

Trauma and Psychological Losses in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novels

Abstract

This dissertation's five chapters each address traumas and psychological losses in the lives of the central characters of F. Scott Fitzgerald's five major novels. Chapter One conducts a thorough analysis of Jay Gatsby's traumatic loss when he cannot possess his beloved forever. Chapter Two deals with the sexual illusions and disillusionments of Amory Blain, who has suffered from sexual obsessions during different phases of his life due to the loss of an idealized father figure. Chapter Three presents the economic anxiety and the emptiness in life of Anthony Patch, from his golden youth all the way to his alcoholic nightmare. Chapter Four investigates Dick Diver's downfall, including both his hidden sexual desires and his excessive ambition in his professional career. Chapter Five focuses on the sense of meaninglessness in Monroe Stahr's life, who has never recovered from the loss of his wife. What distinguishes this dissertation from other studies on trauma and losses is its attempt to explore the psychic personal losses, social and family relationships and fantasies of Fitzgerald's protagonists using Freudian trauma theory and contemporary trauma theory. In addition, Fitzgerald's five novels share a similarity in their ways of expressing the psychological loss of the heroes when their idealized love connects to actually embodied women. No matter how hard they try, their lives gradually fall into a distorted fantasy realm due to the loss of their love.

Carefully tracing the unspeakable traumatic loss of various protagonists in Fitzgerald's five novels, this dissertation offers various critical contributions to

Fitzgerald's criticism. Firstly, by using eclectic theories, such as trauma theory, the psychoanalytic approach, gender studies, gaze theory, sociological, historical and biographical studies, it investigates a wide range of topics in all Fitzgerald's five novels, but especially the mental states of the protagonists, including dreams, repressions, desires, illusions, and fantasies. All these mental states exhibit the inner life of Fitzgerald's heroes and heroines.

Secondly, this study redefines, renews and adapts Freudian trauma theory, so that it provides a new perspective for exploring the deep psychic disorders of the protagonists of the five novels. The Freudian notions of trauma and fantasy are extremely relevant and useful in the depiction of Fitzgerald's protagonists, psychological realm. Using Freudian trauma theory extensively, we can clarify the psychosexual meanings of dreams, illusions and fantasies reflecting the mental life of these heroes and heroines. In its Freudian interpretation, this dissertation has also used various other specific Freudian concepts, such as the significance of projections of the devil, the devil as a father-substitute, schoolboy psychology, the 'imagos' of the father or the mother, the idea of being slighted when one cannot receive the exclusive love of parents, daydreams of youth, the concept of one who has been wrecked by success, and the idea of melancholia.

Furthermore, this study broadly examines the importance of memory in one's life, and how it affects and changes individual identity. We can see clearly the huge impact of trauma-induced memories on people's lives when considering wars, bombings, terrorism or natural disasters, but there are comparatively few analyses of the impact of traumatic memory arising from the loss of the beloved in literature. From our analyses, we can conclude that trauma during Fitzgerald's era varies greatly in its forms,

although in every case the individual fails to distinguish reality and fantasy. These fantasies and their significance often lead to neurotic effects, suggesting that truth and falsehood, reality and fantasy are all twisted together in these traumatized figures. Fitzgerald was, of course, not the only major U.S. novelist who dealt with various types of loss suffered by traumatized characters. Nevertheless, his presentation of traumatic loss in these five novels characterizes the age in which he lived, and it also provides a particularly detailed depiction of historical traumatic psychology that remains of deep interest to readers today.