The Little "Extra" He Had: Fitzgerald's Craft in "Bernice Bobs Her Hair"

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الملخّــص:

كان يتطلب النشر في المجلات دافعة الأجور العالية في الربع الأول من القرن العشرين الكثير من الصبر والصمود، على الرغم من ان النشر لم يكن أمراً سهلاً في حينه بسبب التنقيح المركز والرقابة الحثيثة من قبل المحررين في المجلات المعنية، إلا أن العوائد المادية على المؤلفين الذين كانوا يستطعوا النشر فيها كانت مجدية. إذ كانت هذه المجلات تكافئ من يلتزم بضوابطها و بمتطلباتها بمبالغ طائلة. إن تميز فتسجرالد بأسلوبه السردي منحه احترافية منقطعة النظير ودخلاً عالياً بين أقرانه من الكتاب في عصره ممن كانوا يتنافسون على النشر في هذه المجلات.

اعتمد الكاتب في القصص التي كان ينشرها في المجلات الأدبية واسعة الانتشار نمطاً موحداً يتميز بذروات سريعة، ونهايات مفاجئة ترسم بسمة على شفاه القراء. ولكن براعتيه الاحترافية المميزة لم تلقى اهتماما كافياً من قبل النقاد والباحثين في الأدب.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إبراز الاحترافية والبراعة في كتابته للقصص التجارية في المجلات الواسعة الانتشار، التي ميزت فتسجرالد عن باقي كتاب عصره، ليس من خلال دراسة الأعمال المشهورة له وإنما من خلال تحليل قصة " برنيس تصّقف شعرها قصيراً" التي لم يسلّط عليها الضوء من قبل النقاد على الإطلاق.

Abstract:

Writing for high-paying magazines in the 1920s took patience and thick skin. Even though the writing process could be long and tiring with many revisions and editorial cuts, the potential financial rewards were considerable. Popular magazines in the 1920s and 1930s paid top dollar for stories that conformed with the magazine's requirements and limitations.

Fitzgerald, who was among the highest paid magazine fiction writers of the 1920s, found a way to overcome the magazines' conservatism. In writing his stories, he followed a simplistic and undeviating pattern with "snappy climaxes" and surprise endings, leaving a smile on the readers' faces. This craft, unfortunately, has not yet been given enough attention.

One can by no means judge the excellence of Fitzgerald's craftsmanship by confining oneself to one well-crafted short story, yet, if one is asked for a specimen of an excellent short story, "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" constitutes an excellent choice. This study will examine "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," one of Fitzgerald's best, though sadly neglected stories and will show how this author not only mastered the techniques of the commercial story, but was also able to tailor his story in a way to meet the tastes and interests of his contemporary audience.

F. Scott Fitzgerald earned a widespread reputation from his masterpiece The Great Gatsby (1925) and is, therefore, mostly known as a novelist. His four major novels[1] were translated into several languages and earned him an international reputation. Fitzgerald's short fiction, on the other hand, is mostly being neglected for three main reasons: Firstly, Fitzgerald considered the novel the only "serious work" and not the short story (Bruccoli A Life 169); secondly, he admitted more weakness than he actually had, assessing himself as a second rate writer--a "hackwriter and plagiarist" (Meyers and Southam 354) and since he often wrote hastily for magazines to raise money to support him while he wrote his novels, critics continued to consider his stories "worthless potboilers" and his novels as the more serious attempt at producing memorable art (Bryer Essays 3). Additionally, in his more depressive moods, Fitzgerald echoed the talk in literary circles about writers "selling their souls" or "prostituting their talents" in the magazines (Burlingame 217). In a gloomy letter to his friend Ernest Hemingway, Fitzgerald voiced denigrating comments about his contributions to magazines.[2] This was proof enough for those who argued for the superiority of his novels even though Fitzgerald's reputation during his lifetime came mainly from his short fiction.

