almost her first words were to explain that it was all because of his shattered nerves” (169). At the end of the story, both Milly and the reader discover that even Jim’s war heroism has been a lie. Hence in both stories above we see another aspect of nervous discourse in the form of characters who feign nervousness or use it as an excuse to justify their behavior, just as Beatrice O’Hara in This Side of Paradise.
However, several other illustrations of nervous discourse during this period of Fitzgerald’s career are related to ideas about the medical profession and are worthy of mention. In “The Adjuster,” discussed above, when Luella tells Doctor Moon that she has “no particular faith in psychoanalysis,” Doctor Moon says, “Neither have I . . . apparently unconscious of the snub” (ST 146). Here Luella and Doctor Moon’s lack of faith in psychoanalysis—as well as the fact that he should regard the implication that he is a doctor who practices psychoanalysis as a “snub”—reveals something of Fitzgerald’s attitude toward the new ideas of psychoanalysis. In a letter to Zelda’s father in 1925, Fitzgerald speaks of “the various bastard sciences that have sprung from Freud” (qtd. in Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 241). Furthermore, in “The Unspeakable Egg,” first published in 1924, the character of Aunt Jo, concerned about her niece’s mental health, first suggests that “A few weeks in one of those rest-cure places, or perhaps even a good cabaret” might do her niece good; however, she later calls in Doctor Gallup, saying “that perhaps psychoanalysis might clear up what my sister and I have been unable to handle” (PW 132), and exclaiming that “this will be the first really modern step we’ve ever taken in our lives” (134), since “Doctor Gallup is one of the most modern doctors in New York” (136). Yet both Aunt Jo and Doctor Gallup turn out to be thoroughly misguided: the “unspeakable egg” (undesirable man) whom their niece is associating with turns out to be the wealthy Mr. Van Tyne, who was simply acting a part to entertain the niece. At the end of the story, Aunt Cal “looked scornfully at him [Doctor Gallup] and turned to her sister. ‘All your modern ideas are not so successful . . . ,’ she remarked significantly” (141). And it is even rather ironic that the “modern” Doctor Gallup, in an attempt to muster everyone’s courage to go down to the fog-enshrouded beach and see what is going on, mutters, “Forward we go! . . . I’m inclined to think this is all a question.
of nerves” (139). All of the above evidence suggests that, like many people in the 1920s, Fitzgerald was reluctant to embrace the new theories of Freud and psychoanalysis at this point.

Yet to conclude this discussion with *Gatsby*, once again, we may note the use of the word *nervous* in the text. In chapter nine, on the day before Gatsby’s funeral, “an obviously frightened person” named Klipspringer calls up the Gatsby residence and speaks to Nick (GG 131). Although Nick is initially “relieved . . . for that seemed to promise another friend at Gatsby’s grave” (131), it soon becomes apparent that Klipspringer is not going to attend the funeral. Nick “ejaculated an unrestrained ‘Huh!’ and he [Klipspringer] must have heard for he went on nervously: ‘What I called about was a pair of shoes I left there . . .’” (131-32), and Nick hangs up the phone on him. Although Klipspringer is referred to as “obviously frightened” and acts “nervously,” reconfirming the connection between male nervousness and weakness (this time in the form of fear), and although one could maintain that Klipspringer’s “nervous behavior” has moral connotations, since he is not attending Gatsby’s funeral even though he did attend Gatsby’s parties, it is clear that this usage is virtually identical to our contemporary sense of *nervous*. And it is perhaps fitting that this final instance of *nervous* in the text of *Gatsby* is so similar to our own usage pattern, for it reminds us that we have inherited a nervous discourse which still retains some of the associations which the word has developed over time, particularly regarding gender; that is, nervousness is still associated with weakness and fear, and these qualities retain “unmanly” or “feminine” connotations according to our cultural constructions of gender. However, we must also remember that Fitzgerald stood at a unique point in the history of the development of nervous discourse; during his time the word retained implications which could be traced back to an era when
nervousness was associated with strength or vigor, a highly refined and sensitive nervous system, or an abundance of nervous energy—implications which have been lost to us—while also taking on its more modern sense of weakness or timidity. Hence Fitzgerald lived in a period which was witnessing a recent transformation of nervous discourse, a period which literally marked the threshold of what we would now call the modern world.
Notes

1 See Audhuy for a discussion of how “Fitzgerald, consciously and unconsciously, drew upon The Waste Land as a whole, to the point of making it the informing myth of his novel” (41).

2 Oppenheim also explains how cultural conceptions of gender in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could lead to anorexia nervosa:

Psychiatrists today stress the anorectic person’s desire to achieve total self-control and absolute autonomy, a goal that would have appealed poignantly to many Victorian and Edwardian women who so often heard and felt that it was beyond their grasp. In choosing to practice self-mastery through self-starvation, however, they only seemed to underscore, in the eyes of the medical profession, women’s startling incapacity to act reasonably. (215)
CHAPTER FIVE

VITALITY, NERVOUS BANKRUPTCY, AND DEGENERATION: THE BASIL AND JOSEPHINE STORIES. TENDER IS THE NIGHT, AND THE CRACK-UP

After the publication of *The Great Gatsby* in 1925, nine years would transpire before Fitzgerald would complete *Tender is the Night* for publication in 1934. During this interim Fitzgerald wrote numerous short stories to support himself, perhaps the most significant of which were two series of short stories initially published between 1928 and 1931. Each of these series describes the growth of a young protagonist: the first focuses on Basil Duke Lee; the second, Josephine Perry. In fact, for a time Fitzgerald considered assembling this collection of stories into what he referred to as “a nice light novel” (qtd. in Bryer and Kuehl viii), but later abandoned the idea. However, Jackson R. Bryer and John Kuehl assembled the collection for publication in 1973. Following the publication of *Tender is the Night*, from 1934 through 1937 Fitzgerald began writing a series of short autobiographical essays for *Esquire* magazine which chronicled what Fitzgerald perceived as his inability to write; these essays were posthumously collected and published with other material in 1945 as *The Crack-Up* by Fitzgerald’s long-time friend Edmund Wilson. While numerous critics have recognized a common theme running...
through *The Basil and Josephine Stories*, *Tender is the Night*, and *The Crack-Up*, I will demonstrate that this theme is directly related to the ideas associated with nervous discourse.

However, before discussing Fitzgerald's work, it is necessary to briefly discuss the events which occurred in Fitzgerald's life during this time. In addition to the death of his father in 1931, the most significant event of this period was Zelda's deteriorating mental condition. In 1930, Zelda suffered her first mental collapse, and this had two important ramifications for the purposes of this study: first, it provides us with a rare opportunity to see how Fitzgerald perceived of mental illness through his correspondence with Zelda's doctor, and second, it would come to influence Fitzgerald's ideas about psychology.

In previous chapters I mentioned Zelda's 1925 episode of "nervous hysteria" which required an injection of morphine. However, by 1929-30 Zelda's condition had deteriorated to the point where, as Matthew Bruccoli reports, "At a flower market she told Fitzgerald that the flowers were talking to her" (*Epic Grandeur* 291). On April 23, 1930, Zelda was admitted to the Malmaison hospital outside Paris. Although she discharged herself against doctor's advice in early May, her condition quickly worsened: "Less than two weeks later she was dazed and incoherent. She heard voices that terrified her, and her dreams, both sleeping and waking, were peopled with phantoms of indescribable horror. She had fainting fits and the menacing nature of hallucinations drove her into an attempted suicide" (Milford 159). On May 22 she was admitted to the Valmont clinic in Switzerland, and Dr. Oscar Forel was called in for a consultation: Forel diagnosed Zelda as schizophrenic and admitted her to his Les Rives de Prangins clinic on June 5, 1930. After Zelda suffered relapses in the autumn of 1930, Dr. Paul Eugen Bleuler, who had named schizophrenia and was considered the leading authority on the
illness, was called in for a consultation to confirm Forel's diagnosis. Though I do not wish to trace the future course of Zelda’s illness, it will suffice to say that while she made a recovery and was released from Prangins in September 1931, Zelda would have numerous relapses which would force her into various clinics and hospitals for the rest of her life. Zelda died in a fire at Highland Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina in 1948, surviving her husband by over seven years.

However, of particular relevance is the fact that the director of Highland Hospital was Dr. Robert S. Carroll, author of The Mastery of Nervousness Based Upon Self-Reeducation, a text I have quoted from throughout this study to demonstrate the ideas associated with nervous discourse during the early twentieth century. Zelda first entered Highland Hospital under the care of Dr. Carroll in April 1936, and Jeffrey Meyers has noted that Carroll "was a strong believer in a strict diet that would eliminate ‘toxic conditions of the blood’; in outdoor exercise and physical work; in hiking, camping, sports, crafts and music" (266)—a program for mental health he was already formulating in his aforementioned text. Yet what is even more interesting is that Fitzgerald himself had proposed a theory of "poison" as the cause of Zelda’s illness even before her admission to Highland Hospital. In a letter to Dr. Oscar Forel dated January 29, 1931, Fitzgerald proposed the following regarding Zelda’s mental illness and her outbreaks of eczema:

The original nervous biting, followed by the need to sweat might indicate some lack of normal elimination of poison. This uneliminated poison attacks the nerves.

When I used to drink hard for several days and then stopped I had a tendency toward mild eczema—of elimination of toxins through the skin. (Isn’t there an
especially intimate connection between the skin and the nerves, so that they share
together the distinction of being the things we know least about?) Suppose the
skin by sweating eliminated as much as possible of this poison, the nerves took on
the excess—then the breakdown came, and due to exhaustion of the sweat glands
the nerves had to take it all, but at the price of a gradual change in their structure
as a unit.

Now, (I know you’re regarding this as the wildest mysticism but please read on)
—now just as the mind of the confirmed alcoholic accepts a certain poisoned
condition of the nerves as the one to which he is the most at home and in which,
therefore, he is the most comfortable, Mrs. F. encourages her nervous system to
absorb the continually distilled poison. Then the exterior world, represented by
your personal influence, by the shock of Eglantine [where patients were placed
under restriction], by the sight of her daughter causes an effort of the will toward
reality, she is able to force this poison out of the nerve cells and the process of
elimination is taken over again by her skin.

In brief my idea is this. That the eczema is not relative but is the clue to the
whole business. I believe that the eczema is a definite concurrent product of
every struggle back toward the normal, just as an alcoholic has to struggle back
through a period of depression [original underlining]. (LL 205-06)

Fitzgerald continues in the same letter to assert that “The whole system is trying to live in
equilibrium. . . . I can’t help clinging to the idea that some essential physical thing like
salt or iron or semen or some unguessed at holy water is either missing or is present in
too great a quantity,” and he concludes that “she needs . . . all you include under the term
reeducation” (LL 206-07).
This concept of toxins causing skin problems and nervous disorders was expressed by Dr. Carroll in *The Mastery of Nervousness Based Upon Self Reeducation*, in which Carroll states the following:

A more or less crude understanding of the condition of chronic self-poisoning, technically termed autointoxication, has entered the minds of most magazine readers. . . . A number of the most chronic, distressing and disfiguring skin diseases are primarily the result of autointoxication, and the specialist has no hope of treating them successfully save through a proper regulation of diet and exercise. (50-51)

Whatever its manifestations, the physical damage of nervousness is practically always due to a self-intoxication in which the vital alkalinity of the sensitive protoplasm forming the nervous tissue has been reduced. This damage, to repeat a truth which should be shouted from the housetops, may be avoided only by maintaining that essential chemical equilibrium possible through a correct balance of food and exercise, of fuel and draft in the furnace. (54)

While these theories proposed by Carroll and Fitzgerald seem fantastic to the modern reader, they are in keeping with the nervous discourse described in this study. Specifically, nervous disorders are caused by tangible substances which the body either has too much of ("toxins") or lacks ("the vital alkalinity of the sensitive protoplasm").

