

An Analysis of the Flappers' Identity Crisis in Scott Fitzgerald's "The Ice Palace"

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"The Ice Palace" is from the first collection of short stories by American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, titled *Flappers and Philosophers*. The story portrays that the flapper, Sally Carrol, faces the sharp cultural contrasts between the North and South and her identity crisis has occurred. As Sally becomes aware of the stagnation and survival challenges in the post-war South, she chooses to escape her Southern home and go to the developed North. However, during her journey to the North, Sally's cultural identity is gradually challenged by the traumatic memories of the Civil War, the eerie atmosphere of the Northern "ice palace", and the complexities of female freedom and constraint. Ultimately, Sally decides to flee the North and return to the South. This article analyzes the identity crisis of Sally Carrol in "The Ice Palace" based on the theory of identity crisis in the stages of personality development. It explores the significant impact of identity crisis on the personality development of the flapper, aiming to uncover the risks of identity crisis in personality development and emphasize the importance of promoting healthy personality development.

Keywords: Scott Fitzgerald, flappers, identity crisis, "The Ice Palace"

Introduction

"The Ice Palace" is a short story by the renowned American novelist of the Jazz Age, F. Scott Fitzgerald. This article aims to explore the identity crisis faced by the flapper Sally Carroll amidst the cultural conflict between the North and South.

Identity is an important concept in contemporary Western cultural studies, referring to the social and cultural identity formed by individuals within specific backgrounds. Initially explored within philosophical paradigms, the concept has evolved into three main research models with the development of subjectivity: the Enlightenment-centered identity, the society-centered social identity, and the postmodern decentralized identity. In the post-World War II era, as the world entered the age of globalization and capitalism rapidly developed, existing values were subjected to intense scrutiny, leading to conflicts between old and new values. Everything was in rapid flux, necessitating individuals to continually seek and affirm their selves amidst change. Scott Fitzgerald focuses on this issue, highlighting the individual spiritual crisis pervading the entire world. He explores various categories of self-identity crises faced by protagonists in different works within the context of social and historical processes. Scott Fitzgerald delves into the struggles of characters after encountering crises of self-identity and the process of reconstructing the self beyond their limitations. His characters often exhibit a sense of directionlessness,

embracing new things while rebelling against tradition, yet feeling sorrow and confusion in the fragmented world of the Jazz Age.

From both domestic and international research perspectives, scholars predominantly analyze this short story from angles, such as traumatic memory, eco-feminism, and Southern nostalgia. This article, however, focuses on the flapper's image of Sally Carroll in "The Ice Palace". Through close textual analysis and drawing upon the theory of personality development stages, it delves into Sally Carroll's encounters with identity crises in her process of personality developments. The aim is to fill the research gap in the study of the flapper image in "The Ice Palace" from an identity perspective.

Historical Background: Flappers in the Jazz Age

The flapper emerged as a new type of woman during the Jazz Age, which was characterized as one of the most hedonistic periods in American history. The term flapper originally referred to a young bird just learning to fly, but by the early 20th century, it had evolved to denote a carefree and uninhibited young girl. By the 1920s, with the publication of F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, which he described as "a novel about flappers dedicated to philosophers," the term gained widespread popularity and underwent a fundamental transformation. It became synonymous with young women who eschewed traditional constraints in dress, hairstyle, and behavior. Scott Fitzgerald later used this term again in his short story collection *Flappers and Philosophers*, published in September 1920. The flappers were a product of America's economic prosperity, modernization, and rapid industrialization in the 20th century. They rejected the constraints of Victorian-era traditional feminine attire and sought to break free from the patriarchal culture, yearning to enjoy life as freely as men, beyond the confines of traditional domestic roles. They pursued happiness, freedom, and novelty, embracing pleasure and individualism.

In "The Ice Palace", Sally Carrol embodies the typical image of a flapper. Set at the turn of the 20th century, during America's third great migration where rural populations moved to urban areas and Southern populations migrated North, Sally is one of the Southern individuals seeking opportunities in the North. The flappers depicted by Scott Fitzgerald are naive, passionate, and eager to find themselves, pursuing independence. They symbolize the chaos and conflict in American society between the North and South. From innocence to maturity, from eager departure to the choice to return, Sally, the flapper, "embodies a fusion of the past and the future. Her romantic qualities imbue her spiritual home with a tinge of sadness, composing a requiem for the era" (Sun & Yang, 2023, p. 76). She also represents the author's exploration of his own spiritual home in an era of accelerating industrialization, looking back at an era of harmony between humanity and nature.