Concurringly, Fitzgerald's dependable source of income came to be the large-circulation magazine market and not Charles Scribner's Sons who published his novels and short story collections. Individually sold short stories brought him more income than the

royalties he received for his novels.[3] The author wrote 178 short stories; 146 of which were published during his lifetime (Bryer Approaches xi). His mass-circulation magazine publications served him twofold: they kept his name visible in intervals between novels and they also maximized his income (West xi). Being in constant contact with publication houses and the magazine market, Fitzgerald soon discovered that his short fiction could help him finance his extravagant style of living he and his wife Zelda Sayre were pursuing. Aside from the financial temptations, Fitzgerald had professional motivations as well. West points out that "short stories allowed Fitzgerald to try out new characters, themes, and situations he might later rework for his novels, and they imposed a kind of discipline on him, bringing him regularly to his writing table" (xii). Fitzgerald worked his experiences, observations, and social analyses into short stories which he would sell with the help of his literary agent, Harold Ober, to the slick-magazines.

Business with these magazines meant he had to master the technique of magazine fiction. With time Fitzgerald was able to tailor his short fiction in a way to address successfully the large audiences of the mass circulation market. He was aware that mastering the "formula story" or pattern story will get his stories published quickly and easily (Hearn 33). By mastering the art of thematic and structural patterning, Fitzgerald was able to overcome a major difficulty which faced short fiction writers, namely, the conservatism of the magazines he was writing for. Many magazines of the 1920s were highly conservative in language, subject matter, and theme. Scribner's

Magazine, for example, returned a galley proof to an author objecting to a "too frank" passage: "The magazine goes into a great many families as appropriate reading for young and old. It also is used as collateral reading in some schools of both sexes. We fear that some of them would find this paragraph too frank for reading in public" (Burlingame 82). The structural patterning which Fitzgerald came to master, would compensate readers for the lack of thematic and linguistic innovation due to strict censorship provisions and austere conventionality in magazine fiction.

Despite the fact that the publication of various short story collections have made Fitzgerald's short fiction accessible to both readers and critics alike, the current critical canon bears witness to the fact that Fitzgerald's novels are still of more interest to scholars than the short stories. The less anthologized short stories are not researched seriously and are largely ignored. This, however, should not blind us to the fact that Fitzgerald also produced first-rate short fiction he took great pride in. Some good stories are still frequently anthologized, such as "Babylon Revisited," "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," "May Day," and "Winter Dreams." Others are being ignored or dismissed as poorly written. Even though a significant amount of research has been done on his short fiction, most of it is focused on the analysis of thematic patterns and disregarded the stories' structural development.[4] This research explores how Fitzgerald crafted his short stories to achieve maximum effect and keep the readers interested. The researcher has chosen Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," a

story which has been unfairly neglected, even though other very well written stories of his would also provide excellent ground for research. Aside from presenting a detailed composition and publication history of "Bernice," this research will also explore the story's structure which makes it one of the most well crafted pieces of short fiction he produced. The composition history will refute the assumption that Fitzgerald's story was written in an irresponsible and rapid fashion for easy money and is, therefore, low in quality. It will also disprove the prevailing categorization of Fitzgerald as a "literary ignoramus—as someone who wrote brilliantly without knowing what he was doing" (Bruccoli and Baughman 20).

In the fall of 1919, while awaiting the publication of his first novel entitled This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald wrote a long story called "Barbara Bobs Her Hair." The story was originally ten thousand words long. After being rejected by several magazines, among them Scribner's Magazine and the Women's Home Companion, Fitzgerald, who was still a novice short fiction writer then, rewrote and cut the story to seven thousand words in the hope of finding a publisher (Bruccoli, As Ever 4). Fitzgerald gradually learned by trial and error that magazines favored stories which were between 7000-8000 words in length (West xii). At that time, George Horace Lorimer, the editor of The Saturday Evening Post, had become interested in Fitzgerald's short stories. Fitzgerald had gone to New York to consult a literary agent as to the possibility of selling several stories he had been unable to sell on his own to bigger magazines. The agent was Paul Revere Reynolds recommended to him by a St.