Reduced to its simplest formulation, the idea seems to be this: improper diet and exercise leads to an abundance of "poison" in the body, and this poison then depletes nervous energy or "vital alkilinity." Thus Fitzgerald perceived his wife's eczema as the body attempting to eliminate the "poison" which was harming her nerves, depleting her nervous energy and causing her mental illness. One can also detect another element of
nervous discourse which I have discussed previously in this study: the significance of the will and its relation to nervousness. In Fitzgerald’s letter, he maintains that only by “an effort of the will toward reality” can Zelda expel the poison and move back toward a healthy mental state.

As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, Zelda’s illness would also force Fitzgerald to engage with more contemporary ideas about psychology. As Joseph Mancini, Jr. has pointed out, in one of the first Josephine stories, “First Blood,” initially published in 1930, Fitzgerald “mentions Jung by name along with one of his theories about the male dimension in a female” (91). However, it is important to remember that while Fitzgerald would begin to appropriate some of the “new” theories of psychology and incorporate them into his fiction, the nervous discourse which he had inherited in the early years of the twentieth century would continue to dominate his work.

The most significant theme in Fitzgerald’s fiction during the period under discussion is that of vitality, and it reflects another manifestation of nervous discourse. While vitality can be detected in a number of Fitzgerald’s works discussed previously, it becomes the predominant trope in his fiction during this period. The Latin word vita, meaning “life,” is the original root of vitality, and the OED demonstrates that word vitality literally means “vital force, life” and had come to refer to “mental or physical vigour” by the late nineteenth century. However, there is significant evidence to indicate that Fitzgerald, writing in the early twentieth century, conceived of vitality or vital energy as a specifically nervous energy. This, of course, is a logical conclusion: since medical science had determined that consciousness resides in the brain, the intricate network of nerves which make up the central organ of the nervous system, one’s vital energy or life force is a nervous energy. It is of interest to note that Bernard Shaw—whose work
Fitzgerald was certainly acquainted with—consistently links his conception of a “life force” to higher evolutionary levels of nervous development, specifically, the brain. Consider Don Juan’s statements regarding the “life force” in Act Three of Man and Superman:

... I enjoy the contemplation of that which interests me above all things: namely, Life: the force that ever strives to attain greater power of contemplating itself.

What made this brain of mine, do you think? ... But there is the work of helping Life in its struggle upward. Think of how it wastes and scatters itself, how it raises up obstacles to itself and destroys itself in its ignorance and blindness. It needs a brain, this irresistible force, lest in its ignorance it should resist itself. ... Things immeasurably greater than man in every respect but brain have existed and perished. ... These things lived and wanted to live; but for lack of brains they did not know how to carry out their purpose, and so destroyed themselves. (617-19)

Furthermore, as many critics have noted, Fitzgerald perceived a loss of his own vitality during the 1930s, and this theme dominates both Tender is the Night and The Crack-Up essays, as I shall demonstrate. There are a number of possible reasons for Fitzgerald’s preoccupation with the vitality motif, and the first among these is Zelda’s mental illness, which certainly had a significant impact on Fitzgerald’s life. Also, as I have previously discussed, there is some evidence to suggest that Fitzgerald conceived of his wife’s mental illness as stemming from a lack of nervous energy. Second, the death Fitzgerald’s father in 1931 seems to have strongly affected him, prompting him to write an unfinished essay on the subject. Third, Fitzgerald had a great deal of difficulty completing Tender is the Night for publication and was disappointed by its sales; as Matthew Bruccoli has pointed out. “The author struggled with it for nearly a decade, and
what he expected would be his greatest popular and critical success was a qualified failure” (*Composition* xiv). Fourth, Fitzgerald’s career and income began a downward spiral during the 1930s. Fitzgerald’s *Ledger* records his earnings in 1931 as $37,599.00 (67). By 1936, Fitzgerald would record a total income of $10,180.97 in his *Ledger* (76). Fifth, Fitzgerald began experiencing health problems related to tuberculosis and his chronic alcoholism. And lastly, we must remember that Fitzgerald, the Jazz-Age author who had been considered the spokesman for a younger, restless generation, was approaching middle age during the 1930s, and these years coincided, of course, with the Great Depression.

Nevertheless, whatever the cause, the idea of vitality is first developed in Fitzgerald’s Basil Duke Lee stories, initially published between 1928 and 1929. In these stories, Fitzgerald drew upon his own childhood experiences to describe the development of a young boy from the age of eleven to seventeen. According to Bryer and Kuehl, “This plan shows that Fitzgerald designed these stories to present Basil encountering different experiences and hardships so that, in the words of critic Matthew J. Bruccoli, ‘he gradually comes to achieve self-control through an understanding of his own assets and liabilities of personality’” (xii). And Basil does indeed suffer a series of adolescent hardships: as the narrator in “He Thinks He’s Wonderful” points out, “It was apparent that before he [Basil] obtained much success in dealing with the world he would know that he’d been in a fight” (*BJ* 78). However, what is particularly striking is Basil’s resilience: although he suffers humiliation and heartbreak, he consistently bounces back. As the title of one of the stories in the series indicates, Basil keeps “Forging Ahead.” Yet it is a passage in the story “He thinks He’s Wonderful” which explains why Basil can keep forging ahead: “He lay on his bed, baffled, mistaken, miserable but not beaten.
Time after time, the same vitality that had led his spirit to a scourging made him able to shake off the blood like water not to forget, but to carry his wounds with him to new disasters and new atonements—toward his unknown destiny” (BJ 97-98). Clearly, it is Basil’s “vitality” which allows him to struggle onward. Bryer and Kuehl have commented that Basil “emerges triumphant, escaping the fate of Amory Blaine, Anthony Patch, Jay Gatsby, Dick Diver, and Monroe Stahr, all victimized by females. Why? Because Basil possesses the ‘vitality’ . . .” (xxi). However, while Basil does indeed possess more vitality than these other characters, it is not because he is intrinsically different from them. Rather, it is because Basil, unlike the other characters, is still a young boy: he still has an ample supply of vitality. In fact, references to Basil’s vitality or ample supply of energy abound in these stories. In “The Scandal Detectives,” Basil and his friend “spent their afternoons struggling to evolve a way of life which should measure up to the mysterious energies fermenting inside them” (BJ 18). And in “The Perfect Life,” during a football game Basil “could feel his expended energy miraculously replacing itself after each surpassing effort” (BJ 121). In the same story, as Basil contemplates living the “perfect life,” “The very thought of such perfection crystallized his vitality into an ecstasy of ambition” (125-26). Also, to return to a point made in chapter two, Basil’s ample supply of energy can be seen in his “restlessness”: in “The Freshest Boy.” as Basil looks upon New York City, he recognizes that “He would see it a lot now. lay his restless heart upon this greater restlessness of a nation . . .” (BJ 75).

However, youth does not guarantee that one cannot expend his or her supply of vitality or energy, a fact evidenced in the Josephine Perry stories, first published between 1930 and 1931. In the first of these stories, the young Josephine Perry appears to have an ample supply of energy, specifically emotional energy. In “First Blood,” we are told that
Josephine "did not plan; she merely let herself go, and the overwhelming life in her did the rest" (BJ 196). In the same story, the narrator also refers to Josephine's "ample cup of emotion [which] had spilled over on its own accord" (203). In "A Nice Quiet Place," we can again see evidence of Josephine's energy: "To the three months of nervous energy conserved since Easter beneath the uniform of her school were added six weeks of resentment—added, that is, as the match might be said to be added to the powder. For Josephine exploded with an audible, visible bang: . . . " (BJ 219). However, by the final story in the Josephine series, "Emotional Bankruptcy," Josephine Perry has depleted her reserves of emotional energy. In the closing lines of the story, as Josephine confronts the man of her dreams, she is forced to acknowledge that she has nothing left to give him: "'You're everything—you're everything I've always wanted.' Her voice continued inside herself: 'But I've had everything'" (BJ 287). Thus Josephine must tell him, "'I've got nothing to give you. I don't feel anything at all'" (287). Josephine Perry has used up her limited supply of emotional energy, and she is left to face "emotional bankruptcy": "She was awfully tired and lay face downward on the couch with that awful, awful realization that all the old things are true. One cannot both spend and have. The love of her life had come by, and looking in her empty basket, she had found not a flower left for him—not one. After a while she wept" (287).

Although I will say more regarding the significance of class and wealth in Fitzgerald's work later in this chapter, we must also bear in mind that there is a noticeable difference between the respective economic backgrounds of Basil Duke Lee and Josephine Perry. In "A Night at the Fair," Basil notes that one of his female friends "was rich and he was only comfortable" (BJ 46), while in "The Freshest Boy" we are told that Basil "knew that he was one of the poorest boys in a rich boys' school" (BJ 59).
contrast, in “A Snobbish Story” we discover that “the Perrys were rich and powerful” (BJ 246), and that Josephine “threw in her lot with the rich and powerful of this world forever” (269). Thus, as in “The Rich Boy,” discussed in the previous chapter, it appears that someone who comes from a background of wealth and status, such as Josephine Perry, lacks or has expended the resources of energy which someone from a lower class has, such as Basil Duke Lee.

In his biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Arthur Mizener was the first to recognize and call attention to the significance of the idea developed in “Emotional Bankruptcy,” linking it to Fitzgerald’s own emotional state in the 1930s:

He [Fitzgerald] also began to fear the exhaustion of his emotional, his spiritual, energy, a final “lesion of vitality.” This idea may have been suggested to him by Zelda’s tragedy, for his first use of it occurs in a story he wrote for the Josephine series just when he was beginning to grasp what had happened to Zelda; the story is called “Emotional Bankruptcy.” . . . The occasion provided by this Josephine story for the definition of Fitzgerald’s feeling is trivial; but the feeling itself is not. It is the same one that dominates Dick Diver when, at the end of Tender is the Night, he makes a last effort to be his old, sensitive self for Mary North. (272)

Although, as I have previously indicated, I believe that Fitzgerald was exploring the theme of vitality prior to the Josephine stories in the Basil Duke Lee series. Mizener’s assessment of the significance of this idea in Fitzgerald’s work is accurate. Mizener maintains that

This possibility of vitality’s exhaustion led Fitzgerald gradually to think of vitality as if it were a fixed sum, like money in the bank. Against this account you drew until, piece by piece, the sum was spent and you found yourself
emotionally bankrupt. . . . It became habitual with him to consider people's lives in the light of this feeling. . . . His own father seemed to him a clear case. (272-73)

In chapter two I mentioned Fitzgerald's father and his business failures in upstate New York, and I quoted from Fitzgerald's unfinished essay written after his father's death in 1931, in which he writes of his father: "He came from tired old stock with very little left of vitality and mental energy but he managed to raise a little for me." Interestingly, in Tender is the Night, Dick Diver's father, who resides in Buffalo, New York and dies during the course of the novel, is also described as being one who is "of tired old stock" and lacks energy: "He was one of those about whom it was said with smug finality in the gilded age: 'very much the gentleman, but not much get-up-and-go about him'" (TN 228). The crucial point is that although the issue of waning vitality or energy is the predominant theme in Fitzgerald's fiction during this period, the idea of possessing a fixed and limited amount of vitality, energy, or emotional capital which, when expended, results in a type of bankruptcy is another significant element of nervous discourse in Fitzgerald's work. As I discussed in chapter one, according to the ideas of nervous discourse in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people were believed to possess only limited amounts of nerve force or nervous energy, as when George Miller Beard speaks of "nervous bankruptcy" in his 1881 text entitled American Nervousness. Furthermore, there is additional evidence to demonstrate that the ideas which permeate Fitzgerald's fiction during this period are intrinsically linked to the ideas associated with nervous discourse.
However, it is necessary to first point out that the gradual depletion of energy or vitality is the key to Fitzgerald's 1934 novel, *Tender is the Night*. In the words of Arthur Mizener,

by the time he came to write *Tender is the Night*, he was haunted by the idea of emotional bankruptcy and made it the central meaning of Dick Diver's history. Dick yields to the other pressures that his world puts on him only after the slow, unavoidable devitalization that takes place inside him has done its work. That "lesion of vitality" is the heart of his mystery, and Fitzgerald traces it minutely in the book. (275)

