



Amory's Disillusionment in *This Side of Paradise*

Thi Huong Giang Bui^{[a],*}

^[a]Graduate student, Department of English Literature, Fukuoka Women's University, Fukuoka, Japan.

*Corresponding author

Received 7 April 2013; accepted 24 April 2013

Abstract

As many critics observe, nobody has described the despair of the twentieth century better than F. Scott Fitzgerald. He came to prominence as a great American novelist in the 1920s, a period dominated by the postwar novel. In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald successfully depicts the disillusionment of the protagonist, Amory Blaine, a young romantic egotist in a quest of forming a "personage" in which he has to face various dilemmas and losses. Critics have adopted different approaches, such as feminist theory, gender studies and realism to analyze Amory's psychic dilemmas. This paper adopts a different approach using early theories of Freud in dealing with the protagonist's disillusionments concerning his personal life.

Key words: *This side of paradise*; Disillusionment; Fantasy; Loss; Mother-figure; Substitute father-figure

Thi Huong Giang Bui (2013). Amory's Disillusionment in *This Side of Paradise*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 6(2), 88-92. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320130602.5245>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320130602.5245>

INTRODUCTION

This Side of Paradise's omniscient narrator points out the huge change in Amory's psychology from naïve self to aware self, with a moment of awakening in between. Written with a well-organized structure in two books and an interlude, *This Side of Paradise* becomes a premise for Fitzgerald's later, more successful novels. In quest of success, money and happiness, Amory has endured many

experiences to form a conception of self but it is hard for Amory to control himself and so he inevitably falls into a disillusioned world view. As Pearl (2005) suggests, Amory "can never achieve a coherent character" (Pearl, 2005, p.3). One of the main points that leads to Amory's misconception of sexual identity as well as gender identity is he is much influenced by his mother, Beatrice O'Hara, in his childhood, without the influence of his father, Stephen Blaine, or an adequate substitute figure. Pearl also points out that "Amory's story traces the development, not of manly character, but of personality—a new, inferior, and effeminate kind of identity" (Pearl, 2005, p.3). In the light of reading *This Side of Paradise*, this essay will focus on the psychological facets of Amory's life and his psychological growth from his boyhood to adulthood to learn how disillusionment functions in his life, especially in his love for various idealized women in his later life. In addition, the study aims to make use of classic Freudian theories and several of Freud's little-known but highly thought-provoking early essays in particular to analyze the protagonist's illusions which lead him to failure in life.

DISCUSSION

Drawing on Freudian theory, we can say that the first erotic object for both sexes is the mother, while the way boys and girls resolve their mother-love determines their sexual identity. However, this theory does not contradict what Freud says in another of his theories about the most idealized figure, the father, of a boy. With the relevant Freudian concepts, we can see obviously that Fitzgerald is much influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic principles in depicting the relationship between mother and son.

Freud's "Some Reflections on Schoolboy Psychology" (Freud, 1914, p.241-244) exhibits several unusual and distinctive views which are of use in analyzing *This Side of Paradise*. In this school essay for the 50th anniversary of his own school's foundation celebration, Freud recalls

the past, giving an adult's view of schoolboy experience, a time of "confusion and illusions, painful distortions and heartening success" (Freud, 1914, p.241). In this essay, Freud reflects on the individual's emotional attitudes toward other people, and how they are of such extreme importance to his later behaviors. Such attitudes are already established at an unexpectedly early age: "the nature and quality of the human child's relations to people of his own and the opposite sex have already been laid down in the first six years of his life" (Freud, 1914, p.243). According to Freud, "he may afterwards develop and transform them in certain directions but he can no longer get rid of them" (Freud, 1914, p.243). Furthermore, "the people to whom he is in this way fixed are usually his parents and his brothers and sisters. All those whom he gets to know later become substitute figures for these first objects of his feelings" (Freud, 1914, p.243). From this point of view, we can say that all the beloved people surrounding the boy in his childhood may be the idealized figures that follow him in later life.