Paul friend and novelist, Grace Flandrau. After having been able to sell a story for $400 to The Saturday Evening Post with the help of Reynolds, Lorimer was interested in seeing more of Fitzgerald's fiction. Fitzgerald rummaged through a number of stories that had been rejected by other magazines to see what else he might have for the Post. Lorimer "evidently liked stories written in a light, comic vein with attractive, strong-willed young women as heroines" (Piper 66). With this in mind, Fitzgerald rewrote two earlier pieces, "Lilah Meets His Family" and "Barbara Bobs Her Hair," that had both been rejected by Scribner. His revisions were not just superficial rewritings of texts to meet the demands of publishers, but were a painstaking revising of his work-in-progress until he would eventually settle on a final version (Prigozy 227). Fitzgerald's manuscripts are ample proof of his labor during his revisions and show that the author wrote with the clear target to meet the requirements of magazines (Bruccoli & Margolies 1990-1).

At some point in November 1919, Harold Ober, a partner in the Reynolds Agency, became responsible for F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ober would later become Fitzgerald's literary agent after setting up his own office a decade later (Piper 66). In a letter dated December 19, 1919, Fitzgerald informs Ober that he will "fix up 'Barbara Bobs Her Hair'"(Bruccoli As Ever 6). By early January 1920, Fitzgerald had written a new version of the story. In another letter to Ober, Fitzgerald states that he has retitled the enclosed "Barbara" story, now called "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" "to distinguish it from the Mary

Rineheart's 'Bab' stories in the Post." Fitzgerald continues to explain that he "managed to inject a snappy climax into it" (Bruccoli, A Life 36) and he assures Ober that the story is in "an entirely different, absolutely unrecognizable form" compared to the original manuscript which was rejected by Scribner's Magazine, Woman's Home Companion, and The Post in the summer of 1919 (Fitzgerald's underscoring, Bruccoli, As Ever 8). In an undated letter signed by Harold Ober ca. January/February 1920, Fitzgerald received the pleasant news that The Saturday Evening Post had decided to keep "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." Learning how to please magazine editors with a structural pattern, Fitzgerald had opened for himself the gates to the mass circulation magazine market.

On May 1, 1920, "Bernice" appeared and scandalized parents who were indignant at the thought that their daughters might wear their hair short; only two years earlier this had still been a sign of dangerously subversive ideas. Letters of protest cascaded down upon Lorimer, but he stood his ground, convinced that he was moving with history. Lorimer was taking risks but he knew precisely how far he could go. The Saturday Evening Post had found a writer who would help make it America's leading magazine. In 1925, it had nearly three million readers and every issue earned $5 millions from its advertising.

"Bernice Bobs Her Hair" was Fitzgerald's fourth story published in the Post and brought him $500 (Bruccoli As Ever 12). It also provided the subject for the dust-jacket illustration when it was later collected in Flappers and Philosophers published by Scribner on

September 10, 1920. The story occupies an important position in the Fitzgerald canon as a witty early treatment of a characteristic subject that he would later examine more seriously. What will be our concern in this research is how Fitzgerald developed the structure of this story and injected the "extra" which made him one of the most desirable short fictions writers of his time. In "Our April Letter," a prose poem in his Notebooks, Fitzgerald expresses his awareness of using a special technique in writing his stories—the "extra" which would set him apart from other writers: " I have asked a lot of my emotions—one hundred and twenty stories, The [sic] price was high, right up with Kipling, because there was one little drop of something not blood, not a tear, not my seed, but me more intimately than these, in every story, it was the extra I had" (Bruccoli Notebooks 131).

Writing, for Fitzgerald, was an emotionally draining process, but was also one in which he could use biographical data and explore personal experiences. The story is based on a letter Fitzgerald wrote to his five year younger sister Annabel in 1915. Fitzgerald was then 19 years of age and a student at Princeton. In this ten page remarkable document he advises his sister how to achieve popularity with the opposite sex: how to cultivate the art of conversation, poise, carriage, dancing, expression, and hair. He also goes into details about dress and personality which, according to Fitzgerald, depend on the type of person. Concerning conversation, he instructs Annabel how to be a good conversationalist:

(1) Boys like to talk about themselves--much more than girls … Here are some leading questions for a girl to use.

a) You dance so much better than you did last year.

b) How about giving me that sporty necktie when you're thru [sic] with it.

c) You've got the longest eyelashes! (This will embarrass him, but he likes it)

d) I hear you've got a "line"!

e) Well who's you're [sic] latest crush!

f) Avoid

g) When do you go back to school?

h) How long have you been home?

i) Its [sic] warm or the orchestras [sic] good or the floors [sic] good. (Bruccoli, A Life 7)

He encourages his sister to initiate conversation with boys but never talk about relations, mutual friends, or her school. Fitzgerald was one of the few men who was able to imagine himself so expertly in the position of the young women of his time. Indeed, as Donaldson remarks, "few young men could have written this set of instructions" (Donaldson 47).