Southern Traumatic Memory

At the beginning of the 20th century, the South faced not only a modern era, but also a slew of issues left by their ancestors: reverence for tradition and past memories, as well as a sense of alienation from the North due to the failure in the Civil War. The American Civil War was not just a political contest between two ideologies or an economic system's contradiction; it was also a struggle between two ideological concepts. This included the conflict among the individualism, Protestant ethic, and capitalist spirit advocated by Northern capitalism and the self-restraint, simple living, and hardworking lifestyle cherished by Northerners, as well as the struggle between Southern aristocracy, leisurely lifestyle, and close family ties. Even though the South had entered the 20th century, both the defenders who unfortunately lost in the war and their descendants still lived in the trauma.

The cultural conflict between the North and South still existed. In this particular context of trauma culture, the cultural imagery of the Old South became a memory strategy to suppress past trauma, forget the pain, and allow the current social order to continue. As a survivor of the entire South's trauma, the protagonist Sally Carroll did not escape the trauma memories inherited from her ethnic group. As a witness of history, she had to face the increasingly powerful economy, politics, culture, and pride of the Northern ethnic group. On the one hand, she had to admit the decline and stagnation of the South, as well as the inherent laziness and "idleness" of Southern people. "Going to the North symbolized the decline of the old Southern tradition, and the memory and legend of the old Southern aristocracy, including the pride of the entire South, would gradually fade away in the reality" (Fu, 2018, p. 24).

Talton, located in Georgia, bordered Tennessee to the North and Florida to the South, deep into the heart of the South, and was the headquarters of the Southern Confederacy during the Civil War. It was a dusty and hot town, where any girl with a little charm and attraction married Northerners. Sally Carroll also wanted to be like them. She had grown old enough and pretty enough, and she wanted to see the world and gain more experience. She thought the South was not quite suitable for her, but this unsuitability was not about money; it was rather a bit of helplessness and sadness. After the war, the South stagnated politically and economically. People on this land gradually became lazy, indulging in memories of the past, and the long-term sleepiness enveloped the land. This sense of powerlessness made them feel helpless against the North's radicalism, and inter-generational trauma destroyed their sense of security in living normally. They could not make sense of history and reality, nor could they control their lives. This was the recognition of Southern girls towards the current situation in the South. They associated their past life with their hometown, and going to the North was an act of seeking to abandon past memories and continue living. In the dichotomy of North and South opposition, the South was forced to focus either on the past or the present. However, attempting to heal trauma can never escape from the trauma subject. In the contradiction between remembering the past and wanting to forget, Sally Carroll painfully wanders between tradition and reality, losing her sense of identity.

Northern Ice Palace: The Exploitation to Sally Carrol

The ice palace, which in symbolic terms is the object of Sally Carrol's quest, represents the essence of Harry's society, and the dream he lives by. It is, to begin with, huge and elaborate; and to Harry, indeed, much of its beauty clearly resides in its impressive statistics. "It's a hundred and seventy feet tall", he tells Sally Carrol proudly; "covers six thousand square yards" (Scott Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 9). Sally Carrol, who responds to beauty rather than to numbers, is "dazed by the magic of the great crystal walls" (p. 6). But the phrasing has dark resonances: When one is dazed he is vulnerable, and magic can be black as well as white. The glitter of the walls is spurious in the sense that the ice itself is cold and dark; the inside of the ice palace, then, is a chill dimness made brilliant by artificial lights. If water is a symbol of life, the ice is the negation of life because Sally Carrol, in the South, goes swimming at both the beginning and the end of the story. The ceremonies in the palace are military in nature masculine and aggressive. The most sinister aspect of the ice palace, however, is the labyrinth which literally underlies the main hall; for a labyrinth, after all, is deliberately designed to confuse people and lose them. Sally Carrol gets lost at once, searches frantically for the room she started from, but finds only "another glittering passage with dark ness at the end" (p. 10). The labyrinth, once the lights are turned out and Sally Carrol is wandering about in total darkness, is simply an image of Hell. Sally Carrol is afraid of dying physically, but what really threatens her is spiritual death: remaining in the North, of which the palace is the essence, forever,

figuratively "embedded in the ice like corpses she had read of, kept perfectly preserved until the melting of a glacier" (p. 10).