At the beginning of *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver, a psychiatrist, and his wife Nicole, a former psychiatric patient, are at the French Riviera, where Dick meets a young American actress, Rosemary Hoyt, whom he becomes infatuated with. At this point in the novel, the narrator informs us that "At that moment the Divers represented externally the exact furthermost evolution of a class, so that most people seemed awkward beside them—in reality a qualitative change had already set in that was not at all apparent to Rosemary [emphasis added]" (*TN* 29). Thus, in reality, Dick's gradual loss of vitality has already begun. As Matthew Bruccoli points out, "His [Dick's] infatuation with Rosemary is a clear signal that his process of deterioration is well advanced by the opening of the novel" (*Epic Grandeur* 363). In addition, what seems to attract Dick's attention to Rosemary is her ample supply of "vitality": Dick says to her, "'Of course we've been excited about you from the moment you came on the beach. That vitality, we were sure it was professional—especially Nicole was. It'd never use itself up on any one person or group'" (*TN* 47). In fact, one cannot but wonder if Dick somehow vicariously seeks in Rosemary the vitality he is losing.
Nevertheless, after the flashback which occurs through chapters 1-10 in Book Two of the novel, Dick's decline becomes apparent. Repeatedly, Dick is described as exhausted or lacking energy, and there are several references to loss of his vitality. First, Dick attempts to rid his mind of Rosemary Hoyt, "but for the moment he had no force to do it" (TN 189). Then, as Dick leaves his clinic to travel to a psychiatric conference, "he felt numb, realizing how tired he was" (218). During this trip, Dick runs into Tommy Barban, whose condition provides a striking contrast to Dick's: "he [Tommy] was all relaxed for combat; as a fine athlete playing secondary defense in any sport is really resting much of the time, while a lesser man only pretends to rest and is at a continual and self-destroying nervous tension" (221). When Tommy tells Dick, "'You don't look so—' he fought for a word, 'so jaunty as you used to, so spruce, you know what I mean,'" we are told that "The remark sounded too much like one of those irritating accusations of waning vitality" (221). Dick later contemplates his situation, realizing something has been lost:

"He had lost himself—he could not tell the hour when, or day or the week, the month or the year. Once he had cut through things, solving the most complicated equations as the simplest problems of his simplest patients. Between the time he found Nicole flowering under a stone on the Zurichsee and the moment of his meeting with Rosemary the spear had been blunted. (225)

Still later, Dick is described as "somewhat exhausted," and he must "conceal his fatigue as best he could" from Rosemary (231-32). Furthermore, since his previous encounter with Rosemary, "there had been a lesion of enthusiasm" (233). And during an evening in Rome with Collis Clay, Dick "felt a distinct lesion of his own vitality" (248). When Dick and Nicole later run into Rosemary at the beach, Dick attempts an acrobatic stunt while..."
aquaplaning, yet he cannot do it, though "he had done the thing with ease only two years ago" (315), and Dick asks Rosemary, "Did you hear I'd gone into a process of deterioration?" (317). Dick then says, "It's true... The change came a long way back-but at first it didn't show. The manner remains intact for some time after the morale cracks" (317). Although Fitzgerald would later explore his own "crack" in The Crack-Up, it is clear that Dick Diver has undergone a gradual deterioration or decline, one which is linked to his loss of vitality. By the close of the novel Dick has lost both his family and his career, leaving Nicole to Tommy Barban and returning to America. Dick moves back to upstate New York, first Buffalo, then Batavia, Lockport, and Geneva, and "his latest note [to Nicole] was post-marked from Hornell, New York, which is some distance from Geneva and a very small town; in any case he is almost certainly in that section of the country, in one town or another" (349). Hence Dick fades into oblivion, and it is fitting that Fitzgerald would locate Dick's final decline and disappearance in upstate New York, the place where Fitzgerald's own father's career had come to an end.

Yet the central dilemma facing readers is the cause of Dick's decline or loss of vitality. On one hand, Dick's loss of vitality can be seen as inevitable, as the gradual diminution of a limited amount of vital energy: in other words, Dick's deterioration can be ascribed to simply getting old. However, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that the cause of Dick's lesion of vitality is his wife, Nicole. When Dick first meets Nicole he is embarking on a successful career as a psychiatrist, while she is a wealthy American patient at Dohmler's clinic on the Zurichsee. While I will say more regarding how Fitzgerald employed contemporary ideas about psychology later, for the present it suffices to point out that Nicole, who had been sexually molested as a child by her father, begins a correspondence with Dick which enacts, in the words of Franz Gregorovius, her...
doctor, "a transference of the most fortuitous kind" (TN 137). When Dick begins to acknowledge that he is falling in love with Nicole, Franz provides him with a stern warning: "What! And devote half your life to being doctor and nurse and all—never! I know what these cases are. One time in twenty it's finished in the first push—better never see her again!" (160). And although Dick decides to end his relationship with Nicole, they inadvertently run into each other again at a later date and their romantic relationship begins in earnest, culminating in their marriage and children. However, though Nicole is far wealthier than her husband, there are numerous statements which indicate that she relies upon Dick for her sustenance, though, contrarily, because of the extreme wealth of Nicole’s family, she is said to in fact "own" him:

She [Nicole] had come out of her first illness alive with new hopes, expecting so much, yet deprived of any subsistence except Dick, bringing up children she could only pretend gently to love, guided orphans. The people she liked, rebels mostly, disturbed her and were bad for her—she sought in them the vitality that had made them independent or creative or rugged, sought in vain—for their secrets were buried deep in childhood struggles they had forgotten. . . . She led a lonely life owning Dick who did not want to be owned. (203)

And Nicole’s sister’s “unsaid lines” reiterate this: “We own you, and you’ll admit it sooner or later. It is absurd to keep up the pretense of independence” (199). Yet it is even more clear that Nicole’s illness is a drain on her husband’s energy: Dick “could not watch her [Nicole’s] disintegrations without participating in them” (214), and later, “she [Nicole] must continue her dry suckling at his [Dick’s] lean chest” (310). In other words, Nicole has been drawing her mental health and vitality from Dick, but he has nothing left to give her. Furthermore, “though Nicole often paid lip service to the fact that he [Dick]
had led her back to the world she had forfeited, she had thought of him really as an inexhaustible energy, incapable of fatigue—she forgot the troubles she caused him at the moment when she forgot the troubles of her own that had prompted her” (334). Finally, after Nicole’s “nascent transference to another man [Tommy Barban]” (334), she can contrast “her health and beauty against his [Dick’s] physical deterioration, her unscrupulousness against his moralities . . .” (335) and break with her husband. The end of Dick and Nicole’s relationship is summarily described as, “The case was finished. Doctor Diver was at liberty” (335). However, it is important to remember that “Dick had anticipated everything” (344). In the final scene of the novel, after Nicole says, “Dick was a good husband to me for six years. . . . All that time I never suffered a minute’s pain because of him, and he always did his best never to let anything hurt me,” her sister responds with, “That’s what he was educated for” (346), reinforcing the fact that Dick has been used, or has let himself be used. It is also significant that in the final scene, after Mary North says to Dick, “All people want is to have a good time and if you make them unhappy you cut yourself off from nourishment,” Dick answers with, “Have I been nourished?” (347). It appears that Dick has not been nourished throughout the course of the novel, but has instead provided nourishment for others, most notably his wife, and this had played a crucial part in his lesion of vitality and deterioration.

James W. Tuttleton has commented on Nicole’s drain of Dick’s vitality, linking the “motif of loss of vitality” to the “vampire motif,” and asserting that “the psychoanalytic process of transference substitutes for the older folkloric vampire imagery. . . . What it comes down to is the transference of Dick’s health to Nicole, his vitality to her” (“Vitality” 242). Obviously, much of the evidence provided above from the novel tends to support Tuttleton’s belief that Nicole functions as a modern vampire who drains
Dick's vital energy. In fact, in a short story entitled "Her Last Case," initially published in November 1934 (the same year as Tender is the Night), Fitzgerald describes the relationship between a nurse and her patient, a man who suffers from "general deterioration" (PW 576), and his nurse is concerned about "any lesion of vitality" (580). In this story, although the man is divorced, when his wife comes to visit, the maid proclaims, "It was she that did it... She owned him in her black heart when he was no higher than my shoulder, and she comes back to feed on his goodness, like a vampire feeding on his blood to live by" (584-85). However, there are two relevant points to remember regarding Tuttleton's view: first, according to the nervous discourse which Fitzgerald had inherited, Dick Diver could only have a fixed and limited supply of vital energy, and Nicole's continual drain upon this supply must lead to his decline. Yet without the ideas associated with nervous discourse, Diver could be conceived of as a man whose supply of vitality could replenish itself; in other words, Nicole's drain upon Dick's vitality would not necessarily lead to his deterioration. Second, Tuttleton's view does not take into account the fact that Dick seems to willingly participate in Nicole's "vampirism": he lets it happen. Since, as I pointed out above, "Dick had anticipated everything," it appears that he is fully aware of what is going on.

Since Dick seems to aid in and almost desire his own destruction, we must examine what motivates Dick Diver to willingly surrender his vitality. During the flashback episode of Book Two, we get a glimpse of the young Doctor Diver prior to his encounter with Nicole. At one point, Dick says to himself, "--And lucky Dick can’t be one of these clever men: he must be less intact, even faintly destroyed. If life won’t do it for him it’s not a substitute to get a disease, or a broken heart, or an inferiority complex, though it’d be nice to build out some broken side till it was better than the original structure" (TN
133). Later, we are told that Dick “used to think that he wanted to be good, he wanted to be kind, he wanted to be brave and wise, but it was all pretty difficult. He wanted to be loved, too, if he could fit it in” (151-52). However, perhaps the key insight into Dick’s motivation, the explanation of his willingness to surrender his vitality, occurs before the end of Dick and Nicole’s relationship, when Nicole asks him, “‘After all, what do you get out of this?’” Dick says, “‘Knowing your stronger every day. Knowing that your illness follows the law of diminishing returns’” (297). Thus it appears that Dick has surrendered himself, allowed himself to be “faintly destroyed” for the sake of his wife.

Bruccoli has pointed out that Tender is the Night was originally subtitled “A Romance” (Epic Grandeur 342), and he asserts that “In chronicling Dick Diver’s decline Fitzgerald was trying to account for his own loss of purpose after 1925, recognizing that in both cases the causes could be traced to a romantic concept of character” (362). While Bruccoli’s interpretation has validity, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that Dick Diver’s romantic aspiration is related to religious ideals. Specifically, what Bruccoli asserts is a “romantic concept of character” is an aspiration toward a spiritual ideal: following Christ’s precepts by sacrificing one’s self for another. Dick Diver, after falling in love with Nicole, chooses a type of martyrdom by sacrificing his vitality to her. However, that sacrifice had its pleasures as well: Nicole’s physical beauty and the Warren money. Also, Dick Diver is certainly no saint, a fact evidenced by his adulterous relationship with Rosemary Hoyt and his increasingly hostile, often drunken behavior toward others. Nevertheless, Dick Diver’s motives are, in the final analysis, altruistic. He has willingly sacrificed his vitality to Nicole, his wife.