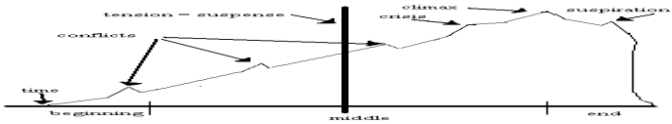
Fitzgerald goes on in his letter to his sister to emphasize the importance of posture: "Poise depends on carriage, expression and conversation …. A girl should hold herself straight …. In dancing it is very important to hold yourself well and remember to dance hard" (Bruccoli, A Life 8). He reassures his sister that most good dancers are self-made and that practice makes perfect. Fitzgerald also adds

that good control over one's facial expression and a "radiant smile" are an absolute necessity for a girl. These should be practiced privately so as to be able to use one or the other "as a good weapon in tight places" (Ibid. 8). Fitzgerald's close attention to details and remarkable ability to register behavior among the youth of his generation reveals how accurate a social observer he was.

As to dress and personality, Annabel's older brother encouraged her to carefully consider her type. She should "accentuate" her "good points" like her beautiful hair, good general size and good features. Fitzgerald warns her that she should "always be careful about such things as underskirt showing, long drawers showing under stocking, bad breath, mussy eyebrows." Annabel's splendid eyebrows, Fitzgerald told her, she ought to brush or wet and train every morning and night: "They oughtn't to have a hair out of place." Fitzgerald goes on in advising her to "dress scrupulously neatly" and to "cultivate deliberate grace" (Ibid 10). The writer was sure that following these instructions would set Annabel on the right path to popularity and would give her more social credit. Fitzgerald's expertise reveals his unique ability as social observer and critic of his time. As he integrated his personal views and experiences into his short fiction, one must discern that his story is not one hastily perceived and irresponsibly written. On the contrary, it is one that was carefully thought over and excellently written.

Fitzgerald considered "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" one of his well-written stories since he chose it among others like "The Offshore

Pirate" and "The Ice Palace" to be published for collection in Flappers and Philosophers. The story, which explores the serious social reality of appearances and acceptability in society, reveals Fitzgerald's structural pattern he used to impress his audience. The story is highly plotted and saturated in material. He begins with vivid descriptions which lead to action or dialogue and then the story moves rapidly to the climax. It ends in a moment of relief or "final suspiration" (Canby 60-8). The following diagram attempts to clarify Fitzgerald's structural pattern as analyzed in the following pages.



The story is about Bernice, a girl from a well-situated family from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, who visits her cousin Marjorie for the month of August. Marjorie is very popular in her circle of friends and represents the fun–loving flapper of the age. Bernice, on the other hand, is the simple, traditional girl who always relied for her popularity in her hometown on her family's reputation and connections. Marjorie agrees to turn Bernice into a society girl. The new Bernice soon excels her teacher and robs Marjorie all attention. So Marjorie determines on revenge and tricks Bernice into bobbing her hair in a Barber shop. When Bernice appears with her strange, new hairdo, the boys lose interest in her almost immediately. Bernice doesn't realize until she sees the reaction of both her aunt and uncle that her act is still too daring for people to accept. She also realizes

that her cousin was able to strip her of all the recently acquired popularity by tricking her into this infamous haircut. The teacher gave and took away again. What Marjorie did not realize was that it would not be an easy victory. Bernice was no longer the good natured and well-behaved girl she could use and abuse.

At first glance the story seems to be quite simple and ordinary, but at close reading we realize why Fitzgerald has chosen this story for collection. It is a powerful story and it is carefully structured. A proper account of its structure and detail will reveal how Fitzgerald mastered the fundamentals of his short stories to gain popularity among his wide-ranging audiences of popular magazines. One can by no means judge the excellence of Fitzgerald's craftsmanship by reading one single short story of his, but "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" is an excellent choice for many reasons.