Furthermore, Freud also points out that "these substitute figures can be classified from his point of view according to how they are derived from what we call the 'imagos' of his father, his mother, his brothers and his sisters" (Freud, 1914, p.243), and "all of his later choices of friendship and love follow upon the basis of the memory-traces left behind by these first prototypes" (Freud, 1914, p.243). However, of all the imagos of a childhood "none is more important for a youth or a man than that of his father" (Freud, 1914, p.243). The reason is that for a boy his father is a representative figure of "the most powerful, the kindest and the wisest creature of the world" (Freud, 1914, p.243). Furthermore, the boy really wants to become a model of manhood like his father and even to take his place in the future, and for Freud, it is in such extremely "contrary feelings side by side that lies the essential character" (Freud, 1914, p.243) in his life. It is thus crucial to examine the role of the "first prototypes" in the boy in childhood and how they will affect him in adulthood, and how he can escape from these "prototypes" to find his true self.

Nevertheless, the duration of idealizing his father is not so long. The more the boy grows up, the more he begins to cast his eyes upon the world outside and hence the more dissatisfied he grows with his father because "he finds that his father is no longer the mightiest, wisest and richest of beings" (Freud, 1914, p.244). From this perception, the boy "learns to criticize his father and to estimate his place in society, and he makes his father pay heavily for the disappointment that has been caused by him" (Freud, 1914, p.244), and "everything that is hopeful, as well as everything that is unwelcome is seen by a child as determined by this detachment from the father" (Freud, 1914, p.244). There is an emotional ambivalence that follows a boy into his adulthood and

determines his feelings and actions in life. However, the boy will hide his emotions and tries to avoid his own responsibilities in life and blames his father for his faults.

Further ideas relevant to Fitzgerald's novel come from another essay, "Family Romances" (Freud, 1909, p.237-241), in which Freud clarifies that the child is likely to feel he has been slighted when he is not receiving the whole of his parents' love. "The liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development" (Freud, 1909, p.237). The child will feel he is being left behind and he may not be strong enough to face his losses in the future. Hence, without the whole love of the parents, the psychological development of the boy will be seriously affected and he will not find his true identity and gender in his future life.

In *This Side of Paradise*, we can find many examples of these Freudian motifs, especially the relationship between the boy and his parents. Fitzgerald's intrusive narrator contrasts the differences between Amory's parents in every way and shows how the differences affect Amory's life. Fitzgerald, from the first page of the novel, shows the domination of Amory's mother, Beatrice O' Hara. It is said that Amory "inherited from his mother every trait" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.11) but he inherits from his father, Stephen Blaine, only two traits, which are "his height of just under six feet and his tendency to waver at crucial moments" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.11). Furthermore, Beatrice is depicted as a beautiful, wealthy, well-educated and aristocratic woman. The narrator notes that "early pictures taken on her father's estate at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, or in Rome at the Sacred Heart Convent—an educational extravagance that in her youth was only for the daughters of the exceptionally wealthy—showed the exquisite delicacy of her features, the consummate art and simplicity of the clothes" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.11). Like his mother, Amory is also attractive, a very handsome and stylish male, "an auburn-haired boy with great handsome eyes which he would grow up to in time, a facile, imaginative mind and a taste for fancy dress" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.12). Unlike Beatrice, Stephen Blaine is said to be "an ineffectual, inarticulate man" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.11). Also, he becomes rich by luck alone after "the deaths of two elder brothers, successful Chicago brokers" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.11). After Stephen's marriage, "he hovered in the background of his family's life, an unassertive figure with a face half-obliterated by lifeless, silky hair, continually occupied in 'taking care' of his wife" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.11). For this reason, the time for marriage to Stephen Blaine and carrying Amory Blaine to birth is a hard and weary time for Beatrice because Stephen Blaine didn't understand his wife. However, readers do not have any clues about the interactions between them. Clearly, Stephen Blaine plays a very dim

role in Amory's very early life and later life, and we can even say he is Amory's lost father.