The ice palace, towering as a symbol of authority to Northern eyes, represented the exploitation to Sally Carrol. "Ice was a ghost, and this mansion of it was surely peopled by those shades of the eighties, with pale faces and blurred snow-filled hair" (Scott Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 9). Laborers toiled for the capitalists with their blood and lives, becoming tools for profit-making, while the capitalists continued to weave the American Dream with lies, enticing more to serve them. The selfishness of the Northerners stood in stark contrast to the gentle compassion of the Southerners. As Sally Carrol found herself trapped in the ice palace, a profound sense of powerlessness overwhelmed her, intensifying her disgust for the North. The author wrote,

She was alone with this presence that came out of the North, the dreary loneliness that rose from ice-bound whalers in the Arctic seas, from smokeless, trackless wastes where were strewn the whitened bones of adventure. It was an icy breath of death; it was rolling down low across the land to clutch at her. (p. 10)

Faced with this colossal entity, Sally Carrol felt disillusioned. This was not the life she desired. At this moment, the ice palace symbolized not only Northern capitalism, but also the moral decay of Western society, ensnaring people in a false illusion.

Freedom and Unfreedom for Women

In the 1890s, for most American women, significant progress had been made in terms of rights. Over the past few decades, efforts in women's rights had yielded meaningful advancements. In 1920, the U.S. Congress passed the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote. However, as the first wave of feminism waned, the movement failed to take root in the 1920s, largely because it did not mobilize the young women of that generation. Before 1910, the feminist movement was primarily driven by a group of young women, but both before and after 1920, few young women recognized their plight or felt any different from the older generation. They viewed the issues their predecessors focused on and the successes achieved by the feminist movement with indifference. They desired to be at the forefront of fashion, dancing, and a more liberal moral outlook. Throughout the 1920s, various forms of popular culture collectively transformed feminism from a social activity into a lifestyle. Extensive advertising, movies, and beauty pageants promoted large quantities of clothing and cosmetics, encouraging a new, ostensibly freer female ideal. Women pursued their own values and became more liberated in their dress, attitudes, and behaviors. Young women inevitably succumbed to this trend. While these young flappers attended weekend dances at college on one hand, they also detested any rules. They pursued freedom, but the drive and ambition that inspired the first generation of college students vanished. The new standard for women was to conform to societal trends, learning to succeed in a competitive society. "Freedom" equated to sex and individualism, constituting the new values. If a young woman wanted to influence and exert power over men, then she became the woman who captivated suitors at dances, the best partner in male-female relationships. They could smoke, drink, and enjoy themselves at parties, so why choose the difficult path like the first-wave feminists did? However, these flappers could not use their freedom for anything significant; their rebellion was merely an action of youth. Once, they felt exhausted and faced reality and their education, they would return to the old path of patriarchy.

In "The Ice Palace", as Harry repeatedly asserts, and as Sally Carrol herself soon discovers, the anonymous Northern city in which the main action of the story takes place is "man's country", the society male-dominated.

Any society or individual, for that matter which totally abjures the feminine, tends to be "obstinate, harping on principles, laying down the law, dogmatic, world-reforming, theoretic, word-mongering, argumentative, and domineering" (Moses, 1974, p. 12). Roger Patton, a kind of choral character who understands and comments on the nature of Northern society, describes the people as Ibsenesque: possessing "a certain brooding rigidity ... righteous, narrow, and cheerless, without infinite possibilities for great sorrow or joy" (Scott Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 7). Sally Carrol's own capacity for joy immediately comes under attack. She is made to realize that the winter sports which she enjoys. Ironically it was prominently included in Harry's apostrophe to the North; was going to help make it a fairy-land for her is regarded as being for children. In a death-oriented society, the child-like has no place; thus, for instance, Harry's angry tirade on the subject of Southerners, who, according to him, have become lazy and shiftless like the colored people (those archetypes of the child-like nature) whom they live Southernness, extends even to her typically Southern double name: Harry's mother insists on calling her "Sally". Sally Carrol understands intellectually what is happening to her; that she is losing forever "her spring... with its lilacs and the lazy sweetness it stirred in her heart" (p. 9). But that understanding does not become an emotional reality for her until she is alone in the ice palace.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of Sally Carrol's identity crisis in Scott Fitzgerald's "The Ice Palace" provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by individuals navigating cultural contrasts and societal expectations. Through Sally Carrol's journey, we witness the profound impact of traumatic memory, symbols of the "ice palace", and women's dilemma on the identity crisis, highlighting the complexities of self-discovery and the quest for autonomy. Ultimately, Sally's decision to return to the South reflects her journey towards self-awareness and acceptance, illustrating the transformative power of confronting identity crisis.

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