Fitzgerald captures the readers' attention in the opening scene where he describes the masses of curious caddies and chauffeurs in the gallery of a dance hall at the country club with an effective metaphor. These bystanders are a "very black and wavy ocean," the waves of which are "the heads of many curious caddies, a few more ingenious chauffeurs, the golf professional's deaf sister" and others (25). Drawing the reader into the text was an important task to be accomplished in writing magazine fiction. As readers would page through an issue, titles and introductory paragraphs of stories would play a main role in capturing the attention of readers. Captivated by the opening, the reader is encouraged to read on.

The setting in particular and the exposition in general set the tone of the story. A dance where both younger and older generations participate is a perfect place to expose the competition, friction, and envy of different groups of people. The concern for beauty, popularity, and attractiveness is universal. Fitzgerald was aware that the engine which drives a short story is the conflict. In this type of genre, opposed to the novel, conflict must start right away to hook the readers and keep them involved. The second paragraph starts to reveal the conflict between the older generation and the younger one. This is the beginning of the emotional tension which will gradually build up in the short story. The middle aged ladies "with sharp eyes and icy hearts behind lorgnettes and large bosoms"[5] eye the youth critically without much approval. Stray couples who escape the "stony eyes" of elders dance "barbaric interludes in the corners" and "the more dangerous girls will sometimes be kissed in the parked limousines"(26). Fitzgerald exposes the revolution in morals and manners of the day. At the time, readers were made aware of the morally loosening parties in novels and stories. His exposition was that kind of material which would catch the eyes of contemporary readers, both young and old. Since women were the guardians of morality, the middle aged women in the story represent the generation of mothers clinging to Victorian conservatism. The temptations of sex were taboo for girls from respectable families. The presence of "sharp eyes and icy hearts" demonstrates the supervision of elders watching the young dance "with the very worst intentions in the world" (25).

The generation gap between the middle aged and the young seems not to stop there. Even younger people, especially married couples are viewed as boring additions to these dances: "The younger marrieds rose and performed ancient waltzes and terrifying fox trots to the tolerant amusement of their younger brothers and sisters" (26). Those already engaged like Jim Strain and Ethel Demorest seem to have been excluded from the world of popularity and desire. Fitzgerald's awareness of the issue of competition among teens, an issue so central in their individuation process, lets him explore it in more detail. Having decided on the theme and having sparked the interest of his readers, the author decides on the number and type of characters needed. For esthetic reasons, Fitzgerald made his competitive characters women. It is evident that structurally the story would have been the same if he had made the characters men. The resultant narrative would have been different in mood and tone, but it would not have been different in structure.

The conflict Bernice experiences is mainly between herself and society, but enveloped in this conflict is a personal clash between her and Marjorie. Both, however, are guilty of materialism and superficiality and lack a definite sense of morals and direction. Both Marjorie and Bernice are completely absorbed in attaining attention from others. Not realizing that her home-town social success is based on her financial status being the daughter of one of the wealthiest families in Eau Claire, Bernice keeps wondering why she is unpopular. She convinces herself that girls who enjoy popularity must

have cheapened themselves in some way and were lacking the glorified virtues of the past. Bernice follows Marjorie's advice and in order to have a good time, she forsakes the manners so essential in her upbringing in favor of a new set of manners more acceptable among the teenagers surrounding Marjorie. Marjorie is a very self-confident teenager who enjoys her popularity to its fullest. At one point in the story she says sardonically: I'll bet [Bernice] consoles herself by thinking that she's very virtuous and that I'm too fickle and will come to a bad end. All unpopular girls think that way" (30-31).

As Fitzgerald gradually develops the conflicts in the story, we see Marjorie complaining to her mother about Bernice whom she refers to as the "lame-duck visitor" (30). Bernice overhears the mother-daughter conversation by chance while in the hall. Here the plot moves from the more general conflict between Bernice and her community to a seemingly more personal conflict between her and her cousin. Marjorie considers herself a modern girl who is willing to shake off all proper behavior and traditional femininity for "a little cheap popularity" (30). Mrs. Harvey implies that "modern situations are too much for her" and emphasizes that "there's no courtesy these days." She remembers that when she was a girl "all young ladies who belonged to nice families had glorious times" (30). Marjorie disapproves with her mother whom she considers old-fashioned. She insists that popularity is "everything when you're eighteen." Marjorie reveals her competitiveness and egotism in this conversation with her mother emphasizing that she will not "permanently bolster up" her cousin because "these days it's every girl for herself" (30).