Joan Allen is one of the few critics who has discussed the significance of Fitzgerald’s Catholic upbringing, devoting a book-length study to the impact Fitzgerald’s Catholicism
had on his work, in which she maintains that "The second person to whom Dick relates as priest is Nicole, for he is not only in love with her but is also consecrated to completing her cure" (126). While there is no need to reiterate the biographical facts regarding Fitzgerald’s Catholic heritage, there are a number of passages in Tender is the Night which point to Dick’s motives. First, when regarding Dick Diver we must remember that his father was a minister, that "Watching his father’s struggles in poor parishes had wedded a desire for money to an essentially unacquisitive nature" (TN 225). Also, as Dick flies from Zurich to Munich,

... it was more fun to descend in his imagination into the villages and shake hands with the rural characters. He sat in the churches as he sat in his father’s church in Buffalo, amid the starchy must of Sunday clothes. He listened to the wisdom of the Near East, was Crucified, Died, and was Buried in the cheerful church, and once more worried between five or ten cents for the collection plate, because of the girl who sat in the pew behind. (219)

And in the closing scene of the novel, as Dick departs from “his” beach on the French Riviera, “He raised his right hand and with a papal cross he blessed the beach from the high terrace” (348). Furthermore, in a preliminary sketch which Fitzgerald made for Tender is the Night in 1932 (originally entitled The Drunkard’s Holiday), he says that the novel should “Show a man who is a natural idealist, a spoiled priest, giving in for various causes to the ideas of the haute Burgeoise [sic], and in his rise to the top of the social world losing his idealism, his talent and turning to drink and dissipation” (qtd. in Bruccoli, Composition 76). And lastly, what are we to make of James Thurber’s account of Fitzgerald referring to Tender is the Night as “my Testament of Faith” (Thurber 36)? Of course, Fitzgerald was not the first author to link romanticism with Christian ideals.
In fact, I am reminded of an earlier American romantic author whose work sometimes examined the compatibility of Christ's precepts and life in the modern world (and whose work, incidentally, has been linked to nervous discourse, as I pointed out in chapter one): Herman Melville. In *Pierre*, the pamphlet by Plotinus Plinlimmon states,

— That in things terrestrial (horological) a man must not be governed by ideas celestial (chronometrical); that certain minor self-renunciations in this life his own mere instinct for his own every-day general well-being will teach him to make, but he must by no means make a complete unconditional sacrifice of himself in behalf of any other being, or any cause, or any conceit. (Melville 214)

In *Tender is the Night*, Fitzgerald demonstrates what happens to a man who has attempted to fulfill the Christian ideal of altruism by sacrificing his vitality to his wife: he fades into oblivion, alone.

Although the means by which Dick Diver has sacrificed himself—by surrendering his vitality—is of particular relevance to this study, there may be another element of Dick Diver's decline which is related to nervous discourse. At one point in *Tender is the Night*, Dick is awakened by a phone call from two acquaintances requesting his help:

He got up and, as he absorbed the situation, his self-knowledge assured him that he would undertake to deal with it—the old fatal pleasingness, the old forceful charm, swept back with its cry of “Use me!” He would have to go fix this thing that he didn't care a damn about, because it had early become a habit to be loved, perhaps from the moment when he had realized that he was the last hope of a decaying clan. On an almost parallel occasion, back at Dohmler's clinic on the Zurichsee, realizing this power, he had made his choice, chosen Ophelia, chosen
the sweet poison and drunk it. Wanting above all to be brave and kind, he had
wanted, even more than that, to be loved. (TN 335-36)

Matthew Bruccoli maintains that Dick “has been destroyed by defects in his character,
and in the process his resources have been so completely drained that there is no hope for
him” (Composition 83-84). Perhaps more specifically, Bruccoli asserts that “the true
source of Dick’s collapse is his need to be loved and admired, which compels him to
squander his emotional capital” (Epic Grandeur 341), and that “Dick’s generosity is not
disinterested, for he requires the ‘carnivals of affection’ that he inspires” (363).

However, the notion that Dick’s need to be loved is a defect in his character is somewhat
untenable: one could easily argue that all human behavior is prompted by self-interest, or
what Freud refers to as the “pleasure principle.” In other words, even altruism can be
seen as a selfish endeavor, since helping others makes us feel good about ourselves. Yet
there may indeed be a “defect” in Dick’s character. Specifically, the statement that Dick
is “the last hope of a decaying clan” warrants further scrutiny. Is the “decaying clan” the
Warren family, whom Dick has chosen to help by marrying Nicole, or is it Dick’s own
clan? In either case, the idea of a decaying clan suggests degeneration, which I will
discuss at a later point. However, I believe the decaying clan may be Dick’s own, and a
description of Dick’s character in the 1932 sketch of the novel provides some support for
this:

Also he is very intelligent, widely read—in fact he has all the talents, including
especially great personal charm. This is all planted in the beginning. He is a
superman in possibilities, that is, he appears to be at first sight from a burgeoisie
[sic] point of view. However, he lacks that tensile strength—none of the
ruggedness of Brancusi, Leger, Picasso. (qtd. in Bruccoli, Composition 78)
The phrase “lacks that tensile strength” is of particular relevance to this study. *Tensile* means “capable of tension,” and the word *tension* is unquestionably related to nervous discourse. While the words *tense* and *tension* have occurred in a number of Fitzgerald’s previous works and I will discuss the significance of these terms more extensively in chapter six, for the present it is suffices to point out that the *OED* clearly indicates that by the nineteenth century, *tension* had come to refer to “A straining, or strained condition, of the mind, feelings, or nerves,” a meaning which the word retains to this day. By stating that Dick Diver lacked “tensile strength,” Fitzgerald may have been indicating that Dick’s nervous system lacked the strength or energy to endure stress. Therefore, perhaps this can be seen as the defect in Dick’s character, one which helps to account for his decline: since his nervous system lacks “tensile strength,” it is easy to understand why Nicole’s drain of his vitality has such a dramatic effect on him.

However, in the final analysis, we must wonder to what extent Fitzgerald’s early sketch of Dick Diver represents the final form of his character in *Tender is the Night*. Matthew Bruccoli has described the long process of development which the novel went through, he and cites credible evidence “which indicates that Fitzgerald’s view of his hero’s fate subtly changed as the novel was written” (*Composition* 83). While I disagree with Bruccoli’s final assessment of Dick Diver as I described it above, I concur with his conclusion that Fitzgerald’s conception of Dick changed as the novel progressed. Specifically, I do not think that the original plan for Dick’s lack of “tensile strength” accounts for his decline, nor that he merely turns “to drink and dissipation.” Rather, the tragic nature of Dick’s decline, as I pointed out above, stems from his altruism, his willing surrender of his vitality to his wife, which leads to his final fading into oblivion.
Nevertheless, perhaps the most elucidating statements which Fitzgerald made regarding the loss of vitality occur in the autobiographical essays collected in *The Crack-Up*. In “Sleeping and Waking,” first published in 1934, Fitzgerald describes his difficulty with insomnia “at a time of utter exhaustion—too much work undertaken, interlocking circumstances that made the work twice as arduous, illness within and around . . .” (CU 64). In addition, Fitzgerald describes the source of his “horror” in this essay:

> Back now to the rear porch, and conditioned by intense fatigue of mind and perverse alertness of the nervous system—like a broken-stringed bow upon a throbbing fiddle—I see the real horror develop over the roof-tops, and in the strident horns of night-owl taxis and the shrill monody of revelers’ arrival over the way. Horror and waste—

> --Waste and horror—what I might have been and done that is lost, spent, gone, dissipated, unrecapturable. (CU 67)

In the above passage, Fitzgerald describes his fatigue and exhaustion, as well as what appears to be an ill-functioning nervous system, comparing it to a “broken-stringed bow,” yet the true source of his horror is the concept of “waste.” In other words, his energies have been “spent” or “dissipated,” and they cannot be recovered. However, in “The Crack-Up,” first published in 1936, Fitzgerald describes in further detail what he perceived of as his own loss of vitality, his “crack,” and he makes it very clear that this “crack” is associated with his nerves:

Now a man can crack in many ways—can crack in the head—in which case the power of decision is taken from you by others! or in the body, when one can but submit to the white hospital world; or in the nerves. William Seabrook in an unsympathetic book tells, with some pride and a movie ending, of how he became
a public charge. What led to his alcoholism or was bound up with it, was a collapse of his nervous system. Though the present writer was not so entangled—having at the time not tasted so much as a glass of beer for six months—it was his nervous reflexes that were giving way—too much anger and too many tears. (CU 70-71)

Later in the same essay, Fitzgerald writes that “I began to realize that for two years my life had been a drawing on resources that I did not possess, that I had been mortgaging myself physically and spiritually up to the hilt” (72). And in “Handle With Care,” also first published in 1936, he writes that he had been making “a call upon physical resources that [he] did not command, like a man over-drawing at his bank” (CU 77). Once again, the financial analogies abound, and Fitzgerald seems to be reiterating George Miller Beard’s descriptions of “nervous bankruptcy.”

However, in “The Crack-Up,” Fitzgerald also indicates that these resources he has been depleting are bound up with the notion of “vitality”:

... it occurred to me simultaneously that of all natural forces, vitality is the incommunicable one. In days when juice came into one as an article without duty, one tried to distribute it—but always without success; to further mix metaphors, vitality never “takes.” You have it or you haven’t, like health or brown eyes or honor or a baritone voice. (CU 74)

And this point is reiterated in “Pasting It Together,” first published in 1936: “so the question became one of finding why and where I had changed, where was the leak through which, unknown to myself, my enthusiasm and my vitality had been steadily and prematurely trickling away” (CU 80).
It is particularly relevant that Fitzgerald associates his “crack” and loss of vitality with his nervous system. Since, therefore, what has been referred to as “vitality,” “energy,” and “emotional capital” throughout this chapter is related to the nervous system: these terms refer to what is essentially a nervous energy. In addition, this idea was not unique to Fitzgerald, but rather reflects another manifestation of the nervous discourse which Fitzgerald had inherited. As I pointed out in chapter three, Robert S. Carroll, in *The Mastery of Nervousness Based Upon Self Reeducation*, states that “the penalty of wasted and misused vital energy will assert itself as ‘nervousness,’” once again demonstrating that vital energy or vitality is a nervous energy, and that its depletion results in “nervousness.” Furthermore, Fitzgerald’s statements suggest that one has a limited amount of this energy, and that—unlike Dick Diver’s vitality in *Tender is the Night*—one cannot distribute it. While Bruccoli maintains that Fitzgerald may have been “achieving Zelda’s impossible cure in fiction” in *Tender is the Night* (*Epic Grandeur* 341), it must have been clear to Fitzgerald that in reality one could not, like Dick Diver, transfer his vitality to his wife to cure her.

Yet the essays collected in *The Crack-Up* abound with other examples of nervous discourse which are worthy of consideration. Of particular interest is a theme which Fitzgerald begins in “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” first published in 1931, and continues in “My Lost City,” first published in 1932. In “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” Fitzgerald gives a retrospective analysis of the 1920s, a period which he associates with a great deal of nervous energy. He writes “that something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War” (*CU* 13). In addition, Fitzgerald states that even the word jazz “is associated with a state of nervous stimulation” (16). However,
Fitzgerald also seems to indicate that this period, marked by a great expenditure of nervous energy, was beginning to take its toll:

... something was taking place in the homeland—Americans were getting soft. ... we were not turning out to be an athletic people like the British, after all. ... Of course if we wanted to we could be in a minute; we still had all those reserves of ancestral vitality, but one day in 1926 we looked down and found we had flabby arms and a fat pot. ...

By 1927 a wide-spread neurosis began to be evident, faintly signalled, like a nervous beating of the feet, by the popularity of cross-word puzzles. I remember a fellow expatriate opening from a mutual friend of ours, urging him to come home and be revitalized by the hardy, bracing qualities of the native soil. It was a strong letter and it affected us both deeply, until we noticed that it was headed from a nerve sanitarium in Pennsylvania. (CU 19-20)

In "My Lost City," Fitzgerald continues his description of the effect the 1920s had on America:

But the restlessness of New York in 1927 approached hysteria. The parties were bigger ... the pace was faster—the catering to dissipation set an example to Paris. ... Young people wore out early—they were hard and languid at twenty-one. ...

Many people who were not alcoholics were lit up four days out of seven, and frayed nerves were strewn everywhere; groups were held together by a generic nervousness and the hangover became a part of the day. ... (CU 30)

The scene of America during the Boom years of the 1920s which Fitzgerald describes is thus one which is defined in terms of the nervous discourse I have delineated throughout this study. America, with an ample supply of nervous energy or vitality after
World War I, begins to waste or dissipate that energy in revelry, and the result is a "widespread neurosis," people with frayed nerves writing letters from nerve sanitariums, and young people who are "worn out" at twenty-one.