Moreover, the narrator also emphasizes that it is Beatrice O'Hara who nurses and educates Amory during his childhood. Amory, therefore, consciously learns what good lessons and care he has received from his mother. The narrator implies that Beatrice wants to take on a dual role, both as Amory's mother and father. She does not want Amory to feel slighted when her husband cannot take his conventional role in the family. Moreover, she even encourages Amory to call her by her first name, which was rare at the time. Beatrice also reverses the usual moral instructions in teaching Amory while he is a little boy. For instance, when Amory was five, Beatrice did not want Amory to get up early in the morning because she has "always suspected that early rising in early life makes one nervous" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.12). It is a very unusual moral instruction for a little child, obviously, because getting up early is supposed, according to American folk wisdom, to make him healthy, wealthy, and wise. However, Beatrice seems to ignore such maxims and it is one reason "how particularly superior he [Amory] felt himself to be, yet this conviction was built upon shifting sands" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.15). From the educational psychologist's point of view, a boy will shape his personality from one to five years old. In the novel, it is also a time Amory shapes his concepts about life conduct but he cannot precisely know which instructions will help him best in life.

At the age of eleven Amory is allowed to have "a cigarette in his exaltation—and succumbed to a vulgar, plebeian reaction. Though this incident horrified Beatrice, it also secretly amused her and became part of what in a later generation would have termed her 'line'" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.13). In contrast, one of his first girlfriends has a different view and advises him not to smoke because "you will stunt your growth" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.19). Therefore, whether for good or bad, Beatrice is proud and supports whatever Amory does and she wants to prove that "this son of mine" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.13) is possessed by her now. It is likely that Beatrice wants Amory to be the spitting image of herself and she believes she can give Amory the best life without any help from her husband. Beatrice takes him everywhere she goes and Amory "was already a delightful companion for her" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.11). In a tour from the "domestic pilgrimages" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.13) to "Cape Cod" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.13), it is hard to see the role of Stephen Blaine in Amory's life or any significant relations between them.

Being "attached to no city" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.13), Beatrice wants to recall "her memories of her years abroad" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.13) but mostly because she thinks "my nerves are on edge—on edge. We must leave this terrifying place tomorrow and go searching for sunshine" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.12), as Beatrice once

confesses. The narrator is clearly aware of Freudian theory when describing Beatrice, saying that "like Freudian dreams, they [her past stories] must be thrown off, else they would sweep in and lay siege to her nerves" (13). In reality, Beatrice has twice had nervous breakdowns, once "in a fashionable hotel in Mexico City". However, dangerously, "this trouble pleased her, and later she made use of it as an intrinsic part of her atmosphere—especially after astounding bracers" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.12). Another incident happened when Amory was thirteen when Beatrice had a nervous breakdown which was actually probably "delirium tremens" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.15), suggesting her alcoholism. Overall, Beatrice herself is not consciously aware of the seriousness of her problem, or of the fact it will affect Amory. However, "what a few more years of this life would have made of him [Amory] is problematical" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.15). Clearly, Amory's naïve self in his childhood is much influenced by Beatrice's psychological troubles.

It is obvious that Amory grows up side by side with his mother without any influence or instruction from his father. In the three-word chart of his early life given in the novel, "Amory plus Beatrice" is the brief summary of this period (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.96). We hardly see the role of Amory's father in his early stage of life, and it shows that Amory completely lacks the love, education and guidance of his father. Drawing on Freudian theory, we can say Amory lacks a representative figure in his childhood and he cannot find any model in life. Therefore, his reactions toward losses and dilemmas in later life show him being not "the most powerful, the kindest and the wisest" figure, but instead being just as "ineffectual", "inarticulate" and "unassertive" as his father. Clearly, Amory cannot find any good reflections of his first "prototypes" during his childhood.

As a matter of fact, Beatrice can never give Amory her entire love. In addition, she cannot play successfully the roles of both Amory's father and mother. The main problem is that "Beatrice appropriates her son's act of disobedience as evidence of their similarity, rather than their difference: 'we're all delicate; here'. Surrounded by references to Freud, Beatrice's dramatic gesture 'here' assimilates Amory's exploit into a discourse of female hysteria" (Pearl, 2005, p.5). Therefore, Amory still is skeptical about both life and his mother, for he says he has "no illusion about her" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.12). The way Beatrice instructs and nurses Amory is "as if Beatrice raises Amory as a girl, breeding within him a case of hysteria, or 'nerves', which his mother repeatedly complains about" (Pearl, 2005, p.5). Even when Beatrice dies, he mentions it without emotion in a letter to his friend while he serves in the war; he just condemns her for leaving him no money. When his father dies, Amory thinks that "burial was, after all, preferable to cremation, and he smiled at his old boyhood choice, slow oxidation