Next day during breakfast, Bernice confronts her cousin with the fact that she overheard the conversation she had with her mother the evening before. Marjorie is obviously startled, but controls her embarrassment well. Here the tension rises further especially when Bernice threatens with leaving. Marjorie keeps control over the situation without displaying any emotional reaction. Bernice, however, is greatly disappointed since her high expectations of this parent-arranged visit are being disappointed entirely. "Bernice had rather longed to exchange those confidences flavored with giggles and tears that she considered an indispensable factor in all feminine intercourse" (29). When Marjorie finally tells Bernice she is willing to give her her month's allowance and suggests a hotel to her, Bernice breaks down in tears.

The reader is by now hooked to the story and the plot proceeds quickly to the climax. In the afternoon, after Bernice has calmed down a little, the subject is picked up once again. The ensuing conversation between the two cousins sheds light on the type of conflict between them. Rather than personal in nature, it is one between tradition and modernity:

"Oh, please don't quote 'Little Women'!" cried Marjorie impatiently. "That's out of style."

"You think so?"

"Heavens, yes! What modern girl could live like those inane females?"

"They were models for our mothers."

Marjorie laughed.

"Yes, they were – not!" (33)

The story's exposition is full of lively dialogue which provides vital details for the readers. The source and nature of the conflicts are explored in full without which the reader would be doomed to misunderstanding and confusion. Yet, Fitzgerald is not excessively wordy to bore the readers with too many details. Using such techniques, Fitzgerald transports the readers from one scene to the other increasing tension and suspense. To ensure the satisfaction of his readers and to keep them committed the author continues with the complication. Marjorie realizes that Bernice would never leave before the previously arranged time of departure since she does not want to be impolite to her hosts. She does also not want her parents to know of her crises. Marjorie hints at that: "Our mothers were all very well in their way, but they know very little about their daughters' problems" (33). So Marjorie has once again gained the upper hand. Since Bernice seeks acceptance among Marjorie's friends, she is finally willing to do anything to gain popularity. Bernice agrees to be Marjorie's loyal pupil, but what she does not realize at the time is that she is a mere guinea pig in the hands of her cousin. Marjorie instructs her how to dress, do her eyebrows, dance, and converse with young, shy, and less popular boys to attract the attention of the more desirable ones. Finally, she suggests to her the bobbing of her hair.

Marjorie's advice is shocking to Bernice and revealing to the reader. Bernice reveals that "nobody's ever talked to me like this before." She adds that her "brain was reeling" and that she felt "sort of

startled" (35, 36). When Marjorie suggests the hair bob, Bernice collapses backward upon the bed. Here the external conflicts described so far give way to an internal conflict where Bernice has to decide whether to abide by her convictions about conventional femininity or to abandon tradition and become a rebellious, liberal woman. Outraged by her cousin's carelessness toward and open contempt for her, Bernice accuses her of being "hard and selfish" and not having "a genuine quality in her" (34). At this point the reader starts to ask questions: Is it possible that Bernice will follow her cousin's advice blindly for the sake of popularity? What is Marjorie's intent? Does she honestly want to help Bernice? The narrator informs us that there is no affection between the two girls, so why would she bother? Marjorie's true nature is withheld until a little later in the story to increase suspense. The reader at this point does not realize yet that Marjorie can only win. When she helps out Bernice, she will gain the approval of her cousin and mother. She is expected to be nice and helpful—so she is. If Bernice becomes more popular then she will have dance partners and Marjorie wouldn't have to campaign for her on these occasions. She would not have to "bolster up" her visitor (30). The hair bob is introduced by Fitzgerald as a tool to build tension and develop suspense. Marjorie encourages the bob to push Bernice to the edge and to be able to experience the immediate effect of such a daring action on Bernice's immediate surrounding. Marjorie knows that it is too early for a girl to go so far but she desires to punish Bernice with impunity for having attracted Warren McIntyre