However, as we know, the Boom years of the 1920s were succeeded by the Depression of the 1930s, and it is interesting that Fitzgerald compared his personal life to the events of the nation. As West has pointed out,

Fitzgerald had long felt that the cycles of his own life paralleled the rises and falls of American society in the 1920s and 1930s. The twenties were his "boom" decade, a time of money, fame, and frivolity. But after Zelda's mental breakdown in the crash year of 1929, Fitzgerald's fortunes had plummeted, and the 1930s were for him "bust" years of remorse and regret, just as they were for America. (164)

Perhaps the most concrete example of this is in "Pasting it Together," in which Fitzgerald writes that "I think that my happiness, or talent for self-delusion or what you will, was an exception. It was not the natural thing but the unnatural—unnatural as the Boom; and my recent experience parallels the wave of despair that swept the nation when the Boom was over" (CU 84). Since, as I have previously discussed, Fitzgerald perceived a distinct lesion of his own vitality during the 1930s, a loss of nervous energy or form of nervous bankruptcy exacerbated by waste and dissipation, it appears that Fitzgerald conceived of the Depression facing the nation as stemming from the same cause, that is, as a lesion of national vitality which resulted from the waste and dissipation of energy during the 1920s.

Nevertheless, it is significant that Fitzgerald compares his own state of mind in 1936 to the Depression, since, in modern psychiatric terms, Fitzgerald seemed to be suffering
from clinical depression during this period. Goodwin maintains that in Fitzgerald’s “The Crack-Up” essays, “the symptoms were classic, their description incomparable” in relation to clinically diagnosed depression (qtd. in Eble 48). Also, there is clear evidence that Fitzgerald was acquainted with depression as a diagnostic term: in “Early Success,” first published in 1937, Fitzgerald, referring to the publication of his first novel, writes, “With its publication I had reached a stage of manic depressive insanity” (CU 88).

However, the fact that Fitzgerald chose to compare his mental state to the Depression and use the phrase “manic depressive insanity” does indicate that nervous discourse was beginning to undergo a significant change as the twentieth century progressed, a point I will discuss in the next chapter.

Yet there is one final element regarding the loss of vitality in Fitzgerald’s fiction during this period, one which I have alluded to, but must discuss more extensively. Previously, I quoted the passage from Tender is the Night in which we are told that Nicole “sought in them the vitality that had made them independent or creative or rugged.” It is significant that Nicole, who suffers from mental illness, seeks vitality from others—particularly Dick, as I have discussed. The final element regarding the loss of vitality is that, in Fitzgerald’s work, those who are mentally ill appear to lack vitality. This has been suggested previously in my discussion of Fitzgerald’s letter to Oscar Forel, Zelda’s doctor, and is a logical conclusion according to the ideas of nervous discourse, since those who lack vitality or nervous energy are bound to suffer a “nervous breakdown” or mental illness. For instance, at the psychiatric clinic “the patients appeared to him [Dick’s son] either in their odd aspects, or else as devitalized, over-correct creatures without personality” (TN 203). Also, patients who are mentally ill, who lack vitality or nervous energy, are “nervous”: Nicole, in one of her early letters to Dick
while she is still a patient at Dohmler's clinic, describes herself as in "a highly nervous state" (139).

However, the morally charged term which connects nervous discourse and mental illness in *Tender is the Night* is *degeneration*. In chapter one I discussed Oppenheim's description of "degeneration theory," in which "moral deficiency and nervous disintegration advanced together through the combined force of individual choice and inexorable heredity." Also, in chapter three I mentioned Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," in which degeneration has obvious moral implications, since the Usher family's nervous malady is clearly linked to incest. In *Tender is the Night*, a similar theme is developed by Fitzgerald, since the cause of Nicole's mental illness is her sexual abuse by her own father. In fact, Nicole's father says of the event, "'ten minutes after it happened I could have shot myself--except I guess I'm such a Goddamned degenerate I didn't have the nerve to do it'" (*TN* 147). In another passage, as one of Dick's patients at the mental clinic leaves, "'[Dick] watched until they drove away, the gross parents, the bland, degenerate offspring; it was easy to prophesy the family's swing around Europe, bullying their betters with hard ignorance and hard money" (283). Yet what links these "degenerate" families is not only faulty moral choices or their mentally ill offspring, but their social class. Consistently throughout Fitzgerald's fiction during this period, there is a clear indictment of the wealthy, as the following passage from *Tender is the Night* demonstrates:

The suite in which Devereux Warren [Nicole's father] was gracefully weakening and sinking was of the same size as that of the Senor Pardo y Cuidad Real—throughout this hotel there were many chambers wherein rich ruins, fugitives from justice, claimants to the thrones of mediatized principalities, lived
on the derivatives of opium or barbital listening eternally as to an inescapable radio, to the coarse melodies of old sins. (277)

I have previously alluded to my discussion of “The Rich Boy” in chapter four, and I have also discussed the disparity in the social classes of Basil and Josephine, yet these are only two examples in which Fitzgerald condemns the wealthy for their distinct lack of vitality or nervous energy. In Tender is the Night, the following passage provides Dick’s conclusion after he assesses the condition of one of his patients at the clinic—a clinic designed primarily for wealthy patients: “The frontiers that artists must explore were not for her, ever. She was fine-spun, inbred—eventually she might find rest in some quiet mysticism. Exploration was for those with a measure of peasant blood, those with big thighs and thick ankles who could take punishment as they took bread and salt, on every inch of flesh and spirit” (208). The above passage, indicating the mentally ill patient is “fine-spun, inbred,” reveals that she suffers from nervous degeneration. In addition, she lacks the reserves of nervous energy necessary for exploration. However, a passage from “A Change of Class,” first published in 1931, puts the predicament of the wealthy in more direct terms: “The carefully brought-up children of wealthy Easterners grow old early; at thirty-four Philip Jadwin wasn’t sure he had any emotions at all” (PW 358). In other words, like Anson Hunter of “The Rich Boy” or Josephine Perry in “Emotional Bankruptcy,” the wealthy lack or use up their reserves of nervous energy.

Yet there is one short story which particularly addresses the impact of wealth on characters. “Six of One—” (first published in 1932) contrasts the fate of six boys from wealthy families with six boys from humbler backgrounds, and the poor boys turn out better than the rich. While Fitzgerald recognizes the allure of wealth, the conclusion of
the story demonstrates that the poor are the “vital and strong” who possess the energy necessary to succeed:

The young princes in velvet gathered in lovely domesticity around the queen amid the hush of rich draperies may presently grow up to be Pedro the Cruel or Charles the Mad, but the moment of beauty was there. . . . There was later a price to be paid by those boys, all too fulfilled, with the whole balance of their life pulled forward into their youth so that everything afterward would inevitably be anticlimax; these boys brought up as princes with none of the responsibility of princes! . . .

. . . life is constantly renewed, and glamour and beauty make way for it; and he was glad that he was able to feel that the republic could survive the mistakes of a whole generation, pushing the waste aside, sending ahead the vital and the strong. Only it was too bad and very American that there should be all that waste at the top; and he felt that he would not live long enough to see it end, to see great seriousness in the same skin with great opportunity— to see the race achieve itself at last. (SS 679)

In addition, Fitzgerald reiterates his indictment of the rich in “New Types,” first published in 1934, writing that “the cloth of a great race cannot be made out of the frayed lint of tired princes” (PW 570). And finally, in “Handle with Care,” Fitzgerald would write of himself, “The man with the jingle of money in his pocket who married the girl a year later would always cherish an abiding distrust, an animosity, toward the leisure class—not the conviction of a revolutionist but the smouldering hatred of a peasant” (CU 77).
One final point regarding nervous discourse in Fitzgerald’s work during this period is that Fitzgerald clearly was becoming more familiar with contemporary ideas about psychology, and this can almost certainly be attributed to Zelda’s mental illness. As I have previously mentioned, in Tender is the Night, the central character, Dick Diver, is a psychiatrist who marries a woman who suffers from mental illness; moreover, Dr. Diver’s book is entitled “A Psychology for Psychiatrists” (TN 186). In addition, there are a number of references to leading figures in psychology and psychiatry, including Jung, Freud, Forel, and Bleuler (198), two of whom (Forel and Bleuler) had been involved with the diagnosis and treatment of Zelda’s illness. Furthermore, I believe that Fitzgerald’s decision to make the cause of Nicole’s mental illness her sexual abuse by her father stemmed from his growing familiarity with Freudian theories. In “On Schedule,” first published in 1933, the father says, “My relations with my daughter . . . are becoming what you call the Electra complex. If a man was an adaptable animal, I should develop a lap and a very comfortable bosom and become a real mother to her, but I cannot. So, how can I put a stop to this father-and-daughter complex we are developing between us?” (PW 441).

Nevertheless, as I have maintained throughout this chapter, while Fitzgerald was certainly becoming more aware of contemporary ideas about psychology, his work was still dominated by the ideas of the nervous discourse he had inherited. However, in terms of usage patterns, it is intriguing to note the recurrence of a word which first appeared in Fitzgerald’s fiction in the material discussed in the previous chapter: neurasthenic. In chapter four, I discussed the rather problematic usage of neurasthenic in two short stories; in each instance the word was applied to animals. During the period currently under discussion, Fitzgerald also uses the term, but now applies it to humans. In the
Basil Duke Lee story entitled "The Freshest Boy" (1928), Basil is called a nickname by one of his schoolmates, who "went on playing, unconscious that he had done anything in particular or that he had contributed to the events by which another boy was saved from the army of the bitter, the selfish, the neurasthenic and the unhappy" (BS 76). The word *neurasthenic* here has obvious negative connotations, suggesting that neurasthenic people are bitter and selfish. In "The Family Bus," first published in 1933, a character goes about "tinkering with the engine until the cut-out was calculated to cause acute neurasthenia to such citizenry as dwelt between the city and Reed's Lake" (PW 499), and this usage seems to simply imply that the noise of the engine would cause anxiety or stress. However, the distinction between the use of this word in the material discussed in the previous chapter and the use of it in the above examples is that Fitzgerald appears to have recognized the legitimacy of the term to delineate mental states. In reality, as I discussed in chapter one, the term *neurasthenia* was losing legitimacy as a diagnostic term in the medical community, but the fact that Fitzgerald began to apply the word to indicate a person's state of mind reconfirms that he was familiarizing himself with contemporary medical ideas. However, there is another intriguing use of the term by Zelda during this period: on May 28, 1933, Fitzgerald and Zelda met with Dr. Rennie and a stenographer to discuss their marital problems, "but the crux was Fitzgerald's insistence on the authority to veto Zelda's writing" (Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 348-49). During the course of the conversation, Zelda says, "It is impossible to live with you [Fitzgerald]. . . . I think the cause of it is your drinking. . . . Dr. Rennie, I am perfectly willing to put aside the novel, but I will not have any agreement or arrangements because I will not submit to Scott's neurasthenic condition and be subjected to these tortures all the time" (qtd. in Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 351). Here, once again, *neurasthenic* has
negative connotations, suggesting not so much nervous weakness, but rather selfishness, and reconfirming the fact that nervous discourse became linked with conceptions of morality.

