

ANALYSIS

“The Rich Boy” (1926)

F. Scott Fitzgerald

(1896-1940)

“In ‘The Rich Boy,’ one of Fitzgerald’s best short stories, the main character, Hunter, is active, gracious, thoughtful, dependable; he is also depressed with ennui, boorish, irresponsible, and spiritually despondent—many persons weary with the search for the one, Where is the ‘fundamental’ Amory? Fitzgerald exhausted himself and all his characters in the devastating inquiry.”

Weller Embler
“F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Future”
Chimera (1945)

“‘The Rich Boy’ was Fitzgerald’s first serious work after *The Great Gatsby*. It was written between April and August 1925; it appeared in the *Red Book* in 1926, and was included in his most famous collection of stories, *All the Sad Young Men*, published in the same year. Like *The Great Gatsby*, to which it is closely akin in several respects, ‘The Rich Boy’ shows us Fitzgerald at the top of his powers, and at the same time in his most characteristic and historically important role—as a critic of the American worship of wealth. Here, as in *Gatsby*, the author probes with remarkable sympathy and insight into the psychology of the very rich.

Fitzgerald made the story, says [Arthur] Mizener perceptively, ‘primarily one of how Anson’s queer, rich-boy’s pride deprived him of what he wanted most, a home and an ordered life.... He cannot commit himself to the human muddle as he must, if he is to have the life he wants.’ Mizener rightly admires the restraint—‘He gets all his climaxes with quiet moments...every paragraph implies much more than it says’—and [Malcolm] Cowley observes, likewise, that this story admirably shows Fitzgerald’s skill in ‘irony and understatement’.”

Walter Blair
The Literature of the United States 2
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 1205-06

“‘The Rich Boy’ ...is a study of the effect of large amounts of money on the character of a young man; it contains, on the first page, Fitzgerald’s famous statement about the born rich: ‘They are different from you and me.’ The essential idea of the story is that hereditary wealth creates a complacency and self-satisfaction in the rich that ruins them for contact with the reality of life; their crack-up generally comes in the form of a love affair, since true human affection is one of the few things that cannot be bought.

Anson, the hero, is effortlessly successful in his early life as a Yale student, as a Naval aviator, and as a broker and speculator on Wall Street. But he falls in love with ‘a conservative and rather proper girl,’ Paula Lagendre, who after a long courtship rejects him because of his lack of character. Anson, turned cynical by the experience, dabbles in a purely physical affair with the social climber Dolly Karger, but finds that nothing satisfies him, not even his success in the financial world. At the end of the story he reencounters Paula, now happily married and a mother, and realizes for the first time the extent of the happiness he has missed. A counterplot relates the jealousy of the happiness of his Aunt Edna and her lover Cary Sloane; he eventually drives Sloane to suicide by threatening to expose him.”

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

“At just about the point at which *The Great Gatsby* was published, Fitzgerald began work on one of his finest short stories, ‘The Rich Boy,’ which occupied him for most of the summer of 1925. In this story he addressed himself directly to the matter of ‘the very rich,’ and the subtle revelation that the story makes

through the character of Anson Hunter, and that a summary statement such as this can only debase, is that not only does their 'carelessness' serve to be brutally destructive of others, but that their ease and pride and self-sufficiency prevent their own fulfillment in human relationships, numb the capacity for love, make personal commitment impossible.

Once again, Fitzgerald managed—as he repeatedly would—the double imaginative act of making us feel, with his peculiar eloquence of style, the charged charm of a certain way of life, and demonstrating to us its rather terrible fatality. Many other fine stories in *All the Sad Young Men*, the volume in which 'The Rich Boy' appeared in the next year, 1926, perform the same feat. This is all the more remarkable in that now, in the mid-twenties, Fitzgerald himself more and more succumbed to the gaudy pleasures of that world which would at last destroy him."

Mark Schorer
Major Writers of America II
(Harcourt 1962) 679

"Certain literary anecdotes are so good that they become literary history—whether or not they actually happened. Among the most widely cited of these defining anecdotes is this exchange between Hemingway and Fitzgerald:

Fitzgerald: The very rich are different from you and me.
Hemingway: Yes, they have more money.

This crushing rejoinder is supposed to contrast Fitzgerald's naivete with Hemingway's pragmatism. But it never happened. These are the facts: In 'The Rich Boy' (1926) Fitzgerald wrote: 'Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me.' A decade later Hemingway wrote in 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' (1936): 'He remembered poor Scott Fitzgerald and his romantic awe of them and how he had started a story once that began, "The rich are different from you and me." And how someone had said to Scott, yes they have more money. This paper exchange is the source for the putative conversation that has become enshrined as history.

However, a similar exchange involved Hemingway and critic Mary Colum—in which Hemingway was the straight man. As attested to by Maxwell Perkins, who was present, Hemingway remarked that 'I am getting to know the rich.' Colum responded, 'The only difference between the rich and other people is that the rich have more money.' By writing this squelch into 'Snows' with Fitzgerald as the dupe, Hemingway was able to shift the humiliation to Fitzgerald—who was not even there."

[Hemingway changed the name in the story to Julian upon request, after Perkins showed Fitzgerald the story and Fitzgerald appealed to him.]

Karen L. Rood, editor
American Literary Almanac: From 1608 to the Present
(Bruccoli Clark Layman 1988) 254

Michael Hollister (2014)