away from her. Pressuring Bernice into cutting her hair a day before Mrs. Deyo's dance given in their honor, Marjorie would be rid of the source of nuisance and challenge and she would, once again, be the flower of the upcoming party and the sole center of attention. Marjorie had never anticipated that her lessons for Bernice would lead to a loss of popularity on her side. Indeed, "these days it's every girl for herself" (30). This act may be considered harsh and egotistical, but Fitzgerald's social observations underscore plain reality.

Having gained much popularity over the past week, Bernice became irresistible. Warren was among the interested; "perhaps it began with Warren's desire to rouse jealousy in Marjorie; perhaps it was the familiar though unrecognized strain of Marjorie in Bernice's conversation; perhaps it was both of these and something of sincere attraction besides (40). He phoned her twice a day, sent her notes and they were "frequently seen together in his roadster" (40). Fitzgerald inserts these details intentionally to achieve the causal relation of events in the development of the plot. The given details become the direct reason for Marjorie's striking revenge. Hereafter, the conflict between Bernice and Marjorie takes on a different shape. The problem is no longer Marjorie's popularity and Bernice's lack thereof, but it is one over stealing Marjorie's property: "'You may as well get Warren out of your head,' she said coldly. 'He doesn't care a snap of his fingers about you'" (41). Bernice reacts with a feeling of guilt and fear: "Bernice strove in vain to master a rising uneasiness. She had offended Marjorie, the sphinx of sphinxes …. She felt suddenly and horribly guilty" (41). Marjorie has reacted with unexpected

immediacy and aggressiveness when she felt that her personal rights have been infringed upon. Marjorie would not bear a moment to be marginalized by Bernice and robbed of her attention from her personal favorite contacts.

As the exposition comes to an end, the aforementioned conflicts intensify until they reach a moment of crisis. Marjorie calls Bernice a bluff and dares Bernice into bobbing her hair: "'That's only a bluff of hers. I should think you'd have realized …. There's a lot of bluffs in the world'" (41). When Marjorie perceives how paralyzed Bernice is in the face of her direct attack, she seizes the moment and continues to challenge her cousin's newly acquired sense popularity as a modern woman which is juxtaposed to the idea of traditional femininity Bernice was trying to escape in order to fit into the group of new friends. Being regularly pushed into bobbing her hair, Bernice wants to prove to the group of youngsters that her daring suggestion was not just "all a line" (41). At this point in the story, the reader lives the moments of hesitation and embarrassment with the victim who is making a last attempt to cling to her newly gained popularity. In order to save her face and defend her integrity, Bernice does what she had claimed she would do—bob her hair.

Fitzgerald is aware that the most intense moment in the story will be the haircutting. Therefore, he gives the climax ample attention. Comparing her to Marie Antoinette bound for the guillotine, the author describes the whole scene in colorful detail. Everyone at

the barber shop is startled by the idea per se. The outrageousness of Bernice's attempt stops even people on the street:

Outside a passer-by stopped and stared; a couple joined him; half a dozen small boys' noses sprang into life, flattened against the glass; and snatches of conversation borne on the summer breeze drifted in through the screendoor. (43)

Fitzgerald reveals Bernice's naiveté and blindness to her cousin's ruthless plan. Bernice thinks that "this was the test supreme of her sportsmanship, her right to walk unchallenged in the starry heaven of popular girls" (42). Here, we realize for the first time that Bernice enjoyed the competition for popularity so much that she wanted to outshine all others of her sex—even Marjorie. It isn't until after the bobbing that Bernice experiences partial disillusionment. "It was ugly as sin … Her face's chief charm had been a Madonna-like simplicity. Now that was gone and she was—well, frightfully mediocre" (43). Marjorie seizes the laurels of her victory immediately. She has successfully redirected Warren's attention back to herself. "Would you mind running me down to the cleaners?" Marjorie asked Warren. "Roberta's driving right home and she can take the others." Warren's attraction to Bernice seems to have ended with her bob: "[F]or an instant his eyes rested coldly on Bernice before they turned to Marjorie" (44).