Fitzgerald’s work during this period also reiterates several points discussed in previous chapters. For instance, in chapter three I described the significance of dissipation in *The Beautiful and Damned*, and the idea of dissipation recurs in much of the fiction Fitzgerald composed in the 1930s. In *Tender is the Night*, there is the character of Abe North, “a musician who after a brilliant and precocious start had composed nothing for several years” (TD 42). Instead, Abe has succumbed to a life of drinking or dissipation: at one point Nicole realizes “how fatigued she was with his [Abe’s] dissipation” (111). Also, the impact of Abe’s dissipation on his nervous system is made apparent: “he looked from left to right with his eyes only; it would have taken nervous forces out of his control to use any other part of his body” (92). “Abe was feeling worse every minute—he could think of nothing but disagreeable and sheerly nervous remarks” (94). Finally, Abe “lay athwart them like the wreck of a galleon, dominating with his presence his own weakness and self-indulgence, his narrowness and bitterness” (95). Also, in a particularly “nervous” passage of *Tender is the Night*, as Dick and Rosemary enter the former Cardinal de Retz palace, “it was an electric-like shock, a definite nervous experience, perverted as a breakfast of oatmeal and hashish, to cross that threshold . . . .” and once inside, “There were the Americans and English who had been dissipating all spring and summer, so that now everything they did had a purely nervous inspiration” (83-84). And in one of Fitzgerald’s best short stories, “Babylon Revisited,” first published in 1931, a character who is attempting to recover from a former life of dissipation contemplates Parisian life:
All the catering to vice and waste was on an utterly childish scale, and he suddenly realized the meaning of the word “dissipate”—to dissipate into thin air; to make nothing out of something. In the little hours of the night every move from place to place was an enormous human jump, an increase of paying for the privilege of slower and slower motion. (SS 620) 

In addition, to return to a theme discussed in chapter four, the character of McKisco in Tender is the Night presents a “nervous” man who learns to harness his nervous energy and achieve success. At the beginning of the novel, McKisco’s wife calls him “nervous,” and McKisco says, “I’m not nervous. . . . It just happens I’m not nervous at all.” He was burning visibly—a grayish flush had spread over his face, dissolving all his expressions into a vast ineffectuality” (TN 15). However, later in the novel McKisco has become a successful novelist: “Success had improved and humbled him. He was no fool about his capacities—he realized that he possessed more vitality than many men of superior talent, and he was resolved to enjoy the success he had earned” (230). Hence McKisco, who has more “vitality” or nervous energy than many other men, has harnessed this energy and achieved success.

Nevertheless, Fitzgerald’s work during the 1930s was dominated by the theme of vitality, or more specifically, the loss of vitality, and it is clear that the ideas underlying this theme are, as I have demonstrated, a direct manifestation of the nervous discourse Fitzgerald had inherited. However, Fitzgerald would utilize the theme of vitality quite differently in the final years of his life, particularly in his last novel, The Last Tycoon, which remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1940. As I will discuss in the next chapter, nervous discourse was beginning to undergo a change during this period, leading us into an “age of anxiety.”
Notes

1 For evidence demonstrating that Fitzgerald was familiar with Shaw's work, see Bruccoli, *Epic Grandeur* 51, 60, 139, 140, 158.

2 Although I can find no significant evidence which reveals that Fitzgerald was familiar with Melville's work, the Melville revival which began after Melville's centennial in 1919 certainly coincides with Fitzgerald's career.

3 For a broader perspective on the issue of degeneration in modernist texts, see Greenslade, as well as Edmond.
CHAPTER SIX

FEELING JITTERY AND TENSE: THE LOVE OF
OF THE LAST TYCOON AND PAT HOBBY
STORIES, AND THE AGE OF
ANXIETY AND BEYOND

In 1937 F. Scott Fitzgerald, heavily in debt, moved to Hollywood to work as a screenwriter. He appeared to have at least partially overcome the artistic crisis and depression expressed in The Crack-Up essays and seemed optimistic about his future in Hollywood, writing to his daughter Scottie in July 1937: “I feel a certain excitement. The third Hollywood venture. . . . I want to profit by these [two] past experiences. . . . Given a break I can make them double this contract in less than two years” (LL 330-31). While in Hollywood, Fitzgerald worked as a screenwriter for MGM and then began freelancing, became involved in a relationship with Sheila Graham, and continued his struggle with alcoholism, falling off the wagon on a number of occasions. Fitzgerald's only screen credit was given for his work on Three Comrades, though he worked on a number of screenplays while in Hollywood, including some polishing of the screenplay for Gone with the Wind. As for his own fiction, Fitzgerald produced a number of short stories between 1937 and 1940, of which the most sustained effort was the Pat Hobby series of seventeen short stories about a Hollywood hack writer, which were initially published between 1939 and 1941 in Esquire. In addition, Fitzgerald was working on his
last novel, *The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western,* which many believe had the potential to become one of his best works, though it remained unfinished at the time of Fitzgerald’s death on December 21, 1940. He was forty-four years old.

Bruccoli asserts that in Hollywood, “Fitzgerald was returning to work he had no heart for” (*Epic Gralendur* 426), and there can be little doubt that Fitzgerald was unimpressed with the movie industry, particularly its emphasis on collaborative writing. In “Handle With Care,” first published in 1936 and included in *The Crack-Up,* Fitzgerald had expressed his attitude toward the new art of film:

> I saw that the novel, which at my maturity was the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to another, was becoming subordinated to a mechanical and communal art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion. It was an art in which words were subordinate to images, where personality was worn down to the inevitable low gear of collaboration. As long past as 1930, I had a hunch that the talkies would make even the best selling novelist as archaic as silent pictures. People still read, if only Professor Canby’s book of the month—curious children nosed at the slime of Mr. Tiffany Thayer in the drugstore libraries—but there was a rankling indignity, that to me had become almost an obsession, in seeing the power of the written word subordinated to another power, a more glittering, a grosser power . . . (*CU* 78)

In “Boil Some Water—Lots of It,” first published in 1940, Fitzgerald reiterates his low regard for the movie industry, as Pat Hobby, the Hollywood hack who has been in the
screenwriting business for over twenty years, maintains that “This was no art, as he often said—this was an industry” (PH 22).

However, considering his attitude toward the film industry, it is a credit to Fitzgerald that he could create a character such as Monroe Stahr as the hero of The Last Tycoon. Stahr is a powerful Hollywood movie executive based loosely on Irving Thalberg, and he is presented as the man who conceived of the collaborative writing technique which characterizes Hollywood. After speaking to a team of writers who are unhappy with the collaborative nature of the work in Hollywood, Stahr says, “The system was a shame he admitted—gross, commercial, to be deplored. He had originated it—a fact that he did not mention” (LT 58). Furthermore, Stahr appears to understand why many writers do not enjoy collaboration; he says, “They’ve just found out they’re not alone on the story and it shocks them—shocks their sense of unity—that’s the word they’ll use.” Yet when someone asks, “But what does make the—the unity?” Stahr says, “I’m the unity” (58).

Although Fitzgerald was unhappy with the screenwriting work in Hollywood, The Last Tycoon demonstrates that he was not only capable of understanding the industry, but that he could create in Monroe Stahr a hero who shows what Hollywood films could be, one who attempts to improve the quality of the film industry: “Stahr was something else again. He was a marker in industry like Edison and Lumiere and Griffith and Chaplin. He led pictures way up past the range and power of the theatre, reaching a sort of golden age before the censorship in 1933” (28). Furthermore, Stahr obviously is willing to consider more than the bottom line. At one point in the novel Stahr shocks his fellow film executives by announcing that he is producing a movie which will lose money, maintaining that “It’s a quality picture. . . It’ll lose money. . . . But we have a certain duty to the public as Pat Brady says at Academy dinners” (48). And in another passage,
after a black fisherman who had "come out to read some Emerson" (93) tells Stahr that he doesn’t go to movies or allow his children to go to movies, Stahr is troubled and thinks,

A picture, many pictures, a decade of pictures, must be made to show him he was wrong. Since he had spoken, Stahr had thrown four pictures out of his plans—one that was going into production this week. They were borderline pictures in point of interest but at least he submitted the borderline pictures to the Negro and found them trash. And he put back on his list a difficult picture that he had tossed to the wolves. . . . He rescued it for the Negro man. (96)

Nevertheless, Fitzgerald’s experience in Hollywood appears to have had a significant impact upon him: he was in a new environment and times were changing, and Fitzgerald’s work reveals this. In 1940, Fitzgerald submitted the short story "Dearly Beloved" to Esquire (which rejected it), and Matthew Bruccoli has asserted that this "brilliantly written sketch . . . is the only story in which Fitzgerald seriously treated a black character. The hero, a Pullman porter, has obvious connections with the philosophical black fisherman in The Last Tycoon" (Epic Grandeur 473). However, the changing times also affected the nervous discourse I have traced in this study, and Fitzgerald’s work reveals this as well.

While the word nervous and its derivatives appear a number of times in Fitzgerald’s work during this period, the usage is most often consistent with our own. For instance, in "Mightier than the Sword," first published in 1941, Pat Hobby, after being ordered off the studio lot, returns to it anyway, since "for many years [it] had been home for him," and "On his way out of the lot he hesitated beside the barber shop but he felt too nervous for a shave" (PH 147-48). Pat Hobby’s nervousness here can be ascribed to a sense of
timidity, since he knows that he should not be on the studio lot, and hence nervous is employed in our contemporary sense. However, Fitzgerald also used nervousness to indicate significant emotional disturbance. In the first chapter of The Last Tycoon, Mr. Schwartz is described as “a middle-aged Jew who alternately talked with nervous excitement or else crouched as if ready to spring, in harrowing silence” (4), and later, Stahr says of him, “‘He’s a nervous wreck’” (16). Yet Mr. Schwartz commits suicide in these opening pages of the novel, and his “nervous excitement” and the description of him as a “nervous wreck” do not simply indicate that he is agitated or timid, but that he is suffering from severe emotional disturbance which leads to his suicide. Also, Episode 9 provides a description of a director named Broaca: “Broaca, on the surface, was an engineer—large and without nerves, quietly resolute, popular. He was an ignoramus and Stahr often caught him making the same scenes over and over . . .” (37). Here the phrase “without nerves” reflects the theme of sensibility which became associated with nervous discourse: Broaca lacks a highly refined nervous system and is thus incapable of artistic sensibility; he is instead an “engineer” and an “ignoramus” who repeatedly makes the same scenes.

The idea of vitality or “life force” also occurs in The Last Tycoon, particularly in relation to Monroe Stahr. Like Fitzgerald himself, Stahr suffers from cardiac problems, and Stahr’s doctor concludes the following regarding his patient:

He was due to die very soon now. Within six months one could say definitely. What was the use of developing the cardiograms? You couldn’t persuade a man like Stahr to stop and lie down and look at the sky for six months. He would much rather die. He said differently but what it added up to was the definite urge toward total exhaustion that he had run into before. Fatigue was a drug as well as
a poison and Stahr apparently derived some rare almost physical pleasure from working lightheaded with weariness. It was a perversion of the life force he had seen before but he had almost stopped trying to interfere with it. He had cured a man or so—a hollow triumph of killing and preserving the shell. (LT 109-10).

While Fitzgerald died before completing The Last Tycoon, the synopsis he had created for the novel indicates that Stahr was not going to die from his heart trouble, but rather in a plane crash. In addition, as the above passage indicates, Stahr appears to use his reduction of vitality or life force to his advantage; his "perversion of the life force" brings him pleasure and appears to aid him in his work. Although the narrator in the novel acknowledges that Stahr's work often costs him his vitality, as when we are told that "Too much of his vitality was taken by the mere parrying of these attempts [at spying by rival studios]" (28). Stahr's vitality is never thoroughly diminished. In fact, Stahr's vitality seems to renew itself: "Occasionally, often less than five years ago, Stahr would work all through the night on a single picture. But after such a spree he felt bad for days. If he could go from problem to problem there was a certain rebirth of vitality with each change" (37). And later, as Stahr encounters Kathleen, "Vitality welled up in him" (73).

This employment of the theme of vitality is certainly different from the treatment it received in Tender is the Night and The Crack-Up essays, in which vitality was conceived of as a fixed and limited nervous energy which is gradually depleted. I believe that this significant change in Fitzgerald's conception of vitality can be understood in light of Fitzgerald's own experience. After all, Fitzgerald had survived the depression and artistic crisis, the "trickling away" of vitality described in The Crack-Up. After 1937, he was embarking on a new life of sorts: moving to California, starting a new career as a screenwriter, beginning a new relationship with Sheila Graham. And perhaps
most importantly, Fitzgerald felt a renewal of his creative abilities, beginning work on a new novel about Hollywood and writing a series of short stories based upon a Hollywood writer. As James Thurber has written, “[Fitzgerald] thought of his talent as something that could be lost, like his watch, or mislaid, like his hat, or slowly depleted, like his bank account, but in his last year there it still was, perhaps surer and more mature than it had ever been” (38). In 1939, after a drinking binge at Dartmouth during which he caught an upper respiratory infection (an event fictionalized by Budd Schulberg in The Disenchanted), Fitzgerald was told by psychiatrist Richard Hoffman while in the hospital, “‘This is not your death . . . it is the death of your youth. This is a transitional period, not an end. You will lie fallow for a while, then you will go on’” (qtd. in Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 455). Therefore, while the nervous discourse which Fitzgerald had inherited influenced his conception of vitality and nervous energy throughout the majority of his career, it appears that his ideas changed somewhat he grew older and the twentieth century progressed.

