Abstract

In this thesis I engage with the subject of identity and how it is formed and undermined in the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald. In many of the novels and short stories a tension exists between two opposing forces. The first is the pursuit of a social identity which values inherited wealth and familial connections, mirroring in the values of the Old European World. In opposition to this is the protagonists' personal identity that is not dependent on these long established connections to others. In characters such as Jay Gatsby and Dick Diver the latter is sacrificed in order to pursue the former. However, such an act of self-betrayal is shown to have significant, indeed disastrous consequences resulting in alcoholism, narcissism and melancholia. Alongside this study of Fitzgerald’s male characters is a consideration of women in his work and the manner in which they are used as symbols of masculine success. I chart the development of these female characters from his first novel, This Side of Paradise, in which women are primarily used to demonstrate the fears, desire and indeed character of the protagonist to more complex representations in the mature novels The Great Gatsby and Tender is the Night. In Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan demonstrates a growing awareness of the female voice, even as, at times, Nick Carraway’s narration attempts to suppress it. In Tender is the Night, I suggest that there are two distinct stories evident in one narrative. In this novel “her” story is as significant as “his” story. I argue that this dialogism is, in part, a product of the author’s biography at the time of the novel’s composition. The depiction of these masculine acts of self-betrayal result in locating the most important aspects of identity in work. Or, as Fitzgerald wrote in 1936, “I have at last become a writer only.”
F. Scott Fitzgerald is an American writer, known for works like The Great Gatsby and Tender is the Night—along with other novels and short stories. Here are a few quotes from the life and works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. "Advertising is a racket, like the movies and the brokerage business. You cannot be honest without admitting that its constructive contribution to humanity is exactly minus zero." - F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter to his daughter, Aug. 24, 1940. "After all, life hasn't much to offer except youth, and I suppose for older people, the love of youth in others." - F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter to his cousin Cici. "All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath." - F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter to his daughter. A look at the book The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald. This essay thoroughly examines the couples present in the novel, their gender roles, and their roles in the American Dream present of the Jazz Age. Women just received the right to vote, were beginning to not only work, but work in jobs that men had previously been the only source for, and gained new freedoms never felt before in our country. These changes are nowhere more apparent than within the depiction of gender roles and how the characters interact within this novel. Men are constantly depicted as powerful, physical, and dishonest. Women are shown in a terrible light that casts the majority of them as tempting, submissive, passive, and petty. F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story "The Ice Palace" deconstructs the assumptions, ideals, and tropes of contemporary society through symbols and parallelism. Specifically, the two geographies of South versus North symbolize stagnation versus progress, respectively, for both Sally Carrol Happer and Harry Bellamy. The two characters' romance proves misfated, however, not because of any natural or inherent difference, but because of romanticized views on the part of each. Sally Carrol's search for identity—complicated by romanticized notions—represents a larger theme which I know Fitzgerald to have explored in other works such as The Great Gatsby. What does the 1910s and 1920s mean for a country traumatized by war and just around the corner from more hardship?