Bernice does not experience a complete epiphany until she confronts her aunt and uncle and sees their utter disappointment and resentment of such an act. She starts to comprehend the trap she has walked into, but is helpless. Fitzgerald could have wrapped up the

story right here and sent Bernice back to her hometown. The disreputable act which gave the title to the story has been fulfilled. As a master story teller, though, he knew that there is nothing more damaging to a story than betraying the expectations of a thoroughly captured reader with an unsatisfying, unfulfilling denouement. The one technique that ensures a writer's longevity and a faithful readership is his ability to end the story in a memorable way.

The unique ending takes shape in Bernice's unexpected retribution. Bernice decides to amputate Marjorie's two thick, blond braids while she is sleeping. As she leaves her aunt's house at night, she throws the braids at Warren McIntyre's wooden porch: "'Huh!' she giggled wildly. 'Scalp the selfish thing' (47)!" On the one hand, the reader is relieved of his tension by the final events; on the other, he realizes that the story's events have created a new type of character. Bernice is no longer the victim, but has become the victimizer. She has learned how to defeat the "sphinx," but not without losses.

The great merit of "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" is not its theme, plot, or characters, but its structure. Fitzgerald's structure in "Bernice" reveals how much he was aware of the effectiveness of carefully arranged events, the significance of detail, and the importance of an unforgettable ending which will linger in the imagination of readers for a long time. The story is not boringly traditional, but keeps the audience interested with details and suspense. The conflicts assist in the gradual increase in tension until the moment of crisis is reached. The subsequent climax then gives

way to the unraveling of events until, finally, the readers' thirst is quenched at the end with an unexpected twist. The moment of suspiration—the final sigh of satisfaction—takes place when Bernice pays back Marjorie all the unfairness she displayed towards her cousin. Cutting her long braids forces Marjorie to experience the same situation as the one Bernice has been pushed into. The causal relations between events are carefully considered and planned. Every detail is there for a reason. What's more, we scarcely admire characters like Marjorie or Bernice, but these characters are replicas of people in the world around us. Neither Marjorie nor Bernice is a heroine, but they are no monsters either. We are brought close enough to these people to discern their problems and discuss the effectiveness of their solutions or the morality of their actions. The reader is also there to enjoy—enjoy the craft of a masterly written narrative and simultaneously consider the "extra" Fitzgerald was able to offer—this skill that made him unique among contemporary short fiction writers.

The painstaking revisions the manuscript underwent and which are documented in Fitzgerald's letters to Harold Ober, disprove that he was a literary ignoramus who did not know what he was doing. In addition, the careful structural patterning of his stories like "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" is prove enough that he had learned the writing techniques required by the mass circulation magazine market, opening for himself the gates wide to the mass circulation magazine market which made him one of the most desired short fiction writers of the Jazz age and the Great Depression. Fitzgerald's craft in "Bernice Bobs

Her Hair" is remarkable and worthy of the attention of readers and critics alike.

Endnotes

[1]Scott Fitzgerald completed four novels: This Side of Paradise (1920), The Beautiful and Damned (1922), The Great Gatsby (1925), Tender is the Night (1936); his last novel, The Last Tycoon, remained a fragment due to his untimely death in 1940 at an age of only 44 years.

[2] In a letter to Ernest Hemingway on September 9, 1929, he considers his magazine contributions as whoring: "Here's a last flicker of the old cheap pride:--the Post now pay the old whore $4000 a screw. But now its because she's mastered the 40 positions—in her youth one was enough." See Matthew J. Bruccoli, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 169.

[3] Between 1919 and 1936, F. Scott Fitzgerald had earned $225,784 for his magazine fiction as opposed to only $66,588 for his novels. For further information on this topic see James L. W. West III, American Authors and the Literary Marketplace Since 1900 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. 107.

[4] See Charles R. Hearn on the formula story (works cited); Sarah Beebe Fryer, Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1988); Jackson R. Bryer ed., The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982) and the checklist of criticism on pp. 348-377.

[5] F. Scott Fitzgerald "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed. The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A New Collection (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), p. 25. Following quotations from this edition will be documented within the text.

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