One indication of the change in nervous discourse during the twentieth century is the introduction of several new words into the English language. Specifically, the words jitters and jittery became part of the lexicon in the first decades of the century. Although the origin of the words is unknown, the OED cites the first use of jitters, indicating “Extreme nervousness.” in 1929, while the Dictionary of American Slang provides a usage from 1925 which indicates “A state of nervous agitation.” In The Last Tycoon Fitzgerald employs the term jittery on two occasions to indicate “nervous” in our contemporary sense, as when Wylie says, “‘I don’t think stenographers have the same dumb admiration for their bosses they had in 1929. They’ve been laid off—they’ve seen their bosses jittery’” (39). The introduction of jitters and its derivative jittery into the
language during the 1920s and early 1930s actually serves to demonstrate what a particularly “nervous” age this was, and these words were further popularized by the “jitterbug,” a type of dance done to swing music which developed in the 1930s and early 1940s.\(^2\)

However, one particular word which recurs in the text of *The Last Tycoon* is *tense* and several of its derivatives. For instance, in Episode 11 the narrator describes the scene in Stahr’s projection room, where Stahr and a number of his colleagues view the lengths of film taken during the day:

> There was often a savage tensity about the occasion—he was dealing with *faits accomplis*—the net result of months of buying, planning, writing and rewriting, casting, constructing, lighting, rehearsing and shooting—the fruit alike of brilliant hunches or counsels of despair, of lethargy, conspiracy and sweat. At this point the tortuous manoeuvre was staged and in suspension—these were reports from the battle-line. (LT 52)

Obviously, the “savage tensity” of the occasion establishes the high level of stress present during these viewings. In Section 14, the narrator describes life in California, maintaining that “there were tense young men and women who lived back East in spirit while they carried on a losing battle against the climate” (80). While the first part of Episode 16 describes “two writers, a shorthand secretary and a supervisor [who] sat in a tense smokey stalemate where Stahr had left them three hours before” (107). Once again, in these usages *tense* indicates stress or emotional strain.

While *tense* and its derivatives occurred in some of Fitzgerald’s previous fiction and I briefly discussed their significance in the last chapter, the development of *tense* as a part of nervous discourse warrants further scrutiny, not only because *tense* can be found in
Fitzgerald’s last novel, but because *tense* and *tension* represent an intriguing manifestation of nervous discourse which remains with us today. The OED indicates that the word *tense*, derived from the Latin verb *tendere*, “to stretch,” originally meant “Drawn tight, stretched taught,” and this meaning can be traced back to the seventeenth century, while *tension* essentially means “The action of stretching or condition of being stretched.” While the words retain this meaning, by the nineteenth century *tense* had also come to mean “In a state of nervous or mental strain,” while *tension* had come to refer to “Nervous or emotional strain.” In fact, we can see the older sense of *tense* giving way to the contemporary usage in the work of Keats. For instance, in *Hyperion*, published in 1820, he writes, “seize the arrow’s barb / Before the tense string murmur” (1.344-45), and *tense* here obviously refers to the tightly drawn bowstring. However, consider the following passage in Keats’ *Otho the Great*, composed in 1819-1820: “We must endeavor how to ease and slacken / The tight-wound energies of his despair, / Not make them tenser” (5.4.25-27). This passage reveals how the older sense of *tense* as “tight-wound” is applied to one’s state of mind, how despair must be eased or “slackened” to avoid an increase of tension—which is an increase of emotional strain. Also, we can see how these words became explicitly linked to the nerves throughout the nineteenth century. In Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), she writes, “as the danger decreased with the distance, the supernatural tension of the nervous system lessened, and she found herself both weary and hungry” (45). And in Kipling’s *The Light That Failed* (1899), he writes “of the Americans, whose rasping voices in the hush of a hot afternoon strain tense-drawn nerves to breaking-point” (105). The striking element of the idea of tension is that it essentially hearkens back to the older sense of *nerves* as sinews or muscles which can be stretched, as one can pull a muscle.
words, nervous tension, signifying emotional strain, appears to reflect a figurative sense of nerves being stretched or drawn tight. In reality, of course, nerves are not literally stretched when emotional strain is experienced, but the idea of tension remains with us and is very much a part of contemporary speech.

In “Pat Hobby’s Secret,” initially published in 1940, Fitzgerald describes a character’s evening of drunken revelry in Los Angeles, writing that it “would have attracted no special notice in the twenties; in the fearful forties it rang out like laughter in church” (PH 54). Fitzgerald’s use of the term “fearful forties” is unique, and probably refers to the fear created by the eruption of World War II in Europe. However, after Fitzgerald’s death in 1940, the term which would displace the “nervousness” of his generation was anxiety. The word anxiety, a derivative of anxious, stems from the Latin adjective anxius, meaning “worried” or “troubled in mind,” and is certainly not new. The OED provides a usage of anxiety from the sixteenth century, and we can see Samuel Johnson employ the term in Rambler 204 in 1752, when he writes, “Why should thy face be clouded with anxiety, when the meanest of those who call thee sovereign, gives the day to festivity, and the night to peace?” (297). However, although anxiety still essentially means “troubled in mind,” the word became increasingly popular throughout the twentieth century.

First, we can see the gradual displacement of nervousness by anxiety during the 1940s. In “Pat Hobby’s College Days,” the last of the Pat Hobby stories which was initially published in 1941, Fitzgerald writes of a character being thrown “into a mood of nervous anxiety” (PH 150). And in Mizener’s biography of Fitzgerald, the first edition of which was published in 1949, he asserts that Fitzgerald had a “lifelong habit of attacking the task of conducting himself like a gentleman with nervous anxiety” (15). The use of
nervous as a modifier for anxiety—which seems somewhat redundant from our contemporary perspective—reveals the shift in usage taking place. However, perhaps the most significant event of the 1940s regarding anxiety was the publication of Auden’s poem *The Age of Anxiety* in 1947, which secured the popularization of the word. (In fact, the OED provides a separate definition under anxiety for Age of Anxiety, stemming from the title of Auden’s poem.) This lengthy poem, describing the interactions and thoughts of four characters who meet in a bar during World War II, reveals the changing nature of nervous discourse, particularly through the use of the word anxious. In Part One, the narrator maintains that “in wartime . . . everybody is reduced to the anxious state of a shady character or a displaced person” (Auden 255). Also in Part One, Malin, a member of the Canadian Air Force, thinks, “Untalkative and tense, we took off / Anxious into air” (262). However, note that tense remains a significant element of nervous discourse, one that is reiterated by Rosetta in Part Five, as she thinks, “Time is our trade, to be tense our gift / Whose woe is our weight” (345-46).

The OED indicates that *Age of Anxiety* is “applied as a catch-phrase to any period characterized by anxiety or danger.” A number of scholars, such as Stone, have applied the term to the years 1945-1963, the period after World War II during which fears of a nuclear holocaust gripped the nation (33). While the term has been applied to our own era as well, the two decades after World War II certainly were designated as an “Age of Anxiety” in popular usage. The cover story of *Time* magazine on March 31, 1961 is entitled “Guilt & Anxiety,” and the article asserts that this is “an era that is almost universally regarded as the Age of Anxiety” (“Guilt” 44). However, the significance of a nuclear threat as a contributing factor in producing anxiety is downplayed: “The possibility of civilization’s total destruction is usually cited as one of the great factors
contributing to anxiety in the U.S. But there is a strong suggestion that The Bomb is merely a handy device, welcomed almost with relief, for the release of anxiety and guilt that have little to do with the subject as such" (49). Rather, the true source of anxiety is once again identified as modernity:

There is general agreement among psychiatrists, theologians, sociologists and even poets that in this era, anxiety is indeed different both in quantity and quality.

Other eras were turbulent, insecure and complex—the great migrations after the fall of the Roman empire: the age of discovery; Copernicus and Galileo’s tinkering with the universe, removing the earth and man from its center; the industrial revolution. But in a sense, the 20th century U.S. is the culmination of all these upheavals—its own the product of a gigantic migration, itself both champion and victim of the industrial revolution, itself faced with the necessity not only of accepting a new universe but of exploring it. (44-45)

In the above passage, one can hear echoes of works discussed in chapter one, particularly Cheyne’s English Malady of the eighteenth century and George Miller Beard’s American Nervousness of the nineteenth. Specifically, increased “nervousness”—or now, “anxiety”--is attributed to the increased stress of life in the modern world, and this nervousness or anxiety is almost celebrated as the unique achievement of the writer’s nation.

As I pointed out in chapter one, people in a number of eras have considered themselves “modern,” and considering the remarkable consistency in how nervousness and anxiety have been repeatedly linked to modernity, it seems reasonable to conclude that stress or nervousness or anxiety have always been a part of the human condition, perhaps an outgrowth of our consciousness or self-awareness. In fact, one has to wonder if the “nervousness” consistently linked to the upper classes in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries not only reinforced social stratification, but reflected the differences in ways of life. After all, people from upper, “leisure” classes certainly had more time to reflect on their state of mind, to contemplate just how stressed or “nervous” they were feeling. In contrast, it is unlikely that the peasant of the eighteenth century or industrial worker of the nineteenth had so much time for self-reflection; after a twelve-hour workday, one often has little time to do much more than eat and sleep. In addition, from my contemporary perspective it seems that human existence in past centuries would have been more stressful than life today, when one considers mortality rates and the average life expectancy in previous eras, not to mention the disease and illness present before the advent of twentieth-century medicine. The question, of course, is how nervousness or anxiety is conceived of by a particular culture at a particular time, how people respond to it and how it is treated. One suspects that people who were experiencing stress in the Middle Ages would turn to religion, yet with the increasing secularization of society and the development of medical science, it is clear that by the eighteenth century they would often look to their doctors.

Nevertheless, regarding anxiety, the OED indicates that the word became increasingly appropriated by the field of psychiatry during the course of the twentieth century, and this has certainly been the case in recent years, as various “anxiety disorders” have been diagnosed. However, many of the various terms which have come to replace nervousness during the later years of the twentieth century are not really new developments. Unlike jittery, an entirely new word, or nervous, which underwent a significant change in meaning during the eighteenth century, they are words like anxiety that have been a part of the English language for centuries, yet have been adopted by the medical community. The OED indicates that stress became utilized by psychologists in the second half of the
twentieth century to indicate “An adverse circumstance that disturbs, or is likely to disturb, the normal physiological or psychological functioning of an individual,” and I have often chosen to utilize this word myself in this study because of its relatively stable meaning. The OED reveals that stress is probably derived from distress, and the word stress has been used to indicate “hardship” or “adversity” since the fourteenth century. We can find Spenser using the term in Book Two of The Faerie Oveene, first published in 1590, when he writes, “Then vp arose a man of matchlesse might, / And wondrous wit to menage high affaires. / Who stird with pitty of the stressed plight / of this sad Realme . . .” (10.37.1-4). Thus the word stress, which has consistently signified “adversity,” is now used to identify psychological adversity. Likewise, the word neurosis, which also became increasingly popular during the twentieth century, most likely because of the growing influence of Freud, is not a new word. It is in reality another manifestation of the nervous discourse which emerged in the eighteenth century: derived from the Greek word for “nerve,” it was used by William Cullen in his 1783 text First Lines of the Practice of Physic, in which he writes, “In this view I establish a class of diseases, under the title of Neuroses or Nervous Diseases” (Part II 2). And lastly, as I pointed out in chapter four, there is some evidence to suggest that some of the patients diagnosed with neurasthenia and subjected to the rest cure treatment in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were probably suffering from what would today be diagnosed as anorexia nervosa. However, this, once again, is not a new term, since the OED reveals that the word anorexia or anorexy was used as early as the late-sixteenth century to indicate “Want of appetite.” Furthermore, it is from this meaning that the English physician William Gull “tentatively adopted” the term anorexia nervosa for a paper read to the Clinical Society of London in 1873 (Oppenheim 212). Today, anorexia and
anorexic are words that are not only utilized by the medical community, but have entered into popular usage as well.