in the top of a tree" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.97). It is unclear how to evaluate Amory's emotions about this burial but it is evident that "what interested him much more than the final departure of his father from things mundane was a tri-cornered conversation between Beatrice, Mr. Barton and Krogman, their lawyers, and himself" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.97). It may seem that Amory thinks it is time to get rid of the shadow of his father, but ironically his father is a representative of the least powerful element in Amory's life. However, lacking a father's care in his boyhood makes Amory in his adulthood "all wrong at the start" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.33) and he is "generally considered both conceited and arrogant, and universally detested [and] unbearably lonely, desperately unhappy" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.33). Obviously, Amory could not find happiness in his early life even though he had very comfortable living conditions. He may have felt the lack of the complete parents' love that he thinks he deserves to have and he thus feels slighted, not a real man. That is the reason why Amory takes a variety of journeys to find a substitute father figure during his life.

Drawing on Freudian theory in "The Devil as a Father-Substitute" (Freud, 1923, p.83-92), we can say that a child faces the loss of the father with great difficulty, and "his mourning over the loss of his father is more likely to turn into melancholia, the more his attitude to him bore the stamp of ambivalence" (Freud, 1923, p.87). Amory may not recognize how great a loss he has after his father dies, and therefore, to a certain extent, he unconsciously considers Thayer Darcy, a Catholic priest, his substitute father. Freud also points out that at an early stage individuals may feel "God is a father-substitute father; or, more correctly, that he is an exalted father; or, yet again, that he is a copy of a father as he is seen and experienced in childhood—by individuals in their own childhood...[and] later on in life the individual sees his father as something different and lesser" (Freud, 1923, p.85). Even Darcy feels that Amory is another part of himself: "I [Darcy] have been trying to tell how much this reincarnation of myself in you has meant in the last few years....curiously alike we are....curiously unlike" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.151). This relation between Amory and Darcy is now replaced by a phase of religious piety, and it is also Beatrice's wish that Darcy, with whom she has once had a romance, become her son's substitute father.

In another essay, "The Motive for the Pact with the Devil" (Freud, 1923, p.79-82), Freud points out that another figure can act as a substitute for a loved father. "In return for an immortal soul, the Devil figure has many things to offer which are highly prized by men: wealth, security from danger, power over mankind and the forces of nature, even magical arts, and, above all, enjoyment—the enjoyment of beautiful women" (Freud, 1923, p.79). Thus, the father, it seems, "is the individual prototype of both God and the Devil" (Freud, 1923, p.86). However, we "expect religions to bear marks of the fact that the

primitive or primal father was a being of unlimited evil—a being less like God than the Devil" (Freud, 1923, p.86). Even though published after *This Side of Paradise*, these speculations by Freud can be seen paralleled in *This Side of Paradise* in a surprisingly specific way, and therefore they give a new perspective for analyzing the novel.

In the apartment of the two showgirls in New York, Phoebe and Sloane, after drinking heavily, Amory is naïvely anxious and fearful of sexual desire expressed by the girls. Moreover, Amory has a hallucination: a strange man, whom he sees only dimly, appears: "there the man half sat, half leaned against a pile of pillows on the corner divan. His face was cast in the same yellow wax as in the café neither the dull pasty color of a dead man—rather a sort of virile pallor—nor unhealthy" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.108). Later, before Amory's "eyes a face flashed over the two feet, a face pale and distorted with a sort of infinite evil that twisted it like flame in the mind; but he knew, for the half-instant that the gong tanged and hummed, that it was the face of Dick Humbird" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.111). Dick, a college classmate, is seen as a second self or another Amory. While Dick was alive, he "seemed to Amory a perfect type of aristocrat. People dressed like him, tried to talk as he did. Amory decided that he probably held the world back, but he wouldn't have changed him" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.78). Clearly, as Amory has no model in his childhood he needs to find a substitute figure that can become his role model. "Servants worshipped him [Dick] and treated him like a god. He seemed the eternal example of what the upper class tries to be" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.78). Therefore, whether alive or dead, Dick is a figure haunting Amory and is a variant of a figure that Amory lacks in his early life. In this uncanny scene, the Devil, Dick Humbird and Amory's father are all hazily combined in a reflection of sexual anxiety.