Yet the word which certainly predominates contemporary discussions of mental health is depression. The word depression, like some of the previous terms discussed, is also not new: it has been used to indicate what the OED describes as "The condition of being depressed in spirits; dejection" since at least the eighteenth century. For instance, in Samuel Johnson’s Rambler 204 (1752), he writes the following:

He chose and rejected, he resolved and changed his resolution, till his faculties were harassed, and his thoughts confused; then returned to the apartment where his presence was expected, with languid eyes and clouded countenance, and spread the infection of uneasiness over the whole assembly. He observed their depression, and was offended. . . . (298)

However, as I mentioned in chapter one, the word depression came to replace melancholy during the twentieth century as a diagnostic term, although melancholy is still used today to indicate sadness, and a number of contemporary texts have explored the connection between melancholy and depression. While they recognize the emergence of the word depression to indicate dejection in the eighteenth century, they conclude that melancholy was displaced by depression in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Radden states that “the term depression was not even in common use until the last part of the nineteenth century” (3), while Jackson asserts the same thing, quoting a statement the American psychiatrist Adolf Meyers made in 1904, which "indicates that he was ‘desirous of eliminating the term melancholia, which implied a knowledge of something that we did not possess. . . . If, instead of melancholia, we applied the term depression to
the whole class, it would designate in an unassuming way exactly what was meant by the common use of the term melancholia.” (6).³

In addition, Jackson has traced the intriguing development by which the word *depression* has come into use. The *OED* indicates that *depression* literally means “The action of pressing down, or fact of being pressed down,” and Jackson examines how the “theme of feeling ‘weighed down’ or being ‘weighted down’” has consistently been linked with melancholy. He points out that as early as Homer’s *Odyssey*, “In his melancholia, Ajax was said to have ‘his mind weighted down.’... in the process of being handed down, this notion gradually came to be used more and more and came into quite frequent use in the Renaissance.” Furthermore, he demonstrates how the significance of *depression* extended from the Renaissance into the present day:

During the Renaissance, in writings on melancholia, “heavinesse without cause” began to be used as synonymous with “sadness without cause.” just as “heavy-hearted” came to mean grieved, sad, or melancholy. It seems likely, indeed, that the drooping body posture of many a melancholic may have contributed to these images—the head and neck bent over, an impression of being “cast down,” a “downcast” or melancholy look. Once again, sometimes there seemed to be a continuing awareness of using a metaphor, but gradually heaviness meant only sorrow. Then, with the first hints of a new trend in the seventeenth century and progressively more use in the eighteenth century, depression began to absorb the traditions of the weighted down and heaviness metaphor. With its own roots in “being pressed down.” depression conveyed much the same impression, and, over the next two hundred years, its use slowly increased to where it achieved its familiar, twentieth-century status. (Jackson 397-98)
Yet there appears to be some disagreement among scholars regarding the similarities between melancholia and depression, and this disagreement can serve to elucidate some of the underlying assumptions of this study of nervous discourse. Jackson, as his above comments indicate, believes that melancholy and depression are essentially the same thing, which is also reinforced by the title of Part II of his study: "Tracing the Variations in a Remarkable Consistency" (27). However, Radden asserts that "melancholy and depression give evidence of being shaped or 'constructed' by pervasive cultural assumptions" (4). My interpretation of the changing ideas associated with emotional states and mental illness lies somewhere between these two views. As I have demonstrated throughout this study, ideas about nervousness were consistently linked to other cultural discourses, such as ideas about modernity, class, gender, and sensibility; in other words, as I have maintained previously, people have conceived of and responded to mental disorders and stress differently in different time periods. In this sense, then, Radden’s assertion above is valid. However, we must remember that there is a fixed and stable reality underlying the ideas of nervous discourse and conceptions of mental disorders: human biology. While factors such as diet and medical science have certainly played a role in human existence, the basic physiological reality of the human species has remained essentially unchanged for thousands of years. Therefore, Jackson’s conclusions regarding the similarities between melancholy and depression are certainly valid, and it cannot be asserted that mental disorders are always, in essence, culturally constructed. In some cases, they certainly appear to have been determined by cultural attitudes: as Healy points out, homosexuality was classified as a mental illness in the United States until 1973 (232). Yet because of the stable reality of human biology, it is reasonable to...
conclude that some people diagnosed with melancholy or neurasthenia in the past were suffering from what today would be diagnosed as depression or a host of other disorders.

However, since the later years of the twentieth century, we have begun to develop the ability to affect some of the basic elements of human biology, specifically through advancements in neurobiology, neurochemistry, and psychopharmacology. That is, we have developed drugs which can affect brain function, the mind, and behavior, ushering in an age of what some have called "biopsychiatry." One can detect the beginning of this era in the 1961 *Time* article mentioned previously, which points out that "Only since 1954 have there been tranquilizing drugs specifically designed and directed toward relieving signs of anxiety. For depression, psychiatrists are now prescribing the psychic energizers, of which half a dozen, such as Marplan and Niamid, have won fairly general acceptance." However, the effectiveness of these drugs is seen as questionable at this time: "But talking it out in psychotherapy is generally recognized as the only measure that offers the possibility of a true cure" ("Guilt" 51).

However, that may not be the general attitude toward psychopharmacology today, for I believe the most recent transformation of nervous discourse has occurred as we have entered what I refer to as the "Pharmaceutical Age." With the advent of the first antidepressants in the 1950s, then the emergence of tranquilizers such as Valium that became popular in the 1970s, and most recently with the introduction of new antidepressants such as Prozac in the 1980s, contemporary conceptions of anxiety and mental disorders are changing dramatically. Healy points out that "an NIMH study in the early 1970s found that many lay people viewed nervous problems as a sign of moral weakness and the use of something like tranquilizers for such difficulties as further evidence of weakness" (227), and this attitude in the 1970s reveals that the vestiges of
nervous discourse remained, since "nervous disorders" were associated with weakness and had moral connotations for many people. However, this attitude is changing dramatically today, as anxiety and depression are increasingly recognized as having a neurochemical cause, and the solution is found in medication. One can see television advertisements which inform viewers that anxiety or depression results from a chemical imbalance and encouraging them to visit their doctors to receive a prescription.

On the one hand, it is impossible to deny the efficacy of these current antidepressants in treating patients who suffer from legitimate mental disorders. On the other, some have raised the question of whether or not these drugs are being prescribed too frequently to patients who are not really suffering from any significant emotional disorders. For instance, consider Geoffrey Cowley's statements regarding the increasing use of Prozac:

Prozac now [in 1994] boasts worldwide sales of nearly $1.2 billion a year. Doctors, most of them nonpsychiatrists, write nearly a million prescriptions a month, and the recipients are often healthy people seeking nothing more than a cheerier disposition. "Prozac helps people think in new ways," says Chicago psychiatrist Mare Slutsky. "It helps you get out of ruts. It helps people who are obsessively driven to loosen up a little." The question is whether that's an appropriate use for a mind-altering drug with unknown long-term effects. (41)

And it is difficult to resist considering some of the implications of the Pharmaceutical Age, particularly when viewed through the lens of Huxley's *Brave New World*: ""'Two thousand pharmacologists and bio-chemists were subsidized in A.F. 178.' . . . 'Six years later it was being produced commercially. The perfect drug.' . . . 'All the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects.' . . . 'Stability was practically assured.'"" (Huxley 53-54). Sharon Begley has even asserted that "as society moves ever closer to
minds-made-to-order, the pressure on those who cannot, or choose not to, give their brain
a makeover becomes intense. Some colleagues, and competitors, of Ritalin-popping
executives feel themselves at a disadvantage, like rules-respecting sprinters facing a
steroid user” (40).

While it is not within the scope of this study to come to any conclusions regarding the
increasing use of antidepressant drugs, it is relevant to recognize that the current “cultural
construction” of anxiety is remarkably unlike anything preceding it, not only because the
cause of anxiety and depression is now frequently defined and popularized as
neurochemical, but because this discovery encourages people who are experiencing a
lack of contentment to find a solution in medication. In fact, how vastly different this is
from conceptions in previous eras, when unhappiness and suffering often were seen as
having value and allowing for growth. In Paradise Regain’d, Milton has Christ
pronounce, “who best / Can suffer, best can do” (3.194-95). And there is a host of
writers who have clearly used their melancholy, neurasthenia, anxiety, or depression as
the source of artistic creation: Burton, in The Anatomy of Melancholy; Coleridge, in
“Dejection: An Ode”; Keats, in “Ode on Melancholy”; Proust, as I mentioned in chapter
one, who linked his neurasthenia to creativity; and even Fitzgerald, in The Crack-Up
eysays which, as Eble has asserted, “convey . . . anxiety in its acute and chronic forms”
(50). One can only speculate on the future implications of the Pharmaceutical Age for
culture in general and literature in particular.

Nevertheless, there are a number of other ways nervous discourse has changed as we
enter the twenty-first century. First of all, while the words nervous and nervousness
remain part of our everyday language, they have lost their significance as diagnostic
terms, having been replaced by a variety of more specific disorders, such as depression,
anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and anorexia nervosa. Even the term *nervous breakdown*, which is still in popular use, is no longer utilized by the psychiatric community. In addition, a number of syndromes have appeared, most notably chronic fatigue syndrome. In her recent text entitled *Hystories*, Showalter points out that “chronic fatigue is a new form of ‘effort syndrome,’ a disorder with a long history. . . neurasthenia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and ‘post-viral fatigue syndrome’ share numerous ailments, symptoms, and signs” (119-20). However, Showalter emphasizes the cultural construction of many of these contemporary disorders, maintaining that they are in reality new forms of “hysteria . . . relabeled for a new era”: “In the 1990s, the United States has become the hot zone of psychogenic diseases, new and mutating forms of hysteria amplified by modern communications and fin de siecle anxiety” (4). As Showalter herself recognizes, some people, particularly contemporary psychiatrists who specialize in the treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome, would certainly take issue with this interpretation, since they maintain that chronic fatigue syndrome does have a pathological origin, though it has not yet been identified. Nevertheless, Showalter’s assertions do demonstrate the changing nature of nervous discourse, since she not only identifies some of the new disorders which have come to replace nervousness or neurasthenia, but because she herself asserts that she regards hysteria “as a cultural symptom of anxiety and stress” (9), and her employment of the words anxiety and stress reveal the gradual displacement of nervousness.

Therefore, while the vestiges of nervous discourse remain with us, the significance of nervousness has changed dramatically since the early years of the twentieth century. Specifically, the words nervous and nervousness are no longer connected with other ideas such as modernity, class, and sensibility or morality. However, as I maintained in chapter
one, nervousness still appears to connote a sense of weakness, and, according to cultural constructions of gender, feeling "nervous" may still retain subtle gender implications, since nervousness is not considered a "manly" quality. In addition, while nervous is still employed in popular usage, nervousness has gradually been displaced in many instances by the word anxiety and a variety of more specific diagnostic terms. Yet the significance of modernity and the "stress of living in the modern world" remain consistently linked to contemporary discussions of anxiety, just as they had been linked to nervousness in the past. Nevertheless, with the advent of the Pharmaceutical Age, conceptions of anxiety, depression, and responses to stress are being altered dramatically, with the emphasis placed on the neurochemical aspect of these conditions, and we can only speculate on what the future holds.
Notes

1 See Bruccoli, Epic Grandeur 461-65 for a reprint of Fitzgerald’s synopsis of The Last Tycoon.

2 Although Fitzgerald does not employ the term nervous Nellie, the Dictionary of American Slang indicates that this phrase, meaning “A timid or cautious person; a worrier,” is yet another which entered the lexicon in the 1930s, perhaps from Frank B. Kellogg, secretary of state from 1925-29, whose nickname was “Nervous Nellie.”

3 Jackson also points out that “the term melacholia has recently emerged once again, this time as a subtype of the major depressive episode in the newest classificatory system. This depression with melancholia has the implication of a severer form of depression” (7).
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