Dick's sophistication and high social status offer a model of manhood that Amory is far from achieving. Dick seems to be the idealized representative figure that Amory lacks during his childhood. As seen from Freudian theory, "God and the Devil were originally identical—were a single figure which was later split into two figures with opposite attributes" (Freud, 1923, p.86) and Dick, who is "treated like a god" when alive, once again becomes Amory's substitute father even when he is dead. In Amory's hidden desire, Dick combines all the good things that he cannot find in anybody else, especially his father. Even when Alec told him "the shocking truth" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.78) that "his [Dick's] father was a grocery clerk" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.78) Amory is confused but hardly changes in his admiration and loyalty toward Dick.

The haunting of this devil figure is for Amory a traumatic repetition. Amory watches Dick's death scene in New York, in which "under the full light of a road-side arc-light lay a form, face downward in a widening circle of blood" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.85). Dick is shown to have

died after “drinking too much” (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.86). The intrusive narrator comments that “all that remained of the charm and personality of the Dick Humbird he had known—oh, it was all so horrible and unaristocratic and close to earth. All tragedy has that strain of the grotesque and squalid—so useless, futile... the way animals die... Amory was reminded of a cat that had lain horribly mangled in some alley of his childhood” (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.86). Amory meets Dick, as a devil figure, which haunts him in such repetitions. Therefore, we can say that Amory is traumatized by Dick's death and this trauma hovers over Amory and causes paranoiac fears. In contrast to the idea of Tanner's “The Devil and F. Scott Fitzgerald” which sees this devil in *This Side of Paradise* as one of its supernatural elements (Tanner, 2003, p.66), we can suppose that the devil haunting Amory in this novel represents an idealized substitute figure that Amory is striving to find and become. Additionally, Amory's idealization of Dick Humbird indicates a way to understand his fascination with high social status. Hence, Dick's death scene traumatizes Amory and lingers over him all his life, but particularly at points of sexual anxiety.

CONCLUSION

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* developed a new psychological perspective to depicting Amory's disillusionment throughout his life. Through the time of boyhood to teenage years and on to adulthood, Amory repeatedly falls into romantic fantasy, typically fascinated by the idea of failing to find a substitute-father figure. From the time he lived with his mother to the years at prep school and Princeton, Amory exhibits characteristic weakness with the loss of his loves and the loss of

direction. By using several crucially connected early essays by Freud, we can come to a much better understanding of the deep-rooted psychic fantasies of Amory Blaine, an early representative figure of the Lost Generation. In particular, we can see how Freud's work provides a contemporary context for understanding Fitzgerald's depiction of Amory's boyhood and the love from his parents, or the lack of it, have affected his later life.

REFERENCES

- Bryer, J. R., Ruth P., & Milton R. S. (Eds.) (2003). *F. Scott Fitzgerald in the twenty-first century*. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press.
- Fitzgerald, F. S. (1920, 2003). *This side of paradise*. New York: Scribner.
- Freud, S. (1909, 2001). Family Romances. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, 9. London: Vintage.
- Freud, S. (1914, 2001). Some reflections on schoolboy psychology. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, 8. London: Vintage.
- Freud, S. (1923, 2001). The devil as a father-substitute. *The standard edition of the complete psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 19. London: Vintage.
- Freud, S. (1923, 2001). The Motive for the Pact with the Devil. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, 19. London: Vintage.
- Pearl, J. (2005). History and masculinity in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *this side of paradise*. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51(1), 1-33.
- Pelzer, L. C. (2000). *Student companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Tanner, S. L. (2003). The Devil and F. Scott Fitzgerald. *Bryer, Prigozy, and Stern*, 66-78.